

Assimilation, Sexuality and Racism: Japanese
American Nisei Writer Hisaye Yamamoto

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Abstract

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This dissertation discusses a Japanese American Nisei writer Hisaye Yamamoto (1921-2011), the Nisei main characters in her short stories, and Yamamoto's newspaper articles from the viewpoints of assimilation, gender, sexuality, internment and racial discrimination in order to verify the influence of racial discrimination

upon her stories.

Chapter 1 compares the assimilation of Japanese American Nisei Yuki, the main character in Yamamoto's short story "Epithalamium," with that of a Vietnamese American Le Ly Hayslip in her autobiography *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* to show the unique situation of the Japanese American Nisei who suffered from the oppressions from gender and racial discrimination. To measure assimilation level, the following six benchmarks are applied: (1) Socioeconomic status, (2) Language assimilation, (3) Spatial concentration, (4) Intermarriage, (5) Racial discrimination, and (6) Influence of war.

Regarding socioeconomic status and language assimilation, there is a significant difference between American born Nisei and Vietnamese American first generation. Yamamoto's skill for English language is so much better than Hayslip's that the comparison by the benchmarks socioeconomic status and language assimilation does not provide any meaningful results.

As for intermarriage and influence of war, Le Ly's intermarriage with an American is just a means to emigrate to the U.S., but Yuki's intermarriage with an Italian American is a means to assimilate into white society. The difference of the two women should be largely dependent on their experience in the wars. Le Ly tries to survive by emigrating to the U.S. On the other hand, Yuki's life is not threatened by war, although she is persecuted with racial discrimination through her internment experience. The assimilation

of Nisei is closely related to racial discrimination, gender and sexuality. Therefore Yuki's strong desire to assimilate into white society by leaving the Japanese community involves the complicated situation of the Nisei.

Chapter 2 discusses the sexuality of Nisei central characters in "Epithalamium" and "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara." The sexuality of Yuki is explicitly expressed in "Epithalamium." The main character Miss Sasagawara's sexuality and the internees' life with the details of the internment camp are depicted in "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara." Strong resemblance is seen in the sexuality of Yuki and Miss Sasagawara. Both of the main characters insist on their own ways of life through their sexuality. Although Yuki resists all objections against her sex and marriage and is anxious about marrying an alcoholic dropout, she makes her decision on her life all by herself. In this way Yuki shows her protest to gender discrimination and racial discrimination through her sexuality. This is a Nisei woman's answer to the oppressions and she is different from Japanese American Issei women who cannot escape their situations.

Section 1 of Chapter 3 discusses the racial discrimination against African Americans in "A Fire in Fontana," which was published in 1985. The story dates back forty years to the period of World War II. The story can be regarded as a compilation of Yamamoto's thoughts about racial discrimination over the forty years. In relation to the racial discrimination in the story, two more stories "Wilshire Bus" and "Eucalyptus" are introduced for discussion.

In 1945, Yamamoto started working for the *Los Angeles Tribune* run by African Americans. She wanted to protest openly to the racial discrimination against African Americans, but as a Japanese American news reporter she felt restrained to do so. During this period Yamamoto experienced an incident, the death of an African American family by suspicious fire. Because she had written an article about the family's persecution prior to the incident, she was gnawed by a sense of guilt and regretted that she should have gone to great lengths to describe the situation. She tried to protest against the discrimination in a pacifist way which was not accepted by African Americans. Eventually she could not bear the situations and kept herself away from African Americans. She left the *Los Angeles Tribune* and became a writer and then a catholic worker. Yamamoto seems to have chosen to devote herself to the introspective life as a catholic worker.

Until 1985 when Yamamoto published "A Fire in Fontana," she had little talked about the racial discrimination issue of African Americans since she left the *Los Angeles Tribune*. She had been making desperate effort to atone for her guilty conscience towards the African American family's death. A strong sense of guilt and responsibility to rebel against the discrimination obsessed her and it developed into 'fear of responsibility.' Yamamoto was in a hospital for the treatment of her mental disorder and then she delineated this experience in "Eucalyptus."

"Wilshire Bus" is not a story about the racial

discrimination against African Americans, but it is about Yamamoto's insight and anguish experienced at the *Los Angeles Tribune*. For instance, the comparison of the main character Nisei woman's sensitivity towards racial discrimination with a Chinese woman's shows Nisei woman's fearful attitude towards racial discrimination, which implies the dismay caused by the internment and hostility received as an enemy alien in the U.S.

Section 2 of Chapter 3 discusses the discrimination against African Americans in Yamamoto's newspaper column "Small Talk." Yamamoto's column is reviewed to investigate African Americans' attitude toward racial discrimination and how they protested against it, Japanese Americans' attitude toward racial discrimination and the actions they took against it, and African Americans' attitude toward Japanese Americans.

Yamamoto, as a member of the marginalized racial minorities, tried to resist racial discrimination by sharing painful experience with African Americans. As mentioned above, she tried to protest against the discrimination in a pacifist way which was not accepted by African Americans. African Americans had only blacks and whites in the palette of their hearts, while Japanese Americans were eager to enter the white mainstream and discriminated against African Americans. Under this situation it might have been impossible for the two parties to have 'dialogue' to understand each other. Yamamoto lost her way in the maze of the argument of binary opposition and she was depressed by facing the racial minority's

self-centeredness. Yamamoto failed to improve the situation because of the lack of dialogue and “intercultural competencies” (Tsuchiya 56) and therefore there was no opportunity for the racial minorities to learn from other minorities at that time.

From the discussions of Yamamoto’s stories and her life, it could be concluded that all issues taken up in her stories such as internment, assimilation, gender and sexuality are intricately related to racial discrimination which is a dominant undercurrent flowing through her stories.

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Introduction

Yamamoto was born in 1921 in Redondo Beach, California. Her parents were engaged in cultivating tomato and strawberry. The family led a Japanese life style and lived with Japanese neighbors and Mexican hired hands. French, German, Chinese, Armenians and other people lived in the vicinity of the family and Yamamoto studied at school with the children there (Ueki and Sato 42).

Japanese immigration started in late 19th century. Initially, most of Japanese immigrants were engaged in agricultural works and they were welcomed for their industriousness in their works. However, as the number of immigrants grew and they started purchasing farms and their own business, anti-Japanese sentiment gradually emerged. The anti-Japanese sentiment was accelerated and the legislations such as Gentlemen's Agreement (1908-) (Daniels, *Asian* 125), California Alien Land Law (1913-) (Daniels, *Asian* 138-44) and Immigration Act of 1924 (Daniels, *Prisoners* 15) were introduced.

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 (local time), the conflict between Japan and the U.S. escalated into an all-out war. While the anti-Japanese sentiment went into hysterics, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 and by this order nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans were interned. The men, women, and their children, more than two-thirds of whom were American citizens, were exiled from their home and incarcerated in the internment camps by the U.S. government simply because they or their parents had been born in Japan. Yamamoto was interned in Poston, Arizona, the setting for her story "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara." There she served as a reporter and columnist for the *Poston Chronicle*, the camp newspaper, and published "Death Rides the Rails to Poston," a serialized mystery.

Yamamoto "had early contracted the disease of compulsive reading" (Yamamoto, "Writing" 61) and started writing when she was a teenager, for a time under the pseudonym Napoleon. Much of her work is closely connected with the places and the events of her own life. Many Nisei including Yamamoto were allowed to leave the camps to get jobs or education in the Midwest and the East. She went back to Poston upon receiving the news that one of her brothers had been killed in combat in Italy. The experience became the basis of her story "Florentine Gardens." The Japanese Americans' internment

experience had a great influence on Yamamoto's stories. In 1976, Yamamoto said that "Any extensive literary treatment of the Japanese in this country would be incomplete without some acknowledgment of the camp experience" (" . . . I Still" 69). After the war she worked for three years from 1945 to 1948 for the *Los Angeles Tribune*, an African American weekly paper; "A Fire in Fontana" is a memoir of her job as a reporter there.

A John Hay Whitney Foundation Opportunity Fellowship (1950-1951) allowed Yamamoto to write full time for a while. Drawn to the pacifist and selfless ideals advocated in the *Catholic Worker*, she became a volunteer worker of the *Catholic Worker* rehabilitation farm on Staten Island from 1953 to 1955. *Catholic Worker* was founded by Dorothy Day (1897-1980) and Peter Maurin (1877-1949) in 1933, when the U.S. was at the bottom of the depression. *Catholic Worker* aimed at social justice, relief of the poor, and anti-war activities. Her experience in the *Catholic Worker* became the background of the story "Epithalamium." Yamamoto was one of the Japanese American writers to gain national recognition after the war, when anti-Japanese sentiment was still strong. Four of her short stories found their way to Martha Foley's yearly lists of "Distinctive Short Stories." They are "Seventeen Syllables" (1949), "The Brown House" (1951), "Yoneko's Earthquake" (1951), and "Epithalamium" (1960): "Yoneko's Earthquake" was also

chosen as one of the *Best American Short Stories: 1952*.

Many stories of Asian American literature represent family imbroglios between Issei parents and American born Nisei sons and daughters. However, the main theme of Yamamoto's stories is the relationship not only among Japanese but also of Japanese with the Chinese, Koreans, other Asians, and even whites. In addition, the theme is intertwined with Buddhism and Christianity. Because of her extensive reading of American and European writers and her own cultural background, Yamamoto writes out of both an Anglo American and a Japanese American literary tradition. But all her protagonists are Japanese Americans, and her sympathy is invariably with those who are on the fringe of the American society.

Assimilation and the tormented experience of internment are depicted in many Nisei's autobiographies such as Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1953), Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973) and Yoshiko Uchida's *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family* (1982). Japanese American writers went through racial discrimination and hatred as people of the enemy nation in the U.S. Therefore the situation of Japanese American writers was different from that of Jewish writers who wrote about the Holocaust under the condition of the defeated Nazi Germany. However, Yamamoto was so courageous under such hostile

atmosphere as to introduce the atomic bomb issue in her story “Las Vegas Charley” as early as in 1961. The story depicts an American bomber pilot who is so regretful about dropping an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Moreover, when the internment policy was introduced by the U.S. government, she criticized JACL (Japanese American Citizens League) for their cooperative attitudes towards the policy. JACL maintained leadership for “everything the government did to the innocent Japanese Americans” (Daniels, *Prisoners* 58). Before the internment Yamamoto alone refused firmly to sign when she was asked by a neighbor girl who belonged to San Diego JACL to prove Japanese Americans’ patriotism that “we would willingly go to camp” (Cheung, *Words Matter* 353).

The interaction among various ethnic groups, internment and resistance to racial discrimination are the recurring themes of Yamamoto’s stories. Other important themes are the relationship between Issei parents and their Nisei children over the matter of assimilation and gender issue of Japanese American women. This dissertation discusses Hisaye Yamamoto’s and her Nisei main characters’ attitude toward the issues of assimilation, gender discrimination, sexuality and internment to verify that there lies a deep undercurrent of the influence of racial discrimination in Yamamoto’s work.

Chapter 1: Assimilation and Asian American Women

In the early twentieth century, a large number of new immigrants from the European Continent came to the U.S. According to Daizaburo Yui, Americans were skeptical about the assimilation of German immigrants, particularly after World War I and they thought that it would be impossible for immigrants who are not “100 percent” American to be model citizens of the U.S. (Yui and Endo 31). Horace M. Kallen argues in his 1915 essay that most of the late European immigrants were difficult to assimilate completely into American culture. According to Kallen, the attribution of human beings consists of two parts in terms of assimilation: the ethnic traits based on lineage and the social elements such as citizenship or occupations. He also argues that the innate nature of immigrants never dissolves into the American society and therefore should be retained in personal realms while immigrants make efforts to live together in the society as good citizens (Yui and Endo 30). However, in Kallen’s argument only European immigrants in 1915 were taken into

account. In that year, the first generation of Asian immigrants was regarded as “aliens ineligible to citizenship” (Okihiro 167).

Assimilation is an important issue for both immigrants themselves and their host countries. Asian American writers tend to take two ways in terms of assimilation. One is to assimilate into American culture as a “model minority” (Kim, *Asian* 18). Those in this category are regarded as in the position of the “permanent inferior,” being “good” Asians who never become primary citizens. All that is required in this case is the cheerful acceptance of the assigned status and the rejection of their own racial and cultural background which might prove offensive to the dominant white society (Kim, *Asian* 19). “And of course he must never speak for himself” (Kim, *Asian* 18-19). For that reason, in reading stories by the “model minority,” it is not easy to see the author’s intention. The second case is of “less obliging minorities” (Kim, *Asian* 18) who protest against inequality or take a serious attitude on their social situation. In this case, the assimilation into the Anglo American culture is regarded as violation of Asian culture, so they defy the white domination and stand against assimilation.

Assimilation is a particularly significant matter if the immigrants are from countries of distinctively dissimilar cultures, languages, and races. To measure assimilation level, the following four primary benchmarks (Waters and Jiménez 105),

which are generally accepted in sociology, will be employed here, too.

- (1) Socioeconomic status
- (2) Language assimilation
- (3) Spatial concentration
- (4) Intermarriage

However, those benchmarks concern the characteristics of immigrants themselves, so the environmental conditions for assimilation are necessary in order to have more precise examination of the problem. Therefore, I will add the following two points of view:

- (5) Racial discrimination
- (6) Influence of war

Those benchmarks will be employed here to examine the comparison of Vietnamese American Le Ly Hayslip in her autobiography *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* and a Japanese American Nisei in Hisaye Yamamoto's short story "Epithalamium."

While *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* is an autobiography, Yamamoto's stories are not. However, Yamamoto's

life appears to be closely related to the main character Yuki in “Epithalamium.” Yamamoto wrote stories which could be regarded as autobiographical. Hayslip’s autobiography might not be a story of a typical Vietnamese American in that she is from a poor peasant family while many other Vietnamese American writers are usually from rich urban community. Likewise, “Epithalamium” might not be a typical Japanese American story because it is a story about Catholicism and a Catholic Worker in New York. However, Hayslip and Yamamoto are both well-known Asian American writers, so by comparing their stories, the complicated attitudes of Asian Americans towards assimilation would become clear.

As for (1) Socioeconomic status and (2) Language assimilation, there is a big difference between American born Nisei Yamamoto and Vietnamese American Issei Hayslip. Social and economic status is largely dependent on the educational background, occupation and wealth. Generally educational background gives a significant influence on the adjustment of the immigrant’s life in America. Hayslip had primary school education in Vietnam only for three years and her Vietnamese vocabulary is limited to the use for daily conversation, gossiping and Buddhist prayers. In America she took an English class for immigrants at a community college. Her English skill was not good enough to engage herself in any professional occupation.

She had jobs as maid and assembly line worker of low income. Her co-workers were African Americans, Mexicans and Asian immigrants.

Yamamoto studied at a junior college in America and she also attended a Japanese school for twelve years. She started writing at teenage and she fell into “the disease of compulsive reading” (Yamamoto, “Writing” 61). She worked as a columnist for a weekly newspaper. Her short stories were selected for Martha Foley’s yearly lists of “Distinctive Short Stories.” Yamamoto’s skill for English language is so much better than Hayslip’s that the comparison by the benchmarks (1) Socioeconomic status and (2) Language assimilation is not expected to provide any meaningful results.

Comparison of Yuki of “Epithalamium” with Le Ly on the benchmarks (4) Intermarriage and (6) Influence of war shows significant differences between the two central characters. Le Ly persists with Vietnamese identity and refuses to assimilate into American culture. She is carrying out the life style indicated by Horace M. Kallen that the innate nature of immigrants never dissolves into the American society and therefore should be retained in personal realms while immigrants make efforts to live together in the society as good citizens (Yui and Endo 30). This way of life is rather similar to that of Japanese American Issei.

For Le Ly, her intermarriage with an American is just a means to emigrate to the U.S., but Yuki's intermarriage with an Italian American is a means to assimilate into white society. The difference of the two women might be largely dependent on their experience in the wars. Many Vietnamese villagers including Le Ly's family were tortured and killed in the Vietnam War by Americans and South Vietnamese soldiers or by the Viet Cong in front of her eyes. She was raped, tortured and condemned to death by the Viet Cong from which she narrowly escaped. She tried to survive by emigrating to the U.S. On the other hand, Yuki's life is not threatened by war, although she is persecuted with racial discrimination through her internment experience. The text of "Epithalamium" does not tell why Yuki marries an Italian, Marco, but the narrator of the story expresses some apprehension about Yuki's marriage. By considering these points, let us examine Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* and Yamamoto's "Epithalamium" more in detail.

1.1 Le Ly Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*

Le Ly, the main character of Le Ly Hayslip's autobiography *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace* (1989) and its sequel *Child of War, Woman of Peace* (1993) (hereafter *Heaven and Earth*), was born as the sixth and youngest child in Ky La, a small village near the 17th parallel military border which divided North and South Vietnams. When the Vietnam War began, the eldest son was conscripted into the North Vietnamese army and the second son to the South Vietnamese army. The second son ran away from the army to avoid the destiny of killing each other with his brother, but he died by a land mine explosion. The husband of the eldest daughter was captured as a suspect by the French army and became a missing person. The husband of the second daughter went to the North and the third daughter was placed in the live-in service in a city. By the age fifteen the fourth daughter Le Ly had already been caught in the war, captured, and tortured by the South Vietnamese Republicans. Moreover, she had been condemned to death and raped by the Viet Cong. To escape from the further crossfire, Le Ly and her mother, who also had been condemned to death by the Viet Cong, fled to the city. Her father was accused of abetting their escape, so he killed himself to save his wife and daughter from the pursuit of the Viet

Cong. The family disintegrated in the disaster of the war, tortured by the both sides. While she was in the live-in domestic service, Le Ly delivered a baby of the Vietnamese master, and she suffered from the guilt of disgracing her family's name. Le Ly managed to escape the plight by finding an American husband and emigrating to the U.S. Marriage with an American was a means for her to escape from the disaster in Vietnam. Cultural differences between Vietnam and America puzzled her. Both of her first and second marriage to white Americans ended in failure. The cause of the failure could be her own view of love and marriage, cultural differences, her sense of futility due to the tragedy of the war, her persistence to survive at all costs as a reaction of her war experience, or her regret for living against the Vietnamese tradition. These possible causes will require more specific examination.

The title *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace* comes from a recognition of the chaos of the Vietnam War which Le Ly has survived, suggesting the inversion of heaven and earth (247, 358). Le Ly insists through her books that the pain which Vietnamese peasants have gone through under the wars and the agony which Vietnam veterans and their relatives have experienced are the same. At the end of the autobiography Le Ly organizes a foundation to build a hospital in her hometown Ky La and

advocates the hurt and wounded Americans participating in the charitable work and helping themselves by helping Vietnamese.

Whether immigrants can live without forming a congregation of a particular ethnic group is a significant point in assessing the assimilation level. In fact, the U.S. government tried to minimize the financial burden in particular areas by dispersing the refugees to areas such as California and Texas. But due to the ideology of family collectivism in Southeast Asian culture, the refugees made determined efforts to reunite scattered family members and friends and formed the ethnic communities known as China Town or Little Saigon (Chan 157). Hung C. Thai explains the ideology of family collectivism as follows:

Rooted in a belief system emphasizing family obligation and patchworking of resources, the Vietnamese often reject the values of self-sufficiency, individualism, and egalitarianism that are generally prevalent in the mainstream U.S. culture. For the Vietnamese, the ideology of family collectivism is also practiced in the realm of friendship and as such, friends are often spoken of as family. (56)

In Le Ly's case, she lived with her husband's family at the

beginning of her life in America but she was tormented by loneliness caused by the lack of communication due to her poor English.

Le Ly lived in San Diego with her first husband Ed and the second husband Dennis after the death of Ed. She expresses how lonely the life in San Diego was.

Our new San Diego neighborhood, however, was mostly white collar, so the people were more reserved and not too interested in this ex-GI and his Oriental wife. In Ed's world, I had at least been an exotic decoration. On Dennis's new block, I was no more welcome than another Asian gardener. (*Child* 141)

Le Ly began to visit the Vietnamese Buddhist temple three years after she started living with her second husband. This Vietnamese Buddhist temple became a meeting place for her and other Vietnamese people. She became a foster parent of three Vietnamese orphans and they lived together with her white American husband and her own three children in one house. She spoke Vietnamese with the orphans and cooked Vietnamese food at home. The life with the Vietnamese orphans provided Le Ly with some relief and comfort. Le Ly says that "I needed these stray kids as much as they needed me!" (*Child* 151). This could be

a representation of her Vietnamese family collectivism which was emphasized in the affluent white community of the U.S. Le Ly, who lives with her white husband in the white people's residential area, could not keep away from the ideology of family collectivism akin to Vietnamese in Little Saigon.

Le Ly had tried to approach a navy med tech Red, a civilian mechanic Jim, and then an air force lieutenant Paul to survive the war and poverty and to save her little boy and herself (*Child* 43). For her, the marriage to an American was a means to going to the U.S. Le Ly's family disapproved of her marriage with an American. Her mother thought that Le Ly was acting ungrateful toward her parents and disgracing her family name. Her sister said Amerasians are "tainted with the invader's karma" (*When* 348). Other Vietnamese as well as her family were indifferent to her. The American relatives of her husband presumed that Le Ly had married Ed for his money and her easy life in America. In that regard, Le Ly confesses that she had taken advantage of Ed (*Child* 91). Her marriage was not celebrated by her friends and acquaintances, to say nothing of her family. When her story was adapted to a Hollywood movie, Le Ly's life far from the poor farming family was criticized by the people of conservative affluent class in the Vietnamese American community.

When Hayslip's story was made into a Hollywood movie, some more conservative members in the Vietnamese American community protested that a peasant woman's experience is not representative of the community. (Phan 28)

Le Ly convinces herself that her escape to the U.S. by marrying an American was to survive the disaster, which was a promise with her father. But what her father meant in his message to her daughter, "to survive" (*When* 26), is quite different from her easy life as a wife of a rich American husband. Le Ly admits:

I found it very hard to concentrate at work after Ed made his proposal. He said that in return for marrying him and coming to America and taking care of him as his wife, he would see to it that I would never have to work again; that my little boy, Jimmy, would be raised in a nice neighborhood and go to an American school; and that neither of us would have to face the dangers and travails of war again. It was the dream of most Vietnamese women and the answer to my prayers . . . (*When* 343)

Further, Le Ly tells how she felt at a party: "In this party, I wore

my American clothes; to honor Ed, of course, but also for vanity — to impress the other Vietnamese girls, most of whom were dying to go to America” (*Child* 64). By considering these facts, Le Ly seems to have used Vietnamese typical morality as an excuse for her conduct. She replaces obedience to paternal opinions with marriage with a foreigner, which is aberrant according to the Vietnamese moral code.

Second husband Dennis, a devout Christian, and Le Ly, a Buddhist, could not understand each other’s culture. To Dennis the “soy-and-ginger” (*Child* 144) flavor of Vietnamese food was often unpalatable and sometimes poisonous. She unilaterally accused Dennis of being a white man with dualism. Because of their lack of mutual understanding her second marriage to a white man also came to an end.

Vietnam has a long history of invasion by other nations and of resistance to invaders. Vietnam had been under the Chinese control for over one thousand years from 2 B.C. to 10 A.D. (Liên 63, Furuta 8). In 1883, Vietnam was colonized by France. Vietnam was in war for thirty years, from the French Indochina War starting in 1946 to the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. The Vietnamese are said to have developed “xenophobia” (Kaikou 287) due to the repetition of invasions by foreigners and resistance to them. This attitude is evident in how the Vietnamese treated Le Ly.

I was no longer completely Vietnamese, but I was not quite American either. Apparently, I was something much worse. Even people I had expected to understand me, to be sympathetic to my dream, looked down on me and called me names not always to my back: Di lay My! Theo de quoc Ve My! Gai choi boi! Bitch! Traitor! American whore! (*When* 353)

Le Ly's attitude toward foreigners is seen through her autobiography. There is no evidence of her xenophobia. But she tells how she felt about her racial identity:

After a few weeks of this, I began to hate myself as the useless teenager everyone supposed me to be. I hated my hair for being Oriental black, not European brown or blond or silver. I hated my body for being Vietnamese puny and not Polish plump or German hardy or big-boobed and long-legged like the glossy American girls Ed ogled on the sidewalk. (*Child* 27)

Furthermore, Le Ly admits that in Ed's right mind, no handsome young American would settle for a puny, dark-haired, dark-skinned "foreign imitation" (*Child* 105) of the real American

thing. On the other hand, it is possible to see that Le Ly herself had a racially biased attitude. Referring to the Korean soldiers in the Vietnamese War and the Moroccans who fought against Viet Minh as French mercenaries in the French Indochina War, Le Ly says that “. . . some Korean soldiers went to a school, snatched up some boys, threw them into a well, and tossed a grenade in afterward as an example to the others. To the villagers, these Koreans were like the Moroccans, tougher and meaner than the white soldiers they supported” (*When* 198). Le Ly tells quite positively that she hated the Moroccan mercenaries (*When* 17) as much as she hated the Korean soldiers (*When* 198). They plundered and killed the Vietnamese without reason. Le Ly also tells that the Japanese and the French soldiers destroyed the peasants’ crops, killed their livestock, burnt their houses, raped their women, and “tortured or put to death anyone who opposed them as well as many who did not” (*When* xiii-xiv). She tells of the American soldiers:

At a crossroads ahead of our bus, a GI truck stopped briefly and threw out some garbage . . . When we opened the largest box, however, everyone stepped back in horror. Inside was a young woman, naked and mutilated—but not from war. From the look of her (makeup streaked by her final tears, tight mini-skirt

pulled up around her waist, etc.) she was a hooker who had been “trashed”—used, abused, and dumped—by the servicemen. (*When* 226)

Even though Le Ly witnessed the atrocity committed by the American soldiers, she says that “. . . I never really hated American soldiers. We resented them for invading our country, of course, but we didn’t take it personally” (*Child* 23). Le Ly does not accuse Americans like she does the Moroccans and the Koreans. In her autobiography, Le Ly refers to Americans many times, and she is always favorable towards them. As Sidonie Smith points out, female autobiographers “can speak with authority only insofar as she tells a story that her audience will read” (52). Hayslip seems to have been keeping in her mind a white American audience as the readers of her autobiography and have sacrificed her integrity as a Vietnamese writer to curry favor with the white Americans. Furthermore, as Monique T. D. Tru’ong argues, the texts are manipulated and transformed consciously or unconsciously by American rewriters (translators / coauthors), with the authorial control usurped (219-44).

Le Ly wrote her autobiography with the aid of Vietnamese and English dictionaries, or often she dictated her stories to James Hayslip, her eldest son. The autobiography was translated and rewritten by two rewriters: Jay Wurts, an

American writer, rewrote *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace*, and James Hayslip rewrote *Child of War, Woman of Peace*. James' father was a Vietnamese entrepreneur for whom Le Ly had worked as a housemaid in Saigon. James was taken care of by his grandmother and relatives until he became six years old.

It is interesting to compare the two texts rewritten by two different rewriters in the light of words and expressions. In Jay Wurts' rewriting, harsh words were compensated with others; he writes that Vietnamese "resented, feared, and misunderstood" American, but it was "not your [American's] fault" (xiv). He also explains Le Ly's feeling about America that Le Ly was much "honored" to live in the U.S. and "proud" (365) to be a U.S. citizen, and she did her best to honor the American flag, which was flying proudly over the schools where her children learned to be Americans. On the contrary, James Hayslip describes America as "a world without ancestors—without cause and effect—" (3) and a once hated adversary. He declares that Americans are people with "broken hearts" (35) and all the American men Le Ly had known became "narrow-minded, petty, vindictive" when they were angry, and Americans with "no conscience" were "nothing but dogs themselves" (174). Jay Wurts generally describes Americans in a restrained manner, even when he accuses them. It is difficult to judge whether the

difference of these two rewriters are caused by their characters or originated from Le Ly's original texts.

Le Ly remembers a time when she experienced racial discrimination from an American: “. . . the male clerk, seeing my ao dai, gave me a nasty stare. It was an expression I had seen before—mostly from Vietnamese in Danang who disapproved of my American boyfriends—but here it was something more” (*Child* 23). However, she thought that this was his country, not hers and lowered her eyes (*Child* 23). But, at the same time, she is alarmed by her own racial anger popped up inside her.

So I tried to play the role this young man gave me, but I could not. What alarmed me most was the racial anger that popped up inside me like the flame on a GI's lighter. People can reason about anything they have the power to change, like their attitude or their clothes, but when condemned for their race they react like cornered rats. (*Child* 24)

The relatives of her husband criticized Le Ly for dropping long black hairs around the house, cooking rice and noodles for her children, never socializing with her American relative's guests, and marrying Ed for his money and a comfortable life in America. There were some frictions between the relatives and Le Ly

because of the lack of communication due to her poor English. But it is clear that Le Ly had an emotional problem because she was racially discriminated. Le Ly had mixed feelings because of such tangled elements as the discrimination received both from Vietnamese (*When* 353) and Americans (*Child* 23), her own discriminatory attitude to the whites and colored (*When* 198), her physical inferiority to the white women (*Child* 27), and her sense of superiority over the Vietnamese women brought by her marriage to an American (*Child* 64).

The Vietnam War turned the whole Vietnam into a battlefield. Le Ly's hometown Ky La, a small village near Danang in Central Vietnam, also became a front line too. The U.S. provided not only the military forces, but also enormous financial support to the South Vietnamese Government. Since the U.S. army destroyed the villages to prevent the Viet Cong from lurking there, the farmers who lost their villages were forced to leave their villages to cities like Saigon where they could not live even a day without cash. The U.S. lost Vietnamese support in spite of the enormous aid because the farmers, the majority of the South Vietnamese, regarded Americans as their enemy (*Child* 3). Le Ly had to live through the war of Vietnam in this condition and suffered trauma of this experience (*Child* 24).

War guilt, I had learned, was partly the chagrin you feel

for outliving a crisis that once consumed you. One does not strike a match where there is no darkness, although one may still be afraid of the dark. (*Child* 24)

Her nervous tension triggered by her trauma occurs every time she faces problems in her daily life and often she has been hospitalized. She regrets having survived and gone through the hardships of the war.

The American public, in general, were not concerned much with the Vietnam War and they had only little knowledge of Vietnam. Duane Phan and Nina Hah claims that “American stereotypes usually represent the Vietnamese as poor, uneducated peasants who are victims of war; another is of Vietnamese as the enemy, ‘gooks’ who kill American soldiers” (70). In fact, Le Ly was shocked by the media report that Americans considered the Vietnamese as “Oriental,” that is, the enemy of the U.S. A journalist and TV war correspondent interviewed a young GI in front of a burning village and asked, “Do you think your operation was successful?” The soot-faced young man answered with a big grin, “Yeah, we burned down a lot of Charlie’s homes and destroyed the village—really killed a lot of gooks!” (*Child* 25). When Le Ly cried over the war news in America remembering her family in Vietnam, her husband’s family criticized her for crying “for no reason at all” (*Child* 26).

Monique T. D. Tru'ong claims that "For Vietnamese Americans, this question of loyalties and, more specifically, sides has been a recurring and life-threatening issue since the arrival of United States forces in South Vietnam" (226-27). The Vietnamese, especially the peasants, were forced to cooperate with either side. They were controlled by the South Vietnamese and the U.S. soldiers during the day but were under the control of the Viet Cong during the night and anyone who disobeyed was killed without mercy.

Compared with Vietnamese Americans, Japanese Americans had a rather different war influence. Japanese Americans, generally, experienced World War II indirectly, except the second generation who joined the U.S. army and were sent to the front lines of Europe and the Pacific Ocean. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in 1941, approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans in the West Coast were imprisoned in the internment camps and deprived of freedom and citizenship. This is the institutionalized racism of the U. S. government.

In the United States, the fear of "the unassimilable Asian" (Kim, *Asian* 9) immigrants has bolstered acts of institutionalized racism, from the Immigration Act of 1924 to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Ultimately, it is not a question of assimilation

and adaptation but one of the Asian American's overall capacities for trustworthiness, loyalty, and patriotism to the United States. This lingering doubt and distrust fueled the social rejection that allowed for the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Japanese Americans embodied an underlying fear on the part of Americans that an enemy front was coexisting inside the geographic boundaries of the United States. (Tru'o'ng 226-27)

The effect of the war and racism on Japanese Americans can be seen in the case of Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani, a second generation Japanese American. Furious about his three and half year internment and disenfranchisement by the U.S. government, Mirikitani refused to accept American Social Security even though he was over eighty years old and insisted he was not to be taken care of by "crap government" or "poor America" (Hattendorf). The war and the institutionalized racism left deep wound in the immigrants' mind.

Le Ly relates how she feels about her life in the U.S.:

All my actions—done in good American fashion—seemed to betray everything my father had taught me. My only hope was that by doing things "the American way" while

keeping the Vietnamese way in my heart, I would somehow wind up doing what was right. (*Child* 170)

This is exactly the way of life Horace M. Kallen insists in his argument, that is, to live close together as citizens while retaining one's own racial characteristics (Yui and Endo 30). The legislation which had long prohibited Asians to become naturalized citizens in the U.S. was repealed in 1952 (Niiya 206). It is obvious that Le Ly does not show any sign of "abjection." Julia Kristeva in *The Powers of Horror* claims that abjection is the process of forming one's identity by discarding one's offensive parts (5). In his *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent*, David Leiwei Li differentiates "alienation" and "abjection" by saying that ". . . the discourse of 'alienation' typically constructs Asiatics as unamalgamatable, and the discourse of abjection casts them as essentially assimilable . . ." (9). Le Ly falls into the "alienation" category.

Nisei Daughter, an autobiography by Japanese American Nisei writer Monica Sone, is categorized by Traise Yamamoto as "abjection" story.

What before the war had been an awareness of participating in two cultures became during and after the war a split self. "I felt," writes Monica Sone, "like a

despised, pathetic two-headed freak, a Japanese and an American.” (113-14)

Le Ly did not suffer from identity problems like Sone did because she persisted with Vietnamese identity and refused to assimilate into American culture. Le Ly was amazed at American culture and civilization at first but was skeptical at the same time. She did not think of herself as a “two-headed freak” (Sone 158) of split identity like Sone did. The “dualistic theory of good and evil” (Kokusai 115), an idea adapted peculiarly to the Vietnamese, has been firmly embedded in their minds over the course of their long time resistance to invaders. Given this trait, it is plausible that the Vietnamese had an inflexible attitude in understanding the culture of the others.

In her discussion about assimilation and identity of immigrants, Yuki Kusuhara argues that the more immigrants lose their original culture, the more they assimilate into the society of the new country (99); immigrants are forced to lose something of themselves in compensation for assimilation, which would leave them in agony over the cultural conflict and therefore make them anxious about their identity (106). This does not apply to Le Ly. She could not have an identity either as a Vietnamese or an American, that is to say, she was a diaspora. Le Ly was an ‘alien ineligible for citizenship.’

1.2 Hisaye Yamamoto's "Epithalamium"

"Epithalamium" (1960) is about a Japanese Nisei Catholic Worker volunteer in Staten Island of a New York suburb after World War II. The author Yamamoto worked for the Catholic Worker on the island as a volunteer and she authored the story on the basis of her experience. The central character of the story is Yuki Tsumagari who experienced internment during the War. Yuki comes to New York from San Francisco to become a Catholic Worker after telling her mother that ". . . It's just that I feel in my heart that there are some things I have to do first, before I start having children and settling down" (67). There are many quotations from the Bible and the missal in the story. Four poems are embedded in the story and they play an important role in the story's development. In this paper, assimilation issue of the main character in "Epithalamium" will be analyzed by interpreting the Bible, the missal and the poems.

Catholic Worker was founded by Dorothy Day (1897-1980) and Peter Maurin (1877-1949) in 1933, when the U.S. was at the bottom of the depression. Catholic Worker aimed at social justice, relief of the poor and anti-war activities. Day, who is the model of Madame Marie in "Epithalamium," dropped out of a university and began a social reform movement. She had a belief that some kind of action was required for a reform

movement, so she often participated in demonstrations. Simultaneously, she, as a journalist, sought to appeal social reform to the public. As a Catholic, Day emphasized the importance of the religion for social reform, explaining that Catholic churches were for the people who suffered from discrimination and poverty. In 1932, Day met Maurin who later became her co-founder. Maurin is the model for René Zualet in the story. Maurin, being a Basque and living in France, began working for Christian Democratic movement. But the movement politicized gradually, so he left France. He went to Canada and the U.S., and in 1932 he got a job as a handyman in a camp which the Catholic Church organized in the north of New York. After meeting Day there, Maurin encouraged her to publish a newspaper aiming at social reform based on Catholic teachings. A monthly newspaper, the *Catholic Worker*, was first published in May, 1933. Then she started programs to help people suffering from discrimination, poverty and other problems. One Catholic Worker commune based on Christian teachings after another has been founded since then. And their movement has continued even to present (cf. Ellsberg xxvii).

Dorothy Day wrote that Yamamoto was the best model of the Catholic Worker. Yamamoto worked quietly, efficiently, washing up the kitchen, dining room, hall, and corridors. Their house was spotless, thanks to her job, and yet she always had

time to type articles, to read both to herself and to her small child (“Peter Maurin Farm—April 1954”). Yamamoto found time to read every evening and for short periods during the day, and was ever willing to teach others or lend a hand to others (“On Pilgrimage—September 1954”). Yamamoto even read *Aspects of Buddhism* in the *Catholic Worker* (“On Pilgrimage—May 1954”).

Yamamoto talked about her religious view in the joint interview with Wakako Yamauchi by King-Kok Cheung.

I was brought up Buddhist . . . I was already in my thirties when I accepted the idea that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. That automatically makes me a Christian, right? But I don't reject any of that Buddhism. It's like taking Catholicism down to Mexico and coming up with Our Lady of Guadalupe. You can synthesize. (*Words Matter* 350)

In addition, Yamamoto said in another interview with Cheung that she was a *Catholic Worker* but she is not a Catholic (Cheung, “Interview” 81). The *Catholic Worker* newspaper was one of the *Los Angeles Tribune* exchanges, and Yamamoto's job was to cull items from the exchanges. The *Catholic Worker* fascinated her, so she began taking the copies home and re-reading them. After she left the *Los Angeles Tribune*, she

subscribed to the *Catholic Worker* for seven years, and the more she read it, the more she “wanted to be part of the movement” (Cheung, “Interview” 81).

Yamamoto explains that the Catholic Worker aims at “non-violence, voluntary poverty, love for the land, and attempt to put into practice the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount” (“Writing” 67). In the Sermon on the Mount is preached that:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:3-10)

Yamamoto exchanged letters with Day, and later Yamamoto met her. After careful consideration Yamamoto came to New York from the West Coast to be a Catholic Worker with a view to attempting to put into practice the precepts of the

Sermon on the Mount (Cheung, *Words Matter* 364-65). Such experience of her in the Catholic Worker became the background of the story “Epithalamium.”

The story starts with the Japanese American central character Yuki Tsumagari’s retrospection on the day before she leaves the Catholic community in New York to go back home in the West Coast. That day she marries an Italian American, Marco Cimarusti, who is undergoing rehabilitation in the community to recover from alcoholism. She recollects the places where she has made love with Marco such as a cranny in the community and the seashore or woods belonging to a seminary. Yuki’s pregnancy has ended in miscarriage and she continues to bleed and has confined herself to her room. The narrative explains that Yuki “had become a physical, moral, and spiritual ruin” (62).

Yuki’s sexual experience is always accompanied by the fear of exposure to others: “. . . some instinct, so positive that she [Yuki] blushed with shame, informed her that they [Yuki and Marco] had been watched, in shocked silence, by some young seminarian who had come to pray by the ocean in solitude . . . they had either been nearly discovered or discovered by a couple of kids racing their horses” (62). The feeling of having been watched is strangely gained by her “instinct,” not by her conviction or conjecture. “Epithalamium” is set in New York after

World War II. In those days, Japanese Americans suffered extreme racial discrimination, hostility and anti-Japanese sentiment. Nisei suffered the trauma of internment camps consciously or unconsciously. Yamamoto said that she had come across with a realization that her “choice [to be a Catholic Worker] was a natural outcome of the internment” (Cheung, “Interview” 81). Japanese Americans were discriminated against by laws such as the Gentlemen's Agreement (1908-) (Daniels, *Asian* 125), California Alien Land Law (1913-) (Daniels, *Asian* 138-44), Immigration Act of 1924 (Daniels, *Prisoners* 15), and the Anti-miscegenation Law (Nakano 195). During World War II, Japanese Americans including Nisei who had American citizenship were interned and guarded as enemy aliens by the U.S. government. Yuki’s habit of worrying extremely about what other people think of her might have naturally been born in her mind due to the racial discrimination and the internment.

Yamamoto explained that Nisei’s inferiority complex was due to a belief that their personal appearance and physical constitution were inferior to those of the whites which were stereotypically recognized as the norm of beauty. She said, “I am sure we [Nisei] were brainwashed by the movies we saw, to wish for blond hair, tall stature, etc . . . Perhaps, unconsciously, we still compare ourselves to the white stereotypes of beauty, the movie stars” (Cheung, “Interview” 79). In addition to this,

Japan's defeat in the war heightened the Nisei's sense of inferiority. To sum up, it can be said that a guilt complex of being Japanese has inhered in Yuki.

On the morning of Yuki's wedding, Hopkins' poem "God's Grandeur" suddenly arises in her mind. "*The World is charged with the grandeur of God. / It will flame out, like shining from shook foil; / It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil / Crushed . . .*" (60). In this part of the poem, the world is praised because it is filled with the grandeur of God. And the next passage follows: "As bookish as she [Yuki] had been all her life, she had never come to consciousness before with poetry singing in her head. Perhaps this was to be the first and last time" (60). This passage seems to foreshadow Yuki's future and have readers expect the Revelation of God's grace as well as some fateful events in Yuki's future.

"Epithalamium" has a lot of references to the Bible and the missal and quotes from four religious poems. Stephen Prickett discusses the effect of poetry by quoting John Dennis:

In 1704 John Dennis . . . cited the authority of Longinus to show "that the greatest sublimity is to be deriv'd from Religious Ideas" (Hooker 358). "Poetry," he concludes, "is the natural Language of Religion" (Hooker 364). It is the form through which the most profound human passion

finds expression, and at the same time it makes plain by its own “regularity” — that is, its expression of order by fulfilling the rules and laws of its being — “the works of God”, which like poetry, “tho” infinitely various, are extremely regular” (Hooker 335). (Prickett 40)

The Bible has a number of poems. Religion needs to depict the subtlety of human nature. Poetry allows religious texts to function effectively on this level. This might be the reason why all religions need poetic expressions. The four poems in “Epithalamium” have made the story poetic, which effectively expresses Yuki’s subtle feelings.

In the story, young seminarians sing “Tenebrae of a Passion” on the beach belonging to the monastery: “The thief from the cross cried out: ‘Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.’ . . . How art thou turned to bitterness, that thou shouldst crucify me, and release Barabbas?”(61). It is on the same beach that Yuki, who is moved to tears by the beauty of the music and the religious solemnity, has sex for the first time. Yuki feels that this sexual experience is miserable for her. The place Marco and Yuki sit down after having sex is “on the huge damp rocks at low tide” (62). Compared with the picturesque scene of the sacred beautiful music of a Passion, the scene of Yuki’s first sex is bleak and pitiful.

However, there is a song which praises love and the body of a woman in the Bible:

How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love, with your delights! / Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit. / I said, "I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit." May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples, / and your mouth like the best wine. (Song of Solomon 7:6-9)

The Song of Solomon is filled with the great joy of life which derives naturally from the religious belief. Yuki is described as having a "plain brown face" (67) and she tells of the size of her breasts: "I bought a couple [of brassiere], the smallest I could find, and they just kept hiking up on me" (62). Compared with the Song of Solomon, the rendering of Yuki's body and her sexual experience sounds pitiful and gloomy. This gloominess of "Epithalamium" stands in sharp contrast to the brightness or beauty of the Song of Solomon. This contrast shows that Yuki holds no such optimistic view of her own life as in the Song of Solomon.

Marco is depicted as having "all the courage, moral and physical, which she [Yuki] had always felt she lacked (she was

afraid of elevators; she had never had the nerve to learn how to drive a car)” (66). Yuki of small stature with flat chest loves poems. She is mentally and physically quite different from Marco. Yuki wants to marry a man who expresses his love in poems, but in fact Marco does not have any poetic sense at all. Instead he says, “It’s like you’ve got a rope tied around my neck that won’t let go” or “If I had a million dollars, I’d just sit here all day long and just look at you!”(67). Hence, eventually for Yuki, “there was no need for poetry; the mere thought of Marco was enough to make her bowels as molten wax” (66).

Marco is “the type of man who should have been driving a Cadillac convertible, that expensive wristwatch glinting in the sunlight as he impatiently drummed his left hand on the outside of the door, waiting for the light to change —with yes, some golden-haired goddess by his side” (67). He is also a man who “retained an enormous vitality . . . he has a gift for work that not many are given . . . he spades the ground out there, with such ease, such grace . . . he is wonderfully made” (66). But he was an alcoholic. In addition, he approaches Yuki forcefully or almost threateningly. He “phoned and threatened, still drunk, to go away forever if she did not marry him that very day” (60).

The difference of Marco and Yuki is reflected in the racial discrimination against Asian Americans in the U.S. at that time, and the gender discrimination against Japanese American

women in the Japanese American society. As Stan Yogi claims:

After being the targets of intense racism and hostility, many nikkei were eager to blend in and not be noticed. In an effort to rebuild their lives [after the internment], many sought to merge into the American mainstream, to forget about the traumas of internment, and in some cases to escape from nikkei communities and heritage. (134)

If Yuki seeks to “merge into the American mainstream,” that is, to assimilate into the white mainstream America, it is understandable that for her “there was no need for poetry; the mere thought of Marco was enough to make her bowels as molten wax” (66). Marco makes Yuki’s love for him stronger and more passionate. This could be because of her wish to escape Nisei’s difficult situation and belong to white society. Yuki’s course of life of moving to New York from San Francisco and marrying a white man, corresponds to Japanese American Nisei’s desire of assimilation into the white mainstream. Although Marco is an Italian and alcoholic, to marry him is the best first step to take for Yuki, a racially marginalized Japanese American Nisei woman. Marco has been “wounded three times in the recent war, he wore a good-sized crater just below his left rib” (66). Similarly

in the Bible, Jesus Christ is betrayed by Judas three times (Luke.22:54-62) and has spear wounds on the right side (John.19:34). Here is suggested an ironical contrast between Jesus Christ leading Christians to heaven and Marco making Yuki an outsider of Japanese community and seemingly leading her to white society.

The reason Yuki has become a Catholic Worker is not explained clearly in the story. But Madame Marie says that Catholic Workers are “idealistic young and not-so-young women who, like Yuki, had been drawn there ostensibly by God but probably more because of their own ambiguous reasons” (63). There must have been some precedents who had come to the Catholic Worker and married alcoholic men. The words of Madame Marie are harsh on Yuki, “who had been such a serious and devout member of the Community for two years” (65). Yuki cannot talk back to Madame Marie because she has had an affair with the alcoholic Marco in the Community. Madame Marie has received the Revelation of God “over and above her earthly contentment” (64) and has become a Catholic Worker. Madame Marie is a precedent of Yuki despite the fact that Madame Marie is from white society.

Yuki cannot help thinking that her cleanliness contains impurities: “Near the creek, where she had been so delighted to find earlier that spring (it had been St. Joseph’s Day)

those first curious shells, striated maroon and pale green, of skunk cabbage, the back of her dress had been streaked with mud” (62). Soon after that, Yuki’s anxiety is to continue: “always there had been the anxiety of being suddenly come upon, of scandalizing the whole Community, and most of all, of giving grief to saintly, gentle Madame Marie” (62). Madame Marie says that “there was the wise virgin who, immediately upon realizing that she was coming to regard an alcoholic with unseemly tenderness, had decided to leave the Zualet Community. Now she was leading a happy and useful life “with a group of Catholic laywomen” (63). In contrast, according to Madame Marie, there is a woman who married an alcoholic and is leading an unhappy, impoverished life, suffering from domestic violence. Madame Marie’s words evoke “the wise and the foolish Virgins” (Matt. 25:1-13) and seem to foretell that Yuki’s marriage to the alcoholic Marco will end in disaster.

Madame Marie is a white, so, however deep her insight is, she does not understand the plight of a Japanese American Nisei and her desire for assimilation into the white mainstream by escaping from the Japanese American community. And also Yuki’s mother, an Issei, cannot understand her Nisei daughter’s struggle. The mother had tried to persuade Yuki to marry a Japanese American man and settle down to a peaceful family life when she just passed thirty years old. However, Yuki had left for

New York to become a Catholic Worker. She imagines her mother's astonishment and disappointment in learning her marriage to a "*hakujin*" (68) alcoholic. Yuki worries about her parents as well as her own life with an alcoholic husband. In her despair, "Suddenly, Yuki could not see ahead at all" (68). One day she goes out of the community with Marco who is looking for a job. Yuki, Marco, and his African American friend, Manuel, witness a crime and an accident on a street happen one after the other. Such a scene is just a part of an everyday life in the American society.

Even during the simple legalization of marriage in the registry office, Marco is drunk, and drinking more, he can barely walk. His friend explains that "when he's drinking, you can't trust him [Marco] with a quarter to go across the street and come back with a loaf of bread" (65). At a bus stop, Yuki mutters in her mind that "O bright unhappiness. O shining sorrow" (65), holding the head of Marco on her lap. Yuki foresees the brightness of white society where she wishes to belong and the unhappy life with an alcoholic husband, and the shining of love and the sorrow of isolation from the Japanese American community. Yuki's words of oxymoron are an outcry of the struggling Japanese American Nisei woman seeking to assimilate into the white mainstream. Yuki does not seem to be aware of her own desire, and questions herself "Why this man?" (65-66).

Yuki keeps remembering Hopkins' poem on the way back to the community with heavily drunken Marco.

*The World is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed . . .
. . . And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright
wings. (68-69)*

Yuki worries about her future with an alcoholic husband and about her isolation from the Japanese American community. And she is deeply concerned about her Issei parents' disappointment. Suddenly she feels that her marriage might be without hope. But at once, she clings to the hope that the marriage could be the revelation of God. She interprets Hopkins' poem as a message that the world is full of God's dignity, love, and good intention. However, the narrator adds that "it is a wicked and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign" (68), implying that Yuki Tsumagari's future life is uncertain or rather dubious of its success in assimilation.

Yuki marries on the Feast Day of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist, which suggests that she feels St. John the Baptist would condemn her for defiling holy places by having sex there. Furthermore, on the morning of her wedding, while listening to the priest at mass, Yuki remembers the last part of Gustave Flaubert's *Herodias*, where Iakoban's head is severed: "As it was very heavy, they carried it alternately" (69). Yuki might be superimposing the heaviness of Iakoban's severed head on her obscure future. That day is also the memorial day of St. Sabina, who was converted by a maidservant and beheaded under the Emperor Hadrian. However, the story closes with a sentence about St. Sabina that "it was not certain whether such a woman had existed at all" (69), implying that although Yuki is desperately trying to assimilate into white society by leaving Catholic Community and Japanese community, her converted life has no solid foundation and her future will be uncertain.

King-Kok Cheung explains that "Whether Yamamoto uses a Buddhist or a Christian frame of reference, her overriding tone is one of human questioning accompanied by understanding rather than of moral certainty coupled with religious complacency . . . we must be attentive to all the words on the page to unbury covert plots, fathom the character's repressed emotions, and detect the author's silent indictment and implicit sympathy" ("Introduction" xxi). Yamamoto's "human questioning

accompanied by understanding” can also be seen in her desire to become a “pacifist” (*Tribune*, 14 September 1946: 12) and her decision to “practice the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount” (Yamamoto, “Writing” 67). Yamamoto might have had a clear understanding of Japanese Americans’ desire for assimilation, but she does not seem to have approved of her character’s desire for assimilation, which might be the representation of Yamamoto’s strict awareness of the harsh reality of assimilation.

Chapter 2: Sexuality of Japanese Americans

For Hisaye Yamamoto her internment experience is so important that all her stories are intricately related to the racial discrimination which prompted the internment. Among Yamamoto's stories, excepting her poems, only "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" and "Las Vegas Charley" describe the details of the internment camp and the internees' life. To fully appreciate Yamamoto's stories it is imperative to have the basic knowledge about the internment and her own experience.

In this section, the sexuality of Yuki Tsumagari and Miss Sasagawara of "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" is discussed in relation to the internment and racial discrimination and therefore it would be appropriate to introduce the outline of the internment. The following is a rough portrait of the internment experience of Hisaye Yamamoto and other Japanese American writers in connection with their stories based on their camp experience.

In December, 1941, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii seemed vulnerable to further attack. Yet in Hawaii there was only minimal incarceration of Japanese; out of a population of some 150,000, fewer than 1,500 people were confined. Secretary of the Navy Knox called for mass incarceration in Hawaii; the nation's highest military commanders successfully resisted the pressure, not because of any concern for the civil rights of the Hawaiian Japanese, but because Japanese labor was crucial to both the civilian and the military economies in Hawaii. These facts show that the internment of Japanese Americans on the West Coast was not carried out on the basis of military necessity to defend the U.S. from Japanese military advancement but was due to racial discrimination (cf. Daniels, *Prisoners* 47-48). About 120,000 Japanese American men, women, and their children, more than two-thirds of whom were American citizens, were exiled from their home on the West Coast and incarcerated in the internment camps by the U.S. government. Hisaye Yamamoto was also confined in the Poston internment camp in Arizona.

The camps were in the deserts surrounded by the barbed wire fences, with floodlights and armed soldiers on the watch towers. Winter temperature was “-30°F” [-34°C] at the lowest at Heart Mountain, Minidoka, and Topaz (Daniels, *Prisoners* 66). Most Japanese American Nisei served in the

segregated 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which became “the most decorated unit in the entire American Army” (Daniels, *Prisoners* 64). In what may have been the supreme irony of their service, “the men of the 442nd helped to liberate the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau even while their parents and other relatives were still held in American concentration camps” (Daniels, *Prisoners* 64). The men of the 442nd said the barracks of American internment camps and those of Dachau were the same (Watanabe 244). Hisaye Yamamoto depicted the inside of the barracks in her poem “Exile 1942–45.”

Knotholes in the lumber. / Sneezes, snores, laughter, /
sobs, sudden exclamations / spill family matters over /
into adjoining cubicles. / Privacy is reduced to whispers,
gestures, facial contortions, / hissed curses, silent
screams.

(*Rafu Shimpo*, 19 Dec. 1981)

According to Roger Daniels’ *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II*, Japanese Americans were not allowed to ship “household goods to camp, so people had to sell, give away or discard what they could not carry” (55). And “most goods were sold at ‘bargain’ prices: the buyers knew that the owners had to sell . . . One woman remembered, years later, that

her mother smashed her wedding dishes, brought from Japan, one by one rather than sell them for a pittance” (55). The U.S. violation of civil and human rights was justified by President Roosevelt on the grounds of military necessity. “The Constitution was treated as a scrap of paper not only by . . . Roosevelt but also by the entire Congress, which approved and implemented everything done to the Japanese Americans” (47).

Internment experience had oppressed Japanese Americans for over forty years after the war. Issei and Nisei generally considered their experience to be shameful and did not talk about it because they did not want their descendants to feel the same. Through the period of 1960 to 1970, when minorities were active to promote the movement to expand their rights, Sansei began to question about the omission in Japanese family histories. Then Nisei and Sansei started campaigning for apology and redress from the U.S. government for the unconstitutional internment and lost property. Not only Japanese Americans but also other Asian Americans were involved in this movement. At last, Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, and apologized formally to Japanese Americans and paid 20,000 dollars to each person alive who was interned.

Among Nisei writers Mine Okubo, Monica Sone, and Jeanne Wakatsuki Huston as well as Hisaye Yamamoto expressed the bewilderment of massive uprooting. “The Legend of

Miss Sasagawara,” Yamamoto’s haunting story about derangement, is set in a camp. Yamamoto wrote in an essay:

Any extensive literary treatment of the Japanese in this country would be incomplete without some acknowledgement of the camp experience . . . It is an episode in our collective life which wounded us more painfully than we realize. I didn’t know myself what a lump it was in my subconscious until a few years ago when I watched one of the earlier television documentaries on the subject, narrated by the mellow voice of Walter Cronkite. To my surprise, I found the tears trickling down my cheeks and my voice squeaking out of control, as I tried to explain to my amazed husband and children why I was weeping. (“ . . . I Still ” 69-70)

Most Japanese American Nisei writers’ stories, including Yamamoto’s, can be regarded as some forms of autobiographies because they are closely related to their own experience. Japanese Americans’ internment experience had a great influence on Yamamoto as well as on other Nisei writers.

In the story “The Legend of Miss Sasagawara” the main character Miss Sasagawara had been a ballerina before the

war. Her gracefulness stands out in a desert camp. The narrator's friend Elsie tells her that Miss Sasagawara looks twenty-five years old, but actually she is thirty-nine, and that "she wasn't sorry she never got married" (21). She and her father Reverend Sasagawara, a Buddhist minister, live together in the camp. Reverend Sasagawara's "lifelong aim was to achieve Nirvana, that saintly state of moral purity and universal wisdom" (32). The life in the camp is "considered by those about him as sheer imprisonment, but he had felt free for the first time in his long life" (32).

It became possible for him to extinguish within himself all unworthy desire and consequently all evil, to concentrate on that serene, eight-fold path of highest understanding, highest mindedness, highest speech, highest action, highest livelihood, highest recollectedness, highest endeavor, and highest meditation. (32-33)

The internment camp is sheer heaven for Reverend Sasagawara to realize his Buddhist faith, whereas his daughter shuts herself up and does not acclimatize herself to the life of the internment camp. Other Japanese internees talk about her as a "crazy" (21) woman. At last she is sent to a mental hospital. However, what

she longs for is the 'life for a human being' in contrast to other internees who are accustomed easily to the inhuman internment camp life. Seemingly 'crazy' Miss Sasagawara is the representation of the resistance to the inhuman life in the camp where one cannot have privacy. What is the place of self-realization and freedom for Rev. Sasagawara is that of self-renunciation and confinement for Miss Sasagawara. "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" is a story of protest to the inhumanity of the internment by portraying the legendary insanity of Miss Sasagawara and asking who is actually sane or insane.

Yamamoto's poem "Exile 1942-45" begins with the scene in which Japanese Americans leave their home for an internment camp, and it goes on to depict the camp life in detail. Below are the lines from the poem:

We go through the motions / of living as though they are
of moment, accidie the order / of each day, as we play
at this hapless game of patience.

But this limbo is only the shadow
of the substance, even so. / The real horror, unbelievable
Even now, is left to others.

Hermetically sealed in this

arid semblance of bliss, we are
purblind: the skies will soon / entertain a flowering more
spectacular than all the cherry
blossoms of any given year / put together, so dazzling as
to beshrivel man's hope for aye; / as well as unaware of
millions more over there, uprooted,
handpicked much as we, being
refined in such stunning ways,
as to make our much too dusty,
much too sunny sojourn approach
in review, their land, usurped, / of milk and honey.
(*Rafu Shimpo*, 19 Dec. 1981)

Yamamoto condemned the U.S. as a barbarous country, “their land, usurped, of milk and honey,” which tried to emasculate and destroy one ethnic group by internment. JACL showed “complete agreement” (Daniels, *Prisoners* 50) with the internment policy due to their orientation towards assimilation to the American mainstream at that time. When the internment policy was introduced by the U.S. government, Yamamoto criticized JACL for their cooperative attitudes towards the policy.

Compared with Yamamoto's other stories “Epithalamium” tells of sexuality rather explicitly. Teruyo Ueki sees a contrast of sex and sacredness in the story which depicts

the sexual passion of a man and a woman in a religious setting (Ueki and Sato44). She does not attach significance to racial issues and considers its theme as a universal one. However, Yuki does not try to hide her hometown, Japanese community, internment experience and her Japanese physicality. By considering Yuki's obstinate self-determining attitude about her life, her sexuality appears to be related to resistance as a process to establish her own life. Yuki's sexuality needs to be examined in view of gender and racial discrimination through which she tries to establish her own life.

Not only is Yuki aware of her objectified Asian body but also she feels that her existence itself is aberrant (Maeda 290); she says that "I'm a *katawa* [sic] . . . Nothing but a freak" (67). Her mentality is complicated by her sense of inferiority, anger and sadness caused by the internment, racial discrimination and strife with her Issei parents. Racial discrimination and the internment experience inflicted by the U.S. government have become traumatic for Yuki. She was interned in the Utah internment camp called Topaz during the war. It must have been a particularly harsh experience for Yuki because she is sensitive enough to love literature, particularly poems, and shed tears when she hears beautiful *Tenebrae* of seminary students.

In the U.S. Asian Americans have been objectified as

“sexual otherness” (Gairola 27) due to racial discrimination (cf. Lim 95). Etienne Balibar claims that “racism and sexism function together and in particular, racism always presupposes sexism” (49). Moreover, sexism stems from patriarchy as well especially in the Asian American community. Therefore, Japanese American women are supposed to have been twice oppressed: they have faced the racial discrimination in the American society and the gender discrimination by men in the Japanese community (cf. Cheung, *Articulate* 54).

From a character development point of view, Rosie in “Seventeen Syllables” (1949), Yoneko in “Yoneko’s Earthquake” (1951), and Yuki in “Epithalamium,” are closely related in Yamamoto’s stories. In “Seventeen Syllables,” Japanese American Nisei Rosie is in her puberty. Rosie feels something wrong with Mrs. Hayano who gave birth to four girls supposedly expecting she would finally have a boy. Rosie hates her father who shows his anger not by proper words but by attitude, and Rosie hates her mother as well who apologizes to the father without arguing. Nisei Rosie feels anger at her Issei parents who have embodied the patriarchal gender structure of Meiji era Japan. Her fury is intense to the extent that she imagines her family’s car being crushed and the death of her family including herself (12). In “Yoneko’s Earthquake,” Yoneko’s mother Mrs. Hosoume and a Filipino employee Marpo have an affair, which is

implied by Mrs. Hosoume's pregnancy and abortion at the end of the story. Having been brought up in the tradition of Meiji Japan, which does not allow free love or love marriage, Mrs. Hosoume's affair represents a chance to have a new way of life in America as a Japanese American Issei. Then, how does a Nisei daughter, who tries to live as an American, perceive Japanese values imposed on her by her parents? How does Nisei compromise on the disparity between Japanese values and her desire to assimilate into American society? Nisei's anguish seems to be more serious than Issei's.

The Nisei central characters of "Seventeen Syllables" and "Yoneko's Earthquake" are teenagers, but the Nisei central character Kiku has turned twenty years old in "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" (1950). Kiku shows understanding of and sympathy with Miss Sasagawara, a Nisei woman, and her life in the internment camp. Miss Sasagawara wears a vivid costume which reminds the others in the camp of her ballerina days. Other Japanese Americans in the camp gossip about her as a 'freak.' She is exposed to their inquisitive stare. She is unable to accept the inhuman treatment which other internees seem to have submitted to. Miss Sasagawara's weird deeds such as sitting next to and staring at a sleeping young man at night are taken for the representation of her sexual desire.

However, Ichimura Takako sees Miss Sasagawara's

desire as 'like a human being' in the inhuman and sexually repressive conditions (48). Furthermore, Ichimura insists that when Japanese women characters in Yamamoto's stories try to free themselves from the oppression of their life, they resort to sexuality on many occasions. Liberation from the gender discrimination in the Japanese American community is a step from one stage of life to another (Ichimura 47-48).

In "Epithalamium" Yuki's abjection is also accompanied by sexuality. Julia Kristeva explains in *Power of Horror* that abjection is the process of forming one's identity by discarding one's offensive parts (5). According to Traise Yamamoto, "The abject is characterized by disgusting corporeality and deformation; it is associated with decay, illness, defilement" (133). Yuki's "flat chest," "plain brown face" (67), sense of self-depreciation as "a *katawa* [sic]" [freak] (67), and the Japanese community are the abject to be discarded. According to Kazuhira Maeda, Yuki tries to reject her own Japanese-ness, which is a process of abjection. Yuki's process of abjection parallels her process of identity formation as a second generation Japanese American to leave the Japanese community and assimilate into the American mainstream even though she stays on the margin of white American society (291-93). Yuki tries to reconstruct her identity as Japanese American through the marriage to Marco, in the process of which sexuality is involved.

Yuki mutters in her mind: “O bright unhappiness. O shining sorrow” (65). These words are an outcry of a struggling Japanese American Nisei woman in the process of building new identity.

Traise Yamamoto points out that “direct, explicit mention of sexuality and the body has been until recently largely absent from the writings of Asian American women” (74). This is due to racial discrimination and distorted ethnicity inflicted by “the white man’s virility and the white race’s superiority” (Kim, “Such” 70). It is in a book published in 1999 that Traise Yamamoto made the above statement. However, “Epithalamium” was published in 1960. Hisaye Yamamoto broke her silence on sexuality in comparatively early days. Though Yuki cannot understand why she loves Marco, the narrator tells how Yuki feels about Marco: “the mere thought of Marco was enough to make her [Yuki’s] bowels as molten wax” (66). This expression reveals Yuki’s desire for the assimilation into the white mainstream and emotional healing from the trauma of the internment, racial discrimination and conflicts with the Issei parents.

Ichimura quotes Michel Foucault’s moral of homosexuality that sexuality invents a new way of existence that one cannot expect would be possible at the present moment (Foucault 13). From this viewpoint, sexuality for Yuki could be a means to liberate herself from the old life, that is, the life as

Japanese in the Japanese American community. Yuki's sexual experience is always accompanied by the fear of exposure to others: "some instinct, so positive that she [Yuki] blushed with shame, informed her that they [Yuki and Marco] had been watched, in shocked silence, by some young seminarian who had come to pray by the ocean in solitude . . . they had either been nearly discovered or discovered by a couple of kids racing their horses" (62). The feeling of having been watched is strangely gained by her "instinct," not by her conviction or conjecture. This instinct might have rooted in her experience as a Japanese American. During World War II, Japanese Americans including Nisei like Yuki who had American citizenship, were interned and guarded as enemy aliens in the internment camps by the U.S. government. It could be that Yuki's self-consciousness of worrying extremely about what other people think of her is caused by this racial discrimination and the internment.

Yuki's sexual experience is described emphatically that "there was scarcely a nook or cranny of the Community that they [Marco and Yuki] had not defiled" (61). They have sex frequently and passionately on "the wooded stretch of beach belonging to a nearby monastery and seminary" (61). Yuki "had urgently sensed that it was against God's will, as though some supernatural agent had been sent to deter them [Marco and Yuki] from their immorality; each moment stolen for love had been

unmistakably tainted” (61). And Yuki always feels anxiety of “giving grief to saintly, gentle Madame Marie” (62). However, Yuki does not stop having sex with Marco. Once “they had walked up Meadowvale Lane in the spring rain and stopped every few minutes to cling and kiss, careless of their sodden clothes and the few cars that slowly passed” (61). Yuki wonders if it is “against her will? Hardly (she had made no outcry; she could have firmly refused to . . .)” (61). The text insists that sex is a kind of expression of Yuki’s strong will. Such an explicit declaration of sexuality cannot be found in Yamamoto’s other stories.

Madame Marie talks about the women who have married alcoholics and lived in misery. She tries to persuade Yuki not to marry Marco. Even so, Yuki never hesitates to marry Marco. Yuki’s mother urges Yuki to marry a Japanese American, but Yuki distresses her mother by going to New York to study Catholicism. She pictures her mother’s astonishment and disappointment when she finds that her daughter has married a “*hakujin*” (68) alcoholic. Although she feels that she has committed a sin by having sex on sacred places and she understands her mother’s agony and disappointment, she does not give up the life and marriage she has chosen. Yuki’s sexuality and self-assertion could be understood as the reflection of her resistance to the Nisei mindset and culture and the attempt to make a new identity.

Asian American men were considered “‘hypersexual’ to ‘asexual’ and even ‘homosexual’” (Espiritu, 90) and Asian American women were considered “both superfeminine and masculine” (Espiritu, 106). Compared with Yamamoto’s other protagonists, Yuki has strong will to stick to her own way of life and sexuality. The text shows resistance to racial discrimination and the Asian stereotype by emphasizing Yuki’s sexuality.

Strong resemblance is seen in the sexuality of Yuki and Miss Sasagawara. Both of the main characters insist on their own ways of life through their sexuality. Although Yuki is anxious about marrying an alcoholic she makes her decision all by herself to lead a new way of life with him. In this way Yuki shows her resistance to gender discrimination against Asian American women. This is the answer by Yamamoto’s Nisei heroine to gender discrimination and Yuki is different from Japanese American Issei women who cannot escape their situation depicted in “Seventeen Syllables” and “Yoneko’s Earthquake.”

Hisaye Yamamoto wrote about the white men’s “Haru fan club” in a column of the *Los Angeles Tribune* (February 21/28, 1948). Yamamoto had resisted the image of stereotypical Asian woman since 1948 in the columns. “Haru” in Lafcadio Hearn’s *Kokoro* is a woman who embodies the gender of the patriarchal Meiji Japan. In Yamamoto’s “Haru fan club” a white man

asserted that “the American educational system has made of the American woman a kind of freak” (*Tribune* February 21, 1948) and that the Oriental woman, particularly the Japanese woman, is the true woman. Against him, Yamamoto insisted that “with Haru, loyalty was probably a matter of habit” (*Tribune February* 28, 1948), the same as a “faithful dog” (*Tribune February* 28, 1948). Yamamoto advocated that “women of the western world, arise, arise, you have nothing to lose” (*Tribune February* 21, 1948). Yamamoto tried to condemn the white man for his biased view of Japanese women in terms of gender as early as in 1948.

Nisei’s sexuality is different from Issei’s as is seen in the case of Mrs. Hosoume of “Yoneko’s Earthquake” and Rosie’s mother Tome Hayashi of “Seventeen Syllables.” These two Issei women try to escape from the Japanese gender roles by resorting to haiku composition or religious conversion, which is an escape in the world of imagination (Ichimura 48). But in the case of Yuki, Nisei Japanese American, her sexuality is a means to realize in the real world her desire for assimilation in the post-war America.

Chapter 3: Racism

3.1 The Stream of Racial Consciousness in “A Fire in Fontana”

Yamamoto was one of the few Japanese Americans who criticized JACL outright for their cooperative attitudes towards the U.S. internment policy. She could not help being concerned about the injustice of internment which stemmed from racial discrimination. Also Yamamoto showed understanding of and sympathy with the racial discrimination issue of African Americans. However, she suffered for the differences in attitudes and thoughts towards racial discrimination and the way of protesting between African Americans and herself. Finally she could not bear the suffering and kept herself away from African Americans. During this period Yamamoto came across an incident, the death of an African American family, the Shorts, by suspicious fire. Because she had made an article about the

Short's complaint of the persecution from white people, she regretted and was gnawed by a sense of guilt. The incident was so significant for her as to change her life afterward. This chapter will discuss Yamamoto's thought and reaction towards racial discrimination in her short story "A Fire in Fontana."

The story starts with a confession of main character about her peculiar changes happened in her mind.

Something weird happened to me not long after the end of the Second World War. I wouldn't go so far as to say that I, a Japanese American, became Black, because that's a pretty melodramatic statement. But some kind of transformation did take place, the effects of which are with me still. (150)

The resistance of a Japanese American Nisei woman to the racial discrimination is narrated in the story. It shows the complicated emotion of a Nisei woman who was interned by racial discrimination. The story was published in the *Rafu Shimpo* in 1985, but the story dates back forty years to the period during World War II. The story can be regarded as a compilation of her thoughts about racial discrimination over the forty years. In this autobiographical story Yamamoto tells her view about the internment of Japanese Americans and the racial discrimination

against African Americans by white Americans.

The first-person narrator “I” tells the incident she experiences when she is on a bus going back to the camp in Arizona where her father stays. When the bus is in St. Louis, she sees a racial discrimination against an African American. The white woman sitting next to her is “filled with glee” (151). The seatmate says “Well, it’s all in the way you’re brought up. I was brought up this way, so that’s the way I feel” (151). From this event, the narrator feels “there was a connection between my seatmate’s joy and our [Japanese Americans] having been put in that hot and windblown place of barracks” (151). The first job the narrator gets after coming out of the internment camp is a news reporter’s position in an African American newspaper in Los Angeles. She gradually becomes aware of the reality of racial discrimination, and her awareness of the racial discrimination becomes deeper.

The story avoids one-sided self-righteousness and a rational judgment is made on the narrator herself as well. The narrator and main character refers to African Americans’ skin colors as “a negro who looked absolutely white” (152) or “the color of café-au-lait” (152). She considers African Americans as individuals and not collectively as a whole. However, at the same time she does not accept one-sided self-righteousness. When she is in “a spirited running argument going on almost every day”

(152), she “got a snootful of it” (152) because African Americans talk about race all the time, full of strong hatred: “No matter what the initial remark, if the discussion continued for any length of time, the issue boiled down to Race” (152).

Hisaye Yamamoto’s stance towards racial issues based on her “humanity” is firmly embedded in the story. One day in the story, Short, African American, calls on the office and complains about “threats of get-out-or-else” (153) after purchasing a house in Fontana where many white people live. An African American co-worker shows her hatred, “I hate White people! They’re all the same!” (153). “I,” the narrator, feels something is wrong with her words. To show an example of a white person’s critical conduct about racial discrimination, “I” introduces a story of a white priest who had been so dubious about the fire in Fontana that he wrote a protest play about the fire. In this way, “I” refutes the co-worker’s claim that all whites are the same. ‘I’ had made from her notes “a calm, impartial story, using ‘alleged’ and ‘claimed’ and other cautious journalese” (154). Later the Short family dies from the fire which is suspected to have been set deliberately by a white person. She regrets that she should have gone to greater length to describe the situation.

Her remorse and mental complication which would eventually change her life are described as follows:

It was around this time that I felt something happening to me, but I couldn't put my finger on it. It was something like an itch I couldn't locate, or like food not being cooked enough, or something undone which should have been done, or something forgotten which should have been remembered. Anyway, something was unsettling my innards. (154)

She can feel the pain of a discriminated person and she wants to protest against the discrimination. However she thinks that she does not have a firm basis to do so and that she is not qualified to speak out about the discrimination.

One afternoon when she is on a trolley bus, she hears a dispute "between the Negro driver of the bus I was on . . . and the White driver of the other bus" (155). The quarrel ends with the white driver waving his arms and cursing, "Why, you Black bastard!" (155). She feels queasy with anxiety and she knows the African American co-worker's fury and she thinks of reporting the white driver to his management. However, she remains silent and wonders "what could I have said?" (155). She is furious about the incident and wants to do something against the injustice of discrimination. However, she feels sick and cringes at the blow of those abusive words. She falls into a dismal mood and she recognizes how helpless she is against the discrimination.

Her dilemma is explained by telling her memory of two persons. One is a Japanese Christian evangelist who, before the war, used to shout on a corner in Little Tokyo. The other is a very large boy in a wheelchair and there is a clean white handkerchief tied around his neck to catch the saliva which occasionally trickles down from a corner of his mouth. She says that she “should have been an evangelist at Seventh and Broadway, shouting out the name of the Short family and their predicament in Fontana. But I had been as handicapped as the boy in the wheelchair, as helpless” (155). She could not protest over the racial discrimination against the Shorts in a powerful voice because she did not know the best course of action as a news reporter who was supposed to write unbiased articles. She says that she should have been the evangelist preaching about Christ. However, the evangelist’s face had been awry and purple with the passion of his message, and his “call to salvation . . . sounded like the sharp barking of a dog, ‘Wan, wan, wan! Wan, wan, wan!’” (154). He must not have realized the difference between the words from his mouth and the words of Christ’s. His misunderstanding that he could preach the right words of Jesus might have made his preaching meaningless like a dog’s barking. At the same time, it shows the hypocrisy of the main character in her behavior acting as if she were an African American. The more she feels African Americans’ anger over the persecution due to

racial discrimination, the deeper her doubt becomes about what she, neither white nor African American, can do against the discrimination. The handicapped boy in the wheelchair represents her helplessness.

She talks about a young man Otis. He is a white musician in an African American band. The group becomes respected in the jazz and blues circles. Later Otis becomes the pastor of a church in Watts. She says that “he, too, arrived at a place in his life from which there was no turning back. But his life . . . represents a triumph” (150). It is because he can protest against racial discrimination from the standpoint of a white that she thinks his life is successful. On the other hand, she cannot speak out either from the standpoint of the whites or from that of African Americans. As a result she might have thought of herself as an outsider in the racial issues.

But I don't know whether mine is or not. Because when I realized that something was happening to me, I scrambled to backtrack for awhile. By then it was too late. I continued to look like the Nisei I was, with my height remaining at slightly over four feet ten, my hair straight, my vision myopic. Yet I know that this event transpired inside me; sometimes I see it as my inward self being burnt black in a certain fire. (150)

The expression “my inward self being burnt black” shows her deep empathy with African Americans. At the same time, it seems to show the main character’s irritability to her helplessness. She feels guilty about the Shorts’ death. She is angry at racial discrimination, but at the same time she is disappointed by her own helplessness.

She is to be neglected gradually by her family and friends because when they fun around or dare “so much as to imitate Southerly accents,” she pounces on them “like a cougar” (155). Even her correspondent tells her that she should not speak out too much about racial issues. Her sense of responsibility and helplessness oppresses her, and she leaves the *Los Angeles Tribune* for the East. Her decision to leave the position as a journalist of the Los Angeles Tribune corresponds to Hisaye Yamamoto’s retreat from politics as is claimed by James Kyung-Jin Lee (81). Yamamoto, however, left the newspaper to join Catholic Worker in New York. Yamamoto seems to have chosen to devote herself to the introspective life as a catholic worker over journalism. Until in 1985, Yamamoto had little talked about the racial discrimination issue of African Americans since she left the *Los Angeles Tribune*. And she moved to the introspective religious world of Christianity. The incidents she experienced while she worked for the *Los Angeles Tribune*

affected her life so much and changed her life afterward. She was making desperate effort to atone for her guilty conscience towards the Shorts' death. Her guilty conscience grew into 'fear of responsibility' (Yamamoto, "Writing" 67) and then mental illness. Her sense of guilt for the Shorts' death nagged her for a long time to eventually become the theme of "A Fire in Fontana" published forty years after she left the newspaper.

The complicated mind of a Japanese American Nisei suffering from racial discrimination is also delineated in "Wilshire Bus" (1950) which is one of the four stories Yamamoto wrote in 1948 after she left the *Los Angeles Tribune*. None of these stories is about the racial discrimination against African Americans, but it is about Yamamoto's insight and anguish experienced at the *Los Angeles Tribune*. The story depicts the differences in reactions on the racial discrimination between a Nisei woman and a Chinese woman. The difference is clear from the comparison of the Nisei woman's attitude towards racial discrimination with the Chinese woman's.

The main character Nisei Esther Kuroiwa, who is on the way to a soldiers' home, is on the same bus with an elderly Asian man and his wife. Esther turns her head to smile a greeting, but the woman is not watching her at all. In time, a drunken white man starts cursing the Chinese old couple for

their stay in the U.S. Esther is annoyed with the white man and feels sorry for the old couple. She feels quite detached and finds herself wondering, though. She has the fear of exposure to others when a drunken white man harasses a Chinese-looking couple. The fear would be an instinctive response which is natural for a Japanese American who wants to escape racial discrimination and hatred. Esther tries to escape the white man's harassment of Asians by thinking that he is targeting Chinese not Japanese.

. . . whether the man meant her in his exclusion order or whether she was identifiably Japanese. Of course, he was not sober enough to be interested in such fine distinctions, but it did matter, she decided, because she was Japanese, not Chinese, and therefore in the present case immune.(36)

Then she is startled to realize that what she is actually doing is gloating over the fact that the drunken man has specified the Chinese as unwanted. She wants to have the sense of solidarity with them as Asian Americans, but in reality they discriminate each other.

At the same time, she remembers that there was racial discrimination among fellow Asian Americans. She recalls the face of an elderly Asian man. That is not long after she

returned to Los Angeles from the internment camp in Arkansas. She sees a button on his jacket. It says “I AM KOREAN” (36).

Heat suddenly rising to her throat, she had felt angry, then desolate and betrayed. True, reason had returned to ask whether she might not, under the circumstances, have worn such a button herself. She had heard rumors of I AM CHINESE buttons. So it was true then; why not I AM KOREAN buttons, too? Wryly, she wished for an I AM JAPANESE button. (36)

Being shamed of herself she smiles at the Chinese woman to smooth over her shame. But the woman presents “a face so impassive yet cold, and eyes so expressionless yet hostile” (37). The Chinese woman’s cold look is clearly different from that of Japanese Americans who endure racial discrimination with their traditional values, *gaman* and *enryo*. Yamamoto comments on this point: “Since I was brought up like most Nisei, with Japanese ideas of *gaman* and *enryo* and that whole etiquette structure, I imagine my writing has been influenced by such behavior patterns—it would be strange if it wasn’t” (Cheung, *Articulate* 31). The rules related to *enryo*, were imparted to the children in a Japanese family. *Gaman*, meaning “internalization . . . and suppression of anger and emotion”

(Kitano 136), is further associated with dogged perseverance.

The white man shouts that “So clear out, all of you, and remember to take every last one of your slant-eyed pickaninnies with you!” (37). After the man gets off the bus, another white man speaks out to ask for a reconciliation to the Chinese couple and possibly to Esther. She recognizes that the white drunken man discriminates not only against the Chinese husband and wife, but also against her. At last the bus arrives at the soldiers’ home.

. . . she [Esther Kuroiwa] was filled once again in her life with the infuriatingly helpless, insidiously sickening sensation of there being in the world nothing solid she could put her finger on, nothing solid she could come to grips with, nothing solid she could sink her teeth into, nothing solid. (37)

Her helpless anger might represent the unstable mind of a Japanese American who could not have their subjectivity due to their exposure to the racial discrimination. Most Japanese Americans did not resist against the discrimination. Instead they endured the injustice in order to protect themselves with patience, *gaman* and *enryo*, their traditional morality which has resulted in Esther’s pent-up anger and more serious suffering.

Yamamoto felt that she had a strong obligation to rebel against the injustice. However, she realized that she could do and say nothing when she saw the scenes of racial discrimination she gradually became obsessed with the fear of not carrying out her responsibility. She was frustrated with the fear and she eventually became impatient. It stayed in her mind and finally led her to the mental disorder of anxiety caused by the 'fear of responsibility' (Yamamoto, "Writing" 67). She would fall into helplessness realizing that it was impossible for her to protest loudly against the injustice of racial discrimination committed by the society. She quit news reporter's job in 1948 because she felt she could not write her personal opinions outright as a press reporter, then she became a writer to express her thoughts freely. She said, "the oppression and discrimination [against African Americans] finally got to me, and the weight was just too much to bear. So after two, three years I left [the *Los Angeles Tribune*] . . . that's when I started writing the short stories" (Cheung, *Words Matter* 364). For Yamamoto the most prolific time was in 1948, when she left the *Los Angeles Tribune*, through 1952. Yamamoto could free herself from her 'fear of responsibility' only when she recognized the 'fear of responsibility' as her own problem.

Yamamoto was in a hospital for the treatment of her mental disorder around 1960. As Yamamoto said that "My own

background is also the basis for ‘Eucalyptus’” (Yamamoto, *Seventeen* 129), her experience in the hospital was delineated in the story. The story was written in 1970, and published in 1990. The central character, Toki Gonzales, is hospitalized for her mental disorder treatment. The story depicts communications among patients, doctors and staff of the hospital. The doctor diagnoses her illness as “anxiety,” and he says that it stems from her ‘fear of responsibility’ (147). There is no clear explanation in the text about the cause for the ‘fear of responsibility.’ However, it is so significant for Yamamoto as to nearly ruin her life, and therefore significant for us as well to understand what it is in her stories.

While Toki is in a hospital for her mental disorder treatment, she finally understands this line of the Bible: “If the salt hath lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?” (147). Yamamoto herself chose to join the Catholic Worker in 1953 through 1955 to put “the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount” (Yamamoto, “Writing” 67) into practice. She was as courageous a person of deeds as the one who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt.5:6). Yamamoto might have felt she had a responsibility to do something for the sake of “righteousness.” But the “righteousness” in her mind was not exactly the same as that of Christianity. It must have been based on her nature that she could not overlook injustice. Yamamoto suffered for the guilty

conscience of the Shorts' death. She felt that she was responsible for their death and she tried to set off her guilty conscience. This might reflect a significant part of her 'fear of responsibility.' King-Kok Cheung insists that "whether Yamamoto uses a Buddhist or a Christian frame of reference, her overriding tone is one of human questioning accompanied by understanding rather than of moral certainty coupled with religious complacency" (Cheung, "Introduction" xxi). Yamamoto criticized racial discrimination not only by white people but also by African Americans and Asian Americans including herself. Her observations on the racial issues were always made from a relativistic point of view. She seldom protested openly; she expressed her anger quietly with irony.

Yamamoto made an ambiguous comment about her religious view: "I was brought up Buddhist . . . I was already in my thirties when I accepted the idea that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and that automatically makes me a Christian, right? But I don't reject any of that Buddhism . . ." (Cheung, *Words Matter* 350) . She said that she was not Catholic but a Catholic Worker (cf. Cheung, "Interview" 81), but at the same time she said that "I call myself a Christian anarchist . . . I'm a Christian because I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and an anarchist because I agree that 'the government is best which governs least,' the government by mutual consent in small groups

— communities — is the ideal form of democracy” (Cheung, “Interview” 85). Furthermore, she said that “I’ve come across one analysis that my choice [to be a Catholic worker] was a natural outcome of the interment” (Cheung, “Interview” 81). Although she was trying to put “the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount” (Yamamoto, “Writing” 67) into practice, she did not say simply that she was a Christian. These statements and the fact that Yamamoto declined Stanford Writing Fellowship offered by Yvor Winters to step up as a writer (Winters 22) suggest that she was skeptical about any Establishment, status, reputation and authority.

At the end of “A Fire in Fontana,” the Watts riot in 1965 is mentioned. Yamamoto’s autobiographical narrator “I” feels in the violence of the African Americans’ riot “an undercurrent of exultation” (157).

Appalled, inwardly cowering, I watched the burning and looting on the screen and heard the reports of the dead and wounded. But beneath all my distress, I felt something else, a tiny trickle of warmth which I finally recognized as an undercurrent of exultation. To me, the tumult in the city was the long-awaited, gratifying next chapter of an old movie that had

flickered about in the back of my mind for years. (157)

Her straightforward “exultation” is different from the anguish over racial discrimination she had held in the past. Her “exultation” might have resulted from her realization that she had not been able to do anything for solving the racial discrimination problem. For her, observing the violence might have become a vicarious experience, and then she must have been released from her anxiety and agony, partly at least.

King-Kok Cheung suggests:

In admitting to feeling “a tiny trickle of warmth which [she] finally recognized as an undercurrent of exultation” while watching the burning of another family of four (who were likely to be as innocent as the Short family), the narrator makes us aware that those who constantly suffer from racist abuse or bear witness to no amount of reasoning and individual good will can check the anger and hatred of those incapable of obtaining justice from law enforcement officials (who may, in the event, actually persecute the victims or turn a deaf ear to their grievances), that inequity will provoke retaliation, if only vicariously and even at the expense of other innocent people. (“Dream” 126)

Yamamoto enjoyed stable days like a white person while she was close to the marginalized African Americans. This kind of ambiguous position would have caused cracks in other minorities. The story tells that “An attractive Korean lady friend and real estate agent put her children into Catholic schools because . . . the public schools hereabouts were ‘integrated,’ while, on the other hand, she winsomely urged local real estate onto Black clients . . . and her considerable profits made possible her upward mobility into less integrated areas” (156-57). What is suggested here is that the difference of social standings and economic disparity among minorities bring further prejudices. “A Fire in Fontana” was published in 1985, seven years after the Los Angeles riot occurred. In the riot, African Americans’ target was Korean Americans who had retail stores in an area where many African Americans lived.

3.2 Resistance to Racism in the Column of the *Los Angeles Tribune*

In 1945, Yamamoto started working for the *Los Angeles Tribune*. She wanted to protest openly to the racial discrimination against African Americans, but as a Japanese American news reporter she felt restrained to do so. At that time she did not tell much about protest and the reason for leaving the newspaper. As shown in the previous chapter Yamamoto addressed more openly in her story “A Fire in Fontana” how she felt about the incident happened to her forty years before when she was working for the newspaper. In this chapter the discrimination against African Americans is discussed in Yamamoto’s newspaper column “Small Talk.”

The column carries Yamamoto’s opinions on the relationships among racial minorities including Japanese Americans after World War II (Hiraishi 70). Many columns written in 1945 refer to the situation of Japanese Americans after the internment. A column of October, 1945 reports that 18,000 Japanese Americans refused to leave the camps because of their anxieties of an unknown future (*Tribune*, October 22, 1945). And a column of November, 1945 tells the difficulties of relocation to new home from the camps and restarting lives after the war. For example, an article on November 19, 1946 reports that an Issei

male committed suicide after leaving the camp, and that a family refused to leave the camp (*Tribune*, November 19, 1946). Particularly elderly Issei faced difficulties restarting their lives from the beginning since they had lost the whole properties. Yamamoto's awareness of racial discrimination became intense at this time when she was working for the African American newspaper.

Yamamoto's column tells African Americans' attitude toward racial discrimination and how they protested against it. A column written in 1947 reports that there was a meeting for having a better relationship between African Americans and Japanese Americans resulting in no fruitful outcomes at the end. She gradually became exhausted in fighting against racial discrimination (*Tribune*, March 8, 1947). An April, 1946 column tells that she could not agree with African Americans' militant protests towards discrimination. She deplored that "there was only black and white in African American's mind" (*Tribune*, April 13, 1946: 8). According to Taeko Hiraishi, Yamamoto's sense of alienation stemmed from marginalization of Asians while the race in the U.S. was divided into two opposites, whites and African Americans. Gary Y. Okihiro claims that "Asians have been marginalized to the periphery of race relations in America because of its conceptualization as a black and white issue — with Asians, Latinos, and American Indians falling between the

cracks of that divide. Thus, to many, Asians are either ‘just like blacks’ or ‘almost white’” (xi). Okihiro also insists that “By seeing only black and white, the presence and absence of all color, whites render Asians, American Indians, and Latinos invisible, ignoring the gradations and complexities of the full spectrum between the racial poles” (62).

Yamamoto reported on the protests organized by CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) in her columns. CORE held up an idea of pacifism, which denied violent direct-action, and organized activities without racial barriers (cf. Salzman and Smith). In a column Yamamoto writes that she participated in a protest campaign against the Bullock Tearoom which refused to allow African Americans (*Tribune*, July 5, 1947:19). The *Los Angeles Tribune’s* editor, Almena Davis Lomax, criticizes Yamamoto and CORE for their policy which designated “peaceful protest” without demanding any compensation, and for their attitudes of taking “stomach humiliations and wounds.” And Lomax insists that CORE could not involve “cowardly African Americans who do not have self-esteem” (*Tribune*, January 25, 1947: 14), and says that her “quarrel with CORE is that its idea of ‘non-violent direct action’ is peculiarly spineless and ‘nice-nasty,’ guaranteed to get no results,” but for Yamamoto “non-violent direct action” was the best way to protest strongly (*Tribune*, June 26, 1948: 6). This is the conclusion reached by the

Japanese American Nisei who suffered from the war and the internment, the violence committed by the U.S. government. Yamamoto knew that violent actions of the minority for a solution to the violence committed by the majority might cause the death of the minority. In fact, most of the 34 people killed in a Watts riot were African Americans (Horn 3).

Yamamoto's column also shows Japanese Americans' attitude toward racial discrimination and the actions they took against it. Yamamoto said in a May, 1948 column that although other Japanese American news reporters argued about the racial discrimination against Japanese Americans, her concern was the Japanese Americans who discriminated against African Americans. Many Japanese Americans had preconceptions about African Americans such as "dirty," "robber" and "rapist" and thought "they're [Japanese Americans were] better than Negroes" (*Tribune*, May 22, 1948:16, 20). JACL held "Testimonial and Appreciation Dinner for returned nisei (small "n") [sic] veterans and Caucasian friends who helped us during the war years." They held "an important Japanese-white dinner in a community where Negroes, Mexicans, Filipinos, Chinese, and who knows what other -oes, -ans, -os, and -ese dwell, would be rather exclusive" (*Tribune*, September 14, 1946: 12). Yamamoto felt uncomfortable for JACL and she said "I filed the letter [invitation of the dinner] away in my wastebasket." She criticized

JACL for their attitude of having good relationship only with the whites (*Tribune*, September 14, 1946: 12). Yamamoto's attack is against the Japanese Americans who, eager to enter the American mainstream, discriminated against African Americans.

Furthermore, Yamamoto's column tells of African Americans' attitude toward Japanese Americans. An article on September 14, 1946 shows that *Tribune* editor Lomax could not understand Japanese Americans denying cooperation with African Americans who had struggled with racial discrimination for over two hundred years. She believed that Japanese Americans were surprised at the African Americans' fierce response to the racial prejudice and that it was because Japanese Americans were still newcomers that they did not have many wants and therefore did not have complaints. However, African Americans who had been in the U.S. for so long and demanded many things of the government were not successful. Lomax emphasized the long history of African Americans' resistance to racial discrimination. She concluded that it was impossible for Japanese Americans who did not understand the real situation of African Americans, to share their painful experience (*Tribune*, September 14, 1946: 12).

According to a 1945 October column, Japanese Americans felt unwelcomed by African Americans when they returned from the camps to Little Tokyo, where many African

Americans came to reside after Japanese left for the camps. African Americans were not interested in Japanese Americans just because of their poverty (*Tribune*, October 1, 1946). From this column it becomes clear that Yamamoto felt neither side was interested in the other.

In a 1946 December column, Yamamoto said that she had “my better self, the self that loves all mankind and is radiant with that love,” but “while all this is very beautiful, I have a worse self, too, which hates all mankind and is tarnished with that hate.” What Yamamoto recognized from her working experience with African Americans of the *Los Angeles Tribune* was that “most, if not all whites—and not just whites, but all those who are not Negro—will never quite understand what it can mean to be black in a white man’s country” (*Tribune*, December 21, 1946: 26). In this column, Yamamoto pointed out how difficult it was to understand the views of others. “Trying to peer through three veils, white, yellow, and black” (*Tribune*, December 21, 1946: 26), she perceived that the racial stand of Japanese Americans was not as clear as those of other races in the U.S.

Yamamoto repeated her concerns about Japanese Americans’ indifference to the racial discrimination against African Americans, although she could not help feeling the irreparable distance between Japanese Americans and African

Americans. Yamamoto opposed the idea of judging people based on the colour of the skin, particularly white and black, in which the individuality of people is ignored. Yamamoto once showed her attitude to racial discrimination: “I am concerned in racial discrimination and respect the differences of individuals” (*Tribune*, April 13, 1946: 8). Then, Yamamoto tried to fight against the discrimination in cooperation with other racial minorities (*Tribune*, July 5, 1947: 19), but she faced different thoughts, approaches and indifference. What we can see from Yamamoto’s column is that Yamamoto felt a lack of “dialogue” on the issue of racial discrimination among minorities. African Americans had only black and white in the palette of their hearts, while Japanese Americans were eager to enter into the white mainstream and discriminated against African Americans. Under this situation it must have been impossible to have “dialogue” to understand each other. While Yamamoto worked for the African American newspaper, she lost her way in the maze of the argument of binary opposition brought out by the racial essentialists and she was depressed by facing a minority’s self-centered thoughts and deeds.

Yamamoto insisted that racially discriminated experience should be shared by others. This is shown in the *Chicago Review* interview. The interviewer asked Yamamoto about a white author who wrote of Japanese American camp

experience without having gone through it. A number of critics felt the white writer was trying to appropriate the camp experience. Yamamoto replied:

Well, the impression I get from all the reviews in the Japanese American newspapers is that it's thumbs down on that movie because it's told from a white viewpoint . . . I don't think any writer has to get permission from anybody. Just write about what you want to put down. I mean, you don't need a license to write about Japanese if that's what you want to write about. Anybody can write about anything. That's what the freedoms guarantee. (Osborn and Watanabe 38)

Yamamoto thought that the white author was perfectly entitled to write about a painful experience of Japanese Americans.

Yamamoto showed understanding of and sympathy with the racial discrimination issue of African Americans, but she gradually tried to maintain distance from them because of their differences in the attitudes to racial discrimination. Yamamoto wanted to become a real pacifist someday (*Tribune*, 14 September 1946: 12) in contrast to *Tribune* editor Lomax's aggressive thoughts of resistance. Yamamoto herself as a member of the marginalized racial minorities tried to resist the racial

discrimination by sharing painful experience with African Americans. She realized it was not easy and eventually lost her passion to do so. She understood the racially discriminated situation of African Americans while she worked for the *Los Angeles Tribune*, and she tried to protest against the discrimination as a pacifist. However, eventually Yamamoto failed to improve the situation, possibly because of lack of dialogue and “intercultural competencies” (Tsuchiya 56), and therefore there was no opportunity to learn each other between minorities at that time.

Conclusion

Yamamoto experienced two incidents which would change her life afterward: one is the internment of Japanese Americans and the other is the racial discrimination against African Americans she witnessed while she worked for the *Los Angeles Tribune*. The internment was the worst of all the discrimination policies of the U.S. against Japanese Americans which had been implemented since they arrived in the U.S.

The assimilation of Japanese American Nisei was closely related to racial discrimination, gender and sexuality. The examination on the assimilation of Japanese American Nisei Yuki in contrast to that of a Vietnamese American Le Ly Hayslip in Chapter 1 has shown the unique situation of the Japanese American Nisei who suffered from gender and racial discrimination. The above examination was carried out by measuring the assimilation levels of Yuki and Le Ly applying benchmarks: Socioeconomic status, Language assimilation, Spatial concentration, Intermarriage, Racial discrimination, and

Influence of war.

Social and economic status is largely dependent on the educational background. Hayslip had primary school education in Vietnam only for three years and even her Vietnamese vocabulary was limited to the use for daily conversation level. Hayslip's English skill was minimal and she had a serious communication problem which led her to harsh loneliness. On the other hand, Yamamoto studied at a junior college in the U.S. and her short stories were selected for Martha Foley's yearly lists of "Distinctive Short Stories." Yamamoto's skill for English language was so much better than Hayslip's that the comparison does not provide any meaningful results. However, it indicates that language is not an issue for the Nisei's assimilation.

There are significant differences between the two central characters as for benchmarks Intermarriage and Influence of war. Le Ly's intermarriage with an American is just a means to emigrate to the U.S., but Yuki's intermarriage with an Italian American is a means to assimilate into white society. The difference of the two women should be largely dependent on their experience in the wars. Le Ly tried to survive by emigrating to the U.S. On the other hand, Yuki's life is not threatened by war, although she is persecuted with racial discrimination through her internment experience. The assimilation of Nisei is closely related to racial discrimination, gender and sexuality. Therefore

Yuki's strong desire to assimilate into white society by leaving the Japanese community involves the complicated situation of the Nisei.

In the U.S. Asian Americans have been objectified as "sexual otherness" (Gairola 27) due to racial discrimination (cf. Lim 95). Moreover, sexism stems from patriarchy as well especially in the Asian American community. Therefore, Japanese American women are supposed to have been twice oppressed: they have faced the racial discrimination in the American society and the gender discrimination by men in the Japanese community (cf. Cheung, *Articulate* 54). The central characters in Yamamoto's stories resist against gender and sexuality of Asian American women. Through their resistance Nisei women try to establish their identities by choosing their own lives by themselves.

In relation to the sexuality of Nisei central characters in "Epithalamium" and "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara," a strong resemblance between Yuki and Miss Sasagawara has been found in the discussions in Chapter 2. Both of the main characters insist on their own ways of life through their sexuality. Although Yuki resists all objections on her sex and marriage and is anxious about marrying an alcoholic dropout, she makes her decision on her life all by herself. In this way Yuki protests gender discrimination and racial discrimination through her

sexuality. Yuki persists her way of life which is different from Japanese American Issei women who could not escape their situation.

In 1945, Yamamoto started working for the *Los Angeles Tribune* run by African Americans. During this period Yamamoto experienced an incident, the death of an African American family by suspicious fire. Because she had written an article about the family's persecution prior to the incident, she was gnawed by a sense of guilt and regretted that she should have gone to great lengths to describe the situation. Until 1985 when Yamamoto published "A Fire in Fontana," she had little talked about the racial discrimination of African Americans since she left the *Los Angeles Tribune*. She had been making desperate effort to atone for her guilty conscience towards the African American family's death. A strong sense of guilt and responsibility to rebel against the discrimination obsessed her and it developed into 'fear of responsibility.' Yamamoto was in a hospital for the treatment of her mental disorder and then she delineated this experience in "Eucalyptus."

Yamamoto's "Wilshire Bus" is not a story about the racial discrimination against African Americans, but it is about her insight and anguish experienced at the *Los Angeles Tribune*. From the comparison of the main character Nisei woman's sensitivity to racial discrimination with a Chinese woman's, the

Nisei woman's much more fearful attitude towards racial discrimination is recognized. This might imply the influence of the dismay caused by the internment and hostility received as an enemy alien.

The examinations on Yamamoto's newspaper column "Small Talk" in Chapter 3 have revealed that The *Los Angeles Tribune's* editor cannot understand Japanese Americans denying cooperation with African Americans and she believes that it is impossible for Japanese Americans to share their painful experience because they do not understand the real situation of African Americans. In contrast to the African American's militant and demanding attitudes, Yamamoto believed that "non-violent direct action" (*Tribune*, June 26, 1948: 6) was the best way to protest strongly.

Yamamoto felt Japanese Americans and African Americans were indifferent to each other. Yamamoto pointed out that "Trying to peer through three veils, white, yellow, and black" (*Tribune*, December 21, 1946: 26), she perceived that the racial stand of Japanese Americans was not as clear as those of other races in the U.S. Yamamoto, as a member of the marginalized racial minorities with the internment experience, tried to resist racial discrimination by sharing painful experience with African Americans, but she faced different thoughts on and different approaches of protest against the discrimination and the

indifference among the racial minorities themselves. Yamamoto lost her way in the maze of the argument of binary opposition and she was depressed by facing the racial minority's self-centeredness. Yamamoto failed to improve the situation because of the lack of dialogue and "intercultural competencies" (Tsuchiya 56).

From the viewpoints of assimilation, sexuality and racism, Hisaye Yamamoto's stories and column could be verified as influenced strongly by racial discrimination, particularly Japanese American internment. Yamamoto did not directly or explicitly write about internment in her stories like most of other Nisei writers did. In her stories themselves, however, are instilled Yamamoto's obsession of her internment experience and its influence on her sense of racial inferiority. From the above examinations it could be concluded that all issues taken up in her stories such as assimilation, gender and sexuality were intricately related to her sense of identity formed by racial discrimination which is a dominant undercurrent flowing through her stories.

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