

MEMORIES OF THE SILENCED: FROM SURVIVORS TO ACTIVISTS

A Discussion Guide on the documentary *50 Years of Silence*

OVERVIEW

A discussion paper suitable for educators and researchers interested in igniting discourse on the complex issues surrounding Japanese Military Sexual Slavery during World War II.

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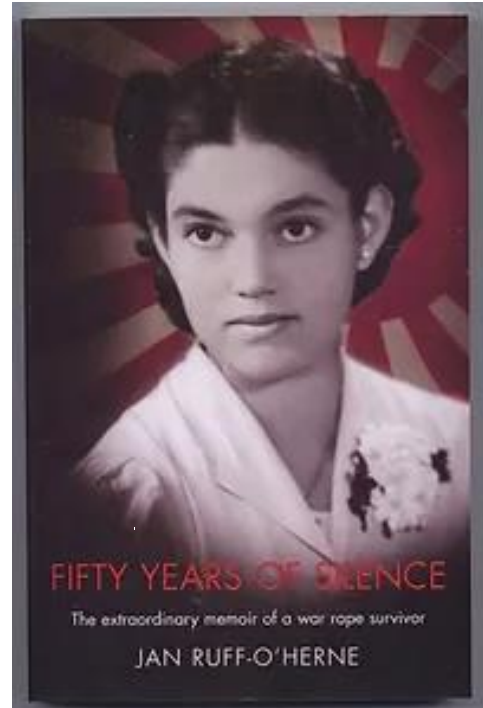
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Introduction

50 Years of Silence by Ned Lander, Carol Ruff, and James Bradley¹ eloquently illuminates the atrocious abuse endured by Jan Ruff-O'Herne, a Dutch woman who was enslaved by the Japanese Imperial military during World War II at the age of 21, as a "comfort woman" for the sexual gratification and subservience of Japanese soldiers.

Based on a memoir written by Ruff-O'Herne, this documentary conveys her story on her own terms, guiding viewers through her resilience and bravery, as she transforms her identity from a victim of sexual enslavement to a survivor of patriarchal and political oppression. She emerges as a valiant advocate, voicing her unrelenting support for women's dignity and representation, and the necessity to remember historical injustices for the betterment of future societies and protection of female rights. It amalgamates footage taken across Ruff-O'Herne's lifespan, vividly encapsulating the happiness and growth of a young girl through scenes of her life with her family and her process of healing through interviews at International Public Hearings and memorials for war victims.



Cover of the original book by Jan Ruff-O'Herne. Image courtesy of [Carol Ruff](#).

Through this film, viewers will acquire a heightened awareness of sexual and gender violence, a global concern that still eludes transparent conversation even during modern times. As students, educators, or ardent pursuers of social justice, may the emotions *50 Years of Silence* evokes bolster your endeavours for upholding gender equality and respect.

Learning Objectives of this Discussion Guide

Understand the significance of agency in narratives, and how the voices of narratives can eclipse the lived experiences of war crime victims

Analyze the interactions between colonialism and patriarchy in enforcing gender hierarchies and gender violence

Reflect on individualized forms of gender and the effects of hegemonic masculinity on scrutiny of conventional gendered presentations and behaviours

¹ Carol Ruff, "50 Years of Silence," carolruff.com, accessed July 20, 2021, <https://www.carolruff.com/50-years-of-silence>.

Using this Guide

Discussions on sexual violence and gender discrimination always have emotional impact, and they may be based on misconceptions and preconceived notions regarding these subjects. This guide aims to provide discussion on the Japanese Military Sexual Slavery (JMSS) System during WWII in Asia through a case study, and gender violence and power, through perspectives from systemic levels to microaggressions of minute everyday interactions. Concepts including the implications of being ascribed a name, what it means to identify as a particular gender and how we express our individual identities, are addressed by engaging in conversations on who we are as human beings and how this informs the way we interact with each other.

The discussion questions and prompts strive to foster empathic understanding of survivors of sexual violence and enslavement, and to help readers deepen their understanding of the aforementioned themes and incorporate their own experiences and values. While the discussion questions and prompts address numerous themes, readers have the liberty of selecting those that have the most meaning in their lives, or those they wish to learn more about. Additionally, the Guide provides readers ways of addressing gender inequalities or prejudices in their social circles or local communities. Readers are empowered when making the minutest contributions towards gender equality, their actions can be facilitated through development of active and sincere listening skills.

The topics and terms used in *50 Years of Silence* can be triggering to individuals. In light of this, educators and facilitators are recommended to prioritize the mental health and well-being of the documentary's viewer), and establish a safe space for expression, where they may seek professional assistance should the need arise.

Background Information

History of the Japanese Military Sexual Slavery (JMSS) System

The “Shanghai Incident” of 1932 is widely considered to have birthed the first “comfort stations” originally established by the Japanese Navy, after the Imperial Army’s invasion into Shanghai following their capturing of Manchuria in 1931.² Despite the prohibition on prostitution in Shanghai by the Chinese government,³ the Japanese Navy had employed prostitutes as “waitresses” in local Japanese restaurants, and these “comfort stations” were for the exclusive use of Japanese navy personnel.⁴

In March 1932, the Japanese Military pursued equivalent ominous pleasures as those enforced by their naval counterparts. Under the leadership of General OKAMURA Yasuji, these “comfort stations” were introduced to minimize acts of rape instigated by military personnel against local civilians. However, subsequent events including the 1938 invasion of Wuhan proved that General Okamura’s initiative failed to prevent widespread rape and atrocities committed against local populations by the Imperial Army.⁵ By February 1942,⁶ the legal characterizations of rape as a criminal offense provides insight into the Army’s conceptualization and attitude towards rape. Initially, rape was only punished if it occurred during events of pillaging. Thereafter, the law was revised to only penalize army personnel who committed rape on Imperial occupied territory.⁷ This illustrates that rape was considered as a by-product of casual theft, and that rape on land that was not under Imperial Army governance was overlooked, as this did not bring shame to the Imperial government. The focus was on the reputation of the Japanese image, not on recognition of rape as a war crime and inherent form of inhumanity.⁸

Furthermore, the consensus among military leadership was that provision of “comfort women” was the most effective means of satiating the army’s pleasure “requirements”, over alternatives including adequate home rest and improved healthcare services.⁹ Moreover, the military could more effectively control the spread of venereal diseases among their personnel and the occupied territories’ populations, through frequent testing for such diseases by military doctors. This initiative was reinforced by their preferential selection of unmarried virgin girls to be coerced into their military sexual slavery system, as this demographic possessed minimal risk of carrying sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁰

The Victims of JMSS

After the colonization of Korea in 1910, changes to land ownership laws resulted in numerous farmers and individuals of low socioeconomic status losing their rights to live and use land for small businesses. Additionally, extended periods of dire weather conditions severely impeded the growth of agriculture. Consequently, marked unemployment and poverty plagued the Korean population in the 1930s and

² Yuki Tanaka, *Japan’s Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation* (London: Routledge, 2001), 8.

³ Tanaka, 8.

⁴ Tanaka, 9.

⁵ Tanaka, 10.

⁶ Tanaka, 28.

⁷ Tanaka, 29.

⁸ Tanaka, 29.

⁹ Tanaka, 29.

¹⁰ Tanaka, 30.

beyond. The urgency of their economic situation sparked a mass exodus of Korean nationals towards Japan in search of employment. Alongside occupations such as housecleaners and waitresses, some young women resorted to prostitution to provide for themselves and their families.¹¹ However, approaching 1938, the supply of available prostitutes was deemed insufficient by the Imperial Army, resulting in their increased involvement in recruiting more “comfort women.”¹² The owners of “comfort stations” in China were tasked with providing a stipulated number of women for various brothels across occupied territories. These owners also commissioned their own personnel: Korean labour brokers who had experience in illicit trafficking of women and recruiting prostitutes in their neighbourhoods. It is pivotal to remember that these recruitment agents were chosen by the Japanese Military.¹³ Myung-Hee Kim highlights that prominent denialist literature, such as *The Comfort Women of the Empire* by Yu-Ha Park, emphasizes the labour brokers and brothel owners as the agents responsible for recruiting “comfort women,”¹⁴ thereby redirecting the involvement and responsibility of this war crime away from the Japanese Military, which then denies the systemic organization of the Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. One prominent recruitment method was deception, whereby young, impoverished women, aged between 15 and 18 would be promised of fruitful occupation in Japan, only to be transported to a “comfort station” and subjected to sexual abuse and atrocity by the Japanese Military. One survey in Shanxi Province¹⁵ reveals a woman, Qiaolian, to have been 13 years old when she was first forced into the system as a “comfort woman.”

The recruitment methods utilized in China and the Philippines were distinct and physically gruesome from those used in Korea. After the Rape of Nanking of 1937 (also known as the Nanking Massacre), personnel commissioned by the Japanese Military were found to abduct women from local homes following their refusal to be enrolled as “comfort women.” Across all the “comfort stations,” Koreans were the most abundant,¹⁶ as the Imperial Army feared that usage of Chinese comfort women would not only exacerbate the local Chinese population’s negative views of the Japanese Military, but also that these Chinese women may be used for espionage by the Chinese army.¹⁷ In the Philippines, young women have been captured off the streets and forced into small groupings for the exclusive use by the capturing military unit.¹⁸ These women had additionally witnessed the brutal murder of their family members who had resisted the abduction efforts by the Japanese Military, before they were repeatedly raped by multiple men numerous times a day, held in captivity for months and subjected to further physical violence.¹⁹

Placing yourself within Jan's Life Context

If you were suddenly instructed by an authority (e.g. the military) personnel to pack a suitcase to leave your hometown during a time of political conflict, what would you bring with you? Why?

How do you understand the experience of being transported to the large house in Semarang on a truck?

¹¹ Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 35.

¹² Tanaka, 38.

¹³ Tanaka, 38.

¹⁴ Myung-Hee Kim, “Dilemma of Historical Reflection in East Asia and the Issue of Japanese Military ‘Comfort Women’: Continuing Colonialism and Politics of Denial,” *S/N Korean Humanities* 3, no. 1 (March 2017): 55, accessed July 20, 2022, https://www.snkh.org/include/download_files/v3/1_43-68.pdf.

¹⁵ Tanaka, 46.

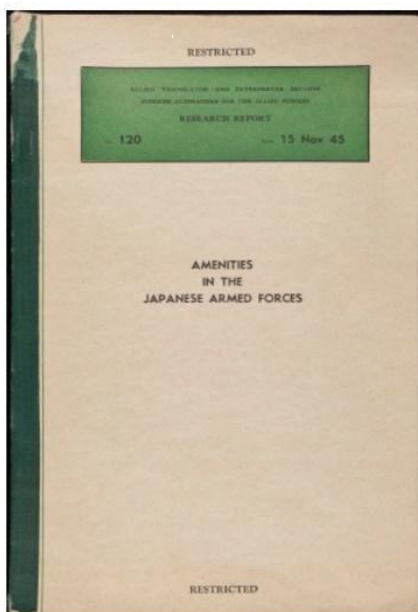
¹⁶ Bonnie B. C. Oh, “The Japanese Imperial System and the Korean ‘Comfort Women’ of World War II,” in *Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II*, eds. Margaret Stetz and Bonnie B. C. Oh (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2001), 3.

¹⁷ Tanaka, 14.

¹⁸ Tanaka, 49.

¹⁹ Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women*, 46.

The overarching philosophy that guided the behaviours of the Japanese Imperial Army was their concept of racial “superiority.” Through their colonization milestones of neighbouring Asian regions, they categorized the Yamato race, the national race of Japan, as the leading race, with all other races as inferior, to varying degrees down a hierarchy.²⁰ This was exemplified through their abuse towards prisoners of war who were subjected to forced labour. They also expected the “comfort women” to speak Japanese, despite having their own native tongue, and were given Japanese names for the convenience of the military officers who abused the women. “Comfort women” were attributed disparate prices according to their race, with Dutch “comfort women” being the most expensive and reserved only for high-ranking military officials, while Chinese sexual slaves were priced at the least value, below Korean sex slaves, who were below Japanese sex slaves.²¹ This alone illustrates the disgusting racialization of the “comfort women” at the hands of dominant powers during World War II.



Noncommissioned officers and chart (Figure 4).

Classification	Time	Rate			Summary
		Japanese	Koreans	Chinese	
Officers and warrant officers	1 hour	3.00	3.00	2.50	1. Overnight stay will be from 2200 until 0600 of the following morning. 2. Persons staying longer than one hour will pay double for each hour.
	Overnight stays				
	From 2400	10.00	10.00	7.00	
From 2200	15.00	15.00	10.00		
Noncommissioned officers	1 hour	2.50	2.50	2.00	
	30 minutes	1.50	1.50	1.00	
Privates	1 hour	2.00	2.00	1.50	
	30 minutes	1.50	1.50	1.00	

Figure 4. Established Rates of South Sector Billel Brothel
 Note: 1. Civilian employees will pay the fixed rates in accordance with their position. 2. Customers are not to pay more than the above fees to the brothel operators or to prostitutes.

Left (Cover Page): "Amenities in the Japanese Armed Forces," Above (Detail of a chart classifying a fee/payment scheme) from the document.

Research Report No. 120 November 15, 1945
 Date Released February 1992
 Translated Wartime Japanese Military Document

Location of the Document

Original Document United States National Archives on microfiche, as Wartime

²⁰ Oh, "The Japanese Imperial System and the Korean 'Comfort Women' of World War II," 10.

²¹ George Hicks, "The 'Comfort Women,'" in *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931-1945*, eds. Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and Mark R. Peattie (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 318.

Key and Connected Issues

The themes of agency through narrative construction, gender violence inflicted by colonial patriarchy, and hegemonic masculinity are identified as three of multiple plausible topics for discussion, based on the events addressed in *50 Years of Silence*.

The significance of **narrative agency** is highlighted through damaging constructions of the “comfort women’s” identities even in present day conversations. John Mark Remseyer, the Mitsubishi Professor of Japanese Law Studies at Harvard University, ignited contentious controversy in 2021 through his characterization of Japan’s wartime “comfort women” as prostitutes, and not sex slaves, as their earnings were “much higher” and could return home after settling their debts.²² When an academic, alongside the renowned reputation of the institution they work for, promulgates such statements, this forced identity is considered as veritable in the perspective of public discourse, thereby preventing the actual victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery from revealing their truth. Sociologist Ueno Chizuko explains this phenomenon as an act of “adopting an orthodox historical position of owning an objective narrative.”²³ This mechanism facilitates the production of denialist literature, whereby historians exploit their privilege as researchers to misconstrue the lived experiences of narrative subjects for the benefit of a nationalist image. Furthermore, such literature bolsters the marginalization and shaming of “comfort women” and their traumas with sexual violence,²⁴ labelling them as voluntarily providing sexual services and thereby misrepresenting their identities as victims and women.

Media of Communication

What are the unique benefits of using film to convey a war crime, compared to written publications?

How does the making of this documentary and telling her story publicly facilitate Jan’s healing process?

Furthermore, Maki Kimura incorporates Judith Butler’s understanding of interpellation²⁵ with respect to identity formation. When Kim Hak-Sun first broke the silence on the subject of Japanese Military “comfort women”, she enabled the subject of “comfort women” to be “hailed” by major public discourse, which allowed survivors of JMSS to finally have their voices heard.²⁶ Through this public discourse, survivors of JMSS could strive to have the atrocity of wartime sexual enslavement comprehended as a crime against humanity. This process highlights the importance of agency, especially in the advocacy efforts of activists such as Jan Ruff-O’Herne.

The second theme of **gender violence** through colonial patriarchy emphasizes the intersectionality between racism and sexism that was substantially prevalent in the Imperial Japanese regime. As described in the Background Information section, the notion of racial superiority is used by Pyong Gap Min to explain the brutality that coincided with sexual abuse inflicted upon Korean, Taiwanese, and Chinese “comfort women,”²⁷ among other ethnicities. Min suggests that racial prejudice fueled the

²² Sachiyo Tsukamoto, *The Politics of Trauma and Integrity: Stories of Japanese “Comfort Women,”* 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2022), 1.

²³ Yang Li, “Reflections on Postwar Nationalism: Debates and Challenges in the Japanese Academic Critique of the ‘Comfort Women’ System,” *Chinese Studies in History* 53, no. 1 (2019): 47, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094633.2019.1689758>.

²⁴ Li, 47.

²⁵ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997).

²⁶ Maki Kimura, “Narrative as a Site of Subject Construction: The ‘Comfort Women’ Debate,” *Feminist Theory* 9, no. 1 (2008): 13, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700108086360>.

²⁷ Pyong Gap Min, “Korean ‘Comfort Women’: The Intersection of Colonial Power, Gender, and Class,” *Gender*

Japanese Military's maltreatment of its prisoners of war,²⁸ and this was an ideological assertion of Japanese superiority over subjugated colonies. The inclusion of this theme facilitates readers to understand the nuanced nature of every survivor of sexual violence, and how intersections of their racial and gender identities predispose them to unique microaggressions.

The third theme of **hegemonic masculinity** invites readers to contemplate their individual presentations and practices of gender identities. Through discussion of this theme, readers can appreciate the existence of multiple variations of gender identities, and analyze the basis of not only their actions, but of daily sexist commentary and behaviour that have been normalized and somewhat celebrated by society as representations as a "masculine" man.

Narratives as Sites of Agency

Jan Ruff-O'Herne's testimony reveals several salient themes that can set the premise for stimulating debate. One prominent theme is the construction of narratives, in which the voice of the narrative can unjustly characterize individuals as victims and sexual slaves, thereby forcing an identity upon these women. Hanwool Choe's analysis of interviews with three "comfort women" conducted during the 1990s reveal how the Japanese Military objectified and dehumanized victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. The military's primary mechanism involves Other-chosen language,²⁹ referring to the Japanese Military's ascribing of Japanese names to the enslaved women, which linguistically prevents victims from adopting their own national identity and are construed as servants of colonial power. This also refers to the prohibition on speaking any language other than Japanese³⁰ during their enslavement, where breaking of such rules would result in physical punishment. By forcing these women to only speak Japanese, the Japanese Military suppressed the voices of the enslaved and pedestaled the Japanese language as the superior medium of dialogue. However, it must be noted that this language displacement was not prevalent across all prisoner camps and "comfort stations."

By being given names of flowers, what identity do you think the Japanese Military was trying to force onto Jan?

Moreover, one testimony reveals a victim being given a nickname of a door number,³¹ which Choe interprets as ascribing a solely functional identity, whereby the women exist to provide utility for the benefit of others. This illustrates why the term "comfort women" is in fact a horrendous euphemism that glosses over the reality these women have experienced as sexual slaves.

Maki Kimura explains the significance of breaking the silence against Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. When individuals such as Jan Ruff-O'Herne publish their testimonies on their own terms, they exercise agency.³² In doing so, they are the narrators of their own stories, and construct their own identities as survivors of militarized sexual slavery, as opposed to victims of colonial and imperial

What does Jan's act of cutting her hair and calling herself ugly reveal about her views on the feminine image? How can this be understood as creating one's own identity as resistance to oppressive forces?

& Society 17, no. 6 (December 2003): 944, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3594678>.

²⁸ Min, 944.

²⁹ Hanwool Choe, "The Other-Granted Self of Korean 'Comfort Women,'" *Narrative Inquiry* 8 (2021): 13, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.20136.cho>.

³⁰ Choe, 13.

³¹ Choe, 15.

³² Kimura, "Narrative as a Site of Subject Construction," 14.

powers. This is a powerful recognition of women resisting the patriarchal oppression that has determined their lives' outcomes. Jan Ruff-O'Herne's testimony presents one prime example of conveying their truth, and using this power to advocate for justice, acknowledgement, and apology from the perpetrators of these war crimes.

Furthermore, Kimura highlights the role of narrative construction in regaining selfhood, through Mun Ok-Chu's testimony in 1995,³³ in which she reveals the satisfaction and relief of revealing her experiences publicly. Kimura explains that through narratives, the individual is permitted to process their experiences, and make sense of the rationale behind them, in terms of the parties responsible. The recollection of traumatic memories is so painful due to ³⁴a myriad of factors, including the confusion arising from a shattered concept of personal identity, which is exacerbated by sensations of guilt and shame. Constructing one's own narrative enables the individual to realize that they are not to be blamed for their own sexual enslavement, and that their identities as individuals and women are not soiled despite the patriarchy's view of "comfort women" as prostitutes.

"First of all, I would like to say I do not like the word 'comfort women', and I am very strong about this. We were not 'comfort women'. We were Japanese war-raped victims."

What are the key implications of Jan's statement, in terms of who is in power and the identity she chose?

Gender Hierarchies Established by Colonial Patriarchy

The Male Gaze

"A number of high-ranking military Japanese walked up and down and up and down the lifting our chins from time to time with a stick and looking at our legs and our figures." How does this represent male dominance and policing of women's bodies?

While we appreciate the emergence of agency through independent narrative construction, Japanese Military Sexual Slavery, with its naming practices and the acts of sexual violence, established and reinforced gender hierarchies during WWII, which are still prevalent in the modern world. Chunghee Sarah Soh illustrates that the term *ianfu* (慰安婦), officially and euphemistically exploited by the Imperial Army, explains the characterization of these women as tranquil wives that comfort others and ensure their safety.³⁵ Moreover, Soh explains that the "comfort women" were considered as gifts to the regime of the emperor.³⁶ These gifts were granted as rewards for the military's services to the emperor and the nation; they could seek satiation needs of pleasure and leisure through these "comfort women," and thus they would be revitalized to continue battling for their nation.

³³ Kimura, 14.

³⁴ Kimura, 14.

³⁵ Chunghee Sarah Soh, "From Imperial Gifts to Sex Slaves: Theorizing Symbolic Representations of the 'Comfort Women,'" *Social Science Japan Journal* 3, no. 1 (April 2000): 67, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30209278>.

³⁶ Soh, 70.

Transitioning from the Imperial fascist perspective to that of the military personnel under casual situations further elaborates upon the gendering of “comfort women.” The slang term used for these women was *pi*, as expressed by Mun Ok-Chu’s testimony in 1990,³⁷ which means vagina. Soh proposes that these slang terminology underlines the patriarchal reduction of femininity to only a sexual organ with functionality for other’s benefit,³⁸ and that this sexism distinguishes the male identity as superior, capable, and powerful to serve the army and uphold the Imperial image, while the female identity is inferior, only to be valued as an object.

Additionally, Soh expounds the influence of traditional narratives and activity and passivity in sexual intercourse according to gendered differences. She explains that females are considered as passive fields waiting to be fertilized by male seeds. Here, sexual intercourse is actively directed by the male figure, in which females are receptive objects of male fervor.³⁹ In essence, these narratives construe women as in need of male initiation, a powerful domination onto sexual subservience. This patriarchal view of women motivated military personnel’s abuse towards “comfort women” during their acts of resistance, as violence and sexual intercourse were the primary means for men to relinquish their stress from battle.⁴⁰

Throughout the documentary, during scenes of interviews between Jan and Japanese interviewers and during the international public hearing, the camera focuses on the reactions of mostly women, with men being in the background. What are your thoughts on this? How do the men’s reactions differ from those of the women?

Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is the concept that only a specific group of practices and gender presentations is acceptable. This group of norms enjoys the highest position atop a hierarchy of genders. The hegemonic aspect of masculinity permits masculine dominance over feminine identities.⁴¹ This type of masculinity establishes itself in contrast to other forms of masculinity, including subordinated masculinity, where hegemonic practices constitute the most ideal and respected image of maleness. As other masculinities are de-legitimized and marginalized,⁴² the identities are left to struggle between conformity to the hegemony or resistance against it.

Timestamp 19:07 – 20:28:

What does the use of a sword represent here (in terms of Imperial power and domination)? What does the act of being pinned down by a man on top represent (in terms of male dominance in sex)?

Nicola Henry explains that rape during eras of armed conflict is a product of militarized hegemonic masculinity that is bolstered by culturally-embedded gender inequality and exploitations of disproportionate power dynamics between genders.⁴³ Hegemonic masculinity can be observed as the foundation that instills ominous cultural values regarding sexual intercourse, the sexuality of male and female. These environmental influences affect the cognitive development of individuals through habitual exposure to toxic conventions, by means of learning through social observation, as

³⁷ Soh, 71.

³⁸ Soh, 71.

³⁹ Soh, 71.

⁴⁰ Soh, 71.

⁴¹ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 832, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.

⁴² Connell and Messerschmidt, 846.

⁴³ Nicola Henry, “Theorizing Wartime Rape,” *Gender & Society* 30, no. 1 (2015): 44.

understood by Social Cognitive Theory.⁴⁴ In light of this, readers must be aware that the soldiers were considerably younger than their ruling generals, who were adults during WWII. However, individual agency and motivation behind acts of sexual violence cannot be isolated or separated from sociocultural influences, as this agency has been deemed to “reconstitute masculine identity.”⁴⁵

The intersection of power exertion between hegemonic masculinity, imperialism and capitalism can help to broaden discussions on the rationale behind male perpetration of wartime rape. Henry highlights that these intersections elucidate upon a collectivistic attitude of military personnel, one that exploits male privilege and entitlement and internalizes conceptions of superiority in terms of race and class.⁴⁶

Concluding Remarks

The themes of narrative as agency, colonial patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity motivate an appreciation of the myriad of overarching forces that affect the everyday lives of individuals. Humans exist in complex, interconnected systems of interactions and influences, which inevitably reinforce hierarchies of privilege and power. From the lens of the victims of Japanese Military Sexual slavery, the convergence of these themes intensifies the trauma and victimization they have experienced. In light of this, *50 Years of Silence* emphasizes the resilience of the survivors of this crime against

Are “comfort women” the only victims of wartime gender violence? Who is truly responsible for perpetrating rape during war, especially when both the ‘comfort women’ and soldiers are weapons of war?

Constructing your Own Identity

What are some ways you have chosen to present your gender identity? Do any of these go against the typical expectations for your gender?

Are acts of resistance more powerful when they are unique to an individual, or when multiple people engage in the same act collectively?

humanity and the bravery exemplified through breaking their silence. Every gender is subjected to conflict amidst the backdrop of historical oppression and modern perpetuation of this dominance in current times, and thus fervent discussion of these personal themes can heighten readers’ comprehension of their own identities and upbringings.

⁴⁴ Henry, 49.

⁴⁵ Henry, 51.

⁴⁶ Henry, 51.

Discussion Questions

Questions on *50 Years of Silence*

1. "And then of course just when I had finished Teachers' College, in 1942, the war broke out, and the breaking out of the war, that was really the end of all my childhood dreams." Jan laughs when she says the latter parts of this phrase. How does this reflect her inner state of mind, in terms of recollecting her past traumas?
2. Why do you think the other victims of JMSS in *50 Years of Silence* did not speak about their experiences for so long?
3. How does Jan use religious symbols in her testimony? What does this reveal about her connection to her religion?
4. Do you think it is fair for Jan to forgive the Japanese Military for their atrocious acts?
5. Timestamp 29:40: Do you think this apology is sincere?

Placing yourself in Jan Ruff-O'Herne's Shoes

1. What thoughts or fears do you think Jan Ruff-O'Herne experienced before she finally told her family members about what happened to her during the war?
2. How do you think Jan's experiences may affect her children, in terms of the processing of trauma?
3. How would you feel if your own mother revealed she had had similar experiences in her life, and never told anyone about them?
4. If you are female, would you feel more afraid or more comfortable talking to your daughters about your experiences with sexual violence? How would you feel speaking to other men about this?
5. Timestamp 40:26: Do you think that a person should be prevented from becoming a clergy member after experiences of sexual violence or abuse? Does being a survivor of rape truly soil an individual, insofar that it overrides their devotion and love for their religion?

50 Years of Silence: A Closer Look



Screen capture from 50 Years of Silence

Perspective of Jan: *The image depicts Jan as a young girl, where she uses her artistic talents in drawing and photography to convey her experiences. What does this image represent? How does it reflect on Japanese powers and the young women who were enslaved, in terms of the ways women were controlled?*

Perspective of Wartime Witness: *This scene provides insight into a view of an external observer of wartime atrocities during WWII during her youth, revealing the notions of gender and culture in that era. What does this statement indicate about the conception of female identities during WWII? What aspects of the place of women in gender hierarchy does it allude to?*



Screen capture from 50 Years of Silence



Screen capture from 50 Years of Silence

Post-war Male Perspective from the Media: *Immediately after this statement, the male news reporter transitions to speak about the weather, trivializing and dismissing the severity of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery. What does statement imply about the Japanese attitude towards acknowledging their wartime military sexual slavery? How does it reflect on the male perspective of misogyny and gender violence?*

Post-war Perspective of another JMSS Survivor: *Breaking the silence of such an atrocity may be impossible for some individuals. There is immense courage, bravery and resilience required. Victims have been observed to internalize shame and guilt regarding sexual violence, which occurs alongside stigmatization of mental health conditions. Why did she feel that it was necessary to "protect" her sons from her experience? By not speaking about this atrocity, who else is she protecting? How does this highlight the individuality behind coping mechanisms after experiencing trauma?*



Screen capture from 50 Years of Silence

Taking Actions

Rape culture exists when sexual violence against individuals is accepted, normalized, and denied as immoral behavior by the victim, in one's social circles or larger communities.⁴⁷ Regardless of your gender, you are responsible for calling out sexual abuse if and when you see them, such as witnessing a girl being touched or cat-called in public. Be careful about using the word "rape" as a synonym for certain descriptions of sports e.g., "Team A completely raped Team B in yesterday's game!" especially on social media, where the veil of anonymity often permits explicit sexual harassment without repercussions.

Encourage your schools or workplaces to have adequate education on consensual and safe sexual practices, including examples of sexual harassment and provision of free contraceptives from public health clinics.

Research on local NGOs that have campaigns or initiatives that advocate for gender equality and protection against gender violence. Speak to representatives of these NGOs and discover how you may be able to contribute to their cause.

Plan and hold workshops and forums to transparently discuss mental health conditions, stigmatization of mental health and normalization of help-seeking behaviors. Ensure these are safe, confidential spaces for discussion where respect and dignity are upheld.



A Korean survivor of JMSS a memorial statue in Seoul. Image courtesy of [Kyodo News](#).

⁴⁷ Jessica Ringrose et al., "Resisting Rape Culture Online and at School: The Pedagogy of Digital Defence and Feminist Activism Lessons," in *Violence, Victimisation and Young People*, eds. Ylva Odenbring and Thomas Johansson (Cham: Springer, 2021), 129.

Sexual discrimination and abuse can exist in subtle forms that are often overlooked. Everyday sexism involves how we respond to sexual abuses that occur, such as commenting on person's clothing and how much skin they are showing, reinforcing stereotypes such as "boys don't cry", and using gendered language during conversation.

What are some common daily interactions that are actually forms of sexual abuse and discrimination at your school or workplace? How can you influence others to be more aware of their behaviours and address everyday sexism?

Glossary

Agency: exercising power or action that causes a specific outcome⁴⁸, refers to becoming the subject of conversation, previously having been ignored as the subaltern⁴⁹

Colonialism: the policy of gaining complete political control over a territory and populating it with settlers⁵⁰

“Comfort woman” (ianfu [慰安婦] in Japanese): a euphemism to label a woman who has been trafficked or coerced into the “comfort system” to provide for other individuals⁵¹

“Comfort women” system: an organized set of procedures established by Japanese Military leaders involving the exploitation of women for the benefit of the male soldiers⁵², best identified as Japanese Military Sexual Slavery

Denial: refusal to admit the truth or existence of a notion or event⁵³; in Psychology, denial is a defense mechanism as introduced by Sigmund Freud, where events are blocked from entering the conscious mind, so as to protect the individual from succumbing to instinctual drives and psychopathological outcomes in the long-term⁵⁴

Discourse: a formal, detailed discussion on a specific subject;⁵⁵ in the case JMSS, public discourse dictates the acceptable and normative identities of human gender and sexuality⁵⁶

Enslavement: to make an individual a slave for a dominant entity, such as a government⁵⁷

Expansionism: a policy that prioritizes expansion, particularly of territory⁵⁸

Gender: an identity that is constructed by social accepted norms and values, which determines how an individual presents their identity in terms of behavior and appearance⁵⁹, it is distinct from biological sex which is informed by genetics

Imperialism: a political philosophy used by an empire which holds control over dependent territories. This is done through diplomacy, military and cultural dominance⁶⁰

⁴⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. “agency.”

⁴⁹ Kimura, “Narrative as a Site of Subject Construction,” 13.

⁵⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. “colonialism.”

⁵¹ Choe, “The Other-Granted Self of Korean ‘Comfort Women’,” 1-30.

⁵² Tanaka, *Japan’s Comfort Women*, 19-20.

⁵³ Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. “denial.”

⁵⁴ Phebe Cramer, “Understanding Defense Mechanisms,” *Psychodynamic Psychiatry* 43, no. 4 (December 2015): 525, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1521/pdps.2015.43.4.523>.

⁵⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. “discourse.”

⁵⁶ As discussed in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁵⁷ Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. “enslavement.”

⁵⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. “expansionism.”

⁵⁹ As discussed in Butler, *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

⁶⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. “imperialism.”

Interpellation: the process by which a subject becomes a part of public discourse when it gains the attention of society at large⁶¹

Marginalization: the process of depreciating and cornering individuals to the outskirts of society⁶²

Microaggression: a statement or act that is viewed as implicit discrimination or prejudice against a marginalized population⁶³

Nationalism: the philosophy of upholding the reputation and interests of the nation to which an individual belongs, even if this damages other nations⁶⁴

Objectification: the notion of characterizing an individual as only an object, devaluing their human characteristics and rights

Patriarchy: a system of male dominance used to exploit women and govern female sexuality, legitimizing violence and objectification of women⁶⁵

Racialization: the process of applying notions of racial discrimination to an individual's or group's mindsets and conduct⁶⁶

Rape: a forceful act of sexual nature that does not involve the consent of the victim and invokes threat and violence to commit⁶⁷

subaltern: in the context of postcolonial studies, this is a term given to a minority segment of society that is overlooked by the majority⁶⁸

trauma: In Narrative Psychology, an event that results in trauma disrupts the individual's sense of timeline of the event and their perceptions of relationships to other people and places relevant to that event. This can entail losing a sense of meaning of the event and memory of the structure of the occurrence⁶⁹

venereal disease: a sexually-transmitted disease

⁶¹ As discussed in Butler, *Excitable Speech* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁶² *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. "marginalization."

⁶³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. "microaggression."

⁶⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. "nationalism."

⁶⁵ Carol P. Christ, "A New Definition of Patriarchy: Control of Women's Sexuality, Private Property, and War," *Feminist Theology* 24, no. 3 (2016): 214, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735015627949>.

⁶⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. "racialization."

⁶⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed (2014), s.v. "rape."

⁶⁸ Bailey Betik, "Subaltern Studies," *Postcolonial Studies @ Emory*, last modified Spring 2020, <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2020/02/17/subaltern-studies>; also discussed in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁶⁹ Michele L. Crossley, "Narrative Psychology, Trauma and the Study of Self/Identity," *Theory & Psychology* 10, no. 4 (2000): 531, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354300104005>.

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