

## Breaking Boundaries: Gender-Based Violence Through an Intersectional Global Lens

Isabella David

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

isabella.david@uni-giessen.de

### English Abstract:

*Representing Gender-Based Violence: Global Perspectives*, edited by Caroline Williamson Sinalo and Nicoletta Mandolini, provides a critical analysis of gender-based violence from a global perspective. The volume analyzes how representations in media, art, politics, and popular culture can reinforce the patriarchal symbolic order, reveal invisible forms of abuse, and highlight the ethical and political challenges of such representations. Despite its comprehensive approach, the book lacks a general conclusion to synthesize findings across contexts.

Grenzen durchbrechen. Eine intersektionale globale Perspektive auf geschlechtsspezifische Gewalt

### Abstract:

*Representing Gender-Based Violence: Global Perspectives*, herausgegeben von Caroline Williamson Sinalo und Nicoletta Mandolini, bietet eine kritische Analyse von geschlechtsspezifischer Gewalt aus globaler Perspektive. Der Band analysiert, wie Darstellungen in Medien, Kunst, Politik und Populärkultur die patriarchale symbolische Ordnung verstärken, unsichtbare Formen des Missbrauchs aufdecken und die ethischen und politischen Herausforderungen solcher Darstellungen aufzeigen können. Trotz des umfassenden Ansatzes fehlt dem Buch ein übergreifendes Fazit, das die Ergebnisse kontextübergreifend zusammenfasst.

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International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

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Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive global issue that needs a critical examination of its representations within media, art, literature, and the broader public discourse. The edited volume *Representing Gender-Based Violence: Global Perspectives* by Caroline Williamson Sinalo and Nicoletta Mandolini has, therefore, as its primary goal to identify global representational models and cultural dynamics that may inadvertently legitimize GBV by perpetuating stereotypes, silencing victims, or normalizing abusive behavior. The volume addresses “a symbolic order that naturalizes gender hierarchies and discrimination [...] that intersect and interact with other forms of control including imperialism, capitalism and neoliberalism” (p. 6).

The editors advocate for a “militant, yet scholarly, perspective,” underscoring a collective commitment to rigorous inquiry: “The category of militant criticism adequately reflects the general approach that editors and authors have unanimously adopted. The aim is to offer rigorous inquiries that do not disguise their feminist ethos, as well as their objective of providing the reader with a set of interpretative tools to critique the ethical positioning of texts or discourse concerning GBV” (p. 17). Accordingly, Williamson Sinalo and Mandolini assert that the volume has the capacity to catalyze meaningful change and substantive interventions by offering a critical analysis of GBV representations in various communication forms. The editors further aim to globalize the discourse on the representation of GBV and to dismantle stereotypes and harmful cultural patterns that legitimize violence, while also shedding light on neglected forms of GBV. The volume seeks to stimulate critical reflection and promote awareness by presenting models of effective representational practices.

Rejecting the privileging of Western narratives, the essays in this collection offer a global perspective that encompasses diverse geographical and cultural contexts, including analyses of Italy, Japan, and South Africa.

The volume embraces the concept of intersectionality, recognizing the specificity of subjects, contexts, and media, and fostering solidarity among experiences of violence and gender (cf. p. 10). The analysis spans various media platforms, reflecting the contemporary communication landscape's complexity. Using an intersectional lens, the volume explores how GBV intersects with race, class, gender identity, and sexual orientation, offering insight into the multidimensional experiences of victims and avoiding simplistic narratives. The analysis extends to different forms of GBV, such as domestic violence, femicide, sexual harassment, voyeurism, human trafficking, and acid attacks (cf. p. 3). Additionally, some essays challenge prevailing definitions of GBV by examining representational practices as a form of GBV.

The book is divided into three sections, each approaching the representation of GBV from a different angle. The first section, "Representations as Violence," plays a pivotal role in uncovering how certain narratives, while ostensibly descriptive, can actively perpetuate and legitimize gender-based violence. The section offers analytical tools for exposing the power dynamics embedded within representations. Caroline Williamson Sinalo, for example, analyzes the international media coverage of Congolese gynecologist Dr. Denis Mukwege's 2018 Nobel Prize win. Williamson Sinalo convincingly illustrates how this discourse, while bringing much-needed attention to sexual violence in the context of war, also falls "into some common representational pitfalls" (p. 25), by framing gender-based violence as a cultural problem specific to certain non-Western geographies and by objectifying women. Another insightful essay of this section that illustrates the complex and often complicated aspects of representational practices in relation to GBV is Federico Tenca Montini's discussion of "The Case of Norma Cossetto." Analyzing recent film and book adaptations and newspaper coverage of Cossetto's murder, Tenca Montini introduces the term 'femorevisionism' to illustrate how the case is rewritten in populist and right-wing media as a way of connecting Eastern Europeans with gender-based violence, while obliterating the fact that sexual violence

was frequently employed as a tool of oppression by the Nazis and their allies during the Second World War.

The second section, “Revealing Representations,” underscores the potential of representations to amplify visibility of often overlooked forms of violence. By examining how victims, activists, and content creators use media to spotlight these issues, this section provides invaluable strategic and methodological insights for activist initiatives. For example, Mandolini’s analysis of the true crime podcast *West Cork* suggests how oblique narrative techniques can address gender-based violence in an ethical and non-stereotypical way, offering media activists alternative narrative approaches to discuss sensitive issues.

The third section, “Representative Re-Imaginations,” is concerned with questioning “our understanding of the GBV category by contesting given or assumed meanings, terms, categories and identities in representations of GBV and creatively re-imagining social and political realities” (p. 15). This third section presents creative and critical ways of re-imagining representations of gender-based violence. The analysis of feminist protests in Spain, for example, shows how street performances and social media activism use Rancière’s notion of ‘dissent’ to challenge patriarchal norms and give voice to silenced narratives. This offers activists models of performative political action and digital communication strategies to raise awareness and mobilize support against gender-based violence. The chapter on the “El Tendedero” project in Mexico illustrates how a collaborative art installation can create an archive of women’s experiences and stimulate reflection and collective action against sexual violence, providing a concrete example of how art can be a powerful tool for feminist activism.

Although the edited volume focuses primarily on analysis and interpretation, many chapters, through their critique of existing representations and highlighting of underlying social and political dynamics, implicitly provide insights and directions for activist action. The authors do not always make explicit policy recommendations, but their conclusions and the analytical methodologies presented can certainly be used as conceptual and critical tools by activists to better understand the complexities of gender-based violence and to develop more effective and informed intervention strategies. Emphasizing the importance of giving victims a voice,

challenging dominant narratives and recognizing the intersections between gender and other forms of oppression are recurring themes that serve as guides for activist action. Overall, the essays not only deliver rigorous and incisive analyses but also equip readers with a rich array of interpretive tools to critically engage with representations of gender-based violence and to empower activist action, all while remaining steadfastly aligned with feminist principles.

While all the essays compiled in this volume offer valuable and insightful insights into the complex dynamics of GBV representation, the volume lacks an overall conclusion that synthesizes the different analyses presented. In my opinion, this shortfall hinders the consolidation of insights into the commonalities between the different contexts, slightly detracting from the richness of the discourse. This is a missed opportunity, as a concluding chapter would have contributed significantly to emphasize the globally shared characteristics of gender-based violence. For example, the potential for the political instrumentalization of gender-based violence used to promote narratives that deem certain ethnicities inferior appears to be a pervasive problem on a global scale as highlighted by several essay authors. On a positive note, the editors' intention to create a bridge between academia and activism makes this work an essential resource for scholars and practitioners engaged in the fight against gender-based violence. The discussions in the different chapters translate from academia to activism in several ways: For example, the chapter on human trafficking highlights how dominant narratives, while being advocacy tools, may unintentionally perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes and obscure structural violence, implicitly suggesting to activists the need to promote more complex and agency-conscious representations of trafficked persons. Similarly, the analysis of the discourse on 'comfort women' in Japan shows how human rights claims and populist claims can be mutually exclusive, indicating to activists the importance of contextualizing representations of survivors and resisting omissions that lead to denial. The editors emphasize the adoption of 'militant critique' as a general approach, reflecting a feminist commitment and the aim of providing readers with interpretive tools to critically analyze texts and discourses related to gender-based violence.