"I SO MUCH WANTED TO BE UGLY": THE REPRESENTATION OF *JUUGUN IANFU*'S DOUBLE COLONISATION IN *BECAUSE WE WERE BEAUTIFUL* (2010) THROUGH THE LENS OF POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

By Nur Aisyiah Az-Zahra

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Erasmus Mundus Master´s Degree in Women´s and Gender Studies (GEMMA)

Main Supervisors: Hannah Loney & Adriana Qubaiova (Central European University)

Second Supervisor: Aleksandra Różalska (University of Łódź)

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Approval signed by the main Supervisor

DECLARATION

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

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding footnotes, bibliography, appendix, etc.): 33,675 words.

Entire manuscript: 37,548 words.

Signed: Nur Aisyiah Az-Zahra

Vienna, 31 May 2024

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a Dutch-made documentary entitled *Because We Were Beautiful* (2010) from the perspective of postcolonial feminism. The documentary portrays the "post-war" lived realities of former Indonesian *ianfu* or comfort women during the Japanese occupation (1942–1945) in the Netherlands East Indies (present day Indonesia). *Juugun Ianfu* (従軍慰安婦) or military comfort women refers to girls and women who were forced into so-called systematic prostitution to provide sexual services for the Imperial Japanese Army before and during World War II (1939–1945). A concept from postcolonial feminist theory that is applied as the main lens of the analysis is double colonisation, which was first coined by Peterson and Rutherford (1986) to refer to how women in colonial contexts are simultaneously oppressed by both patriarchy and colonial power. Thus, the central question guiding this research is: How is the double colonisation of *juugun ianfu* by patriarchy and colonial power represented in *Because We Were Beautiful* (2010)? The thesis applies a mixed-method research in its analysis of the film, combining a documentary film analysis and semi-structured interviews with people who worked in the documentary. I argue that the documentary is a redemptive effort by the Western coloniser (the Netherlands) to its colonised subjects (Indonesia) by villainising its Eastern coloniser counterpart (Japan). *Because We Were Beautiful* possessed the potential to be a decolonial project despite the fact that it was not intended to be one. The documentary serves as a platform for critical engagement, this was the Dutch way of reckoning with a dark colonial past in contrast to how Japan concealed the matter from its own citizens.

Keywords: *ianfu*, comfort women, double colonisation, representation, documentary, Indonesia, Japan, the Netherlands.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Juugun Ianfu (従軍慰安婦) or military comfort women (*ianfu* or comfort women) refers to girls and women who were forced into systematic prostitution to provide sexual services for the Imperial Japanese Army before and during World War II (1939–1945). To break down the *kanji* (Japanese characters) of *juugun ianfu* individually, *juu* (従) means servant or service, *gun* (軍) means army or military, *i* (慰) means comfort, *an* (安) means tranquillity or peaceful, and *fu* (婦) means women, adult female or lady in English. Together, they bear the meaning of women who service the (Japanese) military by offering comfort and solace, although this notion of comfort has been contested in academia and is considered a euphemism. Nonetheless, the comfort women system existed in countries, regions and territories that Japan occupied during its period of imperialist rule (1932–1945) such as South and North Korea, China, Taiwan, Micronesia, Southeast Asia (Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Indonesia) and even in some areas of Japan itself (Kyushu, Nagoya, Hokkaido, Okinawa) (Hicks 1997, 17). This thesis aims to study the representation of the comfort women issue during the Japanese occupation (1942–1945) of the Netherlands East Indies (present day Indonesia) through a Dutch-made documentary entitled *Omdat Wij Mooi Waren* or *Because We Were Beautiful* (2010). Hence, the research question posed for this thesis is: how is the double colonisation of *juugun ianfu* by patriarchy and colonial power represented in *Because We Were Beautiful* (2010)?

Because We Were Beautiful is a documentary directed by Frank van Osch, following the journey of Hilde Janssen, a journalist and anthropologist, and Jan Banning, a photographic artist, when they went to Indonesia to track down the survivors of *ianfu* and talked to about fifty of them. The film serves as a platform for the former *ianfu* to tell the world their stories.

The dialogues in the documentary is mostly in Javanese[1] and Sundanese[2] as all of the *ianfu* survivors represented in the film are Javanese and Sundanese by ethnicity. The subtitles are provided in Dutch and English, a fact which also speaks to the targeted audience of this film. The documentary also has an educational version which will be elaborated on Chapter 5. *Because We Were Beautiful* was critically acclaimed, winning the Best Documentary Award 2011 at the Big Muddy Festival in Illinois and the Artivist Film Festival 2011 for the category of best documentary award in human rights in Los Angeles. Putting aside the awards this film received, the ethical issues surrounding it need to closely examined, especially as the documentary involved victim-survivors who had been subjected to violence. This thesis critically reviews ethical issues-related discussions in Chapter 4 and 5.

The documentary is a part of an overarching *Troostmeisjes/Comfort Women Project*, which also includes Jannsen's textbook *"Schaamte en Onschuld/Shame and Innocence",* Banning's photo exhibition *"Troostmeisjes/Comfort Women*[3]*"* and bilingual photobook *"Troostmeisjes/Comfort Women"*. The project was funded, inter alia, by two Dutch foundations, *Mondriaan Fund*, a public fund for visual art and cultural heritage, and *V-Fonds*, a funding institution which envisions to enhance knowledge about war and conflict. Even though most of the people and parties involved this project were Dutch, the project mainly took place in Indonesia and invited Indonesian collaborators to contribute. While there are two scholarly works on *Troostmeisjes* (see Katharine McGregor and Vera Mackie 2018; Rahmayati 2021), hitherto, no one has analysed *Because We Were Beautiful* in their work. This fact contributes to the novelty of my research in terms of the object of analysis.

I decided to focus on this documentary instead of the whole project because documentary films, as a product of popular culture, possess the power to influence and educate society beyond the screen (Warmington, Van Gorp, and Grosvenor 2011; Faulcon 2012), while at the same time serves to advance human rights activism (Tascón 2016). The documentary has been screened at the 2011 UNAFF (United Nations Association Film Festival) in San Francisco and at the 2012 Byron Bay International Film Festival in Australia. It was also broadcasted in several countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Russia and others[4]. Van Osch wanted the

[1] One of the Indonesian local languages that is widely spoken in Central Java, Yogyakarta and East Java by Javanese people.
[2] One of the Indonesian local languages that is mostly spoken in West Java by Sundanese people.
[3] In 's Hertogenbosch (February–April 2010), Rotterdam (April–August 2010), Jakarta (August–September 2010), Arnhem (July–October 2011), Surabaya (November–December 2011), Séte (May–June 2012) and many other places. For more information, please visit: https://janbanning.com/exhibitions-print-sales/.
[4] I gained this information from my interview with Van Osch.

film to be shown on Japanese television but this attempt unfortunately failed[5]. The film was also not broadcasted in Indonesia due to the agreement with the *ianfu*[6]. Currently, *Because We Were Beautiful* can be accessed online through Van Osch's website[7] and its DVD is available for purchase. In this context, it particularly influences the changing of stigma attached to Indonesian former *ianfu*, educates society about these hidden colonial atrocities, and has the potential to advance human rights activism for former *ianfu* particularly in Indonesia.

It is also notable that the documentary was made by the Dutch citizens, considering the fact that the Netherlands was Indonesia's previous coloniser before the Japanese took over. Thus, in order to further interrogate this Dutch documentary's representation of Indonesian *ianfu* and whether or not a Western gaze appears in the creation of the film, this thesis employs postcolonial feminist theory for the analysis. A concept from postcolonial feminist theory that is applied as the main lens of my analysis is double colonisation, which was first coined by Petersen and Rutherford (1986) to refer to how women in colonial and postcolonial contexts are simultaneously oppressed by both patriarchy and colonial power.

This chapter discusses the research design of the thesis. I start with introducing the background of the topic—comfort women, the object of analysis—*Because We Were Beautiful*, and the project that overarches the film—*Troostmeisjes*. Then, I outline the research purpose and my overall arguments in the thesis. After that, I explain my use of postcolonial feminism and the concept of double colonisation as the lens of perceiving the issue brought up in the documentary. Next, I provide the overview of the mixed-methods that I employ in this research, namely documentary film analysis and interviews. Afterwards, I spell out my positionality as a researcher and what it does to my research, followed by issuing a trigger warning for the readers, taking into consideration the sensitive nature of the comfort women topic. Lastly, I provide the overview of the thesis.

Aims and Argument

I chose this topic for my thesis because the comfort women issue is considerably understudied in Indonesia. Thus far, few Indonesian scholars research the issue, and most

[5] Japan did not want the comfort women issue to gain attention again. More elaboration on this point is discussed in Chapter 5.
[6] The *ianfu* did not want to be exposed as a lot of their husbands and other family members did not know about their pasts. They were also afraid that this exposure can affect their family members in negative ways. More explanation on this is discussed in Chapter 5.
[7] Please visit: https://vanoschfilms.nl/en/docs/omdat-wij-mooi-waren/. The trailer of the film can be viewed in this website or via YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywKoFMOvDWo.

Indonesians are unaware of this dark part of the country's colonial history. Those who do know tend to sideline it as irrelevant to the present. Although most Indonesian former *ianfu* have now passed away, those[8] who are still alive carry the trauma, guilt and shame of this experience. By writing a thesis on this topic, I do not wish to reproduce their trauma, nor do I want to make their experiences a spectacle. My purpose is, apart from contributing to the literature on the Indonesian context of the comfort women issue, to help diminish the public's negative perceptions towards the former *ianfu* in Indonesia. Also, as a student with a Japanese Studies and Gender Studies background, I hope to contribute to both the existing Japanese Studies scholarship in regard to the complicated Indonesia–Japan relationship concerning the comfort women issue and the feminist scholarship in regard to the systematic violence against women during war and armed conflict. The research focuses on the Indonesian comfort women issue and is not applicable to the same issue other countries. The scope of this research only addresses the Indonesian context represented in the film.

In this thesis, I argue that despite the participation of Indonesian contributors in the making of the film, *Because We Were Beautiful* leaves the impression that in order to raise awareness about the comfort women issue and bring to light the voices of *ianfu* victim-survivors, Indonesia needs the presence and help of the Netherlands. This perpetuates the idea that the West is superior compared to the inferior East. Moreover, the documentary portrays both the double colonisation experienced by *ianfu* and the double orientalization through the pursuit of certain Orientalist tropes that are evident in the film. Likewise, I argue that the documentary can be seen a redemptive effort by the Western coloniser (the Netherlands) to its Third World colonised subjects (Indonesia) by villainising its Eastern coloniser counterpart (Japan). The documentary serves as a platform for critical engagement; it constitutes an effort by the Dutch to reckon with a dark colonial past in contrast to how Japan concealed the matter from its own citizens. These contradictory images once again echo the impression that the West can and knows how to reckon with the past and address cases of rape and sexual violence, while the East cannot or refuses to do so. The perceived Dutch "openness" to talk about the comfort women issue was possibly because they were also victims of these atrocities, not perpetrators, diverting attention from their colonial role in Indonesia to Japan's atrocities through the documentary.

[8] There is no information provided about how many Indonesian *ianfu* are still alive as there is never a public record of this information. The Government of Indonesia did not authenticate its *ianfu*.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis approaches the topic from the perspective of postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminism emerged in the 1980s as a result of critiques by Black and third-world feminists towards the western-centric notion of feminism which tends to claim universality in its values, struggles and solutions. To address this shortcoming, feminist postcolonial theory has undertaken a dual objective: to incorporate racial dimensions into mainstream feminist theory; and to integrate feminist perspectives into the conceptual frameworks of colonialism and postcolonialism (Lewis and Mills 2003, 3). This theory is applied for researching *Because We Were Beautiful* for two main reasons. First, the *Comfort Women Project*, the umbrella project of this documentary, was conducted by the Dutch to address a colonial issue (comfort women) of its colonised subjects, the Indonesians. Second, the comfort women system in the Netherlands East Indies was established during the 3.5 years of Japanese occupation before Indonesia gained its independence (1945). In this time period, the presence of the Dutch people and system were still prevalent in the Netherlands East Indies.

Feminist postcolonial thinking also encourages us to look closely at the position of white women in our analysis of colonial and imperial subjectivity and question whether or not they are complicit in the colonised women's subordination and how (Lewis and Mills 2003, 6). Despite the focus of this documentary being Indonesian former *ianfu*, the fact that many Dutch women were still in the Netherlands East Indies during the occupation of Japan should not be neglected. By this, I am not implying a complicity and involvement of Dutch women in this comfort system as a part of enforcement structure. Rather, I delve into the implication of the Dutch women's presence in the Netherlands East Indies during the Japanese occupation in the establishment of the comfort system. Hence, echoing Lewis and Mills, it is important to assess white women's position in this setting too. In fact, some Dutch women were forcefully registered by the Japanese military army as *ianfu*, one of whom was Jan Ruff-O'Herne whose memoir, *Fifty Years of Silence* (1998), was published as a book. Keeping that in mind, the differences between the position of the Dutch *ianfu* and Indonesian *ianfu* will also be taken into account throughout my analysis.

In line with that, feminist postcolonial theory acknowledges that Western feminist theory has frequently generalised about third-world women, assuming homogeneity among highly diverse groups; thus it is also in postcolonial feminists' interests to challenge this limiting view (Lewis and Mills 2003, 9). Many individual from the West assumed that the comfort women

system was an issue exclusive to Asian women. Apart from how this assumption had been dismantled by the previous paragraph, there are people who still perceive Asian women as one big homogenous group. It is worth mentioning that the victim-survivors of *ianfu* make up different regions, countries, racial identities and ethnicities, which suggests that even though they were subjected to the same horror, their experiences differed from each other and cannot be generalised, not even if they belonged to the same nation. The socio-political situation in the occupied territories, before, during and after the Japanese occupation, also vary and this impacts how the *ianfu* were recruited, how the comfort system was operationalised, and how the issue was dealt with after Japan's defeat in 1945. This is yet another reason why specifically looking at the experiences of Indonesian *ianfu* is necessary in order to avoid generalisation of the comfort women's struggles.

As stated above, the concept from postcolonial feminist theory that is employed to analyse Indonesian former *ianfu*'s experience is double colonisation. It is important to note that double colonisation is a process which persists in many countries even after achieving independence and consequently, women experience a twofold colonisation—by male dominance and imperialism and/or colonialism (Petersen and Rutherford 1986). McLeod takes on Petersen and Rutherford's concept and helps illuminate the argument that colonialism glorifies male accomplishment through a series of male-oriented myths, while women are subject to representation in colonial discourses in manners that reinforce patriarchal values (McLeod 2009, 175). This thesis includes analysis of the interplay between each fold of the colonisation experienced by the Indonesian former *ianfu* and discusses what a postcolonial feminist take can offer to contest this kind of representation. In their work, Petersen and Rutherford address the issue of female visibility and explore the challenges faced by female writers in a predominantly male-oriented world. Although it was first a concept associated with women's writing and literature, I posit that contemporarily the concept can be expanded and is applicable to a documentary film analysis as well. Considering how previous research (Jouzaee and Jamili 2014; Ahmed 2019; Azmat 2018; Orouq 2021; Fernandi and Haryanti 2021) which employed the double colonisation concept used literature (novels) as their objects of analysis, this thesis is distinct in its aim to test the applicability of the concept to audio-visual material, precisely, a documentary.

One point to be noted from these scholarly works is that double colonisation is not the only concept applied in their research. To illustrate this point, Jouzaee and Jamili (2014) combine the double colonisation concept with Spivak's subaltern and Said's orientalism in their

analysis, Ahmed (2019) and Fernandi and Haryanti (2021) also brings in Said's orientalism, Azmat (2018) relies on alienation, and Orouq (2021) employs Bhabha's theory of location of culture hand in hand with double colonisation. The complementary concepts and theories they employ depend on the main focus of their analysis. In this respect, I conclude that perceiving *Because We Were Beautiful* solely from the lens of double colonisation might result in partial analysis of the content. The umbrella theory of the double colonisation concept—postcolonial feminism—is indeed integral in examining the colonial and postcolonial context and dynamics between Indonesia, Japan and the Netherlands in this film. However, although postcolonial theory takes into account gender, sexuality, race, nation and empire (Chambers and Watkins 2012, 297), it does not give adequate attention to war and armed conflict. Therefore, aside from double colonisation, I employ Cockburn's (2010) concept of "war as a continuum" to closely analyse Indonesian *ianfu*'s gendered experiences before, during and after the Japanese occupation. Further elaboration on this complementary concept is discussed in Chapter 4.

Methodology

The thesis applies a mixed methods approach to its analysis of *Because We Were Beautiful*, combining documentary film analysis and semi-structured interviews. In examining the film, I mainly rely on Nichols' method of documentary film analysis alongside Plantinga's method of rhetoric and representation in nonfiction film as a complementary analytical tool. The on-screen analysis is centralised in Chapter 4 to investigate the representation of *ianfu*'s double colonisation and the women's experiences of war as a continuum. To enrich the analysis, I conducted interviews with five people who worked on the documentary to gain additional insights beyond what is presented on the screen in the final product of the film. These interviews are mainly analysed in Chapter 5 to interrogate the ethical issues, present what happened behind the scenes, explore the reception of the documentary and provide remarks from the filmmakers for future activism related to the comfort women issue.

According to Nichols (2007), all films are in fact documentaries. Nichols classifies them into two categories, documentaries of wish-fulfilment (fiction) and documentaries of social representation (non-fiction). Based on this classification, *Because We Were Beautiful* falls under the second classification, a documentary that provides a portrayal of elements of the world we already occupy and share in order to give a sense of how we perceive the reality of the past, present and future (Nichols 2007, 1–2). Non-fiction documentaries are further categorised into six different types (poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive

and performative) in which *Because We Were Beautiful* belongs to the "participatory documentary" category where the filmmaker acts as a researcher or an investigative reporter who goes directly into the field and engages with the subjects to enact a form of participant-observation (Nichols 2007, 115 & 119). In this ethnographic sense, the viewers see a filmmaker and the actors as a researcher and the human subjects, so they are expected to pay close attention to the power relations that must have existed in such documentaries. Moreover, a participatory documentary often incorporates interviews in its scenes so as to bring in various perspectives into a single cohesive narrative. This strategy is also used by van Osch in his film as there are 11 former *ianfu* whose interviews were incorporated into the film.

There are three distinct ways in which a documentary interacts with the world through its representation: by offering a depiction of the world that carries a sense of recognisable familiarity, by embodying the interests of others, and by presenting a particular view or interpretation of evidence before the audiences (Nichols 2007, 2–4). The second way—embodying the interests of others—constitutes the basis of the documentary observation in my analysis recalling how *Because We Were Beautiful* represents a colonial issue (comfort women) between Indonesia and Japan. Hence, the Dutch filmmakers are seen as the party who embody the interests of Indonesians through this documentary. In addition, representation is a central concept that is crucial in this research. Hall reminds us that interpreting a representation does not mean discovering the "truth" about what is portrayed, and that is why we must always justify our interpretation (Hall 1997 cited in Rose 2001, 2–3). By way of interpreting the way the *ianfu* were represented in the film, I also depend on Plantinga's (1997) analytical methods concerning the uses of images, voice and authority, structure, and style and technique. I incorporate these examinations in Chapter 4 to make a case for double colonisation and war as a continuum. In addition, Rose explains that a critical approach to interpreting representation requires us to consider the cultural significance, social practices and embedded power relations (2001, 3). Rose's concerns are addressed in the analysis of my interviews with the filmmakers as they can be best captured beyond the screen.

In the semi-structured interviews, I posed a list of questions (which I prepared in advance) to the interviewees, while also allowing myself the flexibility to delve deeper beyond the established protocol (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle 2006) by giving follow-up questions and formulating new questions following the interviewees' answers. The selection criteria for my interviewees were based on their contributions to the making of the film. For this research, I conducted interviews with the director, the photographer, the journalist-researcher, and the

translators. Although I classified my five interviewees into two groups—Dutch filmmakers and Indonesian contributors—there were not many significant differences in the questions I asked them. The interviews with the Dutch filmmakers were conducted in English, while the interviews with the Indonesian contributors were in Indonesian. All of the interviews were conducted online via Zoom with various duration ranging from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours. I used an interview protocol during my discussions to help guide data collection in a systematic and focused manner (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle 2006, 124). The line of questioning was divided into: 1) Participation in the project, 2) The *Troostmeisjes*/Comfort Women Project, 3) Contributions to the making of the documentary, 3) The comfort women issue, 4) Thoughts on the documentary, 5) Reception of the documentary, and 6) Future activism on the comfort women issue. Particularly in examining the reception of the documentary, I complemented the analysis with online reviews and critiques of the film. When analysing this section, I especially considered the parallel arguments between my interviewees and the film reviewers. The indicative list of questions can be found in the Appendix. Even though most parts of the interviews are included in Chapter 5, some have been woven into Chapter 4.

Positionality and Trigger Warning

I am an Indonesian, Asian, and able-bodied woman, from an upper-middle class family, who spent my childhood in several different cities and countries. These facts position me as a privileged outsider to the group of women (*ianfu*) whose experiences I analyse in this thesis. While I share a gender identity—being a ciswoman—with the Indonesian former *ianfu*, I have not experienced the kind of violence these women were subjected to during the Japanese occupation, nor do I have to deal with the stigma attached to them after independence. Even though I am socially located in the oppressed side of power relations (as an Indonesian woman), this does not automatically mean that I am epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic location (the perspective of the *ianfu*) (Grosfoguel 2007, 213). Also, the fact that I studied Japanese Studies and Gender Studies does not substitute the lived experience of the former *ianfu*. I am well aware that my academic background can never do justice to explain and theorise the struggles and stories of these women, but I hope that it can help minimise the proclivity of misrepresenting Indonesian history during the Japanese occupation and carefully situate the comfort system within the continuum of violence which can only be understood through a gender lens.

As a researcher who wants to perceive the comfort women issue with a decolonial approach, I decided to use the term *ianfu*[9] instead of comfort women (or *juugun ianfu* instead of military comfort women) as a way of contributing to the non-English-speaking scholarship on the topic.[10] By doing so, I epistemically locate the knowledge I produce through this thesis on the subaltern side (instead of the dominant side) of power relations in the geo- and body-politics of knowledge (Grosfoguel 2007, 213–14). Hereafter, I refer to comfort women as *ianfu* (as do other Indonesian scholars) when emphasising the women victim-survivors and use the term comfort women when stressing the comfort division or *iantai* as an institution. It is also my decision—being a Japanese Studies graduate who is conscious of the existing gaps in translations—to use the Japanese terms (*ianfu, iantai, ianjo, geisha, heiho, romusha,* etc.)[11] that are related to the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, instead of their English translations. Additionally, in regard to the important names mentioned in this thesis, Japanese and Korean names are written in the order of surname and first name, and not the other way around, as this is how their names are presented in Japan and Korea.

Furthermore, as a Gender Studies scholar, I follow the practice of trigger warnings developed by feminists in the late 1980s and 1990s to give advanced notice before discussing topics that might remind us of past wounds and trauma (Clare 2017, xx). Hence, I will issue a trigger warning applicable throughout the thesis as it analyses, mentions and depicts sensitive topics including the following but not limited to: war, colonisation, occupation, comfort women, sexual violence, violence against women, rape, prostitution and sexual slavery. In particular, I encourage the readers to please be mindful when reading Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 because most of the sensitive topics are explicitly examined there. If the topics discussed in this thesis are triggering for readers, I hope that they prioritise their self-care.

Chapter Overview

This thesis consists of six chapters—starting with the introduction—with each highlighting different foci that further contribute to my argument about how the double colonisation experienced by Indonesian former *ianfu* is represented in *Because We Were Beautiful*.

[9] The Japanese term (*ianfu*) is a term that is used in Indonesia as there is no translation of comfort women to Indonesian language. Further discussion on the naming and framing of the Indonesian comfort women can be found in Chapter 3.

[10] Since the title does not consist the English term "comfort women", my thesis will show up when people look up "*ianfu*" or "*juugun ianfu*" in the search bar.

[11] The explanations of Japanese and Indonesian terms mentioned in this thesis are provided in the Glossary.

Chapter 2 focuses on the main bodies of literature that inform my research. First, I critically analyse literature on the comfort women system, in which I delineate the debate surrounding the two main positions of conceptualising the comfort system as "enforced military prostitution" and "military sexual slavery". Second, I review the literature that analyses representations of the comfort women issue in popular culture, including documentaries, *manga/manhwa*, and an animated film. Third, I shed light on two scholarly work which examine the overarching *Troostmeisjes*/Comfort Women Project. Having identified the gaps in each body of literature, I conclude by underlining the main contribution of my thesis in the existing literature in the field of feminist scholarship.

Chapter 3 provides the background for understanding the comfort women issue in Indonesia. To begin, I outline Japan's invasion of the Netherlands East Indies and the establishment of comfort stations across the Indonesian archipelago. Further, I situate the comfort system as a form of violence against women during war and armed conflict, and consider how militarised masculinity plays a role in it. I move to explain the "naming and framing" of Indonesian comfort women, where I highlight the reason behind the use of the Japanese term *ianfu* instead of its Indonesian literal translation. Afterwards, I discuss the implementation of the Asian Women's Fund (AWF) in Indonesia. Next, I argue that the *Troostmeisjes* project can be seen as a form of transnational activism to seek justice for the recognition of *ianfu*. Here, I also explore local activism for and on behalf of Indonesian *ianfu* and show how *Because We Were Beautiful* has the potential to fuel other forms of activism for *ianfu*.

Chapter 4 analyses the on-screen representations of *Because We Were Beautiful*. This chapter is structured into two main parts focusing on two different yet related concepts. The first half of the chapter examines three main themes that appear in the film, namely beauty, innocence, and religion. The second half of the chapter discusses how the *ianfu* experienced double colonisation by showing how they were represented as being oppressed by patriarchy and colonial power in the documentary.

Chapter 5 contain beyond the screen analysis of *Because We Were Beautiful* by presenting the interviews with the filmmakers. I explore their aims of making the film and challenges they faced throughout the project. Drawing upon reviews of the film and combining them with the answers from my interviewees, I also elucidate the reception of the documentary. Furthermore, I interrogate the questions of ethical issues revolving around the film. Finally, I

convey remarks from the people behind the documentary about their hopes for future activism in relation to the comfort women issue.

Chapter 6 concludes the key arguments I have made in the previous chapters. Here, I also reflect upon the purposes and findings of my research. Particularly, I consider on the usefulness of a postcolonial feminist lens in analysing the representation of the comfort women issue, which I argue was integral in revealing the implications of the complicated colonial relationships of Indonesia, Japan and the Netherlands for Indonesian *ianfu*.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: The Comfort System, Popular Cultural Representations, and *Troostmeisjes*

In this chapter, I will discuss the literature that surrounds the representation of the comfort women issue in popular culture. I group the literature into three main parts, starting from the broad context of comfort women and narrowing it down to scholarly work on the *Troostmeisjes*/Comfort Women Project. The first part explores the conceptualisation of the comfort women system, in which two standpoints emerge namely, the comfort system as "enforced military prostitution" and as "military sexual slavery". This distinction is crucial to illuminate because it informs the historical background of the establishment of the comfort system in the Netherlands East Indies which will be discussed in Chapter 3 and the documentary analysis in Chapter 4. The second part examines the representations of the comfort women issue in popular culture, taking into consideration myriad forms of popular culture in various countries such as animated film, *manga*, *manhwa* (the Korean equivalent of Japanese *manga* or comics) and documentaries. This section outlines how political popular culture is utilised to represent a sensitive issue such as the comfort women issue and to advance justice-seeking activism for the victim-survivors. The third part elucidates the literature that analyses the *Troostmeisjes*/Comfort Women Project, the overarching project of which *Because We Were Beautiful* is a part. The analysis of the other products resulting from this project supports my discussion of the meaning-making process of the documentary in Chapter 4 and 5. After identifying the parameters and the gaps within each body of literature, I will emphasise what my research offers to fill in those gaps. Ultimately, this thesis aims to contribute to the growing research on the representation of the comfort women issue in popular culture. In particular, the thesis contributes to analysing a documentary made by the Netherlands about Indonesian comfort women during the Japanese occupation by employing a postcolonial feminist perspective, which provides a careful yet critical lens that takes into account the colonial relationship between the three countries.

Literature on the comfort women system

While there is a significant body of literature on comfort women in general (or notably on Korean comfort women (for example: Min 2003; Chuh 2003; Orreill 2008; Varga 2009), which I will not discuss in this chapter), less has been written about Indonesian comfort women. Nevertheless, the debate surrounding the comfort women issue is centralised on the conceptualisation of the comfort women system. There are two positions that emerge out of this discourse. First, there is a position that refers to the comfort women system as "enforced military prostitution". Some scholars who take this standpoint include Hicks (1997), Lie (1997), Mackie (2000), and McGregor (2023). Second, there is a position that defines the comfort women system as "military sexual slavery". This position is adopted by, among others, Ruff-O'Herne (1998), Sakamoto (2001), Yoshimi (2002), and Rahmayna (2022). Shedding light on the limitations of the two positions is Soh (2008). I explain and critique each of these positions in the following discussion. Understanding the distinction between the two standpoints enables me to position myself within relevant scholarly debates, and particularly to understand which conceptualisation is most appropriate for the context of the comfort system in the Netherlands East Indies. Further, these conceptualisations travel not only within academic discourse on the issue, but also to representations of the comfort women issue in popular culture. To illustrate the point, Ropers (2011), who analyses two *manga* which engage with the topic of comfort women, refers to the comfort system depicted in *manga* as enforced military prostitution. I therefore argue that there are two layers to this discussion: contextualising the conceptualisation of the comfort system in the Netherlands East Indies; and investigating which conceptualisation the example of popular culture I analyse, *Because We Were Beautiful*, adopts. This section seeks to fulfil such an endeavour.

Conceptualising the comfort system as "enforced military prostitution" puts weight on three points. First, the coercive nature of the women drafted into the organised system. Second, the institutionalised establishment of the comfort stations and the direct involvement of the Japanese military. Third, the reflection of Japanese pre-colonial history on its long tradition of having organised prostitution and the emphasis on how the comfort stations operated like brothels (and some were indeed local brothels turned into comfort stations). The scholars mentioned in the previous paragraph complement each other's work and shed light on one or more points predicated upon the position. Hicks (1997) provides a broad, detailed picture of how the system was established. His work contains exhaustive accounts of the comfort women system, the differences among the comfort stations in the occupied territories, the summarised

stories of *ianfu* across countries (including Indonesia), and the aftermath of the system. While Hicks attempts to analyse the implication of patriarchal society and masculinity upon the system and its operation, he does not examine the issue from a feminist perspective. Recalling how the comfort system is a form of gendered violence during war and armed conflict, comfort women's experiences can only be understood through gender analysis. Therefore, I argue that a feminist approach is required to gain a deeper understanding of the issue by not only focusing on the *ianfu*'s experiences during the occupation, but also examining the preconditions that enabled the establishment of the system and emphasising their "post-war" experiences, as I demonstrate in Chapter 4.

Along a similar line, Lie (1997) underlines how the comfort system is a form of state-sponsored prostitution by Japan. He gives a captivating overview of how Japan, as a state, acts like a pimp to advance its geopolitical aims through the establishment of the comfort division (*iantai*) during the Asia-Pacific War (1937–1945) and WWII (1939–1945), and the Recreation and Amusement Association (RAA) during the US occupation of Japan (1945–1952). The way Lie plays with the term "pimp" reveals his standpoint on the comfort system as "pimp" is directly linked to prostitution. However, Lie focuses only on the Korean and Japanese comfort women. I extend Lie's analysis of the sexual political economy of the comfort system, to the context of Indonesia. Similarly, Mackie (2000) rejects referring to the comfort system as military sexual slavery as it suggests that the *ianfu* victim-survivors were "sex slaves". Mackie further argues that "sexual slavery" bears pornographic connotations. At the same time, she still refers to the comfort system as enforced military prostitution and addresses the *ianfu* as "women subjected to enforced military prostitution" (Mackie 2006 quoted in Soh 2008, 276). Mackie does acknowledge that prostitution, even in the context of the comfort system, implies voluntarism; but this position stresses the institutional aspect of this form of violence which is, according to her, integral to building the overall narrative of the comfort system. While Mackie highlights the link between gender and militarism that perpetuates institutionalised sexual violence such as the comfort women system, her analysis is mainly centred on international human rights discourse. In contrast, my thesis analyses a documentary which is considered a form of victim-survivors' testimonials that Mackie only mentions briefly.

The comfort system as "military sexual slavery" envisions the future in a way that is helpful in a legal framework to address the comfort system as a war crime committed by Japan and which it is conducive to collectively mobilise activism to seek justice for former *ianfu*. Taking into account while at the same time not undermining the feminist debate on prostitution

as legal sex work (see Overall 1992), I argue that military sexual slavery as a conceptualisation is preferred because those accused of maintaining slavery can be taken to court, but not those accused of maintaining or encouraging prostitution. In a similar sense, more activists may be more willing to participate in fights against slavery and not prostitution. Ruff-O'Herne (1998) is among those who advocate this position. Although she does not directly use the term military sexual slavery, in her memoir, she explicitly rejects the euphemism "comfort women" as there is nothing warm, soft, safe and friendly (terms that are associated with the term "comfort") entailed in the system. Ruff-O'Herne refers to herself and other *ianfu* as "war-rape victims, enslaved and conscripted by the Japanese imperial forces" (1998, 165–66). The way she frames *ianfu* also speaks to the conceptualisation of the comfort system as military sexual slavery. Ruff-O'Herne was also a victim-survivor of the comfort system in the Netherlands East Indies, thus I also use her account to compare the situation of Indonesian *ianfu* to the Dutch counterpart during the Japanese occupation in Chapter 4.

In the same direction, but adopting a slightly different approach, Sakamoto (2001) takes a legal and feminist perspective to the comfort women issue by analysing The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery in 2000. It is worth mentioning that the tribunal was not state-sponsored and was not organised by prominent international institutions such as the United Nations, which Mackie (2000) underlines. From the name, it is evident that this tribunal is framed in a way that specifically refers to the comfort system as military sexual slavery, demonstrating how the conceptualisation is beneficial in pursuing the legal responsibility of Japan as a state and to punish those who were responsible in order to restore the dignity of the victim-survivors. Adopting a different approach to Sakamoto, my thesis argues that a documentary can be seen as a non-legal way of restoring the dignity of the victim-survivors. Meanwhile, Yoshimi (2002) provides rare accounts of soldiers' recollections of the comfort system. The distinctions between the *ianfu*'s testimonies and the soldiers' recollections of what happened in the comfort stations reveals how both parties remember and forget differently. This is an interesting approach considering previous research emphasises the importance of victim testimonies while glossing over the testimonies of perpetrators. Yoshimi avoids using the term "prostitution" to explain the comfort system as she argues that terms such as "prostitute" and "licensed prostitute" need to be redefined to mean "women who were exploited sexually" (Yoshimi 2002, 40). Considering that her book does not offer an exhaustive account of Indonesian *ianfu*, this is one of the gaps I fill in my thesis.

While these two conceptualisations of the system are prominent within academia, "military sexual slavery" is not the only conceptualisation used in activism. "Enforced military prostitution" is also used in activism, precisely in the kind of activism that takes form in popular cultural representation. To exemplify how the two conceptualisations are used in activism, I juxtapose two scholars who examine comfort women-related activism through different positions. McGregor (2023) presents a close perspective of the Indonesian context of the comfort system. Although it is not explicitly stated, I assume that McGregor conceptualises the comfort system as enforced military prostitution following the compelling argument of Mackie (indeed, they produced an article together which I discuss in the third section of this chapter). McGregor connects the comfort system with pre-existing forms of sexual exploitation and prostitution in the Netherlands East Indies. Her work offers an exhaustive account of not only Indonesian *ianfu* but also Dutch *ianfu*, two groups of "women who were abused in the same colony, yet remained divided by a crucial postcolonial fracture" (McGregor 2023, 209). She also provides careful analysis of activism for and on behalf of Indonesian (*ianfu*) survivors, arguing that even after engaging in the activism by speaking up about the sexual violence they were subjected to (through various platforms), the shame continues to linger. McGregor argues that this is due to the way the notion of shame is understood in Indonesia, specifically with reference to a woman's family. McGregor's insights informs my analysis of the documentary concerning the extent to which shame plays a role in the former *ianfu*'s activism and how shame comes up in their testimonies. Rahmayna (2022) takes a more contemporary approach to activism related to *ianfu* in Indonesia. Even though Rahmayna stresses how the comfort system was a form of sexual slavery, the military aspect is missing in her definition. This paucity makes it seem like the activism is focused on fighting sexual violence, while neglecting the institution involved in condoning it. Rahmayna employs postfeminist theory in her research, but demonstrates an empirical understanding of gender that is binary. She mentions class briefly, but does not discuss its role in the comfort system. This is a gap that my thesis fills by shedding light on the implications of women's class status in the occupied territories (in my context, the Netherlands East Indies) that affected which women and girls the Japanese targeted and recruited for *ianfu*. Finally, although some of Rahmayna's points are repetitive, her text serves as an example for analysing digital activism dedicated to Indonesian *ianfu* which I examine in Chapter 3. Examining comfort women-related digital activism is useful for identifying the reach and effectiveness of the documentary.

These two positions of classifying the comfort women system are not strictly black and white. There is a grey area that blurs the lines where both positions inform each other. There is also no direct answer to which position "better" defines the comfort system. Yet, I argue that the context in which we use these conceptualisations matterSoh (2008) spells out that referring to the comfort system as "military sexual slavery" unavoidably renders the *ianfu* victim-survivors to be degradingly labelled as "sex slaves". Although she states that this framing would only emerge when addressing the comfort system "in the 1990s in the post-cold war world politics of human rights", I argue that my findings (compiled literature on the "military sexual slavery" position) prove how the conceptualisation travels across time and is still used in legal framework and contemporary activism. Further, Soh argues that referring the comfort system as "enforced military prostitution" is a partial conceptualisation that overlooks other forms of criminal sexual acts condoned by the Japanese military during their occupation (Soh 2008, 142): for example, the rapes and sexual violence that were committed when forced recruitment was conducted, which was prior to the women being taken to the comfort stations and before they were "officially" turned into comfort women. Yet, it was still a part of the continuum of violence in the comfort system. Reflecting upon both conceptualisations, my position as an Indonesian researcher compels me to refer to the comfort system as "enforced military prostitution" considering that this framing is a more appropriate way of conceptualising the comfort system during the Japanese occupation in the Netherlands East Indies, specifically. Further elaboration on how the comfort system operated in the Netherlands East Indies will be provided in Chapter 3. However, I argue that the documentary, *Because We Were Beautiful*, takes on the position of defining the comfort system as "military sexual slavery", taking into account the written synopsis of the film and how the former *ianfu* interviewed focused their stories on the enslavement-like experiences. The former *ianfu* experiences of the comfort system will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Literature on the representation of the comfort women issue in popular culture

Scholarly work on the representation of the comfort women issue in popular culture is gradually growing, despite the fact that the focus is still on Korean comfort women. Popular culture is often used as a means of advancing human rights activism, and the comfort women issue is included. Following the increase in transnational women's activism in the early 1990s to gain recognition for the comfort women victim-survivors, beginning in the late 1990s, this activism began to take form in audio-visual material. This section will be divided into three parts based on the type of popular cultural product: first, documentaries: Kim (2011), Hidayati

(2016), Zhang and Fang (2024); second, *manga/manhwa*: Ropers (2011) and Park (2019); and third, animated film: Choi (2024). My analysis contributes to the growing literature on representations of an under-represented group of comfort women, Indonesian *ianfu,* in popular culture.

2.2.1 Documentaries

In the following, I focus on the analysis of Korean, Indonesian and Chinese documentaries about comfort women respectively. Kim (2011) explores Byun Youngjoo's trilogy about the Korean comfort women survivors: *The Murmuring* (1995), *Habitual Sadness* (1997), and *My Own Breathing* (1999). Kim concludes that the trilogy offers an alternative way of approaching the historical trauma of comfort women that is not only gendered, but also generational. She notes that the films succeeded in raising awareness among the public and paved the way to further the discussion on an academic, organisational and media level. Her investigation of the impact of the aforementioned documentaries serves as a useful example for my analysis, but her objects of analysis are films directed by a female Korean director about Korean comfort women. Certainly, the positionality of the director plays a huge role in how the films were produced. An element that contributes to the novelty of my research is the fact that *Because We Were Beautiful* is directed by a male Dutch filmmaker to tell stories of Indonesian comfort women. Indeed, this is another aspect of the documentary that calls for an analysis from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Hidayati (2016) analyses a documentary made by Indonesian filmmakers about Indonesian comfort women entitled *Sri Sukanti: Kisahnya yang Tertinggal di Gedung Papak* (2012) [The Story of Sri Sukanti Who is Left Behind in Papak Building]. Although Hidayati employs different methods of analysis and her focus is on the identity construction of the *ianfu,* her object of analysis is closest to *Because We Were Beautiful*. Comparatively juxtaposing these two films provides insights into the strengths and weaknesses of having a transnational network in the production of *Because We Were Beautiful*. Finally, Zhang and Fang (2024) critically assess Guo Ke's *Thirty Two* (2014) and *Twenty Two* (2017) by relating them to gender, nationalism and war remembrance. They conclude that Guo's films have the possibility of re-traumatising the Chinese *ianfu* victim-survivors who were the vulnerable subjects of his work. The question of ethics in documentary filmmaking is critical and this article serves as a good comparison to the ethical issues of *Because We Were Beautiful*, which I interrogate in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

2.2.3 Manga/manhwa

Provided below is a discussion of two texts that examine Japanese *manga* and Korean *manhwa* about the comfort women issue and how each country represents the same issue differently. Ropers (2011) analyses *Aru hi* (1996) and *Report* (2006–2007), juxtaposing 2 *manga* which narrate the story of "enforced military prostitution" from the victim's position and the soldier's perspective respectively. Ropers reveals that by visually depicting trauma and violence against women, both *manga* contribute to public discourse as examples of commodified mass culture, mediums of artistic expression, and tools for engaging in historical debate. Likewise, Ropers contends that *manga* possesses a unique potential to involve a transnational audience in critical discourse. In a similar vein, I argue that *Because We Were Beautiful* functions in the same way as *manga* in the sense that the film engages a transnational audience, particularly from Indonesia, the Netherlands and Japan, in critical discussions concerning the comfort women issue. Park (2019) investigates three *manhwa* that were exhibited at the Angoulême Comics Festival in France in 2014 entitled: *Yamato Terminator* (2014), *The Song of Butterfly* (2014) and *Viewpoint* (2014). Park highlights how *manhwa* serves as a reflection of the post-war discourse on comfort women. The comfort women issue happened to fit the theme of the event, which was "memories of war and gendered violence", making the *manhwa* exhibited consciously political. Park states that the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Affairs (GEFA) was involved in the exhibition preparation and thus, this is a form of South Korean soft power diplomacy. Japan's unhappy reaction to these *manhwa* replicates Japan's responses to the *Troostmeisjes*/Comfort Women Project exhibition in Erasmus Huis, Jakarta, in 2010, which I elaborate on in Chapter 5.

2.2.3 Animated film

Differing from the previous forms of popular culture, an animated film is a relatively new medium to represent a sensitive issue such as the comfort women. Contributing to this infant field is Choi (2024) who delves into Kim Sujin's *Unforgotten* (2021), an animated short film about Korean comfort women. Choi's work is not the only study on the representation of the comfort women issue in an animated film, but her work is the one that is relevant to my research. The novelty of Choi's research lies in how she examines the use of experimental technology, such as an animated film, to remember the comfort women's stories; thus differing from previously discussed scholars who focus on other mediums. Choi discusses strengths and limitations of animated film in addressing a sensitive topic of violence and the subject of comfort women. Choi argues that animated film offers an alternative mode of representing and witnessing stories of the past in which the viewers are implicated to become witnesses of

cultural memory. Even though the modes of representing the issue are different, *Because We Were Beautiful* and *Unforgotten* are similar in the way that both films face difficulties conveying the traumatic memories of the women due to the "sexualised and objectified nature of the crimes committed" (Choi 2024, 6). Choi's analysis reminds us that inviting viewers to learn, empathise and relate to women on-screen can anchor a film, which tells stories of the past, to the present. In *Because We Were Beautiful*, I observe similar potential in terms of the extent of audience engagement. I discuss this point in more detail in Chapter 5.

In summary, existing studies on representations of the comfort women issue in the audio-visual material of popular culture are still dominated by the depiction of Korean comfort women. While this is a valuable endeavour, I suggest that the lack of the popular cultural representations of comfort women from other countries results in further marginalisation of an already marginalised group of women and the telling of a selective part of the history. Apart from being tools for educational purposes and awareness-raising, the political nature of documentary, *manga/manhwa* and animated film encourages comfort women-related activism to take forms in popular culture. As I argue in this thesis, *Because We Were Beautiful* is one example of how popular culture functions in activism for and on behalf of Indonesian comfort women.

Literature on the *Troostmeisjes*/Comfort Women Project

There are only two journal articles which look at the *Troostmeisjes*/Comfort Women Project: McGregor and Mackie (2018) focus on Jan Banning's photographic project and exhibition, while Rahmayati (2021) centralises her research on individual photos of the comfort women taken by Banning. These studies are the closest in focus to my own analysis. In other words, nothing has been written specifically on Frank van Osch's film, *Because We Were Beautiful*, and this is a noticeable gap in the literature that my thesis seeks to address. These texts are, however, useful in terms of informing parts of my analysis.

Although McGregor and Mackie (2018) do not directly analyse the documentary, their research provides a broader perspective on the photographic project that is also a part of the overarching Comfort Women Project in which the aforementioned documentary is included. McGregor and Mackie perceive the issue from the lens of memory politics and conclude that Banning's photobook and exhibitions are a form of the Netherlands' "politics of pity" (2018, 140) towards Indonesia after its colonisation. They define the "politics of pity" as an emphasis on creating feelings of pity for an "unfortunate" other. I argue that this approach echoes the

content and justification for the Ethical Policy, introduced by the Netherlands in the late 19th century and early 20th century during the colonisation of the Netherlands East Indies. The Ethical Policy was based on the idea of fulfilling the so-called "moral obligation" and ethical responsibility towards their colonial subjects by promoting the welfare of the native Indonesians (*pribumi*) through economic development, agricultural reforms and the establishment of schools, hospitals and other institutions to provide basic education in line with European curriculum and healthcare (Taylor 1976, 640). Through this photographic project and building on McGregor and Mackie's conclusion regarding the "politics of pity", I argue that through *Because We Were Beautiful*, the Netherlands followed the same pattern to fulfil its moral duty. Yet this time, they managed to implicate Japan and successfully shift the focus of the perpetrator of colonial atrocities which occurred in the Netherlands East Indies from the Dutch to the Japanese, thus recalling how the latter occupied the territory while the former was still there.

Moreover, McGregor and Mackie point out that the photographs and exhibitions are not enough to communicate ethical or political knowledge concerning the comfort women issue as it depends on two things. First, it relies on the audience's prior understanding of the issue and what they do after learning about it from the photographs in the exhibition. Second, it rests upon the continued impact of the project for the Indonesian former *ianfu* who were the subjects of the photographs. Building on these two points, I focus in Chapter 5 on whether the documentary manages to communicate ethical and/or political knowledge about the comfort women issue. What I add to McGregor and Mackie's analysis is that aside from the audience, I focus on the filmmakers' prior understanding of the issue and their subsequent actions. Additionally, the question of continued impact for the former *ianfu* following the release of the documentary will be discussed in Chapter 5. More broadly, this article provides insights into the reception of the overall project and prompts me to consider whether the documentary can complement the contribution made by the photographic project by addressing some of the gaps it failed to cover.

Furthermore, Rahmayati (2021) approaches the object of analysis from a discipline outside of the humanities—photography studies—thus offering nuance to the interpretation of the former Indonesian *ianfu* pictures. Rahmayati concludes that the close-up photographs of the *ianfu* showcase personal distance with the observers and invite interactions from the observers. Ultimately, she argues that the subjects of the photographs demand ethical responses from observers. While this analysis of the photographs is novel, Rahmayati seems to take the

conceptualisation of the term *juugun ianfu* and comfort women in Indonesia for granted. This lack of a deep understanding of the historical context of the comfort women in the Netherlands East Indies resulted in her analysis mainly revolving around the portrayal of *ianfu* as passive victims of injustice. Additionally, even though Rahmayati mentions a *Skype* interview with Banning as a part of her data collection method, the interview is not incorporated into her visual grammatical analysis of the portraits. This is yet another gap that my thesis addresses as I incorporate Banning's interview in my analytical chapters. Nevertheless, this text includes behind the scenes discussion of Banning's photographs, which informs my analysis. Some of the final photographs are incorporated into the film and serves as a mode of transition from one scene to another; Rahmayati's analysis of the portraits also prompts me to make meaning of this transition mode in the film. Rather than focusing on the comfort women's victimhood, however, my emphasis is on their agency: I regard them as active subjects who participated in transnational activism to seek justice for themselves and other comfort system victim-survivors.

Conclusion

To conclude, while there is an extensive body of literature on the comfort women issue, an increasing number of studies of their representation in popular culture, and a handful of articles on *Troostmeisjes*/Comfort Women Project, I argue in this chapter that these existing studies often leave the Indonesian context less-elaborated upon or unexplained. In contrast, this thesis will put into the spotlight the representation of Indonesian comfort women in a documentary made by filmmakers from a country with long colonial relations with Indonesia. Indonesia case of comfort women is distinct due to the fact that the country was occupied in the presence of the Western coloniser, making the oppressions experienced by the *ianfu* different compared to other countries. This fact begs for a postcolonial feminist lens to be applied when analysing the documentary and its impacts of confronting injustices of the past in the present time, as I adopt in this thesis.

Chapter 3

Background: Indonesian *Juugun Ianfu* during the Japanese Occupation

In this chapter, I examine the historical background of the comfort women system in Indonesia during the Second World War. First, I provide an overview of Japan's 1942 invasion of Indonesia, which was still a Dutch colony at the time and known as the Netherlands East Indies. I also discuss the establishment of comfort stations (*ianjo*) across the archipelago during the subsequent Japanese occupation (1942–1945). Second, I discuss how this system can be understood as a form of violence against women in times of war and armed conflict by showing how militarised masculinity played a role in its perpetuation. Third, I delve into the "naming and framing" of Indonesian comfort women, drawing attention to the use of the term *ianfu* in Indonesia instead of the literal Indonesian translation of the term comfort women. Fourth, I elucidate the implementation of Japan's monetary compensation to comfort women, namely via the Asian Women's Fund (AWF), in Indonesia, while interrogating why the project was implemented differently for this country. Finally, I illuminate forms of activism dedicated to Indonesian former *ianfu*, ranging from a creative art exhibition to digital activism. The first three sections provide context for the analysis of representations of the comfort women issue in Chapter 4 and the interview and activism in Chapter 5.

I argue that the comfort women system established by Japan in Indonesia constitutes a systematic form of violence against women. This system was sustained through the enactment of militarised masculinity by Japanese soldiers to subjugate vulnerable women. Furthermore, I argue that the naming and framing of the comfort women issue channelled a wide range of transnational activism to seek justice for the *ianfu* victim-survivors. I consider *Because We Were Beautiful* a form of transnational activism for the *ianfu* victim-survivors, and thus, other forms of activism discussed in this chapter provide context for understanding the impact and effectiveness of the documentary and its aims to seek long overdue redress.

Japan's invasion of the Netherlands East Indies and the establishment of comfort stations

Japan first landed in Indonesia on 11 January 1942 on Tarakan Island,[12] during the time when the country was still under the Dutch rule, following its colonisation in 1816. Japan came

[12] At the time, Tarakan was a part of East Kalimantan. Now, Tarakan is a part of the North Kalimantan province.

with the promise to liberate Indonesia from the Netherlands; this was the reason why initially Indonesia did not perceive their arrival as another foreign invasion. Japan asserted that its army was liberating Asia from Western colonisers and uniting Asians under the ideology of *Hakkou Ichiu* (八紘一宇) with Japan positioned as the patriarch of the Asian family (Van De Ryt 2001, 56). *Hakkou Ichiu* was a "slogan[13]" by Emperor Jimmu and was popularised by Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe in 1940, which bears the meaning of "the whole world under one roof". Following this imperial ideology, Japan believed that the world was connected in eight directions and shared one home: Japan. This ideology was used to justify their imperialist conquest of Asian countries, including Indonesia. The promise of independence and liberation given by the Japanese appealed to many Indonesians, especially those who were anti-Dutch. Some nationalists viewed Japan as a potential model for modernisation that did not adhere to Western patterns (Mark 2018, 41-42 cited in McGregor 2023, 46).

In March 1942, Japan landed on Java and managed to occupy Batavia (present-day Jakarta), pushing the Dutch military forces to retreat to Bandung (Van De Ryt 2001, 58). Indonesians celebrated the success by waving Japanese paper flags and shouting "*Banzai*[14]!" on the streets (ibid). Little did they know that Japan turned out to be another oppressor after the Netherlands. Japan conscripted Indonesian, Dutch and mixed-descent men to be *romusha* (労務者), forced labourers for Japan's war effort in its occupied territories. The women counterparts were not left out; they were also drafted to a form of forced labour—the comfort system—to be *ianfu*. Before arriving in the Netherlands East Indies, Japan had planned which local resources and groups of people they would exploit, which led them to prioritise securing mines, plantations, oil fields and factories (Duus 1996 cited in McGregor 2023, 46). Consequently, this determined where troops were stationed and dictated the locations of the comfort stations or *ianjo* (慰安所) to serve them (McGregor 2023, 46). According to a report written by Kim Il Myon from South Korea, *ianjo* in Indonesia were located in Bandung, Batavia, Semarang, Surabaya and Malang (Hicks 1997, 140). Even though most *ianjo* were situated in Java Island, which was and is still Indonesia's main island, later discoveries revealed that there were traces of *ianjo* in other cities in other islands too.

The initial (purported) aims behind the establishment of the comfort stations was to prevent the rape of local women by the Japanese troops and to prevent soldiers from getting infected

[13] The Emperor's full statement was "hakkou wo ouute ie to nasan" (八紘を掩うて宇と為さん) and could be translated as "I shall cover the eight directions and make them my abode".
[14] A Japanese cheer of triumph. The literal meaning of *banzai* (万歳) is "to live ten thousand years".

with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Yoshimi 2002, 65–66). The former, the prevention of rape, was due to the backlash Japan received on an international level after the Nanking Massacre in 1937 in China (Lie 1997, 254). The latter rationale, to prevent STDs, was based on a male heterosexual assumption that men need to satisfy their sexual needs by engaging in sexual activities with women. However, engaging in sexual intercourse randomly with women and without the use of condoms intensifies the possibility of getting infected by STDs, which in turn would impact the troops' performance in battle. By establishing the comfort stations and operating the comfort system, Japan could organise which women could satisfy their sexual needs. Further, by establishing an organised system of (forced) prostitution, the military could enforce the use of condoms upon the soldiers and the consumption of abortion medication to the *ianfu*.

At first, the establishment of comfort stations in the Netherlands East Indies followed the initial procedure of the establishment in previous occupied territories such as Korea, which required a declaration of willingness to be signed by the women. In fact, the declaration was just a formality and did not bear any legal weight. For the Netherlands East Indies, the declaration was written in either Japanese, Dutch or Malay, regardless whether the signatories fully comprehended what they signed up for (Hicks 1997, 148). However, when the *ianjo* that had been more or less filled by "volunteers[15]" became understaffed, Japan engaged in a more intensive recruitment (ibid). This meant a crueller way of forced recruitment of *ianfu*. The Japanese army forcefully took local Indonesian girls and young women from villages and Dutch girls and young women from the internment camps in the Netherlands East Indies. Further elaboration on the forced recruitment of *ianfu* is discussed in Chapter 4.

The role of militarised masculinity in perpetuating the comfort women system

In this section, I show how the comfort women system established by Japan before and during WWII was a form of violence against women used in war and armed conflict. Even though many activists and researchers stress the issue as a case of sexual violence against women, this systematic enforced prostitution, as discussed in Chapter 2, also encompassed physical and psychological violence. The combination of these three types of violence experienced by *ianfu* continues to shape their "post-war[16]" lived realities to this day. Merry

[15] I use quotation marks in this word to problematise referring to the women as volunteers. It was true that some women whose jobs were prostitutes "voluntarily" signed up. However, it would be more accurate to say that they were pressured to volunteer.
[16] The problematisation of the term "post-war" is discussed in Chapter 4.

reminds us that the prevalence of sexual violence against women in times of war and armed conflict relies on the concept of militarised masculinity and the utilisation of rape as a means of dishonouring enemies (Merry 2009, 1). With the establishment of *ianjo* in the Netherlands East Indies during the Second World War, Japan not only tried to dishonour Indonesia (its colonised subject) but also the Netherlands (its "rival" coloniser), recalling how *ianfu* victim-survivors in the Netherlands East Indies comprised both Indonesian and Dutch women. However, Indonesian women disproportionately made up a larger number of *ianfu* victim-survivors during that period.

Merry further notes that many forms of gender violence are part of broader conflicts like ethnic assaults, military occupation, warfare and refugee movements where rape and violence against women are employed (2009, 2). The establishment of the comfort system was a part of a military occupation with Japan's agenda of imperialist conquest in mind. This was a means of consolidating power hierarchies, both against women and other men; and this form of gender violence is commonly weaponised as a fundamental strategy in warfare (Merry 2009, 3). However, gender is not the sole dimension at play in this structural power hierarchy. Racial dimensions play a major role in consolidating the hierarchy. To illustrate this point, according to Kim Il Yon's report on the comfort women, Dutch women were depicted as being forced to serve Japanese soldiers while being permitted to keep photographs of their husbands, who had been captured by Japan, at their bedside (Hicks 1997, 140). This act demonstrates power relations by putting Japanese men on a higher hierarchy, while keeping both Dutch and Indonesian women and men on the lower counterpart[17]. The transformation of colonised women into concubines and "keeps[18]" represents a significant aspect of the colonial appropriation of resources, reinforcing not only gender but also racial hierarchies; meanwhile, concerns about sexual assaults on European women (in this context, Dutch women) by supposedly "primitive" men of colour [Japanese men] fuelled the mechanism of policing and control over both (Ann Stoler 1997, 377 & 381 cited by Merry 2009, 11). Following this logic, women were seen as objects that could be taken away and brought home as war trophies in the celebration of successful conquests. In this context, women were caught in the crossfire of these male-driven conflicts.

[17] The role of the racial dimension in the comfort system will be further demonstrated in Chapter 4.

[18] This is the term used in the Stoler's argument cited by Merry. It presumably refers to how women of a defeated collective were kept by the winning side and were considered "spoils of war".

This twisted display of the Imperial Japanese Army's power had an international audience in mind; it was a way of proving that as the colonial power from the East[19], Japan had managed to make the colonial power from the West, the Netherlands, succumb. According to Hicks (1997, 36), prior to the rise of Japan as a military and imperial power in Asia-Pacific, Japan's expansionist ambitions could not go further because the Western colonial powers refused to regard Japan as an equal. This racial dimension intensified in the 1920s, fuelling Japanese insecurity which subsequently pushed its extremist military factions towards heightened aggression. Japan's chauvinism put the Japanese as second to none among Asians as they labelled themselves to be the liberators of Asia from Western imperialism. Despite this chauvinistic elements of perspective, it is essential to also keep in mind that Japan was the only Asian nation challenging the dominance of the Western colonial powers at the time (Van De Ryt 2001, 57).

In the context of gender and nationalism, while men have been constructed as naturally linked to warfare, women have been constructed as associated with peace (Yuval-Davis 2004, 170). I argue that the paternalistic perception that women are mothers of a nation and men are its soldiers and defenders sustains patriarchy and militarised masculinity. This paternalism partly explains why Indonesian men who failed to protect their women were then considered less masculine than Japanese men. In this way, violence is intertwined with the enactment of gendered identities (Merry 2009, 22). In other words, enacting violence means doing a specific gender performance. As mentioned, it is noteworthy that when men condone violence against women, they are not only exerting control over the women but also performing a certain type of masculinity, which is then assessed by other men who measure their own masculinity through such performances (specifically, militarised masculinity) (Connell 1995 quoted by Merry 2009). This is where Butler's insights become particularly useful. They argue that femininity and masculinity in relation to gender are in fact performative acts. Gender reality is performative in the sense that it is real only to the extent that it is performed (Butler 1988, 527). Once again, I would like to emphasise that when something is performed, there tends to be an audience meant to receive and understand the message.

In the context of a patriarchal state such as Japan, as argued by Lie (1997), Hanochi (2003) and Frix (2023), the show of masculinity through the comfort system is not only directed

[19] The binary signifier of West and East are used to highlight the power relations that exist between the two countries.

towards their colonised countries. It can also be seen as a display to incite fear and anxiety among Western colonial powers, in particular the Dutch, who were occupying Indonesia. When it comes to militarised masculinity, the relationship between militarism and patriarchy is dialectical in the way that in order to function, militaries rely on male privilege and female subordination (Turpin 1998, 15). I will not delve into Japanese militarism here, but Turpin's argument illustrates how Japan's militarised ideologies and values, which includes masculinity, heavily influenced its soldiers during colonisation. Additionally, Enloe points out that militarism can be traced back to patriarchy and the quality of maleness. From her perspective, armed forces are the extreme embodiment of the patriarchal family (Enloe 1983 cited in Rich 1984, 225). Hence, the problem rests upon how the armed forces (the Imperial Japanese Army) as the patriarchal family valorised manliness and masculinity through violence they committed against *ianfu.* The Japanese soldiers' gender performances towards the comfort women reinforced militarised masculinity. In other words, militarised masculinity, enacted through the comfort system, pushed the wheel of double colonisation experienced by *ianfu*. Nevertheless, it is clear that masculinity was not enough to explain and rationalise the comfort system. There was a pre-condition, the legacies of the Dutch, that *enabled* the establishment of the comfort women system in the Netherlands East Indies: further elaboration on this point is provided in Chapter 4.

Naming and framing Indonesian comfort women

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the comfort women issue was a *nameless* tragedy until a South Korean *ianfu,* Kim Hak Sun, spoke up for the first time in a public forum in 1991, demanding that Japan take responsibility for this abuse (Soh 2003, 209). Her testimony shocked the world. During that time, rape was not yet recognised as a weapon of war[20]. Since there was no legal international document nor policy which could be referred to, people did not know how to address the issue and deal with it. One constraint of such international instruments to address the matter of rape as a weapon of war was that they primarily utilised tools suited for specific post-conflict situations [such as the Yugoslavian and Rwandan cases] and has limited efficacy during wartime (Plauchut and Le Houérou 2017, 6). As such, we can see how

[20] The concept of rape as a weapon of war did emerge in the 1990s following rape cases in the former Yugoslavia and Rwandan genocide, but it was not yet legally established in international instruments. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) recognised genocide-rape as victims of genocide and crimes against humanity in 1998 and the International Criminal Court (ICC) considered sexual violence during war as crimes against humanity and war crimes in 1998 (Plauchut and Le Houérou 2017). Hence, these two international instruments were 7 years after Kim's testimony.

crucial "naming and framing" the problem (comfort women) was the first step in establishing a social and political movement for seeking justice for *ianfu* victim-survivors. Naming the problem means devising a framework that not only defines it, but also proposes potential solutions; and each problem name comes with its own baggage, political orientation, inclusions and exclusions (Merry 2009, 27). In addition, the practice of naming makes more or less visible *who* is doing *what* to *whom*, thus we can highlight the various sets of connections within an issue (Boyle 2019, 20).

As discussed in the above section, I refer to the comfort women system as a form of violence against women (VAW). I categorise it as VAW instead of gender-based violence (GBV) because the term GBV does not underline the disproportionate victimisation of women, whereas all *ianfu* victim-survivors are women. I take the definition of both VAW and GBV from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) report:

> Gender-based violence is violence that is directed against a person because of that person's gender or that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately. Violence against women is a form of gender-based violence that affects women excessively as it is directly connected with the unequal distribution of power between women and men, which perpetuates the devaluation and subordination of women, and violates women's fundamental rights and freedom (EIGE 2016, 3).

Even though GBV is a broader term, it does not specify the perpetrator; meanwhile, VAW is in fact "*men's* violence against women" (Boyle 2019, 24) that make evident the perpetrators, which in this context—the perpetrators of the comfort system—were men. Boyle (2019, 29) further elaborates that by addressing forms of VAW as a continuum of men's violence, we can think of violence as being gender-based not solely because of *who* it targets but, rather, because of how that violence is perceived in relation to perpetrators' gender performances. This is in line with the discussion in the previous section where I established that the Japanese soldiers' gender performances towards the comfort women perpetuate militarised masculinity. As such, addressing the comfort system as a form of violence against women (in war and armed conflict) makes visible the constructed nature of militarised masculinity within the system.

On that note, there are two issues that need to be addressed when it comes to naming and framing. First, while the process of naming and framing can be considered elitist due to the fact that the ones who name and frame the problem are usually those in privileged positions, I agree with Merry that naming and framing can channel social and political responses to the problem, raise public awareness and create terminology to discuss it (2009, 28–29). This is evident in how the Japanese government initially denied Kim Hak Sun's claim of being involved in the

establishment of comfort stations. After the problem was named and framed by mostly South Korean activists who supported justice for *ianfu*, it channelled responses from the international sphere; moreover, Japanese activists and professors who advocated for former *ianfu* provided irrefutable proof of the Imperial Army's involvement in the establishment and operation of *ianjo* (Soh 2003, 209). In 1992, Miyazawa Kiichi, Japan's prime minister, apologised publicly to South Korea on behalf of Japan. At this point, Japan has not apologised to other countries in regard to *ianfu*. Miyazawa also promised that the government would provide compensation to *ianfu* victim-survivors. Kim Hak Sun's public testimony can thus be seen a part of the naming and framing process. Kim, who was not in a privileged position, contributed to exposing what Keck and Sikkink call "violations of women's rights for which states could and should be held responsible" (1998, 180). Without her involvement and visibility politics, the naming and framing of the comfort women issue would not have escalated so quickly on a national, regional and international level.

Second, in order to attract international attention, it is helpful for the problem to be named and framed in English because documents and conventions at the international level use English as the *default* main language of instruction[21]. Thus, this process is Anglocentric, which is neither a new nor unique issue to international organisations (Wolfe 2014). The term "comfort women" serves as a good example of this. The English translation, which is used most commonly internationally, fails to capture the contextualised meaning of *juugun ianfu* (of which the *kanji* I explained in Chapter 1). This linguistic issue might seem trivial, yet there is always a gap in translation. This shortcoming demonstrates how there will never be a perfect and satisfactory naming and framing, making this process limited in the first place. Various ways of framing women's predicament and the selection of frames impacts how the issue resonates with diverse audiences and determines which institutional arenas women can access for remedy (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 197). This point is illustrated by how *juugun ianfu* translates to English and Indonesian and how the framing travels outside of Japan. These concerns are also reflected in the extant literature on the topic: some scholars (Hicks 1997; Yoshimi[22] 2002; Soh 2003; McGregor and Mackie 2018; McGregor 2023) writing in English about Indonesian *ianfu* tend to use the phrase *comfort women in the Netherlands East Indies* to

[21] Although almost all international organisations use English as the language of instruction, it needs to be acknowledged that many do operate in and translate their work into other languages. To exemplify this point, the United Nations (UN) has six official languages (English, Chinese, Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish) and two working languages (English and French). For more information, please visit: https://www.un.org/en/our-work/official-languages.

[22] In the case of Yoshimi's book, it was translated into English by Suzanne O'Brien

highlight the fact that this occurred before Indonesia gained independence on 17 August 1945, hence no state can be blamed and have a finger pointed at it as "failing to protect" its female citizens. Meanwhile, some Indonesian scholars (for example, Hindrati and Kimura[23] 2007; Suliyati 2018; Rahmayati 2021; Rahmayna 2022) who research this topic and write both in Indonesian and English use the term *Indonesian juugun ianfu* (when stressing the military element and army involvement) or *ianfu* (when emphasising the women victim-survivors). Although the comfort women issue happened before independence, I argue that using Indonesia instead of the *Netherlands East Indies* signifies solidarity among women across the Indonesian archipelago, despite the fact that they were not yet united under one nation-state at the time.

Further to the above, hitherto there has been no direct translation of *ianfu* into the Indonesian language. The existing translation is misleading as it means *wanita penghibur* or "women entertainer", which partly explains why the term *juugun ianfu* or *ianfu* is preferred by Indonesian people, scholars and activists. Precisely on this question of naming of the comfort women in Indonesia, McGregor argues that the ongoing use of the term *ianfu* in Indonesia suggests a failure to fully engage in a critical examination of both the Japanese occupation as a colonial experience and the unfinished process of rehabilitating survivors and affording them dignity (2023, 14). Agreeing and thinking along similar lines, I argue that using the term *ianfu* instead of the problematic translation of "women entertainer" emphasises that this is a "legacy" of the Japanese occupation (alongside, for example, the term *romusha* and *heiho*[24]). In so doing, Indonesia does not allow the term to be detached from Japan nor does it grant Japan the right to simply forget about *ianfu* victim-survivors even after the end of its occupation. I argue that this is a powerful act of continuously holding Japan accountable for what they did to *ianfu*.

The Asian Women's Fund (AWF): Japan's monetary compensation

Following Kim Hak Sun's testimony and lawsuit in 1991, and the prime minister's apology and promise in 1992, it took more than three years before Japan established the Asian Women's Fund (AWF) in 1995. This act was followed by the commencement of a "national atonement" project in 1996, which lasted until the end of 2002 (except for the case of Indonesia) (Soh 2003, 210). The AWF is a monetary compensation fund provided by the Japanese government to former non-Japanese *ianfu*. The main aim behind the establishment of the AWF was to fulfil a

[23] Koichi Kimura is Japanese.
[24] Heiho (兵補) were local (Indonesian) auxiliary troops unit consisting of local (Indonesian) male youths raised by Japan during the occupation.

moral responsibility to the former *ianfu*. However, it was also a way of regaining Japan's "honourable position in the international community[25]" by addressing the international pressure to compensate former *ianfu*, considering how their compensation was not included along with the other Japan's war reparations. In hindsight, the fund appears to be an apology from the perpetrator to the victims-survivors of this state-sponsored form of violence against women. However, in fact, Japanese citizens who supported the recognition of *ianfu* involved themselves actively by donating "atonement money". This act shows how the Japanese people shared the remorse and responsibility of their government's colonial wrongdoings. Thus, it cannot be inferred rigidly that the AWF is an apology solely from the perpetrator (the state). Former *ianfu* who were deemed "eligible[26]" for this fund received two types of compensation. First, they received atonement money (contributed by the Japanese people) that came with a letter from the AWF president and messages from Japanese contributors; second, they received medical welfare support (contributed by the Japanese government) and a letter from the prime minister of Japan (2003, 222). Although this initiative can be seen as a well-intended "national atonement project" that stems from collaboration between the state and its citizens, AWF fundraising and implementation were not without challenges and disputes (see Soh 2003).

Comparatively, the AWF can be perceived as a successful effort of transnational organisation and activism to combat violence against women that is long overdue. When discussing transnational movements to combat violence against women that have roots in the so-called developing world, Keck and Sikkink (1998, 175) mention two examples, one of which is "Asian groups working on [the] comfort women" issue. It is crucial to note that it was possible for the AWF to be established because of "transnational activism" for *ianfu*, and this activism was possible due to Kim Hak Sun's public testimony. Transnational activism is defined as cross-border collective action, engaging individuals from two or more countries in specific campaigns or longer-term movements, and encompassing various forms, including lobbying, advocacy, protests and direct actions (Moghadam 2010, 292). Hicks suggests that comfort women activism, aided by feminists and other activists, highlights the significance of personal testimony within networks across diverse cultural settings, even when such testimony is deemed profoundly shameful (1997, 22). Despite agreeing with Hicks, I argue that it is necessary to consider what makes such testimony shameful in the first place. In a patriarchal

[25] A remark from Murayama, quoted from an English translation of News Vol. 19 published on 22 March 2002: A Discussion with Mr. Tomiichi Murayama, President of the Asian Women's Fund. Read more: https://www.awf.or.jp/e6/news-19.html.
[26] Women who could be identified by the authorities as victims of Japanese military occupation (Soh 2003, 227).

society like Indonesia, where notions of honour and purity are put on a woman's virginity and sexuality (Sarwono 2012; Raihana and Ghufron 2015), speaking up publicly about rape was certainly something that was frowned upon. Rather than sympathy, such testimony invited insults and stigma. These cultural and contextual elements shed some light upon why many former *ianfu* chose not to disclose their names, used pseudonyms in any written publications, or decided to remain silent.

The Philippines was the first country to receive funding from the AWF in 1996, and Indonesia became the last country when the project was dissolved in 2007. According to the AWF final report[27] (2007) on their project in Indonesia, the Indonesian government preferred the project to be conducted differently to the other recipient countries because they had not fully identified their former *ianfu*. I would argue that this reasoning is rather weak and will elaborate on this in the next paragraph. Additionally, this controversial decision was not made after consultation with *ianfu* victim-survivors or the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (Yayasan Bantuan Hukum Indonesia: YLBHI), which had been helping *ianfu* to seek redress (McGregor 2023, 18). Indonesia's agreement with the AWF to use the funds to establish facilities for elderly people instead demonstrates the government's reluctancy to make an effort to locate and authenticate their *ianfu* (this job was later taken on by NGOs and activists). This echoes the notion of a "cultural waiting room" discussed by Mourad (2014) where marginal identities, which include women, have to wait for their rights to be realised. From a feminist perspective, Indonesia's decision also exemplifies how women's issues are marginalised and deemed less important by the state, which prioritises what it considers more urgent national matters (Lynn 2010 cited in Mourad 2014, 69). According to the AWF website, from 1997 to 2007 the AWF, assisted by Indonesia's Ministry of Social Affairs, allocated 380 million yen[28] to build 69 senior welfare facilities in Indonesia. While the majority are general senior citizen facilities, a foundation in Blitar—known as the "Family"—dedicated to projects for former *ianfu*, established a facility accommodating 14 survivors; and the AWF built three other facilities planned by the aforementioned organisation. The website also stated three reasons as to why Indonesia decided to task the AWF with developing welfare facilities instead of giving the money to individual *ianfu* directly: first, it would be extremely difficult to authenticate former *ianfu*; second, it was important to protect the honour of the former *ianfu* and their

[27] The final report of the AWF project in Indonesia, presented by the Ministry of Social Affairs in January 2007. "Report on the Handle of Ex Jugun Ianfu by Indonesia Government in Cooperation with Asian Women's Fund" (2006). Read more: https://www.awf.or.jp/e3/indonesia-00.html.
[28] Or approximately 2,237,494.46 Euro.

families; third, the question of war reparations from Japan to Indonesia had already been settled by accords, specifically the Treaty of Peace. I find my country's stance on this issue to be extremely disappointing. My positionality as a woman who shares the same gender identity with the *ianfu*, a feminist with a stance against any form of violence against women, an Indonesian with the same shared history, and an Asian who wants to support and show solidarity to other *ianfu* from other countries, affects how I think about Indonesia's position on this matter.

In responding to the three "excuses" that the Indonesian government made, I would pose three arguments. First, I acknowledge that authenticating former *ianfu* in the Indonesian archipelago is an extensive task. Yet this is not impossible to achieve if the government cooperated with YLBHI, NGOs, researchers, activists (both local and transnational) and the already public *ianfu* to help locate and authenticate others. Second, using honour to justify their reason is an outdated narrative. This is an illustration of how the state is instrumentalising honour to advance their interests. By so doing, Indonesia not only instrumentalised the honour of its women (*ianfu*), but also the honour of the state; or to put it more precisely, the honour of the state which is constructed in a way that it lies heavily on the honour of their women (Das 1995; Mookherjee 2006; Baron 2006). Moreover, it is not just *any* woman's honour, but a *particular* group of women who are chaste, feminine, reproductive, heterosexual, adhering to gender norms, etc. Third, the 83-page Treaty of Peace between Indonesia and Japan—written in Indonesian, Japanese and English, signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of both countries, and ratified by President Soekarno on 10 April 1958—did not specifically address *ianfu*. In article 4, number 1, it is stated that "Japan is prepared to pay reparations to the Republic of Indonesia in order to compensate the damage and suffering caused by Japan during the war". This is elaborated in point a: "Japan agrees to supply, in accordance with detailed terms as may be agreed upon". However, there is no complementary document, accessible to the public, listing the "detailed terms". Thus, there is no way to confirm that the promised war reparations include financially compensating former Indonesian *ianfu*. Finally, while I do not wholly oppose the establishment of senior citizen facilities as they also benefit former *romusha* and *heiho*, this is not a woman-focused consideration nor a victim-centred decision. By doing this, the state deprived the former Indonesian *ianfu* of their agency and rights as women subjected to violence, as workers deprived of revenue[29] and as subalterns colonised by a

[29] By this, I am referring to the earnings that the *ianfu* were supposed to receive for their services. The soldiers had to pay to be able to use the services of *ianfu*, but the money received by *ianfu* was so little that often times the

colonial power. From this position, Indonesia perceives the comfort women issue and the AWF as a bilateral matter between two countries instead of violence against Indonesian women condoned by the Japanese army.

Activism for Indonesian *juugun ianfu*

As mentioned earlier, activism for the comfort women issue began to flourish in the 1990s, fuelled by Kim Hak Sun's public testimony. During that period, forms of activism mostly revolved around the recognition of *ianfu* (including the involvement of the Japanese army in the establishment of *ianjo*), the demand for a state apology, and the pursuit of legal responsibility from the Japanese state. In general, activism for *ianfu*—be it on a national or transnational level—has been well-recorded by previous researchers. One prominent example is Soh (2003), who focuses on national (South Korea and Japan) and transnational activism of *ianfu* supporters and feminists in relation to the establishment and implementation of the AWF mandate. However, when it comes to activism for and on behalf of *ianfu* in the Netherlands East Indies, there is less literature on the topic. McGregor (2016) provides a careful and considered historical account that chronologically summarises transnational and Japanese activism directed towards former Indonesian and Dutch *ianfu.* Rahmayna (2022) provides a postfeminist analysis of media campaign advocacy which supports Indonesian *ianfu*. Recently, McGregor (2023) complemented her previous research by including Indonesian colonial-era novels about comfort women as another form of activism. Building upon this literature, I aim to shed light in this section on a more recent form of local activism dedicated to Indonesian *ianfu* in both physical and digital spaces. Illuminating other forms of activism for and on behalf of Indonesian *ianfu* provides context for understanding the impact and effectiveness of *Because We Were Beautiful* and its purposes to seek long overdue remedy for the *ianfu* victim-survivors. In this section, I also aim to show how the *Troostmeisjes* project fuels other forms of activism for Indonesian *ianfu*.

I will begin by positing that I consider the *Troostmeisjes* project (and with it *Because We Were Beautiful*) as a form of activism to seek justice for Indonesian *ianfu*. To be more specific, this project is a kind of activism which utilises art as the medium of communicating the issue. Activism in art entails operating outside of institutions, in public spaces, where it can engage with and make use of various modes and forms of culture (Dufour 2002, 157). The project

ianjo operators pocketed the money. There were also some cases in which the women did not receive any kind of payment or were promised that they would be paid after Japan had won the war (Hicks 1997, 92 & 248).

combined a book, a photo exhibition and a documentary as modes and forms of culture to communicate the comfort women issue in public spaces. Further, by employing strategies that focus on collaborations and communities, emphasising processes over products, these forms of arts can impact and challenge social spheres beyond the confines of the art world itself (ibid). Not to mention, the political nature of the project itself infused the scope of the activism. More explanation on how political the project is will be discussed in Chapter 5. Nevertheless, after the conclusion of the *Troostmeisjes* project, some notable grassroot organisations were motivated to utilise art in their activism for *ianfu*. Below, I will demonstrate that the people who knew of the *Troostmeisjes* project and were involved in it subsequently led or were involved in other forms of activism for *ianfu*.

In August 2016, a creative art exhibition titled *Kitab Visual Ianfu* or *Ianfu* Visual Book was held in Central Jakarta. This exhibition was initiated by the Indonesian *Ianfu* Committee to commemorate the International Memorial Day for Comfort Women on 14 August[30]. Twelve women were invited to participate in this project and created their own artworks through painting, illustration and mixed-media to visualise the experiences of *ianfu* and the comfort system. The idea behind this art exhibition is credited to independent research by Eka Hindrati, an *ianfu* activist and researcher who was also involved in the making of *Because We Were Beautiful*. This exhibition[31] was considered to be successful as it was covered by KOMPAS TV, one of the major Indonesian TV channels. People got to know about the comfort women issue not only from the exhibition, but also from television. Hence, the effectiveness of this exhibition was exemplified by the coverage on a national media.

In August 2017, Dance Soul n Calm (DSC)[32] in collaboration with *ianfu* activists held a series of events entitled "*Potret Kelam Perempuan Jawa*" or "The Dark Portrait of Javanese Women" in Central Java. The event included five elements. First was a painting exhibitioncalled *Dokumen Rahim* (Womb Document) by a feminist artist and academic, Dewi Candraningrum, which displayed representations of rape victims. From that point onwards, Candraningrum continued showing her support for *ianfu*. Second was a talk show with

[30] This particular date was chosen to memorialise *ianfu* due to the fact that it was when Japan surrendered unconditionally to the Allied forces. This was also due to the fact that Kim Haksun gave the first public testimony on 14 August 1991. The date was later declared International Memorial Day for Comfort Women at the 11th Asian Solidarity Conference for the issue of Military Sexual Slavery in 2012. For more information, please visit: https://www.e4sjf.org/international-memorial-day-for-comfort-women.html

[31] *KOMPAS TV*, "12 Perempuan Gelar Pameran Ianfu di Jakarta," uploaded on 12 August 2016, 3:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUegB3_ieaE&ab_channel=KOMPASTV.

[32] A local dance group based in Central Java.

Ngadirah, an Indonesian former *ianfu*[33]. Third was a dance performance titled *Kamar 11* (Room 11) choreographed by Dwi Surni Cahyaningsih. *Kamar 11*[34]: a traditional dance performance inspired by the story of one *ianfu*, Mardiyem or Momoye (the name she was famous for). In the comfort station to which she was brought, Mardiyem was put in room number eleven. Fourth was a dance performance titled "iANFu[35]" also choreographed by Cahyaningsih. Two years later, she choreographed another performance dedicated to *ianfu*. Lacy (2006) suggests that the turn to art performance as a new mode of activism has more to do with empowering oneself than the spectators as it involves a complicated politics of perception. However, art performances as activism, especially feminist ones[36], have their advantages. The art performances engaged a wide audience with works that were relationship-affirming (between the artists and the spectators), supported individual women's empowerment, and ultimately stimulate social transformation across various themes of oppression (Lacy 2006, 101).

Fifth was a film screening of *Kisah Sri Sukanti yang Tertinggal di Gedung Papak*[37] or The Story of Sri Sukanti Who is Left Behind in Papak Building. Papak building was one of the *ianjo* locations in Indonesia, and it was one of the places where Sri Sukanti was forced to serve Japanese soldiers. This is an Indonesian-made documentary featuring a former *ianfu.* Sri Sukanti was known to be the youngest Indonesian *ianfu*, being only 9 years old at the time the Japanese soldiers took her from her home (Rahmayna 2022, 59). This film was made collaboratively by the Mataoli team, in which Hindrati was again involved as the researcher. In this documentary, the identity of the *iamfu* was constructed in four ways: as beautiful women who became the target of the Japanese soldiers, as women who suffered damage to their

[33] By curating an exhibition called *Rumah Roh* or House of the Spirits in December 2019, where she exhibited her paintings of Indonesian former *ianfu*.. The video of her discussion about *Rumah Roh* with Anna Marsiana was posted on the YouTube. Marsiana, Anna, "Dewi Candraningrum. Mendokumentasikan Luka & Roh Perjuangan Perempuan Dalam Lukisan," uploaded on 22 December 2020, 57:51, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdEO5NvvT0E&ab_channel=AnnaMarsiana.

[34] The recording of this performance can be viewed on YouTube. *Sanggar Seni PNB Official*, "Kamar 11 – Koreografer (Dwi Surni) DSC," uploaded on 4 December 2018, 25:43, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAkdSIBQmGM&ab_channel=SanggarSeniPNBofficial.

[35] The performance was streamed live from Balai Soedjatmoko in Solo and is available on YouTube. *Bentara Budaya,* "TARI iANFu, POTRET KELAM PEREMPUAN JAWA, Live Stream dari BALAI SOEDJATMOKO SOLO," uploaded on 13 September 2017, 36:56, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAkdSIBQmGM&ab_channel=SanggarSeniPNBofficial.

[36] By this, I am not implying that the art performances listed above are necessarily feminist. Making an art performance out of women's issue does not automatically make them feminist. I would to conduct need deeper analysis and be present during the performances to be able to draw this conclusion, but, Lacy (2006) discusses the topic in the context of feminist art performance.

[37] The trailer can be viewed on YouTube. *Ianfu Penyintas*, "Kisah Sri Sukanti yang tertinggal di gedung Papak," uploaded on 6 October 2012, 3:24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23Iu-zsV-QU&t=25s&ab_channel=ianfupenyitas.

reproductive organs, as women who experienced psychological trauma, and as women who were isolated from the society (Hidayati 2016, x). Perceiving how this film also constructed *ianfu* as someone beautiful, the pattern is parallel with *Because We Were Beautiful*. This could possibly be because Hindrati was also one of the Indonesian contributors in Van Osch's film. While there are similarities between the two films, Mataoli's documentary extended what was not covered by Van Osch's, which was the physical impacts that befell the *ianfu*. Comparing the reach of the two documentaries, Van Osch's received attention on an international level due to the transnational network of the filmmakers. Mataoli's film was more of a local work, thus its reach was not as wide as *Because We Were Beautiful*. However, this film represents how the Indonesian comfort women issue was perceived by Indonesians. Using film as the main areas of intervention on this issue means the activists are relying on the cinematic gaze as activism, as argued by Caporale (2009), to alert consciousness and raise public awareness of significant questions of postcolonial identities—which in this context means *juugun ianfu*. Caporale further notes that the camera becomes a privileged tool for promoting social change and women's rights to Western as well as non-Western audiences (2009, 39).

In March 2019 a performance combining dancing, choreographed by Cahyaningsih, a motion graphic and animated prologue by Bezita Saiya—*Aburing Kupu-Kupu Kuning*[38]—was carried out in Central Java. This was the result of collaboration between *Ianfu* Indonesia—a grassroot organisation of Indonesian activists that focuses on the Indonesian comfort women issue—and DSC. *Aburing Kupu-Kupu Kuning*[39] means a flying yellow butterfly. This yellow butterfly is used to symbolise the struggle of *ianfu* survivors who, after the violence they experienced, transformed into brave figures. Rahmayna (2022, 58) adds that yellow represents hope and the butterfly embodies the dream of *ianfu* survivors to break free and soar away from the violence they endured. From the examples of Candraningrum, Hindrati and Cahyaningsih, I argue that one form of activism for the comfort women issue subsequently does fuel other forms of activism and participating in one motivates one to continue taking part in other forms of activism. This argument constituted two questions that I asked my interviewees, which will be expanded on Chapter 5.

[38] The recording of the performance can be viewed on YouTube. *Sanggar Seni PNB Official*, "Aburing Kupu-kupu kuning Pertunjukan Tari X Motion Graphic (Dwi Surni – Bezita Saiya)," uploaded on 7 April 2019, 53:35, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDKmjE8u2rU&ab_channel=SanggarSeniPNBofficial.
[39] The naming of the performance, *Aburing Kupu-Kupu Kuning*, was inspired by the title of a novel written by Sindhunata, despite the fact that this novel has nothing to do with *ianfu*.

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a pivotal moment for social activism, accelerating the shift to digital activism and the utilisation of technology to organise and coordinate activism efforts (Mehan 2023, 5). This shift is also reflected in activism for Indonesian *ianfu*. Recalling the strict regulation on social distancing, exhibitions, performances and movie screenings were out of the question. A number of *ianfu* activists and feminist groups thus turned to social media, particularly Instagram, for awareness-raising. Their posts can be found with the hashtag #ianfu in the *Explore* feature of Instagram[40]. Aside from various social media content, this digital activism extended to a Zoom webinar held by Universitas Sanata Dharma, to which two prominent figures who published books about Indonesian *ianfu* were invited: Eka Hindrati, the writer of *Momoye: Mereka Memanggilku* [They Call Me 'Momoye'] (2007), and Anna Mariana, the author of *Perbudakan Seksual: Perbandingan antara Masa Fasisme Jepang dan Neofasisme Orde Baru* [Sexual Slavery: Comparison between the Fascism of the Japanese and the Neofascism of the New Order] (2015). At the time *Because We Were Beautiful* (2010) was released, however, this kind of digital activism for *ianfu* was not yet visible. As such, the reach of this activism relied on Banning's exhibitions, Janssen's books, and Van Osch's film screenings and broadcasts.

Conclusion

This chapter provides critical background to understanding the comfort women issue in Indonesia, as represented in *Because We Were Beautiful*. Having discussed the backdrop of the comfort system, starting from Japan's invasion of the Netherlands East Indies to the various forms of activism for *ianfu*, I have demonstrated how the comfort system is a form of violence against women (VAW) during war and armed conflict. This organised system was sustained through the enactment of militarised masculinity by Japanese soldiers which hierarchised not only Indonesian and Dutch women, but also their men. Additionally, the naming and framing of comfort women channelled a wide range of transnational activism to seek justice for *ianfu* victim-survivors, with one of them being the *Troostemeisjes* project. Likewise, I argue that *Because We Were Beautiful* can be seen as a form of transnational activism, having the benefits of a transnational network to seek justice for Indonesian *ianfu*. I further posit that the project fuels and motivates other forms of activism for *ianfu* which take form in mostly exhibitions, dance performances and cinema. A deeper analysis of this specific form of activism is provided

[40] Some of the Instagram accounts posting social media contents related to *ianfu* include: @ianfuindonesia, @comfortwomenaction, @lawanpatriarki, @drivepedia, @atlasroom.id, @narasisejarah, @arsiparia, @projectpheonix_id and @srilijogja.

in Chapter 4. Interviews with the people behind the documentary are discussed in Chapter 5 to gain additional insights for the analysis in its previous chapter.

Chapter 4

The On-Screen Representation of *Because We Were Beautiful*

This chapter discusses the stories of 11 Indonesian former *ianfu* interviewed in *Because We Were Beautiful*. This chapter is structured into three sections. In the first section, I will discuss how the *ianfu* interviewed understood "war as a continuum" (Cockburn 2010) through the process of remembering and forgetting their time as *ianfu*. This section is divided into three parts, with each elaborating on the three main themes—which I identify and organise—that appear in the documentary, namely beauty, innocence and religion. I posit that *Because We Were Beautiful* represents the 11 former *ianfu* according to what Mohanty (1984) describes as a corresponding set of universal images of Third World Women produced by the West. In the second section, I will discuss the double colonisation experienced by *ianfu* according to their stories. The dual oppression they had to endure spanned from the recruitment process to their time at the *ianjo* and finally to their stigmatisation. I argue that before portraying the double colonisation experienced by *ianfu*, the film represented them as doubly orientalized.

War as a continuum: *Ianfu* on remembering and forgetting "post-war" memories

To begin, I will explain why I use quotation marks for the term "post-war" in this thesis. I perceive it as a way of problematising the image and assumptions built into the term "post-war". To put it simply, this term is commonly used to indicate a certain period of the so-called peace time after a war is over. However, it is important to also question the definition of war in the first place. The conventional definition of war that is used mostly by International Relations scholars covers only what happens during the so-called official war period. It glosses over the preconditions that enable wars to happen, the gendered ways in which wars are used to subdue the opposition, and the gendered impacts in the aftermath of wars. Therefore, I adopt a feminist definition of war which places emphasis on the experiences of women, system and structures implicated before, during and after the war. Following Cohn and Ruddick (2004, 411), "feminists see war as neither beginning with the first gunfire nor ending when the treaties are signed… [and] when the organized violence of war is over, what remains is a ripped social fabric… [thus] typically, "peace" includes official ongoing "punishment"–retribution,

reparations, domination, and deprivation". This is the standpoint that I adopt for analysing the documentary.

Further, the conventional definition of war lacks an understanding that war is gendered on practical and symbolic levels, as argued by Cohn (2013). Considering how the comfort women system is a form of violence against women during war and armed conflict, it is crucial to acknowledge that comfort women's experiences of war can only be understood through the lens of gender analysis. This is true for Indonesian former *ianfu*'s experiences, which I will discuss in this chapter. Even though the "official war" is over and the country gained independence, the *ianfu*'s war has not yet ended. As represented in the documentary, it pertains to how these *ianfu* continue their lives "post-war". They still struggle with the effects of the physical, sexual and emotional abuses to which they were subjected to during the Japanese occupation. Moreover, society is still an ongoing battleground for them as they were looked down upon, denied and stigmatised. Raped women are frequently stigmatised, facing ostracism from their own families and communities, where they may be regarded as tainted and worthless "property" (Turpin 1998, 5).

In addition to the comfort women system as a form of violence against women during war and armed conflict, the system also bears both facets of "violence as a continuum" (Cockburn 1998) and "war as a continuum" (Cockburn 2010). The perspective on violence as a continuum spans from domestic violence to military violence and state violence (Cockburn 1998, 44–45), in which the comfort system is a form of violence perpetrated against women in occupied territories, condoned by the Japanese military and committed by Japan as a State (Lie 1997) against its own women[41]. By implicitly accepting rape as a part of military life, militaries worldwide also endorse and may even enforce prostitution linked to their military installations (Turpin 1998, 6). Meanwhile, war as a continuum emphasises on how wars are only phases in a sequence of conditions that are linked together; they incorporate militarism through to militarisation, through to a series of 'hot' war, and then to cease fire, followed by an unsteady peace (Cockburn 2010, 147–48). In short, these are series of conditions that are systemic in perpetuating cycles of violence, and they continue to impact societies for a long time afterwards. Consequently, war is used to legitimise the institutionalisation of violence. *Because We Were Beautiful* is a documentary that portrays how Indonesian former *ianfu* remember and

[41] While the latter is mostly applied to the establishment of the Recreation and Amusement Association (RAA) during the US occupation of Japan, the fact that there were *ianfu* who originated from Japan makes it clear that the comfort system was an enactment of both military and state violence.

forget the continuum of violence they experienced as subjects of the comfort system. I echo Mookherjee's (2006, 443) understanding that remembering and forgetting are social acts in which "remember[ing] to forget" is necessary so as to maintain collective forgetting. In a society that harbours the trauma of violence against women, collective forgetting is required to avoid further re-traumatisation, to maintain social stability and to reconstruct identity that is not defined by traumatic experiences. The film I analyse depicted how the 11 former *ianfu* possessed both individual memory and collective memory.

Beauty: "When I was young, I was beautiful"

In this part, I will investigate the theme of beauty that frames the whole film, *Because We Were Beautiful*. The verbal testimonies of *ianfu*, in which they stated that they were beautiful, are used as a starting point for the analysis. The title of the documentary similarly refers to the beauty of the former *ianfu*, and this is a theme that frames the entire film. Upon initially coming across the title, I wondered: why did the filmmakers choose the theme beauty to frame the documentary when there are other more important aspects about comfort women's experiences that could be highlighted? The documentary concludes the research and interviews with 11 *ianfu* by centralising beauty as the cause of what befell them. However, being beautiful does not fully explain the rationale behind the forced recruitment of Indonesian *ianfu* and the establishment of *ianjo* in the Netherlands East Indies by the Japanese Imperial Army. I argue that the title thus demonstrates the romanticisation of the comfort women issue and an understatement of *ianfu*'s struggles as it suggests that because these women were beautiful in appearance, they were recruited by the Japanese army to be *ianfu*. Van Selm makes a similar argument in her review of the documentary, expressing a sense of annoyance about the title. Van Selm also deems it problematic that the filmmakers linked the former *ianfu*'s appearances when they were young and being chosen to serve the Japanese soldiers. She further argues that the use of past tense, "were", in the title infers that these women are no longer beautiful now that they are old (*Historiek,* 11 July 2011).

The documentary begins with scenes of several *ianfu* talking about how beautiful they were when they were young. **Paini** began by stating that even though people considered her to be pretty, she herself thought that she was ugly. **Kasinem** stated that she was only 10 years old when the Japanese army took her to an *ianjo,* she was young and beautiful. **Iteng**, an *ianfu* from Sukabumi, made a remark: "Maybe we were picked… because we were beautiful. I wasn't ugly… that's why the Japanese picked me." Janssen later revealed that the title of the

film was quoted from Iteng's remark. Nonetheless, these statements underline how the Japanese men possessed sexual access to the "beautiful" colonised female bodies. Having exclusive sexual access to those perceived as the most desired and "beautiful" woman serves as a performative indicator of dominant and heterosexual masculinity (Saraswati 2011, 120). As such, by establishing the comfort stations, Japan made sexual access to colonised female bodies exclusive because only authorised people could enter *ianjo* and use the services of *ianfu*. Through this sexual access, Japan performed[42] a dominant and heterosexual masculinity over its colonised men as they did not possess sexual access to their own "beautiful" women. This can be seen as an act of emasculating colonised men (Indonesia) and masculinising coloniser men (Japan).

On that note, **Wainem** spoke about how all the men wanted to marry her wherever she worked because she was beautiful. The concept of the "beauty myth" coined by Wolf serves as a good explanation for this. Women are expected to aspire to embody beauty ideals and standards, while men are expected to desire women who embody them (Wolf 2002, 12). Although it cannot be inferred whether or not Wainem aspired to match the beauty standards at the time, her recollection exemplifies how the men around her desired women who embodied (to put it more precisely, whom they thought embodied) beauty ideals and standards. Additionally, **Tasmina** revealed how men used to fight over her when she was young. In the middle of the documentary, she showed a black and white photograph of her from 1945. She stressed how she was just a village girl at the time. Banning and Janssen—the Dutch photographer and the interviewer—both agreed that Tasmina looked beautiful in the photograph. These examples demonstrate the extent to which the women interviewed place emphasis on their youthful beauty. While it is unclear whether the questions from the interviewer led these women to reflect on their beauty or whether the topic just came up unintentionally during their talk, as Turpin argues, being young and pretty in fact has very little to do with becoming a victim of wartime rape (1998, 5).

In addition to the title, the film also implies that these women were beautiful according to Japan's beauty standard at the time. However, there was a hierarchisation among *ianfu* and Indonesian were ranked low in terms of Japanese preferences. Several scholars have provided further details on this system and its implications for Indonesian women. Lie provides an

[42] I use the word "performed" to contextualise it within Saraswati's argument and her terms of "performative indicator".

account of how colonial power relations and racial hierarchies stratified Japanese and Korean *ianfu* where the former were put in a higher position and the latter were positioned lower (1997, 255). Lie focuses only on the hierarchical division between Japanese and Korean *ianfu*. Accordingly, he weaves in Senda Kakou, the author of the book *Juugun Ianfu* (1978), who states that *ianfu* from other conquered territories were treated worse than the Korean *ianfu* (Senda 1981, i cited in Lie 1997, 255). Meanwhile, Hicks adds to our understanding of this hierarchy by taking into account *ianfu* from other ethnic groups:

> In the Japanese society, then as now, there was status consciousness linked to ethnic origins. This probably had a bearing on where the majority of comfort women came from. On the scale of Japanese preference, Koreans were ranked after Japanese and Okinawans; then came the Chinese, and lastly Southeast Asians [which included Indonesian women], who tended to be darker-skinned (Hicks 1997, 48).

Hicks further states that these distinctions had official recognition in terms of the fees set in the comfort stations in which the soldier had to pay, the salary the *ianfu* received for their service, the rank of the soldiers they had to serve and the base locations to which they were sent. In relation to this final point, the Japanese *ianfu* were mostly assigned to safer military bases (ibid). Hicks also mentions that the Japanese *ianfu*—of whom most were sex workers—were more mature in age, matched the Japanese standard of beauty, spoke the same language as the soldiers and possessed more skills in sexual techniques. Assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy based on culturally imposed physical standards is an expression of power relations (Wolf 2002, 12). In this context, the power relations existed not only between the Japanese army and *ianfu*, but were also imposed among *ianfu* of different ethnic origins. Building on these scholars' discussion of the hierarchy among *ianfu*, it seems that the filmmakers' straightforward portrayal of Indonesian *ianfu* as simply "beautiful" lacks a deeper understanding of the perceptions of beauty as racially inflected. Furthermore, if masculinity is contingent upon sexual access to attractive women, then the standards of beauty hold significance for both heterosexual men and women, though for men, being classified as ugly does not inflict the same harm it does on women (Saraswati 2011, 125–26).

It is not my intention to suggest that the Japanese did not think Indonesian women were beautiful. Rather, I argue that the framing of Indonesian *ianfu* as beautiful in the documentary was a conclusion drawn by the Dutch filmmakers that was informed by the colonial relationship between Indonesia and the Netherlands. This framing is particularly evident in the practice of concubinage during the colonisation of the Netherlands East Indies where the Dutch men took

"beautiful" local (Indonesian) women as live-in partners, who were referred to as *Nyai* (K. E. McGregor 2023, 29). This example speaks to the representation of an Orientalist view where the male coloniser from the West (the Netherlands) exoticizes the beauty of its colonised female subjects from the East (Indonesia)[43]. Through the filmmakers' reflections and the film's title, they somewhat unwittingly contributed to this view. I argue that the focus on colonised women's beauty in the documentary illustrates how the filmmakers failed to capture the complexities of the comfort women issue due to their lack of comprehension that racial dimensions play a role in establishing perceptions of beauty.

Innocence: "I thought it (a condom) was a small balloon for children"

Innocence is the theme that appears most often in the stories told by the 11 former *ianfu*. What I mean by innocence here is the lack of knowledge and childlike experience when it comes to sexual intercourse. I echo the work of Montgomery (2008), who discusses the fetishization of sexual innocence and virginity. However, considering the prominent influence of religion (specifically Islam) in Indonesia, understanding innocence works within a religious framework as well. This understanding is illustrated by how Indonesian society emphasises women maintaining their virginity until their heterosexual marriage, deeming women who fail to protect their virginity as "immoral" (Sarwono 2012, 48–9). Even though Montgomery writes in the context of child-sex tourism and prostitution in Thailand, her argument parallels with my case on two levels. First, many of the *ianfu* were taken to *ianjo* when they were very young (for example, Kasinem was 10 years old and Suharti was either 11 or 12 years old[44]); though most of them were teenagers, there were others who could be considered children. For most, their experience with anything sexual was through sexual violence and rape which took place inside the *ianjo*. This example is a form of a systemic rape of children. In this way, the comfort system can be perceived as bearing similarities with child-sex tourism brothels which provide sexual services by children. Second, Montgomery traces how foreigners used the services of local prostitutions to the establishment of Rest and Recreation (R&R) during the Vietnam War where US servicemen were entitled to use the services of local sex workers in the locally organised brothels (2008, 906). This interaction between the foreign (sexual) service user and

[43] The binary signifier of West and East are used to highlight the power relations that exist between the two countries. I use West and East following Hasan's (2005) distinctions and I use the term Third and First World following Mohanty (1984).

[44] During the interview, Van Osch revealed that he was also surprised to know how young the *ianfu* were when they were taken to *ianjo*.

the local (sexual) service provider applies to the comfort system recalling how Japan established *ianjo* in the territories they occupied, forcefully recruiting local women to be *ianfu*. Without prior knowledge about sex, the *ianfu* were coerced into satisfying the Japanese soldiers sexually. The accounts of how these 11 *ianfu* remember and forget their experiences of forced intercourse provide a window into understanding how their "post-war" memories were constructed subsequently.

The testimonies given by the former *ianfu* provide various insights into the nature of this process. **Paini** spoke about how she was forced to have sex by Lieutenant Harukuma. The fact that she remembered his name illustrates how hard it was to forget the violence to which she was subjected. She said that the experience hurt a lot, but she did not have the courage to resist. **Sarmi**, Paini's friend, testified that it was true that Paini had to serve the Japanese. She herself witnessed Paini being tied up and unable to run away. When Sarmi saw that, she fled. It was not clearly indicated whether that took place in *ianjo* or in their village. When Janssen asked if she ever experienced the same thing, Sarmi seemed very uncomfortable to answer the question. **Wainem** made a short remark about the rape she experienced. She said that she was still a child, and she made an analogy that: "If I were cooked, I would not taste good". Meanwhile, **Sanikem** revealed that she knew nothing about sex before she became an *ianfu*. She used the Javanese[45] word "*saru*" (vulgar) to shy away from Janssen's blunt question. Sex, according to Sanikem, hurt so much that she felt as if she was being drilled. Yet, she could only but comply so as not to get killed. She also demonstrated her hatred towards the Japanese, using the Indonesian word "*benci*" (hate) several times in her interview. Talking about the rape they experienced was difficult for these women because they perceived it as something shameful.

In the documentary, the *ianfu* used strategies to escape Janssen's questions, mainly withdrawal or avoidance. When being made *malu* (ashamed), women (in the context of Malay societies, in which Indonesia is included) tend to become withdrawn or avoidant (Collins and Bahar 2000, 48). Aside from Sarmi and Sanikem's account, this strategy is also employed by Kasinem. **Kasinem** recalled the moment she was photographed by the Japanese and informed that she would be sent to Japan. She emphasised how young and stupid she was at the time. At the *ianjo*, she was told to put on makeup before servicing the Japanese. The Javanese word "*wedhi*" (scared) was uttered several times during her interview. Kasinem then proceeded to cry. Despite Janssen's effort to get an answer, Kasinem kept avoiding answering the question

[45] Sanikem can be identified as a Javanese by ethnicity.

of whether or not she had "slept" with the Japanese soldiers. She mentioned that she was already bored and fed up talking about this topic.

Because We Were Beautiful can be classified as a "participatory documentary". The drawbacks of this type of documentary include the overreliance of witnesses, a simplistic approach to history, and an excessive level of intrusiveness (Nichols 2007, 138). These three downsides are evident in *Because We Were Beautiful*. Van Osch depended too much on the testimonies of the *ianfu* as witnesses to reinforce his narrative. A simplistic approach to the history and overall context of the comfort women issue is seen by how the filmmakers frame the documentary using the theme of beauty. Janssen's way of pursuing an answer from the *ianfu*, which lacked understanding of how (Indonesian) victims subjected to sexual violence might want to avoid direct questions, demonstrates the excessive level of intrusiveness that Nichols points out. In my interview with Janssen, she disclosed that she always tried to be considerate towards the women and strategized ways to ask very delicate questions about rape. Janssen said that she had to find ways to overcome the women's reluctancy to talk about such matters. However perhaps, in some parts of her interviews with the women, Janssen was too adamant to get an explicit answer.

Niyem was among the interviewees who cried when elaborating her experience. She said that the Japanese did not care whom they "raped": "Maybe that's what they liked, doing it (sex) with children." In other words, according to Niyem, sex is something that should be done between two adults and not between an adult and a child. **Iteng** conveyed that on the first day she arrived at the *ianjo*, she was taken to the second level of the building and was immediately raped. She showed her frustration by saying how "crazy" the whole situation in the *ianjo* was. Iteng said that she was forced to have sex despite not being in love with them. **Umi** shared that she was quite lucky in comparison with her two sisters who were taken by the Japanese before her. She said that her time in the *ianjo* was shorter, she only had to serve one man, she did not develop a venereal disease as her sisters did, and that the man did not force her too much. She said that she just did it (sex) randomly since she knew nothing about it. What is striking about their stories aligns with what Montgomery argues: "the stereotype of an innocent virgin being used repeatedly by foreigners in a brothel gives an extremely distorted picture of child prostitution, which fetishises virginity and sexual innocence" (2008, 910). The film portray these depictions, through the testimonies of the women, to show the viewers how extreme the situation in the *ianjo* was and how much the *ianfu* had to endure.

Suharti was rather open to disclosing things in a more detailed way compared to other *ianfu* in the documentary. She said that she was either 11 or 12 years old when she was taken to Rumah Panjang, one of the *ianjo* locations. On her tenth night, the Japanese divided the girls they rounded up into differently numbered rooms. Suharti explained how a "polite guest" came to her room, opened the conversation by asking how old she was and where she came from before doing it (sex). She recalled the moment when she struggled to break free, the man told her, "It is okay", but still proceeded to rape her. Suharti mentioned how she never felt satisfaction during the sex and that she could be considered dead when doing it. Suharti's story illustrates the sexual innocence—as described by Montgomery—that lies in, among other things, virginity. Even though none of the *ianfu* interviewed explicitly uttered the word virginity, this is indicative of the internalised patriarchal values that prevent them from talking openly about the loss of virginity through sexual violence by someone who is other than their husband. The concept of virginity in Indonesia is a product of patriarchal culture in which social, cultural and religious factor contributes (Raihana and Ghufron 2015, 271). The next part of this section will further discuss what the implications of rape mean for the reputation of these former *ianfu* in a society that places significance on religion.

I argue that there exists an Othering process in *Because We Were Beautiful* through the depiction of Indonesian *ianfu* as women from the East who are innocent about sexual intercourse, place importance on keeping their virginity, and are secretive about sexual experiences. Therefore, the representation of these women in the documentary adheres to one of the universalised images of Third World women, "the chaste virgin", listed by Mohanty (1984, 352). This image is contrasted to the generalised image of women from the West who know more about sex, do not emphasise virginity, and are not reluctant to talk about sex. This narrative is pursued by the filmmakers while glossing over the fact that the sex these *ianfu* experienced was rape.

Religion: "Are we not sinful?"

Throughout this part, I will articulate how the representation of Indonesian *ianfu* as religious is constructed in *Because We Were Beautiful*. To clarify, the documentary does not implicitly show the religion of each *ianfu*. However, the religious representations in some of the scenes help narrow the possibilities down. During the Japanese Occupation, the majority of the population in the Indonesian archipelago were Muslim (Benda 1955), despite the spread of Christianity during the Dutch colonial era (Melamba et al. 2019).

Sanikem and **Niyem**, for instance, wore headscarves during their interviews and photoshoots, therefore it is rather safe to conclude that they are Muslim (in the case of Indonesia). The image of "the veiled woman" (Mohanty 1984, 352) is thus applicable to the portrayal of Sanikem and Niyem. **Tasmina** said that it is up to God whether her sin of being an *ianfu* would be forgiven or not: "If I am forgiven, alhamdulillah. If I am not forgiven, alhamdulillah". Saying alhamdulillah is indicative of Tasmina being a Muslim as well. Meanwhile, **Suharti** was either a Protestant Christian or a Catholic, as can be inferred from a scene where she prayed in front of miniature of Jesus in her house. She also conveyed how she often wondered, when left alone with her thoughts, if this (being an *ianfu*) would last forever or would only be temporary: "How could it be like this? Will the God not curse us? Are we not sinful?" Since Suharti thought of her time as an *ianfu* as a sin, her portrayal of praying in the "post-war" time is then depicted as her way of atoning for her sin during the war. **Kasinem** also thought that being an *ianfu* was a sin. She murmured how she was not their wife, yet she had become their wife (through sex). From this, it can be concluded that Kasinem perceived sex as something that is supposed to occur between a heterosexual married couple and thus doing it with others is sinful. The way these women stressed how their experiences as *ianfu* were sins that they had to erase sheds light on the importance of religion in their everyday life, influenced by a certain socio-religious interpretation of what constitutes permissible sex and sex as a sin.

During the interview, **Wainem** told Janssen with an annoyed look—indicated by furrowed eyebrows and the sound of tongue clicking—after answering her questions: "Don't take too long. I want to pray (*salat*)". Wainem then proceeded to go to her room. At first, I thought that this scene could have been cut out during the editing process because it did not add anything to the story that Wainem told. However, after viewing the scene several times, I came to believe that it did speak for something. How the scene was included implies that the filmmakers intended to portray these women as pious and religious. While it is possible that Wainem might have wanted to escape Janssen's intrusive questions by excusing herself to pray, Wainem is portrayed as worried that she would miss prayer time. For Wainem, being devout is an integral aspect of her "post-war" lived reality. Commenting precisely on this scene, Eka Tanjung, one of the film translators whom I interviewed, explained that Wainem looked like she had wanted to retreat from the interview. However, Wainem did not explicitly say that she wanted to cease the session. As a translator who paid attention to non-verbal signs of

communication[46], Tanjung translated it as Wainem's way of sending the team away and concluding the interview. This signal was probably not picked up by Janssen.

Drawing upon these examples, I argue that *Because We Were Beautiful* depicts these *ianfu* as religious and pious because they value their religion deeply and use religion as the main lens to perceive what is considered sinful. While it is true that religion also shapes the ability of these women to re-integrate into their own societies, religion is not the only lens. Self-judgement and societal judgement informed by patriarchal values, then deepens their sense of guilt and sin. It appears that the filmmakers had little interest in exploring the nuances of religion from the outset, although they incorporated the sound of *adzan* as a transition scene. I came to this conclusion because of two things. First, in our interview, when asked about the themes that he wished to raise in the documentary, Van Osch did not mention religion as one of them. Second, Janssen's interviews with the *ianfu* did not include direct questions about religion. What I mean by direct questions that link to religion are, for instance: How has your experience at the *ianjo* affected your faith? In what ways have your religious beliefs helped or hindered your healing process? Despite the absence of such questions (at least from what was shown in the film), the women frequently connected their answers to socially conservative values influenced by their understanding of religiosity, indicating religion's underlying significance in their lives. This tendency is perhaps what drove the filmmakers to represent these *ianfu* as religious by selectively showing interviews and footages that can be associated with religion and religious practices. Being religious is yet another characteristic that is often attributed to women from the East and it also forms an Orientalist trope. Hence, I argue that the film portrays the *ianfu* as religious and represents how their "post-war" lived realities include remembering and forgetting their "sins" through prayers and atonement.

Double colonisation experienced by *ianfu*

Juugun ianfu, a group of women subjected to an extreme form of systematic violence during war, endured twofold of oppression: by imperial forces and patriarchal structures. At first, I planned on dividing this section into two parts, each of which discussing one fold of oppression. However, keeping in mind that colonial power and patriarchy enforce each other and are intertwined to produce layers of women's oppression, discussing both folds of

[46] Tanjung said that whenever he translates (mostly from Indonesian to Dutch), he does not only translate the language, he also translates the culture. He closely examined the bodily gestures and facial expressions of the speakers. He mentioned that it was such part of Indonesian culture not to say things explicitly.

colonisation in one section seems to be a more logical way of explaining. Employing a similar pattern to the previous section, here I will also utilise the testimonies of the *ianfu* from their interviews as point of departure. In a documentary, interview segments aim to reverse a deeply-ingrained silence by facilitating a free flow of language and crafting a compelling personal narrative (Caporale 2009, 35) to which the viewers can relate.

In Chapter 1, I mostly explain the concept of double colonisation through the work of feminist scholars. Hasan adds to our understanding that double colonisation is actually a result of double orientalization:

> The concept of double colonization concocted by feminist discourse in the 1980s was actually a result of a double orientalization pursued by the Orientalits along with the colonial administrators. Patriarchal oppression coupled with Orientalist manipulation of native women foregrounded the postcolonial feminist notion of double colonization and gave it theoretical credence (Hasan 2005, 31).

His insights align with what I discussed in the previous section, precisely how the documentary pursued certain Orientalist tropes to portray the women. Such representations amplified the West's fantasies about Eastern women, as Orientalists constantly sought to fulfil the West's preconceived, imaginary notions about the East (ibid). Consequently, the *ianfu* in the film are also represented as being doubly orientalized: as women and as Orientals, before they are represented as doubly colonised.

"The Japanese came to Java to conquer the world. The world of the villagers. They took our rice and other things. An alarm always sounded in the evening. The lights were switched off. Then they took all we had." This was what **Wainem** said at the beginning of the film, recalling Japan's arrival to her land from her own perspective. Japan's invasion of Indonesia was obviously a form of colonial power oppression. As discussed in Chapter 3, Japan not only exploited the resources but also people who lived in the Netherlands East Indies. While most men were forced to become *romusha* to build railways and male youths were conscripted as *heiho* to fight for the "promised independence", women were drafted to be *ianfu* to satisfy the presumed biological needs of the army. Multiple strategies were employed to recruit *ianfu* in Indonesia. These recruitment methods mirrored those used in Japan and Korea, occasionally employing existing prostitutes, luring some individuals with promises of scholarships or jobs, but predominantly relying on indirect recruitment through local village administrations (Hicks 1997, 142). The explanation of **Suharti** parallels with the information Hicks provided: "In the Japanese time, each village chief received an order from the Japanese government. Every

village had to deliver several hundreds of people for forced labour (*romusha*) and young men as auxiliary soldiers (*heiho*) and comfort women (*ianfu*). But they were called this: *The fight for a better destiny for uneducated children* (*Perjuangan nasib anak-anak yang tidak sekolah*)." The terms *romusha*, *heiho* and *ianfu* were used in her speech, indicating my discussion in Chapter 3 about the ongoing use of the Japanese term (related to the occupation period) which suggests unfinished process of rehabilitating survivors and affording them dignity (McGregor 2023, 14). This again speaks for the continued impacts of the occupation.

Apart from that, it can be understood from Hicks and Suharti's insights that Japan needed the compliance of colonised subjects in rounding up *ianfu*. As the modern state expands its influence—Japan was transforming into one at the time—it cannot rely solely on coercion but must also seek the collaboration and compliance of its subjects (Lie 1997, 252). Besides recruiting *ianfu*, this compliance was also exemplified by how Japan forced *heiho* to use the service of *ianfu*, saying that having sex is one of the perks of being in an army. Additionally, during our interview, Janssen disclosed that *heiho* were given the task to guard the *ianjo* where the *ianfu* were confined[47]. In so doing, they managed to get colonised men to oppress their colonised women counterparts. This kind of colonial rule necessitates the active consent and collaboration of colonised elites, playing on not only gender, but also class, ethnic and other social divisions (ibid). It is worth mentioning that the girls and young women taken from the villages were those from families with difficult economic backgrounds, never from upper class families. This fact underlines how class divisions protected a certain group of women at the expense of other groups of women. From the examples provided, the men and the village chiefs were the "colonised elites"—to borrow Lie's (1997, 252) term—who took part in the oppression of the colonised women. I understand that there existed clear power relations between the Japanese imperial power and the colonised men, highlighting the complexity of colonial dynamics; but that still does not erase the fact that the latter were complicit in the oppression of women from the same collective to presumably maintain their status and privileges. By aligning with the occupiers, these men perpetuated a system that oppressed and exploited women, demonstrating how the Japanese occupation not only imposed external control but also manipulated internal power structures to achieve its goal. Therefore, the stories

[47] Janssen also said that during her search for former *ianfu*, former *heiho* were among other informants who helped her get in touch with the women.

of *ianfu* recruitment represented in the film illustrate how the women were colonised simultaneously by colonial power and patriarchy.

Being recruited to be *ianfu* was just the beginning of their horrors. The various forms of violence that occured inside the *ianjo* ranged from having to endure repeated rapes over an extended period, being forced to undergo an abortion if they became pregnant, and getting their basic needs and hygiene neglected. The following paragraphs will discuss each of these three points.

Tasmina revealed that she was among those who were deceived by the promise of work. She said that upon arrival at the *ianjo*, each woman was put into a room. She clearly remembered that she was put into room number three where she had to serve four men the very next day. Tasmina was threatened by a weapon, so she had no choice but to obey. **Suharti** also experienced threats; she stated that if she did not comply she would be beaten: "*Udah luar biasa, membuat manusia ini kayak anjing aja*. *Mau ditungging, mau dibalik, mau dijungkir… Kita ndak mau, dipukul. Gitu.* (It was abnormal. They treated you like a dog. Sometimes they wanted it in a bent over position, like a somersault. And if you didn't co-operate, you were beaten. That's how it went)." These examples demonstrate how the rapes that Tasmina and Suharti had to endure were layered. First, it was a rape condoned by a man against a woman, underscoring the pervasive violence against women and the exploitation of female bodies. Second, it was a rape condoned by the coloniser against the colonised, highlighting the power dynamics and racial oppression at work in colonial rule. What I mean by racial oppression here is the hierarchisation within the Asian race where Japanese perceived themselves to be in a higher position than other Asian ethnic groups. Hence, we cannot look at the rapes of the comfort women without assessing the double identity—as a man and as a coloniser—of the Japanese men who committed these acts.

With the multiple instances of sexual intercourse that the *ianfu* were forced to engage in, the possibility of getting pregnant was extremely high. However, as pregnancy was deemed as something that would get in the way of the women doing their jobs, the *ianfu* operators tried to prevent it. Reflecting upon her experience, **Wainem** explained: "Nobody got pregnant. If there was a chance of pregnancy, we got medication. It was a small package with a type of powder. We put the powder in a cup of water and drank it." Pregnancy prevention and termination at the *ianjo* involved several methods, such as administering the women with herbal concoctions, forcing pregnant girls to abort using pills, and sterilising them (Hicks 1997,

96). While I agree with the argument that preventing pregnancy and undergoing abortion are women's rights (Zampas and Gher 2008), what happened in *ianjo* cannot be classified as one. Not only the safety of these measures should be questioned, but the fact that the women had no way of refusing is indicative of the structural oppression that operated in the *ianjo*. Perceiving that the *ianfu* would not be productive (in their service) if they became pregnant, the higher-ups instructed the *ianjo* operators to use whatever means necessary to prevent and terminate cases of pregnancy. As the aforementioned methods were imposed on the *ianfu*, these were a form of oppression in which a woman loses her bodily autonomy. Not to mention, many *ianfu* later became sterile due to a combination of disease and trauma to their reproductive systems (Hicks 1997, 96). Thus, the imposition in the operation of the comfort system is reflective of the double colonisation concept where the women were stripped off their rights and autonomy both as colonised subjects and as women.

Another major problem that was raised by the *ianfu* in the documentary was the precarious life that they had to lead inside the *ianjo*. In this concern, **Tasmina** elaborated on the situation at *Rumah Panjang* (a comfort station where she was detained): "There was nothing, no hygiene. When you bathed, you bathed like a pig. It (the room) was only this size. A sofa and a sink. Only a sink to wash yourself *down there* and a little tray for the condoms. That was all. Nothing else." The description of the situation might sound harmless and less violent compared to actual physical violence discussed above. However, deprivation of basic needs and hygiene is in fact a violation of human rights. Moreover, the dire living conditions exacerbated the psychological and physical trauma endured by the women, adding another layer of oppression. The way Tasmina and Suharti used animal metaphors (Tasmina mentioned the word *babi* (pig) and Suharti used the word *anjing* (dog)) in the elaboration of their experience indicates the level of degradation and dehumanisation the *ianfu* had to face. Although animal metaphors are commonly used in speeches (in Indonesia), there is limited understanding of what causes their differences in meaning and degree of offensiveness (Haslam, Loughnan, and Sun 2011, 312). We can also hypothesise about the contextual factors that determine offensiveness, which might include the target of the metaphor, the person using metaphor, and the nature of the relationship between them (Haslam, Loughnan, and Sun 2011, 313). Following this, the metaphors that Tasmina and Suharti used reflected their sense of humiliation and loss of humanity. This layered dehumanisation, conveyed through the use of animal metaphors, represents the combined forces of patriarchal and colonial subjugation.

These three examples demonstrate how female bodies are vulnerable to various form of violence. Further, the double colonisation the *ianfu* experienced within the comfort system were primarily directed to their female bodies, subjecting them to layers of exploitation and abuse. This dual oppression highlights how patriarchal and colonial forces intersected to aggravate the *ianfu*'s suffering, focusing intensely on their physical and reproductive autonomy.

Japan's surrender to the Allied forces in 1945 did not end the *ianfu*'s suffering. These women explained how they were scorned by society following their release from the *ianjo*. As Petersen and Rutherford (1986) remind us, double colonisation is a process which persists even after independence is achieved. The term *bekasnya Jepang* or Japanese cast-off was the label attached to them by society, overlooking the pain, suffering and violence that these women endured. In the documentary, **Suharti** explained: "When I had just come out of the brothel, I was humiliated so often. Everybody knew that I was one of the women from the brothel (*Rumah Panjang*). They always spat on the street when they saw me. *She's beautiful, but a Japanese cast-off!* We were humiliated like that every day." From her elaboration, it can be inferred that people also made connections between the *ianfu* being beautiful and what then befell them. **Paini** recalled: "When I mow the grass or cut trees, they say: *look the Japanese cast-off*. To date, there are still people who call me that name. I am tired and I am ashamed towards the children." Meanwhile, **Niyem** said: "People from the village called me a Japanese *cast-off*. It's all so painful." While this kind of mockery directed to the *ianfu* was indeed painful and harmful, scorn towards the raped women keeps alive the memories of this violent encounter and exposes the silence surrounding rape during wartime (Mookherjee 2006, 434). However, not only does such scorn retraumatise the *ianfu* victim-survivors, it also serves as a reminder of societal complicity in silencing the women and hindering their pursuit of healing and justice.

This *Japanese cast-off* scorn represents a form of twofold of oppression. First, this scorn was a patriarchal tool aimed specifically at shaming, marginalising and silencing raped women. This non-physical tool is invented due to the patriarchal perception that a raped woman taints the honour of a family and community. As discussed in the previous section, Indonesian society places significance in women maintaining their virginity before marriage. Thus, the *Japanese cast-off* scorn puts the blame on and devalues the women who were subjected to sexual violence, further intensifying their victimisation. Second, the word *Japanese* in the statement serves as a constant reminder that the women were abused by foreign colonisers or occupiers.

This scorn reinforces the identity of their oppressors. The scorn again proves how the Japanese occupation continued to rely on the compliance and collaboration of internal forces to expand its influence (Lie 1997) and maintain its presence even after the occupation "officially" ended. By scorning the *ianfu*, the community did not realise that they were in fact aligned with the occupiers and jointly oppressing the women again.

Conclusion

Having analysed the way these women "remember to forget" (Mookherjee 2006) their experiences as *ianfu*, I conclude that my initial hypothesis about how the *ianfu* understood "war as a continuum" is inaccurate. While they did make connections between what happened during the Japanese occupation and its lasting gendered impacts on them afterwards, the women seemed to not realise the implications of the preconditions that enabled the establishment of the comfort stations in the Netherlands East Indies. Thus, their testimonies were mostly centred on "during" and "after" the war, putting aside what factors contributed "before" the war. McGregor (2023) helps illuminate this issue by arguing that the practice of concubinage (*Nyai*) during the Dutch colonisation is a precondition that enables the establishment of the comfort stations in the Indonesian archipelago. Yet, *Because We Were Beautiful* managed to get the viewers to assume that the Dutch colonisation had zero implications in the comfort system in the Netherlands East Indies, while in fact it resulted in, inter alia, the different ways in which Indonesian and Dutch women were recruited to be *ianfu*. Adding to McGregor's contention, I suggest that the comfort system in the Netherlands East Indies was not only magnified by the Dutch colonisation prior to the invasion of Japan, but it also resulted in the perpetuation of victim blaming in cases of sexual violence occurring in Indonesia after its independence, as demonstrated in the latter part of the second section. This demonstrates the blurring of the distinction between the notions of war and "post-war", which can be understood when we perceive war—in this context, the Japanese occupation—as a continuum.

Furthermore, I argue that *Because We Were Beautiful* represents the Dutch way of perceiving the comfort women issue in the Netherlands East Indies "under Western eyes" (Mohanty 1984) by reproducing Western universal images of colonised Third World women (Indonesia) as physically beautiful, innocent about sex and religiously faithful. This Dutch way—or rather, Western way of perceiving the issue—is also demonstrated by how Hilde pushes the *ianfu* to explicitly articulate the violence they experienced, thus placing importance on speaking up. These Orientalist representations of women have consistently aimed to portray

them as passive, lacking agency, and perpetually reliant on Westerners to advocate for them (Hasan 2005, 30). Despite the participation of Indonesian contributors in the making of the documentary, the film leaves the impression that in order to raise awareness about the comfort women issue and bring to light the voices of *ianfu* victim-survivors, Indonesia needs the presence and the help of the Netherlands. Moreover, it suggests that the East cannot reckon with its past, whereas the West can and knows how to address the issues such as rape and sexual violence during war and armed conflict. This further perpetuates the idea that the West is superior to the inferior East (Hasan 2005).

In addition, I argue that the double colonisation experienced by *ianfu* was represented in the documentary through various scenes, illustrating the range of oppression they encountered. It spanned from the violent forced recruitment of the women to the myriad forms of violence at the *ianjo,* and ultimately to the enduring scorn and stigmatisation they faced after the occupation ended. While the most severe oppression happened within the confines of *ianjo,* what happened during the recruitment process and after the dissolvement of the comfort system should not be evaluated as supplementary oppressions. As a matter of fact, they are part of continuum of violence (Cockburn 1998) that the *ianfu* had to experience. These representations point out intersecting forces of patriarchy and colonialism which shaped the experiences of *ianfu* within the comfort system. By illuminating these aspects, the documentary serves as a platform to communicate the *ianfu*'s suffering and trauma. Although in the process of representing the double colonisation experienced by the *ianfu*, *Because We Were Beautiful* also doubly orientalizes them.

Finally, the documentary successfully shifts the focus of the perpetrator of colonial atrocities, which occurred in the Netherlands East Indies, from the Dutch to the Japanese recalling how the latter occupied the territory while the former was still there. Likewise, the documentary is a redemptive effort of the Western coloniser (the Netherlands) to its Third World colonised subjects (Indonesia) by villainising its Eastern coloniser counterpart (Japan). To justify their colonial civilising mission, European colonisers spotlighted local issues to maintain a perceived need for colonial intervention in women's emancipation; this is a strategy that serves to sustain their imperial presence (Hasan 2005, 36). Following this, it can be said that the Netherlands put into the spotlight the comfort women issue in Indonesia through the film as a form of offering assistance to advance women's emancipation, which in this case is seeking justice for victim-survivors of the comfort system.

Chapter 5

Beyond the Screen: Aims, Challenges, Reception and Activism

To better understand the intentions of the filmmakers and their perceptions of *Because We Were Beautiful*, I conducted semi-structured interviews with five people who were involved in the making of the film: Frank van Osch (director), Hilde Janssen (researcher), Jan Banning (photographic artist), Ine WawoRuntu (translator), and Eka Tanjung (translator). Although some of the excerpts of the interviews are weaved into Chapter 4, this chapter will delve deeper into insights from the interviews in terms of their aims, challenges, reception and remarks. First, I explore the purposes of making the documentary and what made it crucial to have a film within the *Troostmeisjes* project. Second, I reveal the challenges faced by the people behind the documentary and how they overcame them. Third, I elucidate the general reception of the documentary, for which I gathered data from two sources: the interviewees and online reviews of the film. Fourth, I convey remarks from the filmmakers about their hopes for future activism on the comfort women issue following the documentary. Finally, I conclude that various challenges in the production of the documentary calls for more ethical responsibility to ensure that the *ianfu*'s experiences and stories are handled with sensitivity and respect. Furthermore, I argue that the film has the potential to be a decolonial project despite the fact that it was not its original intention.

Aims of Because We Were Beautiful

"For every documentary there are at least three stories that intertwine: the filmmaker's, the film's, and the audience's" (Nichols 2007, 61). As the story of the film has been examined in the previous chapter, this section will discuss the stories of the filmmakers', starting with their main aims in creating *Because We Were Beautiful*. After our insightful interviews, I noticed how each of my interviewee had different yet corelated interpretations of the purposes behind the making of the documentary.

Janssen and Banning initiated the *Troostmeisjes* project following their own respective projects prior to this initiative. In 2007, Janssen began researching the comfort women issue, when a newspaper company she worked for asked her to write an article regarding the Indonesia's response to the testimonies of three former *ianfu* at the US Congress. With these

testimonies, they lobbied to gain attention and support from different governments around the world, "especially in Europe and the West", to put pressure on Japan to acknowledge the suffering of the *ianfu* and their part in the establishment and operation of *ianjo*. The efforts to gain attention and support from Europe and the West once again echo what Hasan (2005, 30) argues about the reliance on the "Westerners to advance their causes" which I discussed in the previous chapter.

Afterwards, Hilde talked to Banning, her long-time friend who had been working on the forced labour issue of *romusha*. Around the year 2000, Banning started a project called *Traces of War: Survivors of the Burma and Sumatra Railways*. Alongside this project, Banning thought it would be fair to also pay attention to the forced labour of women in the same period. According to him, the most radical sort of forced labour for women was the comfort women industry. After their discussion, Janssen and Banning decided to collaborate on a project on the comfort women question considering the public ignorance around the topic and a lack of interest in the Indonesian victims of the Japanese occupation both in Indonesia and in the Netherlands.

Less than a year later, Van Osch reached out to both Janssen and Banning and joined the project. Prior to his participation, Van Osch had made several films about the long term consequences of war. He had always been interested in that topic because his parents lived during WWII, so he had heard a lot of stories about it. However, he revealed that he did not know that there was this side of the story in WWII—the comfort women system. Thinking that it was such "a beautiful opportunity" to learn more about that hidden history, Van Osch decided to make a film about it. Janssen, Banning and Van Osch decided that presenting the individual results of the project together would have a bigger impact. At the opening of the *Troostmeisjes* photo exhibition in April 2010 in Rotterdam, both the photo book by Banning and the text book by Jansen were launched. The film was broadcasted on the Dutch national TV (NOS Nederlandse Omroep Stichting) later that year, on 15 August, which is the date of commemoration of the end of the war in the Asia-Pacific.

During our conversations, both Janssen and Banning revealed that apart from film being a beautiful platform to reach a lot of people, the additional value of this documentary is that people can see the body language and hear the voices of the *ianfu* themselves. According to Hilde, the transition from young women to old women in the film is something that viewers can link together to make a connection between the past and the present. By seeing the old

ianfu, the viewers can visualise the trauma and suffering during all those years and how the trauma still has an impact on them in the present. Showing images of girls and young women in the film creates a link to the future and encourages viewers to wonder what might happen to them. Janssen further noted that the film highlighted Indonesian suffering under the Japanese occupation, moving away from the perception that the Dutch were the only ones who suffered during the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies. For Janssen, the main goal of the film was to provide information about what really happened, how the *ianfu* perceived it and how that still had an impact on their lives today. The project offers fresh insights into the comfort women issue, expanding the Dutch perspectives by highlighting Indonesian experiences and acknowledging the broader impact of the Japanese occupation. While Janssen did not offer concrete suggestions on what to do, she contended that film is a good instrument for keeping the discussion about sexual abuse and the position of women in times of conflict alive and to move forward with the discussion about what to do with it. Even after years of the project conclusion, Janssen and Banning are still advocating for the awareness raising of the comfort women issue. The latest invitation they received was a symposium (Remembering the Forgotten: Indonesian "Comfort Women" Symposium) held by Southern Methodist University's (SMU) Women's and Gender Studies programme on 27 April 2024 in Dallas and Texas. Through such opportunities, they keep the discussion about violence against women in wartime alive.

As for WawoRuntu, she stated that the film is an eye-opener to expose what happened in the past, especially for the younger generation who knew little-to nothing about the comfort system. During the interview, WawoRuntu recalled the moment her parents told her about the cruelty of Japan. When WawoRuntu's mother was cycling, she had to lower her head in order not to get hit by the Japanese soldiers. Meanwhile, WawoRuntu's father was also at threat of abduction by the Japanese to build a railway in Burma. Her grandmother had to hide WawoRuntu's father in a closet when the Japanese soldiers came. From both her parents' stories, WawoRuntu had learned about the violence condoned by the Japanese, but she did not know about the comfort system prior to her involvement in translating the film, which shows that participating in the project enhances her knowledge about the comfort women issue.

In addition, Van Osch shared his perspective on what makes it crucial to have a film within the umbrella project of *Troostmeisjes*:

> Hilde created a beautiful book, Jan created really amazing photos, and the film give(s) something third. You look at the lives of those people and you learn more about their soul, I think, with film. But that's my opinion as a filmmaker, that film really comes close to the soul of people. That is what I think, what I hope that the film has added to the project.

Van Osch, who believes that a film can move people's hearts, later stated that there was one Japanese man who came to the film festival in San Francisco. After the screening, this man stood up and apologised for what his people did in the past. He had said he did not know about the comfort women issue because he was never taught about it in school. Although it was a very memorable moment to recall and it showed that the film met some of the stated goals, Van Osch thought that it was not enough to make a real impact. As a filmmaker, he understands both the strengths and limitations of a film. This is yet another constraint of the project that was pointed out by McGregor and Mackie (2018, 140) who contend that the project is not enough to communicate ethical or political knowledge concerning the comfort women issue. Even though they discuss specifically Banning's photograph project, taking into consideration the example given by Van Osch, their analysis is applicable to the film as well. While *Because We Were Beautiful* educates both the audience and the filmmakers, it falls short at communicating ethical and/or political knowledge about the comfort women issue. As discussed in Chapter 2, communicating ethical or political knowledge to viewers relies on their previous understanding of the issue prior to the film and their subsequent actions after watching it. The film does not fully explore the responsibilities and actions needed to address these atrocities, in other words, there is no guidance communicated to viewers on what to do about the issue subsequently.

Challenges in **representing the comfort women**

Creating a documentary requires juggling between storytelling and truth-seeking, which presents a set of challenges. Elucidating the challenges encountered by people behind the film serves several purposes. It illuminates the complexities and dilemmas inherent in representing sensitive topics such as violence against women during war, which will lead to acknowledging the responsibility that comes with addressing it. Moreover, shedding light on the challenges means trying to understand the filmmakers' journey and difficult decisions they had to make behind-the-scenes. Throughout this section, I illuminate practical constraints faced by the people involved in the project in order to highlight the ethical complexities involved in representing the comfort women issue in *Because We Were Beautiful*.

Janssen stated that the first obstacle when executing the project was the fact that they covered war experiences which happened more than 60 years ago. Tracing and finding the comfort women were difficult. Some had died, some were not able to remember anymore as they suffered from dementia, and some did not want to talk about it. Second, the developments that had occurred in between also had impacts. Janssen mentioned the Asian Women's Fund (AWF) and how the Indonesian government did not agree with individual compensation for the *ianfu*, arguing it was shameful to have to acknowledge such a "sinful" experience, and it was not in line with their cultural values to expose this publicly. A more detailed explanation of the AWF implementation in Indonesia is discussed in Chapter 3. Janssen added that the failure to get compensation money to the *ianfu* individually resulted in the whole network of activists breaking apart because the activists felt too ashamed to meet the women again. Hence, it was very difficult for Janssen to ask the *ianfu* to talk about their past experiences and get their permission to be photographed and filmed. Janssen and Banning had to convince the *ianfu* that they were not after their compensation money, rather they just wanted to record their stories before all witnesses pass away.

As a photographic artist in the film project, Banning allowed the director to use his photographs in the film as a transition between scenes. According to Barthes, photographic images in a nonfiction films generates a new kind of consciousness, reflecting the "having-been-there" of the depicted events; these images provide evidence by indicating that certain events took place and unfolded in a certain way (Barthes 1997 cited in Plantinga 1997, 62). Following this, Banning's photographs of the Indonesian *ianfu* victim-survivors serve as additional proof (alongside the footage of the women) of the existence of the comfort women system in the Netherlands East Indies. In Japan, the photographs of the comfort women were part of a collection of 25,000 wartime photographs that were censored (Hicks 1997, 16), underscoring the extent to which evidence were suppressed to conceal these atrocities. Banning's project to reveal the photographs of Indonesian *ianfu* through the stills in the documentary, exhibition and photobook constitute a confrontation to Japan's way of erasing the existence of comfort women. Nevertheless, Plantinga reminds us that images can be confusing, misrepresented and open to various interpretations, which further complicates the evidence (Plantinga 1997, 64). For Banning, it was always challenging to portray a person because he needed to establish contact with the subject of his photographs. He tried to get as close as possible to the women. He established contact by, for instance, giving the women a hand when they got out of the car. Another example was that sometimes during the interview,

when Janssen looked down at her notes, Banning used the opportunity to catch the women's eyes to establish contact with his human subject.

Another challenge were the negotiations with the village head (*Kepala Desa*) who demanded financial remuneration in return for access to the women. Both Banning and Janssen mentioned the role of the village head in their search for the *ianfu*. Janssen expanded and clarified Banning's points by mentioning three occasions when the village head demanded money from them. In Solo, a village head, who was also a local contact person for the activists, pointed out eight *ianfu* in his village and some others in the neighbouring village. Later, he started talking about money to the point that Janssen had to convince him that they were not as rich as he thought and they would not pay money for the interviews. They told him that they would compensate the women for loss of a workday. As a parting gift after the interviews, they gave the women the same amount of money. In Yogyakarta, they paid the village head to arrange the location for the interview and the transport for the women. Afterwards, they drove the women home themselves with their car. In Babar Island, the village head was quite adamant about not letting them meet the *ianfu*. The village head mentioned that the village had decided not to talk about the past anymore as they were fed up with it and the women felt exposed. Janssen elaborated that this village was the target of a revenge act by the Japanese, in which more than 400 locals were killed and 12 young girls were taken hostage and put in a self-made army brothel established in a short distance from the village. The team paid the village head for his hospitality (he had been forced to provide the team with shelter as there was no hotel or restaurant as such in the neighbourhood).

The main obstacle for Janssen was interviewing the women in order to obtain oral proof about what happened to them. In the process, she had to ask very delicate questions about rape. This poses ethical questions of the project. The women were already very old and were mostly reluctant to talk because they felt ashamed, thinking that speaking about sexual matters was vulgar. Thus, Janssen had to find ways to overcome their reluctance to talk about such matters. She set up neutral grounds to interview the women, away from their family members and neighbours that might listen in to their conversations. Janssen also collaborated with local translators so that the women could comfortably speak in their mother tongue, which leads me to the next challenge she faced: language barrier. Janssen speaks Indonesian, but she does not speak Javanese, Sundanese, and any other Indonesian local languages spoken by the *ianfu* whom she interviewed. During the interviews, she was sometimes supported by local

translators, so that the *ianfu* felt comfortable speaking in their mother tongue. The challenges of translating did not only occur during the interview; it also took place in the film translation process. I adopt the definition of "film translation" from (Delabastita 1989, 195) who describes it as the whole set of operations, encompassing specific operations on non-verbal signs, which facilitate and enable the transfer of a film from a source culture A into a target culture B.

Janssen was not the only one who encountered language barrier, Van Osch also struggled with it. He does not speak Indonesian nor any other Indonesian local language spoken by the women. What is striking from his answer was that although he admitted that he only knew a few words in Indonesian, he said: "I never forgot that word: *diperkosa*." *Diperkosa* is an Indonesian passive verb for *to be raped*. The fact that this particular word lingered on the director's mind illustrates how often these words came up in the *ianfu*'s interviews and possibly during his discussions with Janssen and Banning. Van Osch further explained that even if he could speak Indonesian, he still could not do the interviews because he is a man. There were moments where one *ianfu* became wary of Van Osch's presence nearby to the point that Hilde had to assure her that he would not understand what she talked about.

Precisely on this matter, Van Osch claimed: "I had to deal with the fact that I'm a man in a ladies' film." His statement demonstrates his limits—as a male director—of understanding violence and rape as a men's issue, condone by men against women. Thus, I do not agree and find it problematic that he refers to the comfort women issue in the documentary as exclusively "a ladies' film". Van Osch also underlined that he did not want sensational stories in the film. What he wanted was to show a little bit of how it was at the time, mainly how it was to carry the trauma, guilt and shame with them (the *ianfu*) all those years. Documentary films bundle shots and scenes into larger categories or compositions, enabling the viewers to view them as more than just straightforward records or mere footage (Nichols 2007, 66). Van Osch organised the sequences of shots in *Because We Were Beautiful* as a story with the arrival of Japan in the Netherlands East Indies as the beginning and the defeat of Japan as the end. He mentioned that no-one (among the *ianfu*) told exactly what happened (their experiences as *ianfu*) during their interviews and that was what he wanted (to show in the film) as well. This might be because Van Osch understood that narratives are always fragmented, but it could also be because he wanted to convey the message subtly and be careful of misrepresenting the women's stories.

In the process of translation, WawoRuntu and Tanjung provided overviews of the challenges they faced. Although they did not work together during the process of translating

the interviews to the making of Dutch subtitles, their work was combined in the final result of the film. The main challenge that WawoRuntu encountered during the translation process was the emotionally heavy stories of the *ianfu*. As an Indonesian woman, having a sense of shared history with the *ianfu*, she was made to wonder about the truth of the issue and the history that she had learned so far. In our interview, WawoRuntu mentioned that her friends helped her to translate Sundanese and Javanese. Thus, there were 2 processes of translation: first, from the local languages to Indonesian; and second, from Indonesian to Dutch. This process demonstrates an "intermediary translation" in which "films made in little-known languages may be translated via an intermediary version" (Plantinga 1997, 207). Recalling how the two translators I interviewed are Indonesians and the so-called little-known languages are Javanese, Sundanese and other Indonesian local languages, Indonesian language serves as the intermediary language in WawoRuntu's process of translation and her friends as intermediary translators. While having an intermediary translation is very much helpful, it needs to be acknowledged that this process brings with it a proclivity to compress and reduce the message conveyed in the source language.

Comparatively, despite being in the same line of work as WawoRuntu in this film, Tanjung encountered different challenges. The challenge for him was translating the non-verbal signs of the women interviewed. In the process of translation, he made an effort to pay attention to the facial expression, intonation and the gesture of the women, as discussed in Chapter 4 for the scene of Wainem. Tanjung's insights help convey the film's message as he also advocated for the non-verbal voices of the women to the director and the editor. The next challenge he faced was related to the limitations of film as a genre, which is the fact that the duration cannot be too long. A significant issue with subtitling arose because film dialogues are typically spoken faster than the on-screen translation can keep up with, making some degree of text compression or reduction unavoidable (Delabastita 1989, 203). The text compression and reduction are evident in some parts of the English subtitles in the film. While I do not and cannot assess the Dutch subtitles of the film, I pay attention to the English translation of the film and evaluate it with my knowledge of Javanese and Sundanese language. Tanjung said that Van Osch and the editor focused on selecting which scenes best represented the whole narrative, while he emphasised on the messages that needed to be conveyed.

After the exhibition in Semarang, one woman protested because her picture appeared in a local newspaper. The village head presented her with the newspaper, which she hid in a

purse in a drawer. Janssen realised the publicity regarding the exhibition could attract unwanted attention and exposure to the women through neighbours or even family members, which might further embarrass them. After the project ended, Janssen still visited the women as friends and maintained good relationships with them. Her subsequent action after the project is based on the ethical knowledge that she gained throughout the project. I perceive Janssen's subsequent action as an act of solidarity with the women and an example of an ethical knowledge production.

Reception of the documentary

When asked about the reception of the film, my interviewees had various responses to the question. Janssen shared that several mixed descent Dutch-Indonesians were angry at the film due to its omissions of the story of Dutch women, and especially as the film was broadcasted on the Dutch commemoration day of Dutch victims of the Japanese occupation.

Janssen further said that at the government level, she did not think that the project strengthened the relationships between the three nations. Japan was unhappy and informally protested at the Dutch Embassy in Indonesia about them offering a space for the exhibition. Japan perceived this as the Netherlands interference in bilateral affairs that were supposed to be exclusively between Indonesia and Japan. She further reported that some officials came to the exhibition and talked to the head of Erasmus Huis, the cultural attaché. I argue that Japan's unhappy reaction to the *Troostmeisjes* exhibition replicates Japan's responses to the three South Korean *manhwa*, exhibited at the Angoulême Comics Festival in France in 2014, which raised the issue of the comfort women. This was due to the event touching on one of the most politically and emotionally sensitive issues between the two nations: the comfort women (Park 2019, 38). Similar to the reaction in Erasmus Huis Jakarta, the confrontation of the *manhwa* escalated to the point that the Japanese Embassy in France also intervened. What is fascinating from both events is that the representation of the comfort women issue in popular culture (the photo exhibition and *manhwa*) managed to fuel diplomatic tensions between the countries involved. Japan's concern at being perceived as the villain of the story, both by its own people and by others, proves how powerful popular cultural representations can be at shaping public perceptions and changing people's perspectives.

Tanjung, recognising the immense struggle for survival faced by the *ianfu*, suggested that the key takeaway from the film is the importance of fostering a safe space for women to

speak up about sensitive topics. However, I disagree with his emphasis on women having to speak up. It is crucial to recognise that women may choose not to speak for various reasons, including social pressures, as discussed in Chapter 4. Tanjung said that one of the successes of the documentary is that it provides a space for the women to talk about their suffering. Tanjung also praised Janssen's interviewing skills, noting her ability to position herself as a friend and empathise with their experiences—even though, as Tanjung recalled, there was one *ianfu*[48] who wanted to end the interview. Tanjung commented that in that particular scene, Janssen was trying "too much" to pursue an answer from a hesitant interlocutor. In her online review, Van Selm also problematises how Western it is of Janssen to want to open everything up and talk about everything (*Historiek*, 11 July 2011). Henny Wouters argues along a similar line with Van Selm in his critique of the documentary. Wouters sees Janssen as being "very present" in the film, even when Janssen showed empathic responses while listening to the women. He further writes that due to the continuous flow of empathy and by focusing on "the sex" the women experienced, they rarely rise above victimhood (*Cinemagazine*, 6 March 2021).

Tanjung also mentioned that his emphasis on the importance of women speaking up about the violence they experienced is probably influenced by his time living in the West (the Netherlands). He acknowledged that Indonesian women tend to keep silent about the violence they experienced. Tanjung contrasted this tendency with the image of Western women who are more expressive and outspoken, in the sense that they are more likely to have courage to speak up about violence they experienced. This is in line with Van Selm's critique that it is very Western to want to talk about everything. Tanjung, who is an Indonesian and understands the women's reluctance to talk about certain matters, admitted that he was influenced by this Western tendency to speak up. His statement also speaks to the kind of cultural environment in which a woman might feel safe to talk about their experiences. Inferring from Tanjung's opinion, the West, as he perceived, promotes a safer environment for women to speak about violence they are subjected to.

While agreeing that some scenes in the documentary indeed represents the *ianfu* as victims, I observed that there are also other scenes which portray them as survivors. I argue that representing the *ianfu* as victims is necessary in order to portray them as survivors. In the context of the comfort women issue, the term "victim" is important in gaining recognition, in pursuing a state apology and compensation (AWF), and in holding the perpetrators responsible

[48] The *ianfu* being referred to here is Wainem and her scene is discussed in Chapter 4.

e.g., by categorising the comfort system alongside Japan's other war crimes. Referring to the victim (of sexual violence) as anything other than a "victim" would undermine their legal rights, thus this term is useful in legal proceedings and formulations (Mittal and Singh 2018, 49). Taking into account the aims of the documentary discussed in the first section of this chapter, I suggest that by portraying the women as victims, the filmmakers did not want to lose the legal and political currency that comes with the term. Comparatively, the term survivor is argued to be more empowering and that is why it is more appealing to feminists. Among the pioneers who advocated for the use of the term "survivor" in the 1970s was Kathleen Barry, who urged the adoption of the term as it emphasises the agency of women, highlighting that they did not passively accept abuse but actively tried to resist and/or cope (Mittal and Singh 2018, 50). While the term "survivor" is preferred because it stresses the long term outcomes of the violence experienced, it must be acknowledged that not everyone feels empowered [in the sense of wanting to seek justice for themselves or speaking up about what happened to them, etc.] after the violence they experienced (ibid). This is also one of the reasons why I decided to refer to the *ianfu* as victim-survivors. In so doing, I do not label them as either victims or survivors, rather I aim at both so as to hold space for reflecting upon their past experiences of violence and referring to their present identity as women who survived long term consequences of that violence.

Furthermore, during the interviews, I posed a question: might we see this documentary as a form of decolonial project by the Netherlands for Indonesia? While I agree that decolonisation is such a big concept, I perceive a decolonial project as a step that contributes to decoloniality. Decoloniality emphasises the importance of transnational peripheral knowledges within the knowledge system (Jivraj, Bakshi, and Posocco 2020, 452). Following this, I perceive the testimonies of the *ianfu* in the film as peripheral knowledge that was produced through the project. To my interviewees who asked for my definition of a decolonial project, I define it as a project that aims at undoing the effects of colonialism by challenging and dismantling the impacts of it. A decolonial project also seeks to confront colonial atrocities, historical injustices and inequalities perpetuated by coloniser during the colonial period. Along these lines, I question whether this Dutch-made film might be seen as a form of decolonial project that confronts colonial atrocities—the comfort women system—committed by Japan during its occupation of the Netherlands East Indies.

Regarding whether or not the documentary might be seen as a decolonial project, Banning said that his honest answer is no. He emphasised that not one of them (Banning, Janssen and Van Osch) had that intention in mind when they started the project. Banning stated: "Of course, how it is perceived is another matter, which is out of our hands." For Banning, participating in and initiating the whole project was about justice and injustice. In the case of this project, the story was rooted in colonialism. But this project was not meant as an answer or a reaction to colonialism. It was a reaction to, in Banning's opinion, the huge injustices of a power system: in this case, the injustices by the Japanese army to vulnerable people. Further, he elaborated that the project was also about power, yet not necessarily colonial power. However, Banning confessed he had not thought about it along those lines: "I'm not saying that it is not a decolonial project, I'm saying it wasn't intended to be one. How it's being perceived, if it's perceived that way, I have no objection." From his answer, I assume that he partly understood my definition of decolonial. Likewise, Banning believed that the project was very political, recalling the fact that it was shown and published in Japan, which was not keen on having this issue exposed in the first place. He recalled that he got in touch with the Japanese photo magazine who published his photographs in their edition. Subsequently, the staff from Women's Active Museum on War and Peace saw the publication and took the initiative to bring the exhibition to Tokyo and Okinawa.

Precisely on this question of the film as a decolonial project, Van Osch mentioned that the viewers could think that the Dutch colonised the history of Indonesia with the project; indeed, he had heard that critique as well. Van Osch further explained that making a film project out of this history was due to the close ties between Indonesia and the Netherlands. He said that Indonesia is closer to the Netherlands than many other Asian countries as it was part of the empire. Some critiques he remembered also included the idea that the project took Indonesia's story. This is due to the assumption and a sense of belonging of a shared history that this story (of the comfort women) had to be told (be it through film or text) by Indonesian people and not by the Dutch. For Van Osch, these critiques became an extra motivation to learn more about the comfort women story through the creation of this film. He admitted that he was embarrassed about the Dutch role in Indonesia's colonisation and wanted to do something about it. In this sense, it is clear that Van Osch understood that the complicated colonial relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia played a part in the making of the film.

I came to the question of a decolonial project after watching the documentary. I hypothesised that the film started as a decolonial project, this was prior to my interviews with the people behind the project. After learning that neither Janssen, Banning nor Van Osch had the intention of making this project a decolonial one, nor did WawoRuntu and Tanjung perceive it as such; I still do not completely diminish my hypothesis. According to Mignolo, "decoloniality is a path to heal the wounds of coloniality" (Mignolo 2016, vii). To simply define coloniality, I perceive it as the continuity and discontinuity of colonialism which have lasting impacts on societies, cultures and knowledge production. I then argue that although the film did not start as a decolonial project, it has the potential to be one as it confronts the atrocities and injustices committed during the colonial period in which the impacts persist until today. Further, decoloniality amplifies peripheral knowledge by making them visible and spreading them across transnational and transdisciplinary spaces (Jivraj, Bakshi, and Posocco 2020, 453). In this sense, the film indeed made the peripheral knowledge of the comfort women issue visible and disseminated them across transnational spaces. Additionally, the project also anchors critical engagement across transdisciplinary spaces as the people involved in the project are transdisciplinary and scholars who examine on the project come from various academic background (ranging from history to photography studies). This is the basis of my argument.

The fact that Van Osch also made an educational version of the documentary was another reason why the film had the potential to be a decolonial project. The educational version[49] was much shorter in duration but added the story about the war in Asia. According to Van Osch, this shorter version was targeted at children (aged 13-16) at the secondary level for history class. While Van Osch admitted that the educational version was part of an agreement with one of the funding organisations of this film—indicating clear power relations in terms of funding—making the film into a teaching material demonstrates how the Netherlands is considerably more open to discussing colonial matters in schools compared to Japan. On the contrary, Japan included fewer discussions of its own war atrocities by omitting almost all of the contents related to the comfort women issue in their school textbooks (Tawara 2000, 37 cited in Beal, Nozaki, and Yang 2001, 180). However, it needs to acknowledged as well that the Dutch openness to talk about the comfort women issue was possibly because they were also victims of these atrocities and they were not part of the perpetrator side.

[49] For more information, please visit: https://vanoschfilms.nl/docs/omdat-wij-mooi-waren-educatief/.

Remarks from the people behind the film

This section analyses final remarks from my five interviewees about their hopes for future activism on the comfort women issue that they wanted to pick up where the film left off. Their remarks are helpful to direct activists on their future work concerning the comfort women issue.

During our talk, Janssen expressed that in the sense of generating attention and awareness, and motivating activists to do something more, the film does fuel other forms of activism. This point is proven in Chapter 3 as there were some forms of activism which were inspired by the project. On that note, Janssen also wondered what the point of activism would be for the former comfort women today. She hoped that there will be new forms of activism that finds another way of commemorating the *ianfu*. Janssen seemed pleased to know that people are working on furthering the discussion about the topic this project brought up and making new art out of it. According to her, the project also serves as a tribute to these brave women (*ianfu*): "They were brave enough to look the world in the eye and say: Here I am, and this has happened to me, and you better take care of us and respect what we have done." She also advocated for the prevention of the issue in the future and called for a better system of handling this traumatic experience for women.

Additionally, while WawoRuntu agreed that this side of history needs to be known and learned, she believed that the comfort women issue should not be talked again because at some point, we need to stop looking at the past and move forward to the future. She placed significance on the temporality aspect of the issue by saying that it had been 14 years since the release of the film; perhaps many *ianfu* who had been involved in the project had since passed away. Therefore, WawoRuntu hoped that future activism for *ianfu* will extend their respect to their family. This can be done by not taking advantages of them, for example, by not using the *ianfu* and their cause to earn money. This can be linked to the point that Janssen and Banning made about *Kepala Desa* in the upper section. Although WawoRuntu was not involved on the ground, she knew that there were often people who took advantage of the *ianfu* victim-survivors to advance their own interests, mostly financially. This is where Mookherjee's (2006) insight becomes useful, even though she studies the specific context of sexual violence in Enayetpur during the Bangladesh war. Mookherjee argues that since the women are perceived as revealing a secret, many villagers (in Enayetpur) have imposed sanctions against them. Therefore, the act of rape and, more importantly, the women's perceived intention to discuss it

publicly renders them as sinners (and sellers of sex through their words again) who have subsequently lost their moral standing (2006, 438–39). Speaking about the violence they experience is already seen as something shameful, let alone revealing it to outsiders, or in this context, *white people*. Banning also conveyed his concern that the women were harassed afterwards by the *Kepala Desa* who contacted them and said something like: "Well, look, you've been talking to these *white people*. Of course, they paid you a nice amount of money. Now, come up." Building on this, I argue that demanding money from the *ianfu* can be seen as evoking sanctions against them for speaking about what is supposed to be a public secrecy.

Picking up on the discussion about communicating ethical and/or political knowledge after the project dissolved, Banning, who centres his work on the topics of justice and power, disclosed that he did not focus his work on sexual violence against women after his involvement in the project:

> It's not so that after doing the Comfort Women Project, I completely focused on sexual violence against women. No, I did not. For me, it was one of the aspects of great injustices and of abuse of power. And there are other examples of that. And it's not the only thing I do, but it's a very important issue, a very important topic in my work.

Banning also questioned the extent to which the Indonesian *ianfu* will benefit from future activism. He had the same concern as Janssen and WawoRuntu regarding the fact that most of the *ianfu* had since passed away. Banning thought that the individual aspect was diminished as we cannot not do justice to the women themselves. However, he strongly believed that we can still do justice to their story and the history of it. Banning hoped that the people can translate the women's story into not just an awareness of the issue, but also into an activism concerning present-day examples of these horrors.

Van Osch confessed that after *Because We Were Beautiful*, he tried to do something more on the topic of the comfort women. He attempted to find Japanese people who were in the army and were the "customers" of the comfort women, but unfortunately, this attempt was unsuccessful. Now, he is still working on telling stories about war though film, but he did not specialise in comfort women stories after the conclusion of the project. He believed that it would be good for women (such as a female director) to make a film about comfort women. Lastly, Van Osch hoped that despite the shame, people could keep telling what happened [the injustices] to them. Frank hoped that the victim-survivors would raise their voices over and over again because people need to become aware of that. From his statement, it can be inferred that Van Osch comprehends rape as a weapon of war and his understanding is reflected in the

film that he created. From my interviewees' statements, I question whether we should further burden the victim-survivors with the responsibility to educate people about the violence they experienced, rather than allowing them to forget or focus on their healing and recovery.

Conclusion

Having analysed the interviews I conducted with the people involved in *Because We Were Beautiful*, there are four points that can be concluded. First, the main goal of creating the film was to show the Dutch that they were not the only victims who suffered during the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies; Indonesians also suffered, and in many cases even more severely. What is not shown in the film is the differences in terms of the situation and experience of Indonesian and Dutch *ianfu*—two groups of women in the same occupied territory that are differentiated by nationality, racial and social status, leading to distinct forms of exploitation and treatment. Second, the significant challenges faced by the people behind the documentary were experienced mainly during the production process in which photographing, lobbying, interviewing, translating, and representing violence against women during war made for a complex and sensitive undertaking that demanded careful consideration and ethical responsibility at every stage. Third, due to the political nature of the film, more precisely the *Troostmeisjes* project, it received critical reactions and responses from the Japanese government, leading to diplomatic tension among the three countries. Additionally, I argue that *Because We Were Beautiful* had the potential to be a decolonial project, although it was not intended as such, recalling how the film highlights voices and experiences of marginalised women and offers a platform for critical engagement with historical injustice (both through the film and the educational version of it).

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Writing about and analysing violence against women is a challenging endeavour. There seems to be no right words to describe the experiences of the former *ianfu*, nor any right way to theorise their lived realities. Reflecting upon my own experience in examining the comfort women issue, I learned that this complexity extends to the documentary as well. Representing the *ianfu*'s stories of violence in a film is a big task with heavy ethical considerations. The task demands a careful and respectful approach to the *ianfu* victim-survivors and a deep understanding of the historical context that shaped their experiences. Within this thesis, I have analysed *Because We Were Beautiful*, from the perspective of a documentary film analysis which focuses on textual analysis rather than visual analysis, and thematically examined the interviews I conducted with my interviewees.

My research has contributed to the Japanese Studies scholarship on explaining the complicated relationship between Indonesia and Japan when it comes to the comfort women issue and to feminist scholarship on examining the aforementioned issue from the perspective of "double colonisation" (Petersen and Rutherford 1986). The thesis has also demonstrated that the double colonisation concept is applicable to analyse audio-visual material such as a documentary film. Although, it still needed a complementary concept, in which I employed the concept of "war as a continuum" (Cockburn 2010), to provide a more exhaustive analysis. However, my thesis falls short in offering suggestions for actions to take after watching the film and learning about the comfort women issue.

In the thesis, I argued that the comfort women system is a form of systematic violence against women, which was perpetuated by the enactment of militarised masculinity. Further, naming and framing the issue has mobilised transnational activism to seek justice for the *ianfu*, with one being the documentary *Because We Were Beautiful*. Not only did the film involve people from the Netherlands, Indonesia and Japan to collaborate in its production, it also engaged a transnational audience in critical discussions concerning the comfort women issue. This documentary serves as an important intervention in the realm of popular cultural representation. The film's impact extends beyond awareness-raising; it fuels other forms of

activism for *ianfu*, contributing to the memorialisation of the comfort women, amplifying the voices of marginalised women, and ensuring their struggles are not forgotten.

Further, I have argued that a feminist approach is crucial to comprehensively understand the comfort women issue. This approach not only enables us to focus on the *ianfu*'s experiences during the occupation, but also supports an examination of the conditions that enabled the system to function, emphasising the *ianfu*'s "post-war" lived realities. Having analysed the *ianfu*'s testimonies in the film, I argue that *Because We Were Beautiful* represents the Dutch way of perceiving the comfort women issue in the Netherlands East Indies "under Western eyes" (Mohanty 1984) by reproducing the Western universal images of the colonised Third World women (Indonesia) as physically beautiful, innocent about sex and religiously faithful. As such representations are contrasted with generalised images of the women from the West; they correspond with Orientalist tropes, which imagined women from the non-West as docile, sexualised, and without agency. Pursuing such Orientalist tropes resulted in the "double orientalization" (Hasan 2005) of the *ianfu*: as women and as Orientals. Thus, I have argued that in the process of portraying these *ianfu* as experiencing double colonisation, the film also represents them as doubly orientalised.

In that regard, the double colonisation of *ianfu* by patriarchy and colonial power represented in *Because We Were Beautiful* is demonstrated through their stories, which range from violent forced recruitment, to the myriad forms of violence at the *ianjo*, and ultimately to the enduring scorn and social stigmatisation they faced after the occupation ended. What is striking about the double colonisation experienced by *ianfu* is the fact that it did not only stemmed from patriarchy and colonial power, it was also a form of oppression that pushed and manipulated the "colonised elites" (Lie 1997) as the internal forces—people from the same collective—to participate in oppressing the women. However, the compliance and collaboration of the internal forces were not explicitly stated nor shown throughout the documentary. I suggested that the film was reluctant to show this complicity as it might have resulted in breaking the solidarity among the Indonesian collective, which are supposed to be united when it comes to postcolonial matters such as the comfort women. Additionally, the Dutch filmmakers might have assumed a unified stance about Indonesia, while Indonesian collaborators did not want to show a fractured front to the whole world. This omission is indicative of the complexities of postcolonial dynamics between the two countries and the

sensitive nature of representing internal complicity in historical injustices. Attending to this aspect in the film could risk dismantling the collective unity of postcolonial solidarity.

Ultimately, I argued that *Because We Were Beautiful* has the potential to be a decolonial project, although it was not initially intended to be one. This is due to the film raising subaltern voices of the *ianfu*, centring peripheral knowledge of the comfort women issue by making their stories visible and disseminating them across transnational and transdisciplinary spaces (Jivraj, Bakshi, and Posocco 2020). The documentary and its educational version serve as platforms for critical engagement; this was the Dutch way of openly reckoning with a dark colonial past in contrast to how Japan tried to conceal the matter from its own citizens. These opposite images once again echo the impression that the West can and knows how to reckon with the past and address cases of rape and sexual violence, while the East cannot or refuses to do so. Lastly, considering the fact that many *ianfu* have since passed away, future activism for and on behalf of them should find new ways of placing them in history without depending on the *ianfu* victim-survivors' first-hand testimonies. Future research would be well-advised to explore a kind of activism for *ianfu* which allows the women to forget and heal while making sure that their struggles always have a place in history. This could involve shifting the focus of activism towards military history and the perpetrators of these atrocities, rather than placing the burden of remembrance on the victim-survivors. It is important that we do not further burden the victim-survivors with the responsibility to educate people about the violence they experienced so that such atrocities will not be repeated in the future.

Glossary

Banzai (**万歳**) : A Japanese cheer of triumph. The literal meaning of *banzai* is "to live ten thousand years"

Geisha (芸者) : A Japanese term for a female traditional artists who has undergone multiple trainings in arts of conversation and entertainment, traditional musical instrument and dancing.

Hakkou Ichiu (八紘一宇) : A "slogan" by Emperor Jimmu and was popularised by Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe in 1940, which bears the meaning of "the whole world under one roof"

Heiho (兵補) : A local (Indonesian) auxiliary troops unit consisted of local (Indonesian) male youths raised by Japan during the occupation to fight for the war

Ianjo (慰安所) : Comfort station, also translated as military brothels, established by the Japanese Imperial Army during its occupation in occupied territories

Iantai (慰安隊) : Comfort divisions. A military division created to offer the soldiers with female sexual servitude.

Juugun ianfu (従軍慰安婦) : Military comfort women (*ianfu* or comfort women) refers to girls and women who were forced into so-called systematic prostitution to provide sexual services for the Imperial Japanese Army before and during World War II (1939–1945)

Manga (漫画) : Japanese comics with Japanese style of art and characteristics

Manhwa (만화) : Korean comics with Korean style of art and characteristics

Romusha (労務者) : Male forced labourers for Japan's war effort in its occupied territories.

Appendix

Indicative Interview Questions

Participation in the project

1. How did you first become involved in the *Troostmeisjes*/Comfort Women Project?
2. What motivated you to be involved in the project?

Troostmeisjes/Comfort Women Project

1. Was it decided from the start that there will be a film included in the project?
2. What are the things that cannot be conveyed by other medium in the project (book and photo book & exhibition) but can be delivered by film? What are the things that cannot be delivered by the film but can be addressed in the other three medium? What makes it crucial to have a documentary within this project?

Contributions to the making of the documentary

1. In what ways did you contribute to the overall project of the documentary?
2. What was your experience of being involved in the project? For example, were there any particular challenges that you encountered, and how did you overcome them?
3. Do you think that participating in this project strengthens the relationships between Indonesia, the Netherlands and Japan (on various levels, from personal to state level)? If yes, how or in what ways specifically? If not, why?

Comfort women issue

1. Were you aware of the comfort women issue in general and/or in Indonesia prior to your participation in the project?
2. To what extent did your involvement in this project enhance your knowledge and understanding of the comfort women issue?
3. Did your perspective on the issue change after your involvement in the project?

Thoughts on the documentary

1. What are the themes that you decided to bring up in the documentary?
2. What did you learn from the documentary and what kind of expectations do you have for the future of the documentary?

3. Might we see this documentary as a form of decolonial project by the Netherlands for Indonesia?
   (I define decolonial project as a project that aims at undoing the effects of colonialism by challenging and dismantling the impacts of colonialism. It also seeks to confront colonial atrocities and historical injustices and inequalities perpetuated by colonialism during the colonial period).

Reception of the documentary

1. From your perspective as someone who worked behind the scenes of the documentary, what was the main goal of making this documentary and did the documentary achieve this goal after its release?
2. What do you think of the general reception of *Because We Were Beautiful*?
3. Do you think the documentary has the potential to fuel other forms of activism related to seeking justice for Indonesian former comfort women?

Future activism on the comfort women issue

1. Does your participation in the making of this documentary inspire you to contribute to the similar cause (comfort women-related) in different ways?
2. As someone who was involved in the activism related to comfort women, what are your hopes for future activism on comfort women that want to pick up where this documentary left off?

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