

A feminist reading of gender and national memory at the Yasukuni Shrine

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Abstract: This article is a feminist examination of gender and national memory at the Yasukuni Shrine. It argues that the spaces and practices of Yasukuni and the adjoining Yūshūkan War Memorial Museum idealize a militarized masculinity, which is constructed through enshrinement to produce nationalist bereavement and a celebration of sacrificial death for the nation. An examination of female enshrinement and presentations of femininity at the shrine raises questions concerning the appropriate roles for women under the nation-state. The analysis then focuses on female military nurses, specifically the Himeyuri Student Nursing Corps, who form the majority of the few women enshrined at the Yasukuni Shrine. Their depiction as ‘sacrificial daughters’ is problematized through the concepts of gender, sexuality and otherness to understand the context that enables their enshrinement. Finally, the article assesses the possibilities for resistance to the dominant narrative of national memory in both mainland Japan and Okinawa, with special attention to the recollection of experience in survivor testimonies of the Himeyuri, understood as a discursive negotiation of national memory.

Keywords: Japan, military nurses, militarism, Himeyuri, resistance, experience

Introduction

The continuing controversy over the Yasukuni Shrine reflects the prevailing tensions in contemporary Japanese national memory. On one hand, there is a refusal to acknowledge the sufferings caused by past militarism, but on the other there are also distinct voices of resistance to such silences both in and outside Japan. Over the last two decades, the consequences of Japanese military expansionism for women’s lives in the earlier half of the twentieth century have begun to emerge from a silence of over fifty years. As I will discuss in this article, Japanese military nurses such as the Himeyuri Butai are a case in point. Despite numerous

personal testimonies and other forms of evidence, it has proven difficult for their experiences to contest dominant nationalistic versions of national history, such as those produced at the Yasukuni Shrine. Nationalism has been widely recognized by feminist critics as a gendered, discriminatory and dangerous force because of its relations with political power and technologies of violence (McClintock 1997: 89). In this article I use the case of the Yasukuni Shrine to examine how gender is central to understanding the discourse of national memory and deconstructing its assumptions in order to search for silences and sites of resistance to it.

The international controversy surrounding Yasukuni is concerned more with the enshrinement of war criminals than with problematizing nationalism, reflecting how national identity has been adopted, internalized and socialized into everyday life in most states (Özkırmılı 2005: 32–3). Although the shrine was removed from the realm of the state in the postwar Constitution stipulating the division of state and religion, it has remained a location of intense nationalistic expression. The complex relationship between nationalism and the state is reflected in the larger difficulty in defining nationalism that has been expressed by most of its researchers (cf. Anderson 2006: 3–7; Puri 2004: 2). Umut Özkırmılı (2005: 28–33) proposes to understand nationalism as a discourse, where discourses are understood as interpretations of the world, as the constructions and limits of ‘truth’ itself (Foucault 1980: 93). In this sense, nationalism is ‘a particular way of thinking about what it means to be a people’ (Calhoun 1997: 99). The national is therefore present both in the mythical conception of the nation-state (Özkırmılı 2005: 1), as well as the bottom-up process of identity formation coupled with boundary drawing (Hall 1996: 344–5). The persistent reiteration of nationalist discourse loads it with power and results in its becoming hegemonic and naturalized to the point where national values are no longer regarded as social values, but as natural and common sense (Foucault 1981: 94–5). The hegemonic discourse of nationalism often dominates over alternative political languages, concealing various fractures, divisions and differences within the nation.

It is only over the last decade that academics have seriously begun to problematize the divisive dilemmas of national memory represented and practised at Yasukuni (e.g. Breen 2004; Ohnuki-Tierney 2002). The bond between death and nation can be described as a central conceptual point of discussion. John Nelson (2003: 54), for example, explores the spiritual bond between death and nation as the defining relationship at the shrine and its rituals. Similarly Sandra Wilson (1999: 184) and Beatrice Trefalt (2002: 117–19) both describe Yasukuni as a site where private grief is translated into a public ceremony of national identity construction. Interestingly, Benedict Anderson (2006: 7, 9–10) has drawn attention to the dramatic potential of the imagined national community to entice its members to kill and be willing to die for it. Tombs of unknown soldiers and military graveyards are public ceremonials of sacrifice to the imaginary nation, those interred there possessing immortal souls, ‘saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings’ (2006: 9, emphasis in the original). Anthony D. Smith (2001: 584) goes

further and argues that it is not simply the immortality of the individual soul that is celebrated in such spaces of national commemoration, but rather the soul of the whole community and its future generations on its journey to a pre-ordained destiny of glorious self-realization. My first question is to ask how the interconnected concepts of sacrifice, death and nation are gendered at Yasukuni.

Neither Anderson nor Smith engages with gender as a central category of analysis and they are therefore insufficient for a feminist examination of Yasukuni. To begin with, one might point out that the majority of those who are publicly commemorated at war memorials are men, both at Yasukuni and elsewhere. The nation-state, requiring their sacrifice for the maintenance of its borders, needs the military to ensure that men act as 'men', that is, be willing to kill or harm often ethnically or racially different Others and 'die on the behalf of the state to prove their "manhood"' (Peterson and Runyan 1993: 83). War memorials bear the specific markings and remainders of a hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995: 76–8) that services national security interests, often at the expense of feminized and racialized others. Joane Nagel (1998: 251–2) has observed that the dominant norms and practices used to define hegemonic masculinity, such as honour, patriotism, cowardice, bravery and duty, are so connected to both nationalism and masculinity that it can be difficult to differentiate any as either exclusively nationalistic or masculinist.

Consequently, poststructural feminist researchers are particularly concerned with the power relations of nationalism that construct and hierarchize subjects and subject positions through gender and sexuality. Members of a national community construct performatively not only their own gender identity (Butler 1999 [1990]) but also the gendered identity of the entire nation (Mayer 2000: 5). For example, the nation is often referred to by patriarchal metaphors as a family nurtured by the mother (as in expressions of 'motherland'), protected by the father (the state) who governs over their children (subjects, citizens) (Mackie 2003: 5–6; Peterson 1999). Consequently, I am interested in critically analysing how gender is performed in visitations to Yasukuni. How does the shrine aesthetically construct (national) gender norms? I draw largely on previous research, complemented by some primary observations to demonstrate how existing information and knowledge about national memory at Yasukuni is gendered and with what historical and individual significance and consequences.

Further questions that I aim to explore address the mechanisms of discourse to dominate, demean and conceal, producing a specific narrative of history. The masculine/feminine binary is not the only defining dimension of desirable gender identities. Butler (1999 [1990]: 21) observes that gender cuts across culturally constitutive categories, such as race, class, age, ethnicity and sexuality, that define the inclusionary and exclusionary biological norms of group membership through dimensions of 'otherness' (Yuval-Davis 2003: 47). Furthermore, relationships with racialized others may involve forms of sexual domination (Enloe 2000a [1990]: 35–40). In this light, the hegemonic version of Japan's past must be

re-examined and contested. How do discourses of national memory at Yasukuni construct as well as include and exclude, celebrate or demean gender(ed) identities of both the self and others?

Finally, it is necessary to search for possibilities for change. How can hegemonic discourses be resisted? What possibilities exist for subjects to speak and give testimonies of their often horrifying past experiences? The questions I ask are genealogical (Foucault 1980, 1981), which also means searching for silences and absences in social and historical narratives with potentially disturbing results (Gordon 1997). While gender is inseparable from 'the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained' (Butler 1999 [1990]: 6), feminists often find only a profound silence about gender when examining such sites (Kronsell 2005: 283). To challenge the self-evident, poststructural feminist methodology begins by making the familiar strange by challenging accepted everyday beliefs and practices (Ferguson 1993: 8). Institutions must be identified as being 'owned' by particular gender constructions and thus producers of particular discourses. Feminist scholar Annica Kronsell (2005: 283–4) argues that silences about gender in conscription debates can be regarded as indications of the hegemony of masculine norms in the military. Likewise I argue that silences about gender at war memorials, in this case at Yasukuni, are indications of the dominance of militarized masculinist norms in the discursive construction of national memory.

Gendered compositions of space and practice

This section argues that, despite postwar pacifistic changes, Yasukuni continues to be a highly militarized site of national memory production. This is not only because heroized masculinities continue to be enshrined¹ but also because the discourses produced in the space and practice of Yasukuni deify militarized masculinity. These arguments are put forward mainly by drawing on previous work on Yasukuni as well as my own empirical observations.

The Yasukuni Shrine controversy was ignited when fourteen Class A war criminals were secretly enshrined in 1978. Prime Ministers have nonetheless continued to visit the shrine, most recently Jun'ichirō Koizumi. However, neither Emperor Hirohito nor his successor Emperor Akihito has visited the shrine, although they send a representative there and have private audiences with the chief priest. As Breen observes, it is not merely the dead that are mourned; 'Yasukuni is an ideologically loaded site that mourns the dead and appropriates them for ideological ends' (2004: 84). For Breen, this ideology is one of sacrifice for nation and emperor. But gender is a central issue in mourning at Yasukuni, for militaristic masculinity is put on a pedestal in its ritual worship – a nationalistic masculinity that is misogynistic, exclusionary and legitimizes itself through violence.

When a state representative pays homage to military figures, many of whom, whether war criminals or not, are guilty of brutalities, it not only accepts their

exploits but engages in the legitimation of a particular interpretation of history that glorifies (male) death in battle for national victory and a masculinity that legitimizes itself through its capacity for violence. Former Prime Minister Koizumi, however, attempted to justify his visits. While Chinese and South Korean media condemned the visits as an affirmation of Japanese war crimes, Koizumi repeatedly offered an alternative explanation: 'I want to express my deepest condolences to all the people who sacrificed their lives in the war. Our country should never again walk the path to war' (Seaton 2005: 303). Although Koizumi's visit did not appease Japan's neighbours, he nonetheless released a pacifist statement. Some feminists, however, espouse a cautious approach to peace, as it too can be militarized (e.g. Enloe 2004).² The Yasukuni Shrine's website, for example, also explains its role as bringing about peace: Yasukuni, after all, means 'peaceful country' and the website states that Japan's peace and security are owed to the 'meritorious service of the spirits of the deities worshipped' there. But what happens to mourning when those commemorated and worshipped are selected according to their contribution to the nation-state in battle? Yasukuni is specifically a nationalist war memorial and therefore commemorates those male soldiers who contributed to the violence of the nation-state by protecting the nation's women and children from threatening others. The 'peaceful country' discourse produced by the Yasukuni Shrine and Koizumi's statements can be interpreted as militarized because of its specific connotations of national protection. The shrine's purpose and practices are drenched with militarized memory – and militarized masculinity.

The gendered militarism of Yasukuni is not only apparent from the subjects it commemorates, but also from its aesthetic composition. Ohnuki-Tierney has examined the militarization of the falling cherry blossoms at Yasukuni during the Pacific War. These blossoms represented soldiers sacrificing themselves for the emperor, and in 1937 cadets even composed a song about cadets 'scattering like cherry blossoms that would be reborn as blooming cherry blossoms at the Yasukuni Shrine, where the emperor would pay homage' (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 109).

The entwined emotions of loss and nationalism are still expressed strongly at Yasukuni to provoke emotional reactions from contemporary visitors. In 1997 there was a special exhibition at the Yasukuni Shrine's Yūshūkan War Memorial Museum (founded in 1882) called 'Bridal Dolls Dedicated to Bridal Heroic Souls'. The forty-four bridal dolls on display were brought to the shrine by mothers or sisters of fallen soldiers and offered as brides to young men who died before they were able to take a real bride of their own. Alongside these dolls, dedicated to the 'heroic souls', were photos of the dead soldiers, as well as some of their writings and personal belongings (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 178–81). Such dolls, intended to commemorate the 'heroic souls', have implications of both militarized masculinity and femininity. They can be interpreted as a symbolic confirmation of the hegemonic masculinity of the deceased male 'heroic souls'. The bridal doll, often white, is a representation of feminine innocence and purity as

well as heteronormative partnership and domesticity. The dedication of such a doll to a dead soldier is a gift, a bride of the nation for him to wed, to keep him company after death. Alternatively, the dolls can also be construed as performing a militarized femininity. They, like the women who brought them to the shrine, are there for support, comfort and bereavement. The leaflet of the exhibition appeals to the emotions of its readers, explaining that 'a mother or a sister expresses her feelings toward her beloved son, younger or older brother by dedicating in tears these bridal dolls to our shrine' (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 179). This is the kind of femininity that Enloe (2000b: 253–4) describes as necessary for militaries to operate. The woman must be supportive and encourage her male beloved to fight and survive, but, if he dies in service, she should be proud of his memory, trust the military as an honourable institution and believe that he died for a righteous cause.

Gender is also constructed at Yasukuni through the shrine's impressive space and architecture. In order to reach the Hall of Worship and the Main Hall where rituals are performed, one must first pass three enormous *torii* gates. In the middle of the path between the first and second gates is a statue of Masujirō Ōmura (1825–69), Vice Minister of War during the Meiji Restoration (see Figure 1). According to the plaque below the statue, he was a skilled military tactician, played a central role in fighting rebel troops in the Tōhoku region and is credited as a strong advocate of the modernization of the Japanese army during the Meiji Restoration. His personal significance to Yasukuni is also clarified, for he is credited with the very idea of advocating a common shrine to commemorate those who lost their lives for the emperor in the civil wars. In 1894 the huge (and first ever) Western-style bronze statue of Ōmura was installed on top of a pedestal between the first and second *torii* at Yasukuni. As an introducer and promoter of nationalism and modern warfare in Meiji Japan (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 83–4), he is also arguably one of the representative founders of modern militarized masculinity in Japan. His person is now venerated as his is the first figure impressing the shrine's visitors. Simultaneously, the statue of Ōmura also legitimizes the shrine's existence through an emotional appeal to preserve his accomplishments on behalf of a modern and unified Japanese nation in the national memory.

Between the second and third gates stands the Divine Gate, a grand wooden gate embellished by a golden Imperial chrysanthemum seal (*Kiku no Gomon*). From the Divine Gate, it is already possible to view the Hall of Worship past the third *torii*, with a large white banner printed with four more imperial chrysanthemums. At present, the Imperial Seal is used more as a national seal, for example on the covers of Japanese passports. Under the Meiji constitution, however, the Imperial Seal of the Chrysanthemum was reserved exclusively for the emperor's use. While this reflects the bond between emperor, nation and commemoration constructed at the time, it can be interpreted in a number of ways at present. For instance, the seal holds a resonance and represents a degree of continuity with the



Figure 1 Statue of Vice Minister of War Masujirō Ōmura (1825–69) at the Yasukuni Shrine.
Completed 1893, designed by Ujihiro Ōkuma and cast by the Tokyo Military Arsenal.
(Photograph from author's collection.)

past. When the shrine became a private institution by the 1947 Constitution, the emperor, once the 'national father', was also deprived of sovereignty and slowly reconstructed into a figure 'symbolic of the unity of the Japanese people', but nonetheless retaining some continuity with the past, as a unifying force (Hook and McCormack 2001: 11). The seal can also be understood as a tribute to the emperor and his predecessors for watching over the 'national family' as protective 'fathers' of the nation, as symbolically in the past as in the present.

The discourse of the 'national family' is produced elsewhere at the shrine. For example, near the entrance of the Yūshūkan War Memorial Museum is a statue of a mother surrounded by her children whom she nurtured as her husband fought and died to protect them (see Figure 2). She represents the selfless mother, who sacrifices her beloved husband for the protection of the nation and whose duty it is to bear and nurture the future citizens of the nation. This bears a resemblance to the image of a young mother holding her baby boy on a visit to her late husband enshrined at Yasukuni discussed by Midori Wakakuwa (1995: 254). Confirming Enloe's (2000b) descriptions of militarized mothers, the image enforces the idea that a mother should still sacrifice her son to battle even after losing her husband. As Wakakuwa explains, the mother is, in fact, represented as looking after a child belonging to the nation that is merely 'borrowing' her womb to produce its citizens/soldiers.

Contrasting with this image, on the left side of the entrance to the museum is a bronze statue of a Special Attack Force pilot (*Tokkōtai* or kamikaze) standing proudly with his hands on his hips (Figure 3). The inscription reads *Tokkō yūshi no zō*, or 'Statue of special attack hero'. With the statue of the mother with her children only a few metres away, the difference in the pilot's gender identity is clear: he is courageous, rational and warring; she is vulnerable, emotional and caring. Both, however, enthusiastically serve the national interest, the pilot by sacrificing his life for his nation and the mother by caring for her children, the national future. On display in front of the museum are also a vintage machine gun, cannon and torpedo, the modern machines of war that have protected the nation from invasion.

The exhibitions inside the museum guide its visitors through the wars and war memorabilia of the Meiji, Taishō and Shōwa periods while patriotic songs gently play in the background. The accompanying explanations '[exalt] the commitment, loyalty, bravery, and self-sacrifice of those who died in service to the nation and emperor' (Nelson 2003: 454). This is amplified by a strong sense of loss in the displays. Photographs and personal belongings such as helmets, blood-stained uniforms and letters are exhibited and accompanied by detailed stories of the lives and 'heroic' deaths of their owners and authors. Underlining this discourse throughout is the presence of militarized masculinity whose duty it is to protect and sustain the national family.



Figure 2 Statue of mother with children near the entrance to the Yūshūkan War Memorial Museum. (Photograph from author's collection.)



Figure 3 Statue of Special Attack Force (also known as kamikaze) pilot near the entrance to the Yūshūkan War Memorial Museum. (Photograph from author's collection.)

Enshrinement and nationalized discourses of masculinities and femininities

Having observed how the spaces and practices of the Yasukuni Shrine are gendered, a more complex discussion is still necessary, one that delves further into the normative power of discourse. This section focuses on enshrinement. I first discuss enshrinement in the early years of Yasukuni's existence and tie it to the patriarchal ideology of *kokutai* and emperor. I argue that the project of the nation-state, which called particular masculinities to be enshrined, also led to the enshrinement of carefully defined femininities. A closer examination of these femininities and the women that came to represent them, like the Okinawan Himeyuri Student Nursing Corps, draws attention to questions of gender, ethnicity and silence in the practices of enshrinement.

The commemoration of the war dead by enshrinement at the Yasukuni Shrine dates back to the early Meiji period and the construction of the modern Japanese nation-state. The introduction of the Western nation-state, previously absent from Japan, was accompanied by particular conceptions of the nation and those practices necessary to constitute it. One of the imported practices to encourage popular support for the nation-state was the commemoration of war dead. The Yasukuni Shrine was officially established in 1869 in Tokyo by imperial decree as Tokyo Shōkonsha (Tokyo shrine to call back the souls of the deceased). It was dedicated to the *kokujū jūmānsha* (martyrs of the nation) who had died defending Japan since 1853, the year that US Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan, resulting in the unification of the Japanese population as a nation against outsiders. In 1879 the shrine was renamed Yasukuni Jinja, Yasukuni meaning 'peaceful country'. Essentially, the shrine's purpose of enshrining fallen male soldiers reflects the prevailing belief in war as a man's enterprise, generally defined against women's contributions in various roles and their performing of diverse tasks both at the 'home' and 'war' fronts. As Sandra Wilson observes, 'women and men were expected to participate differently in the national project' (2002: 6).

Since the establishment of the Yasukuni Shrine, the Japanese soldiers and sailors who 'sacrificed their lives for the nation' have been enshrined there as Shinto *kami*, or deities. The elevation of the dead into *kami*, however, is not dependent on any virtues or good deeds enacted while living, but specifically for dying for the nation and emperor. Furthermore, as John Breen suggests, the Yasukuni Shrine can be regarded as a creation of the modern nation-state. Established and funded by the state, 'its rituals for the dead were designed to meet the modern state's political needs: to cultivate patriotism through the promise of apotheosis for self-sacrifice' (Breen 2004: 82–3). The qualities demanded by this patriotism, such as aggression, courage, ruthlessness and discipline, are specifically qualities of hegemonic masculinity. These are contrary to hegemonic femininity, especially the kind of *ryōsai kenbo* ('good wife, wise mother') motherhood discourse that

was officially promoted for women at the time (Miyake 1991; Uno 1993), which contributed to the improbability of female enshrinement.

It was not only the honour of dying for one's country that was to encourage men to die in battle, but especially the promise that the emperor would pay homage to their souls and elevate them into *kami* to be worshipped by their descendants. The divine superiority of the emperor was developed in the ideology of *kokutai* that emerged in the Meiji period. This placed supreme authority in the emperor and stressed the connections between him, the people and the Japanese land (Earhart 2005: 577). It was intricately intertwined with the heteronormative construction of the nation as a family and of the emperor as the nation's protective father, which also materialized in this period (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 77–8, 98). By paralleling the family with the state, *kokutai* aroused an emotional attachment to the family in the service of the state (Mackie 2003: 22). It also enforced the hegemony of heterosexual and mutually exclusive gender roles for men as heads and protectors of households (and nation) and women as mothers of their children (and nation). It is interesting, however, to note how women's roles as nurturers and mothers were also given militarized qualities in the discourse of *ryōsai kenbo* in order to emphasize their importance (Nolte and Hastings 1991). Relating housewives to counterparts in the 'public' male realm, the housewife was sometimes described as the "prime minister" of the household or a soldier whose "battlefield" was the home' (Sand 1998: 195). Meanwhile the family was sentimentalized as life's 'sanctuary' and 'life's greatest pleasure' (Sand 1998: 198). The father was nonetheless the breadwinner of the family and thus ultimately responsible for its survival.

The emperor as father of the nation was the supreme figure in the construction of the national family. He thereby held a position that exercised normative power to define exemplary masculinity. As the Japanese army was organized along prevailing Western lines and Japanese society was increasingly influenced by the West in its goals for modernization, changes in hegemonic gender identities also took place (Karlin 2002). The Meiji emperor was gradually expunged of traits that came to be coded feminine, for example by abandoning traditional imperial robes in favour of modern Western-style military uniforms (Kaori 2003: 33). He thus represented a hegemonic, militaristic masculinity, which called upon men and women to participate in nationhood by fulfilling the gendered roles of nurturing the nation and protecting it from outsiders.

The resonance of this masculinity at the Yasukuni Shrine became considerably amplified by the commemoration of soldiers who died in the victorious Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5 and Russo-Japanese war of 1904–5. Through these wars, the hegemony of militarized masculinity was confirmed as 'the image of war became unequivocally one of achievement and honour' and Yasukuni became the central site of celebration of war victories and distribution of information about the progress of the wars (Wilson 1999: 184). When militaristic enthusiasm intensified again in the 1930s and 1940s, Yasukuni was increasingly present in the daily life of the public. In 1932 the media reported the Empress's visit to the

shrine; schoolchildren and their teachers were actively encouraged to pay tribute there (Trefalt 2000: 118). During the Pacific War, the promise of immortality at Yasukuni was central in motivating Japanese soldiers to fight, especially in encouraging kamikaze missions. Trefalt (2000: 118), for example, describes how soldiers shouted to each other 'Let's meet at Yasukuni' before plunging into battle.

While the *kami* at Yasukuni are overwhelmingly male, it is notable that women involved in the Pacific War came to be worshipped at the shrine as well, in particular those who died while performing duties as military nurses. This differs from the traditional route to enshrinement, which was reserved for men who died in combat, thus somewhat broadening the criteria to include women who died while making military contributions. Since it was inappropriate for women to engage in combat, it was women as nurses, restoring male soldiers to fighting strength, who were accorded the official recognition of contributing to the national cause. According to the Yasukuni website some 57,000 women, primarily military nurses, are enshrined at Yasukuni. Despite their military involvement their enshrinement appears to be legitimized through a larger discourse of motherhood.

Military nurses parallel other representations of women at Yasukuni as mothers, wives and sisters, as in the statue outside the Yūshūkan or the bridal dolls displayed inside. Indeed, the Yasukuni Shrine website describes military nurses as the 'mothers and sisters of the battlefield'. These representations depend on the assumption of the caring role of motherhood as women's destiny and most valuable societal contribution, even during wartime. Indeed, there are connections between the discursive positioning of military nurses at Yasukuni and the then-dominant *kokkateki bosei*, that is, 'motherhood-in-the-interest-of-the-state' discourse (Miyake 1991: 271), which can be traced to the dominant Meiji discourse that linked the family state to *ryōsai kenbo* ('good wife, wise mother') (Uno 1993). While *ryōsai kenbo* was concerned with women's role in the family, *kokkateki bosei* was more concerned with the promoting the idea of women as mothers of the nation (Komori 2007: 343–4). Even more than *ryōsai kenbo*, it was particularly effective in mobilizing women into the war effort, even feminists, who saw it as an opportunity to demonstrate women's abilities. Not only did the state produce accommodating legislation, such as the Mother-Child Protection Law in 1937, it also supported the women's organizations founded on the basis of women as patriotic carers such as the Women's National Defence Association (1932) and the Greater Japan's Women's Association (1941). Through the emphasis on home and motherhood, these associations appealed to a national motherhood in performing tasks such as visiting military hospitals, making presents for soldiers, doing their laundry and caring for families of soldiers who had been wounded or killed, that is, carrying out tasks and displaying affection that their real mothers would provide (Ueno 2004: 47). In this sense, military nurses were also located within the realm of the *kokkateki bosei* discourse as patriotic and motherly carers.

Sexuality, otherness and construction of national memory

The Himeyuri Butai ('Star Lilies Corps') student corps enshrined at Yasukuni illustrates how such a brand of femininity can dominate bodies and silence other discourses in the telling of national history. The Himeyuri Butai consisted of 222 15- to 19-year-old female students and eighteen teachers of the Okinawa Daiichi Women's High School and Okinawa Shihan Women's School, who are embodied by Yasukuni as 'sisters of the battlefield' (Yasukuni Jinja 2007). Formed and quickly trained in the final days of the Pacific War, they were ordered to join the Haebaru Army Field Hospital and other medical units in the area. In the harsh conditions of the caves of Okinawa, which stank of rotting flesh, dried blood and excrement, they carried out difficult and often gruesome tasks assisting Japanese doctors. These included not only feeding and nursing soldiers and carrying supplies, but also assisting in surgeries performed without anaesthesia, picking maggots from dying soldiers' infected wounds and dragging soldiers' corpses out of the caves where they were hiding (Angst 1997: 100).

While both the difficult conditions in which the Himeyuri operated and their deaths from US bombardment and suicide are recounted at the Yūshūkan, the circumstances of their death are omitted. The Himeyuri were disbanded on 18 June 1945 and forced out of the caves without vital military rations of food and water. By then the Japanese defeat was unavoidable. Japanese soldiers ordered them not to surrender, telling them that if they did, they would be raped and murdered by US soldiers (Himeyuri Peace Museum 2001: 142). Having to fend for themselves, many sought cover behind half-destroyed trees and coral outcroppings under overhanging cliffs. Of one group of fifty-one students and teachers, only five survived the firebombing of their cave hideout (Angst 1997: 101). It was during the subsequent five days that most were killed by the US bombardment or committed suicide. One hundred and thirty-five of the 222 Himeyuri members were killed³ in the Battle of Okinawa and came to be enshrined at Yasukuni (Himeyuri Peace Museum 2007). Survivor testimonies reveal the brutality and madness of war, such as hearing starving soldiers screaming for food or finding classmates lying in a 'pool of blood' after a mass suicide, mangled beyond recognition (Himeyuri Peace Museum 2001: 143–51). By contrast, the website of the Yasukuni Shrine merely states that the enshrined Himeyuri 'served as nurses at the frontlines', 'carried food and ammunition' and eventually 'perished in the Battle of Okinawa'. Suppressing their forced disbandment and abandonment to the mercy of US bombardment, the memory of the Himeyuri produced by the Yasukuni Shrine claims their ultimate sacrifice 'for the nation' and silences traumatic experiences that would otherwise make the violence of the nation-state glaringly visible.

The construction of the sexuality and Okinawan otherness of the Himeyuri is central to their enshrinement at Yasukuni. I will examine each of these in turn. Nursing was the only legitimate task for women on the battlefield. Like other women on the home front, their identity as nurses fitted the hegemonic norm

of *kokkateki bosei* femininity through their motherly, tireless and unselfish care of soldiers for the state. Coupled with this is their virginal image. Why is it, as Linda Angst (1997: 105) asks, that women who signify purity are the only ones worthy of enshrinement in national memorials?

One explanation, drawing on George Mosse (1985), refers to the interdependence of nationalism and sexuality or, more specifically, 'respectable sexuality'. Although Mosse's analysis addresses modern Germany and England, the idea of respectable sexuality has relevance outside European nationalism. As later research has indicated, often drawing on Foucault's (1981) genealogical approach to sexuality, nationalism engages in a heterosexist repression of the sexuality of both men and women (Parker *et al.* 1992; Mostov 2000). The biological continuity of the nation is dependent on the maintenance of the reproductive heterosexual family, which is patriarchally ordered to privilege male entitlement over women's bodies, sexuality and labour (Peterson 1999: 40). As national reproducers, women are also boundary-markers of ethnic and national groups and are given central roles in the transmission of culture (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989: 8–10). They are thereby particularly susceptible to normative control. Consequently, nationalistic definitions of female respectability are often sexually purified to the extent that women's bodies are stripped of the need for or capacity to experience sexual pleasure and intended solely for biological reproduction in the institution of marriage, legally protected and controlled at the national level. Sexual intercourse before marriage and perceived promiscuity in both married and unmarried women is therefore unacceptable or even punishable. The most quintessential form of female purity, however, as Angst observes, is often 'that which is inherently biological: the sexually (and by extension morally) chaste virgin' (1997: 103). The chaste virgin is not only an object of glorification, but also one of male protection. Not only is she the potential future bearer of national citizens, but she may also be an object of conquest for enemy men.

The Himeyuri were therefore mouldable for national veneration not only because their caring tasks complied with the femininity standards of *kokkateki bosei*, but more specifically because of the idealized virginal sexuality that they came to represent and the masculine protection that this called for during war. The virginal and the motherly fused together to constitute the discourse of the sacrificial daughter, a virginal victim of battle. The deaths of the pure Himeyuri are treated at Yasukuni as necessary and unavoidable, thereby rendering their loss/sacrifice more valuable.

This discourse of the Himeyuri also has implications for the patriarchal relationship constructed between mainland Japan (father) and Okinawa (daughter). As Angst (1997, 2001) has shown, the Himeyuri have become representative of Okinawan identity in the postwar period. Concurrently, however, this gendered formation of Okinawan identity naturalizes an arrangement of power whereby Okinawa is defined as part of but subordinate to Japan (Angst 1997: 102). The Battle of Okinawa killed more than 200,000 people and popular memory focuses on its

victims. Consequently, uncomfortable questions linger regarding the willingness of Tokyo to sacrifice the island and its population for the security of the mainland. Often unspoken are Japanese military atrocities such as forced mass suicides of Okinawan civilians. Indeed 'not a few "remember" Japan as the oppressor' (Hook and Siddle 2003: 12) rather than as the noble and fatherly defender.

The telling of the story of the Himeyuri carefully avoids controversial assertions about Japan's responsibilities to the Okinawan population (Angst 1997: 107). This discourse of 'sacrificial daughters' arguably has continued into more recent times, for example in the nation-wide uproar following the 1995 rape of an Okinawan schoolgirl by three US servicemen. As Angst observes, in both cases the 'victimhood' of these girls actually 'reinscribes Okinawa and women's marginality and subordination' (2001: 251). The Himeyuri suffered and died protecting the mainland, while the schoolgirl's rape was a consequence of the sometimes disruptive but 'necessary' security provided by US bases on Okinawa.

The Yasukuni Shrine constructs a mainland Japanese discourse of the Himeyuri within the frame of heroism and sacrifice, coupled with the exoticism of their Okinawan otherness and sexual purity. The responsibility of the Imperial Japanese Army for their death is omitted from its account of history. Instead, the sacrifice of these virginal Okinawan daughters by the father-figure mainland Japan is constructed as necessary for the safety of the mainland. This has implications for the subjectivity of the survivors, whose articulation of their experiences is overshadowed by the powerful normative practices and discourses of their enshrinement at Yasukuni and the telling of their story at the Yūshūkan as sacrificial daughters of the nation.

The examination of the Himeyuri Butai in the context of the Yasukuni Shrine is significant not only for its explanation of female enshrinement, but also because it challenges hegemonic national memory by problematizing the elevation of particular models of gender over others. As Foucault argues, one of the primary effects of the power of discourses is to render 'certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires [to] be identified and constituted as individuals' (1980: 98). This means that, while some discourses are visible, and some of them even hegemonic, others are marginalized, or even silenced so that they do not appear to exist at all (Kronsell 2005). Such is the case for another group of women that were regarded as rejuvenators of military fighting strength, that is, comfort women. Like other Japanese atrocities during the Pacific War, the sexual enslavement of 50,000–200,000 women by the Japanese military is not addressed at the Yūshūkan.

Enloe (2000a [1990]: 81–92) argues that militaries directly or indirectly support the provision of women/sex for their male members under the simple but decisive pretext of the morale of their male soldiers. But, while militaries are dependent on the sexual availability of women, the women involved are regarded as disreputable and shameful. As Ueno (2004: 21) points out, the reputation of comfort women contrasted starkly with that of the 'saintly' military nurses. Military nurses even

participated in the discrimination against comfort women by demanding that they be removed from nursing tasks that they were sometimes required to perform at the front. The maintenance of the motherly image of military nurses was dependent on the exclusion of the kind of sexual taintedness that marked comfort women. For example, feminist social critic Keiko Higuchi alludes to the considerable amount of sexual harassment that military nurses were likely to have experienced while working. Yet, any confrontation of sexual harassment would have been detrimental to the saintly, motherly image of the military nurse (Ueno 2004: 21).

The absence of any discourse about the comfort women at Yasukuni exemplifies the contradictory and problematic discourses of militarized national memory. The Yasukuni Shrine explicitly celebrates military success, heroism and sacrifice. The Yūshūkan War Memorial Museum exhibits those bearing the marks of national gender ideals and of 'respectable' sexuality, like military nurses and mothers, meanwhile distancing them from potentially contradictory events or experiences. Such is the case of the Himeyuri Butai who are depicted as 'sacrificial daughters' that fought and died for nation-state. Sexually and ethnically constructed others, like comfort women, are completely erased from the discourse of national memory, as there appears to be no language to accommodate their subject positions. Their 'unrespectable' sexuality is littered with connotations of abundant, subjecting sexual encounters with countless male clients. Coupled with their 'otherness' as non-Japanese and colonized female subjects, comfort women deviated too far from any venerable femininity that defined women's roles as reproducers, as 'wives' and 'mothers' within the realm of the family. As Ueno writes, 'military comfort women. . . were forced to carry the burden of "whorishness" as opposed to motherhood, the dark side of the sexual double standard' (2004: 48). It is not only that the bodily impurity of these sexual exchanges shuts comfort women out from national discourse, but also that acknowledgement of a shameful episode in national history would contradict much of what is revered at Yasukuni. Militarized masculinity, instead of being the hero, would be tarnished as the villain. Again, we find that militarism and nationalism are so intricately intertwined and dependent on particular gendered subjectivities (Nagel 1998: 251–2) that the lack of control of gender and sexuality can threaten the survival of both.

Sites of resistance and the discursive negotiation of memory

It is crucial to recognize that the refusal to acknowledge the sufferings brought about by the militarized past is by no means the only setting in which discourses of national memory are or can be produced. The dominant discourses of Yasukuni attain their hegemonic position over others through their constant and contextualized repetition, also propagating their legitimacy as 'true discourses' (Foucault 1972: 218). If there are many possible alternative discourses, there is also a plurality of resistances, all existing in the strategic field of power relations (Foucault 1981: 96). As Judith Butler argues, it is the very *expropriability* of the dominant,

“authorized” discourse [by alternative discourses] that constitutes one potential site of its subversive resignification’ (1997: 157, emphasis in the original). In this section, I begin by pointing to some well-known sites both in and outside Japan. Usually, acts of resistance widely covered by the media are performed by men and targeted at other men. Accordingly, I proceed to the Himeyuri case, turn my attention to Okinawa and ask how the actions of Himeyuri survivors produce new and challenging discourses about themselves and their history.

First, protests inside Japan demonstrate that the war memories defended at Yasukuni are not accepted by all Japanese. For example, when Koizumi visited the Yasukuni Shrine in 2001, present among supporters waving the *hinomaru*, the national flag of Japan, were also students who opposed the visit, guarded by riot police. Along with other demonstrators, they called on Koizumi to be more attentive to Japan’s neighbours (*BBC News* 2001). Such an incident demonstrates that ‘Japanese’ national memory cannot be described as a unified imagining, but rather as a divided body of different interpretations and understandings of the national past.

National memories also possess transnational dimensions, existing alongside other interpretations of and difficulties with telling history. Coinciding with the domestic demonstrations against Koizumi’s visit were also protests in neighbouring countries. In South Korea, for example, twenty men chopped off the tips of their little fingers in a dramatic display to draw attention to their angry disapproval of the incomplete history written by elite Japanese men. In such examples, however, it is necessary to notice the selective focus on war criminals in the Yasukuni controversy. After all, soldiers who are not officially war criminals are also enshrined; the brutalities they perpetrated need attention, too. A more encompassing opposition would be to the war memorial in its entirety as a monument that celebrates murderous, racist and misogynistic military values. In June 2001, 252 Koreans filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government to de-enshrine their deceased ancestors from the Yasukuni Shrine (Tsuji 2002: 197).⁴ While the presence of war criminals makes a strong argument in such cases, it is crucial that lawsuits, because of the normative power they exercise, also aim to remove support for militarized culture.

Lawsuits have also been a strategy for military comfort women in countering dominant accounts of history. In the 1990s the existence of comfort women (*jūgun ianfu*) was exposed through a series of testimonies of largely Korean and Chinese women who had served in Japanese military brothels by force or coercion during the Pacific War. The silence marking their existence was enforced by male-dominated elites both in Japan and in their own countries. Through their testimonies and the initiation of a series of lawsuits (Soh 1996; Watanabe 1994), the existence and sufferings of comfort women whose sexual enslavement supported the Japanese war effort became visible (Yoshimi 1995).⁵

In addition to comfort women’s testimonies as forms of resistance, the testimonies of surviving members of the Himeyuri are also significant as alternative

discourses defying Yasukuni's national memory (Himeyuri Peace Museum 2001: 142–51). Many survivors bitterly recalled the brutality of Japanese soldiers towards civilians in general, as well as towards the Himeyuri. Neither Japanese nor Americans are spoken of as heroes. Rather, accounts of excruciating pain, confusion and feelings of sheer hopelessness shade many of the descriptions of their experiences during the Battle of Okinawa. Significantly, many survivors resisted the idea of self-sacrifice for the nation. Kikuko Kaneshiro, Setsu Arakaki, Toshiko Yabiku and Masako Tokoyama described their encounters with death, being on the verge of committing suicide or wishing for it. A sudden turn of events – the decision to risk surrender to the US soldiers (as Tokuyama put it, 'if I were going to be killed anyway'), dissuasion or witnessing the bloody remains of others – enabled them to escape this fate.

More testimonies are available at the Himeyuri Peace Museum in Okinawa. The museum, opened in 1989, is an interesting example of how Himeyuri memories can be reframed in different contextual and articulative realms. This resignification of discourse in the new context of the Himeyuri Peace Museum, the new 'speaking in ways that have never yet been legitimated', produces 'legitimation in new and future forms' (Butler 1997: 41), which challenges the prevailing discourses at Yasukuni. To begin with, the Himeyuri Peace Museum's physical site, like that of Yasukuni, produces meaning. It is located on Okinawa, the home of the Himeyuri, and not on the dominant and 'fatherly' mainland Japan. Outside the entrance to the Museum is the Himeyuri Monument (*Himeyuri no tō*) that stands on top of a cave in which forty members of their third surgery unit hid and were killed by a US bomb. The building of the museum itself was a result of the initiative of surviving Himeyuri members. The museum can therefore be considered as a localized commemorative context, in which the agency of survivors is emphasized as a result of their own initiatives in memory production. Indeed, while many students died, the depiction of the Himeyuri as survivors instead of victimized 'sacrificial daughters' is central to their legitimation as agents of memory production. Since its opening, survivors have also worked at the museum, speaking to visitors and answering their questions, although in recent years they have been increasingly unable to perform these tasks as most are approaching their 80th birthdays.

The curator of the museum, Tsuru Motomura, is also one of the surviving students. She has described her activity with the museum as a duty: 'It is my duty and the duty of those who survived the war to tell people of the reality of war, the brutality and the stupidity of war' (Allen and Sumida 2004). In contrast to Yasukuni's projection of militarized peace and national self-protection, Motomura's expression of duty is explicitly anti-war. In her view, 'life is more precious than anything else'. Speaking on behalf of other survivors, she expressed the hope that, 'the museum helps people to think about peace and what each one can do to establish and maintain peace throughout the world' (Allen and Sumida 2004). The wish for peace is therefore not contained within the borders of Japan, as in

Yasukuni, but rather expresses a specific desire to encourage visitors to support global peace that extends beyond national boundaries.

Reaching a large audience with approximately 900,000 visitors each year, the Himeyuri Peace Museum can be said to pose a noteworthy challenge to the Yasukuni discourse about the Himeyuri. To be cautious, however, Angst argues that the museum and Himeyuri survivors 'cooperate' with mainland Japan in the construction of their image by not addressing specifically delicate political issues. For example, she argues that the blame for wartime atrocities is dissolved by reference 'to abstract concepts (world peace) or policies and institutions (the prewar education system) rather than targeting specific agents or events' (Angst 1997: 106). Angst's criticism is persuasive. This abstraction is evident in museum displays that often read in the passive voice, trimming out other actors in the Himeyuri story like the Imperial Japanese Army. For example, one caption states that 'some students *were given* improvised bombs and *were made* to perform suicide attacks on US tanks' and another that '*they were thrown* into the hellish war front full of oncoming shells and bullets' (Allen and Sumida 2004, emphasis added).

Such examples support Angst's argument, but they should not lead us to devalue the museum's challenge to Yasukuni. Rather, they can be understood as a part of a negotiation between dominant and peripheral discourses, of a gradual effort by the Himeyuri to gain legitimacy on the mainland for their claims to and of history. Joan W. Scott (1992: 24) warns against taking evidence based on experience as an incontestable truth claim in the writing of history. Indeed, if one were searching for truth on the basis of experience, what would make the testimonies of the Himeyuri more 'truthful' than those experiences recounted at Yasukuni? While making experiences visible exposes repressive mechanisms, it does not explain their inner workings. Instead, we must attend to the 'historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who *have* experience, but subjects who are constituted *through* experience' (Scott 1992: 25, emphasis added). To approach the recollection of experience as the constitution of the speaking subject is therefore to understand resistance as a continual *process* of discursive contestation and negotiation.

In this vein, returning to testimonies, the final example of resistance that I would like to present is a recent documentary on the Himeyuri. In May 2007, a 130-minute film cut from over 100 hours of footage was released, entitled *Himeyuri*. Previous cinematic releases about the Himeyuri have tended to reproduce the 'sacrificial daughters' discourse. For example, in *himeyuri no tō*, released in 1953 and a huge box-office hit in mainland Japan, dedicated and cheerful Himeyuri members bravely endure the terrible circumstances of the Battle of Okinawa. By contrast, the documentary *Himeyuri*, which was also relatively successful for a documentary release, records the testimonies of twenty-two surviving members. Having started the project in 1994, it took director Shōhei Shibata thirteen years to complete because he preferred not to pressure survivors for interviews. Instead he waited for each of them to be prepared to recount their often painful memories,

and made it a rule to keep filming until they felt they had told their story well enough (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2007).

The documentary also reconnects the memory of experience with the participants' corresponding original spaces in Okinawa. The testimonies were given at the locations where each survivor's life was threatened by the bombing and gunfire of the incessant US advance. Sachiko Omi, for example, recalled sitting on a rock on the beach with her friends, each of them holding a grenade and contemplating suicide. Their teacher dissuaded them from pulling out the pins. Another survivor, Kikuko Miyagi, said that they were 'educated to die bravely and we were prepared to do so. But we wanted to live. [In this testimony] I want to convey what my friends who died wanted to say.' The performance of these testimonies by survivors in spaces so meaningfully coded by their experience and memory can be considered an act of resistance against the spatial and narrative discourse of memory at Yasukuni. As Butler contends, 'An utterance may gain its force precisely by virtue of the break with context that it performs' (1997: 145). The horrific descriptions contained in these testimonies and the relief expressed by each survivor at staying alive amid the chaos of war renders them significant acts of resistance to a national memory that has been designed to exalt militarism. As the Himeyuri Alumni Association writes, 'We are determined all the more to do our best to continue to tell our stories of war and by so exposing the brutality and insanity of war, to never allow it to happen again in the future' (Himeyuri Peace Museum 2001: 142).

In this article I have striven to produce a feminist critique of the Yasukuni Shrine and to exemplify the novel insights that a feminist perspective can bring into discussion surrounding the controversial site. The Yasukuni Shrine, as a militaristic, masculinist space where discriminatory nationalistic practices are naturalized, produces particular discourses about the women who were involved in war and exceptionally enshrined at Yasukuni. The femininity and sexuality of military nurses, the Himeyuri in particular, throws these discourses into relief. Their depiction as virginal 'sacrificial daughters' of the nation, instrumentalized not only through the preservation of myths about femininity, but also through the secondary citizenship of Okinawan others, maintains the hegemony of memories of militarized masculinity. Counter-discourses produced not only outside Japan, but also on the mainland and in Okinawa by Himeyuri survivors themselves, voice experiences that force dominant discourses into a discursive negotiation of history and the subjects constituted in it. Critical feminists therefore have much to contribute to the bountiful academic discussion of the Yasukuni Shrine by adding gender not only as a category of analysis but also as a methodological approach that draws attention to cases such as that of the Himeyuri. But their case and the study of survivor testimonies as resistance are not clear-cut, for, as we have seen, 'experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political' (Scott 1992: 37). By exploring the links between gender, militarism and nationalism, one can find oneself reframing questions about

power relations at controversial sites and problematizing the ways in which we understand the construction of national memory.

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Notes

1. Members of the current Japanese military forces, the Self-Defence Forces, are not enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine, although some are enshrined at other prefectural, nation-protecting shrines (Frühstück 2007: 201).
2. Enloe (2004: 220) points out that most militarizing processes occur during peacetime. In addition, not everyone benefits from peacekeeping processes, as can be seen when women are prostituted to and abused by UN peacekeepers (Enloe 2000b: 99–103).
3. Although the official number of students killed is 219, the official school records were burned in the Battle of Okinawa. Researchers have calculated alternative figures with available knowledge (Angst 1997: 108). Himeyuri Peace Museum's official figure is 135 dead, while others cite lower figures, such as 123 (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 2007), or dramatically higher figures, such as 190 (Nakamura 1976: 241).
4. Some 28,000 Taiwanese and 21,000 Korean male soldiers who fought for the Japanese army are also enshrined at Yasukuni (Seaton 2005: 299). As with the enshrined Himeyuri, their enshrinement at Yasukuni is justified by presenting them as subordinate sons that sacrificed for the father nation. In the case of Okinawans, the sacrifice of colonized peoples appears to have been accepted as a righteous exchange in a patriarchal relationship between father and son. Correspondingly, the displays at the Yūshūkan War Memorial Museum illustrate the Japanese Imperial Army as 'liberators' of these colonized people, rather than as their oppressors. The masculinity of the 'liberated' is coded as weak, powerless, even primitive and requiring rescue and instruction by one that is strong, sovereign and civilized. Absent from the displays at Yūshūkan, including that of Okinawa, are the Japanese atrocities, for example the Nanjing Massacre, for which there is no space in the paternalistic colonial discourse.
5. Nicola Piper (2001) contrasts this dynamic transnational activism with the relative neglect of the comfort women issue in Japanese women's groups. One particularly active group with transnational links, however, is the Violence against Women in War Network (VAWW-NET) who in 2000 staged the International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery in Tokyo. Their latest step was to open the Women's Active Museum on War and Peace (WAM) in 2005 to gather and exhibit documentation on the lives and experiences of comfort women (WAM 2007). The museum is the first of its kind, is located in Tokyo just a few kilometres from the Yasukuni Shrine and can be conceived as a new space that challenges Yasukuni's version of national history.

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