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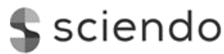

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HISAYE YAMAMOTO'S SILENCE-VOICE INTERPLAY IN JAPANESE AMERICAN IMPRISONMENT CAMPS

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Abstract: *Within times of war and U.S.-state-imposed guilt, Japanese American female characters in "The Legends of Miss Sasagawara" experience repeated status changes throughout World War II and the Japanese American imprisonment camps. The tense conflictual relations between U.S. authorities and the Nikkei (Japanese diaspora in the United States) echo within the intra-Nikkei communities held in camps: branded as enemies by the state, Nikkei individuals re-segregate within camps, leading to a fractured communication and tribalist attitudes. The present paper investigates the silence-voice interplay of female characters in confinement narratives, as depicted by Hisaye Yamamoto in her literary rendering of the Japanese American imprisonment camps phenomenon. The historical context of the 1940s ruptures the communication inside the Nikkei community, especially concerning the female character Miss Mari Sasagawara, leading to misunderstandings, tribalism, and (self-)isolation.*

Keywords: *Hisaye Yamamoto, Japanese American imprisonment Camps, silence-voice interplay, The Legend of Miss Sasagawara.*

1. Introduction

Born in 1921, in Southern California, Hisaye Yamamoto is a second-generation American woman of Japanese descent. She belongs to a generation commonly known as the *Nisei*; thus, she is the daughter of Japanese immigrants who settled in the United States, the *Issei*. Japanese by

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lineage and American by birthplace, Hisaye Yamamoto explored the intricacies of human experience as perceived by her Nikkei community, i.e., the Japanese diaspora in the United States, often focusing on aspects such as one's identity, inter-generational divides and group cohesion, and state-individual relations.

Writers from the Nikkei community in the United States have often represented state-Nikkei relations in their literary works, especially to depict the historical events that preceded and followed the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Hisaye Yamamoto joins other female writers such as Miné Okubo (see Petruș 2023), Shelley Ayame Nishimura Ota, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, Yoshiko Uchida, Kiyo Hirano, Monica Sone, and Julie Otsuka, Japanese American women who expressed the plight of the Nikkei community and fought against the state-imposed censorship of the 1940s.

To contextualise, the female writers mentioned above represent the events that followed the attack on Pearl Harbor and its consequences on the Japanese diaspora inhabiting the United States. After Imperial Japan attacked the United States, the Nikkei community in the U.S. suffered the consequences, as both Japanese immigrants (Issei) and American citizens of Japanese descent (Nisei, Sansei), were branded as inherently evil by U.S. White representatives in power. In the 1940s, one's Japanese ethnicity equalled one's desire to attack the United States from within, presumably. Consequently, a widespread anti-Japanese-wave led to a reconfiguration of civil rights and identity concerning 120,000 individuals, both immigrants and citizens alike: "The Nikkei become *personae non gratae* that ought to be removed from their homes to ensure national security" (Petruș, 2021, p. 119).

The pursuit of "national security" during World War II against the perceived Japanese diaspora in the U.S., however, was a *faux probleme* that led to illegal and mass incarceration of the Nikkei community, contrary to the values of the American Constitution. Japanese immigrants were labelled *alien enemies* and American citizens of Japanese descent were branded *non-alien enemies* (Petruș, 2021, p. 118), two derogatory terms that highlight a Nikkei's status as an enemy, as perceived by U.S. authorities. One statement belonging to an outspoken anti-Japanese U.S. general, John L. DeWitt, hints at how one's ethnicity was the key factor for incarceration, regardless of one's American citizenship: "A Jap's a Jap" (Gott, 1998, p. 228). Thus, the Nikkei community's Japanese lineage resulted in one's disloyalty to the United States and one's allegiance to an enemy force: "Racial traits make it impossible to separate the loyal from the disloyal" (Takei, 2019, p. 26). In 1942, Franklin Delano Roosevelt had signed a document that transformed the destiny of the United States Japanese diaspora: *Executive Order No. 9066* (see

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Archives.gov, FDR 1942). The document allowed military generals to categorise strategic areas that could be evacuated to maintain national security. Although the text does not appear to affect the Nikkei initially, it came into being and resulted in a series of *Civilian Exclusion Orders* and curfews oriented towards Japanese and Japanese Americans in the United States. The *Civilian Exclusion Orders* followed *EO9066* and consisted of announcements (posted in public places) that gave "Instructions to all persons of Japanese ancestry". However, the instructions were orders meant to be strictly respected by the Nikkei community. Disrespecting the "instructions" meant federal prison, while respecting them meant en masse incarceration. As a result of the anti-Japanese wave of the 1940s, the U.S. authorities pursued to isolate the "dangerous" Nikkei community from the U.S. White community and, in a depiction of a racist policy, U.S. branches failed to protect innocent Nikkei individuals and sent them to federal prisons and incarceration camps between 1941 and 1946.

Like many other members of the U.S. Nikkei community, Hisaye Yamamoto was one of the 120,000 illegally detained individuals in 1942. Even if the phenomenon has been discussed and brought to light over the past decades throughout various media, readers ought to be aware of the injustices triggered by U.S. authorities before and after the 1940s, including the present time. As Japanese immigrant residents and American citizens of Japanese ancestry experienced various forms of injustice, such as the denial of civil rights, dignity, and state-imposed guilt, the Japanese American imprisonment camps have the value of an open *historical wound*. This historical wound affected both those who had directly faced incarceration and their descendants. The phenomenon of the Japanese American imprisonment camps is still "underreported and misrepresented" (Reeves, 2015, p. xvii): the mass deportation and incarceration are often downplayed by U.S. authorities and U.S. media, in an attempt to censor the gravity of the historical events.

Hisaye Yamamoto directly experienced imprisonment at twenty years old, as she was detained in the Poston Camp in the state of Arizona. Confined in Arizona with her family, Yamamoto was influenced by camp life and wrote about the phenomenon in newspapers, as a journalist, and in her literary works. Her desire to write came from her experiences in the United States during the war (with a focus on imprisonment camps) and after it (Nikkei family relations). Cheung (2006, p. xi) indicates that the Nikkei community in the United States of America took a great interest in authoring works of literature. Still, the context of the 1940s deeply altered this preoccupation. The war profoundly affected the Yamamotos both because of the camps and the casualties brought by the armed conflict. The United States establishment imprisoned the author and her family in camps, and the author lost one of her brothers during World War II, a brother

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who died in battle in Italy, being part of the most decorated battalion in the United States, *442nd Regimental Combat Team*.

One of her narratives that address the imprisonment in Poston (Arizona) is "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara", a work of fiction which became known to the public on December 1, 1950, being published in the *Kenyon Review*. "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" (also referred to as "Legend" throughout this article) represents one of Yamamoto's most famous short stories, along with that of "Seventeen Syllables". The original version of this short story collection (i.e., *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories*) was first printed in 1988.

With a female author and female protagonists, "Legend" portrays a gendered perception of the Japanese American imprisonment camps. Analyzing the short story through gender lenses reveals the intricacies of female Nisei imprisonment writing in the twentieth-century. To explore the effects of the historical context on female Nikkei characters, namely the interplay of silence and voice, I used the 2006 version of the story, "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara", as included in the *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories* book, published in a revised and expanded edition in 2006.

Considering that the state previously censored the depiction of the Japanese imprisonment camps, it is relevant to mention that Yamamoto's writing portrays the state-imposed censorship by narrative means. Amy Nishimura's categorization of Yamamoto's short story "Legend" indicated it to be an "allegory to comprehend complicit silences" (2014, p. 202). To illustrate, Yamamoto simultaneously silences and voices the injustices of the 1940s that concern the Nikkei community in the United States. The readers infer both the national context and the gravity of the situation as Yamamoto subtly constructs the historical phenomenon. Thus, the historical context represents the subtle background of the micro-level story, as the text provides its readers with a few details that pinpoint the camp location and conditions.

Although Yamamoto's choice of topics is deeply rooted in the historical context, Yamamoto chooses to render the imprisonment camp phenomenon by using a style that abounds in subtleties, in contrast to other Japanese American writers. Instead of being explicit about the socio-political changes regarding Nikkei generations, Yamamoto uses silences to get the message across: "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" vividly depicts camp experience at a micro-level, in an imprisonment camp in Poston. Throughout her indirect depictions of the imprisonment camp environment, Yamamoto reveals a series of confiscated civil rights and identity reconfigurations concerning people of Japanese ethnicity (both intra-community and intra-familial connections). Yamamoto's short story, "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara", depicts the confiscation of rights that

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occurred after December, 1941, rights such as the right to a fair trial, freedom of movement, the property right, to practise a profession, and the right to privacy.

I chose this story as it dwells on the lives of Japanese living in imprisonment camps in the 1940s and displays two significant types of confinement, physical and psychological, along with the changes caused by imprisonment camps. The camp context confines individuals through physical imprisonment (the camp itself) or psychological imprisonment (originating from the reaction to community interrelations/ people's perceptions and self-perceptions). Inside the Arizona imprisonment camp (the topos takes the name of Poston War Relocation Center), all characters are Japanese and Japanese Americans. As a Japanese American text, "Legend" articulates itself as an illustration of tribalism. This social behaviour entails an individual's retreat within a group and an overcompetitive stance towards groups other than one's own. Tribalism represents one's display of group cohesion, a cohesion that may be more or less exacerbated if challenged. A cause of this social behaviour and its manifestation could be the desire for group preservation or establishing group superiority (to differentiate from or oppose another collectivity). For example, one feels a kinship for one's national or ethnic group. If a threat is perceived (opinion or fact), the reaction is to handle adversity for someone belonging to another group but one's own (see Chua, 2018).

Developing upon Amy Chua's concept of tribalism (2018) and applying it to two previous Japanese American texts, Okubo's *Citizen 13660* (1946) and George Takei's *They Called Us Enemy* (2019), I have discovered two patterns of tribalism and have coined two depictions of tribalism concerning the social behaviour connected to the Japanese imprisonment camps phenomenon: a) White-Nikkei tribalism and b) Intra-Nikkei tribalism. *White-Nikkei tribalism* manifests as a fracturing, destructive behaviour exhibited by White individuals towards people of Japanese ancestry in the United States: White individuals discriminate against the Nikkei, show verbal or physical anti-Japanese attitudes, ostracise people of Japanese ancestry and isolate them socially and politically. *Intra-Nikkei tribalism* represents the conflicts that emerge within the Nikkei community in the United States. Intra-Nikkei tribalism is one form of intra-group tribalism, generally known as *othering*. As White-Nikkei tribalism rounded up people of Japanese ancestry into camps, "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" (2006) focuses on personal depictions of camp life through the use of subtleties and silences: the reader needs to complete the non-explicit details around the story and within it. Consequently, this analysis depicts both types of tribalism, with a focus on the latter: *intra-Nikkei tribalism.*

As presented in two previous analyses on the Japanese American imprisonment camps

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(see Petruș, 2021 and Petruș, 2023), there are instances of tribalism which predominantly develop between the White and Nikkei communities (see White-Nikkei tribalism). Fewer instances display intra-Nikkei tribalism. In the case of "Legend", Hisaye Yamamoto portrays another facet of group tribalism: the Japanese American characters exhibit adversity towards a member of their community, whom they repeatedly ostracise: Miss Mari Sasagawara. Through conscious and unconscious othering, they show a "destructive, fracturing tribalism" (Chua, 2018, p. 166). "Legend" introduces the readers to another manifestation of tribalism, where one's purpose is to isolate him/her from one's family, community, or nation. This tribalism identifies one's exacerbated preoccupation with personal endeavours and a lack of awareness concerning intra-community or family members. Individuals can be so engulfed in certain activities (mental, social, or physical) that they ignore their surroundings and the people around them.

2. A Gendered Depiction of the Japanese American Imprisonment Camps

The plot of the short story "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" opens abruptly with some comments made by Kiku, a female character and limited third-person narrator, who describes the appearance and walking manner of a fellow inmate in an imprisonment camp, namely the ballerina Miss Mari Sasagawara. Both women are representatives of the Nikkei community, i.e., second-generation Japanese Americans, whose names belong to the Japanese culture: Kiku, respectively, Sasagawara.

Even if the two women share a cultural heritage, they do not exhibit community cohesion. As Miss Mari Sasagawara was a Poston camp newcomer, Kiku is unwelcoming towards her. While part of the reason for Kiku's behaviour might be precisely Miss Mari Sasagawara's status as a newcomer, it also reflects the historical of the 1940s, when the Nikkei were segregated into different categories of enemies, as branded by the state and confined into camps. In camps, community members re-segregate according to their allegiance, views about the war, and, in Miss Sasagawara's case, one's ability to adapt to the horrors of confinement in isolation from the world outside the camp.

Another reason Sasagawara gets isolated by Kiku and other community members is represented by her ballet dancer profession. According to Sylvia Yanagisako, Miss Mari Sasagawara is perceived as an outsider because "she has spent most of her adult, pre-war, life away from her own ethnic group in an unusual profession" (1985, p. 22). As a representative and performer of the fine arts, Miss Sasagawara demeanour turns her into a character that stands out among her Japanese American community. Yanagisako shows that the woman becomes "a subject

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of idle gossip” (1985, p. 22) within the camp, an enclosed environment where rumours travel quickly.

The abrupt opening of the story does not give the reader explicit details about the unfolding events. One could compare this narrative beginning to the sudden evacuation of the Nikkei community inhabiting the West Coast of the United States in 1942. Yamamoto's straightforward depiction of camp life may hint at the rapid change of events that the Nikkei community faced in the 1940s: Pearl Harbor, *Executive Order 9066*, Civilian Exclusion Orders, and, lastly, the Japanese American imprisonment camps.

The plot's setting showcases the loss of civil rights, including the right to a fair trial and freedom of movement. Shortly after Miss Sasagawara’s appearance, the narrator informs the readers about the location of the plot: “wind, sand, and heat”, “women’s latrines”, “barracks”, “Block no. 33”, “Japanese evacuation camp in Arizona” (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 20). An informed reader could deduce that both characters have been wrongfully accused of espionage and enemy behaviour and sent to camps due to an illegal governmental action that massively affected the Nikkei community in the United States of America.

Under *Executive Order 9066* (1942), army officials (and organisations, such as the War Relocation Authority) had the power to move individuals inhabiting the Western Coast of the United States to protect the *nation’s integrity* from possible enemies during the War. However, the relocation was, in fact, a massive and unlawful uprooting of circa 120,000 people of Japanese ethnicity living in the United States. To reiterate, the Executive *Order* does not specify who is affected by the relocation, but its content and the consequences it entails are self-explanatory (see Archives.gov, *Exec. Order 9066* 1942). Thus, in 1942, Nikkei people started their lives in camps, although they did not show any proof of espionage on behalf of Imperial Japan (cf. Rostow 1945, p. 497).

The Nikkei would inhabit concentration camps that often bear the names of assembly centres, relocation centres, and camps. Consequently, people had to be moved to a series of locations, some improvised and temporary (which I classify as temporary camps), as the time was short and United States officials prompted quick action to be taken against the Nikkei, while others were built precisely for the purpose and kept open between 1942 and 1945/1946 (permanent camps). Camps comprised barracks, usually made of wood and constructed in the same style. Such is the case in “The Legend of Miss Sasagawara”: the characters inhabit a permanent camp set up by the War Relocation Authority and must adapt to the problematic conditions provided by the arid environment in the desert (see Yamamoto, 2006, p. 20).

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Kiku's observant gaze and commentaries could be paralleled to Miss Mari Sasagawara's previous career experience and hint at how her status change has degraded because of the historical context and the confinement in camps. Kiku's initial description of Mari Sasagawara's appearance hints at a typical commentary that audiences may utter in front of a stage. Through the created imagery, Mari Sasagawara's style, appearance, and pace remind the reader about her being on stage, where she previously performed her dance programmes. Kiku tries to understand what she sees and gazes at Miss Sasagawara attentively. With an observant eye, she describes Mari's "costume" in camp, her gracious and calculated walk, alluding to her previous profession, that of a ballet performer.

Furthermore, she claims that Sasagawara's calculated walk was exaggerated, thus a demeanour that should be criticised. Kiku thinks that Mari gives too much importance to her walking "as though walking were not a common but a rather special thing to be doing" (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 20). Although seemingly unimportant, the whole scene signals one's degradation in terms of social roles. Mari, a previously appreciated ballerina, is to be gazed upon and judged by a fellow Japanese American in camp for something she was initially appreciated before entering the camps. Within the camp, surrounded by barbed-wire fences, community members try to assert dominance over fellow Nikkei or ostracise them if they do not share the same values/behaviour. Such is the case of Miss Mari Sasagawara, an imprisoned female character whose sensitivity increases her suffering within camp confinement, as observed by Amy Nishimura:

> a sensitive human being who desperately seeks to retain her artistic sensibility; her creative endeavours are remarked as "different" from those who conform easily to the expectations of the American government. She is depicted as untraditional, as a woman who values specific aesthetic forms such as dancing, poetry, and painting, and she is not hardened to life within the internment camp, a camp that serves as a microcosm to the larger civilian life of deference and proper hegemonic protocol. (Nishimura, 2014, p. 202)

In "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara", the Japanese American community and camp life are depicted at a micro-level through the stories of a few members belonging to the Japanese American community. This micro-universe comes into being as the author brings forth the story about Miss Mari Sasagawara, a thirty-nine-year-old Japanese American whose profession is that of a ballerina. Her father is a Buddhist minister, while her mother is explained to have passed away in a camp they had previously inhabited (c.f. Yamamoto, 2006, p. 20). Yamamoto's story brings forward a topic often overlooked in what concerned the imprisonment camps: the death of

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a close relative, unjustly incarcerated on the grounds of racism, and grief. Although it is not explicitly mentioned in the text, the camp environment was improper and unsanitary for the healthy Japanese Americans, not to mention for those Nikkei members who had illnesses or suffered from various chronic diseases. Moreover, grief is not mentioned within the text; Miss Mari Sasagawara's desire to remain in solitude may signal the woman's intention to grieve and come to terms with the loss of her mother. A sensitive human being who experienced the loss of her mother does not come to terms with the rapid personal and socio-historical changes of the 1940s, which render her vulnerable and prone to overlook her mental health within the Poston imprisonment camp.

Her career disruption, dysfunctional relationship with her father, the fact that she remains unmarried, and the desire for stricter boundaries and privacy are some aspects that lead the characters to start rumours about Miss Sasagawara. According to Cheung, "as a woman or more particularly, as a Japanese unmarried woman, Miss Sasagawara disrupts the normative expectations of a culture that demands deference of the female gender" (Cheung in Nishimura, 2014, p. 202). As such, Miss Sasagawara's gender is decisive regarding her negative labelling and name-calling: the Nikkei community misreads Miss Sasagawara's character because of a gender-based bias. Developing upon Shoshana Felman's theories of gender expectations, Cheung clarifies that "female defiance of gender roles is often interpreted as mental deviance" (Cheung, 1991, p. 112). Consequently, Miss Sasagawara's actions and marital status transform her into an odd member of the Nikkei community, a member who defies societal conventions and suffers from "mental deviance" and thus ought to be isolated from the rest of the group.

Considering that Mari Sasagawara does not conform to the societal expectation of being a married woman with offspring, characters, both male and female, ostracise her and orchestrate intra-Nikkei segregation in which they are the oppressed that turn into oppressors, and Sasagawara is the oppressed: intra-Nikkei tribalism resurfaces and is triggered by Miss Sasagawara's failure to fit into the roles prescribed by the societal norms. In an interesting parallel, Nishimura observes:

> The idle gossip that consumes the camp and targets Sasagawara parallels the gossip that surrounded the Japanese community before the time of their internment. Her accusers, thus, resemble those who provided only circumstantial evidence against the Japanese; that is, Yamamoto's short story asks readers to examine and reexamine the names leveled against Miss Sasagawara, markers that exact a continuance of gender bias. (Nishimura, 2014, p. 202).

Yamamoto's stylistic depictions of gossip and rumours that isolate Sasagawara compare

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Miss Sasagawara's situation to that of the Nikkei in 1941 in the United States. Widespread rumours, fearmongering, and overspread racism led to the en masse incarceration of the Nikkei. Surprisingly, the Nikkei characters who gossip about Miss Sasagawara overlook the consequences of White-Nikkei tribalism that led U.S. authorities to imprison them in camps in the first place. Moreover, the oppressed not only dismiss the racial discrimination orchestrated by White authorities, but they also put their methods into practice within their community, manifesting a destructive intra-Nikkei tribalism.

Now an inhabitant of Barack number 33 (Block no. 33), Miss Mari Sasagawara's presence transforms her into an object of curiosity, scrutiny, scorn, admiration, and pity. Her personality and actions are revealed to the readers through the narrative voice of Kiku and the gossip of characters such as the Sasakis, Elsie (Kiku's friend), health representatives, and, at times, Kiku herself. The characters refer to her as Miss Sasagawara, omitting the use of her first name (Mari). This omission could imply a choice of reverence towards Mari Sasagawara or to refer to one's marital status. In fact, as the plot highlights, this omission is a way for other characters to distance themselves from Mari Sasagawara, a character they cannot grasp and whose "faults" they constantly expose and scrutinise in a depiction of intra-Nikkei tribalism. The author does not yet resort to any narrative means to intervene and reveal Miss Mari Sasagawara's intentions, as Yamamoto plays with the reader's expectations and perceptions. Sasagawara remains silent and is scrutinised by fellow community members, who gossip about her, the perceived outsider. Consequently, the readers still construct Sasagawara's portrait based on a few indications from the narrator and numerous rumours and gossip by other Nikkei.

Although Miss Mari Sasagawara remains silent, other characters construct her moral and physical portrait. In terms of other characters, some Nikkei without medical training impose a diagnosis of madness onto Miss Mari Sasagawara. For instance, Miss Sasagawara's neighbours, the Sasakis, perceive her as "crazy" and a "madwoman" (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 21), while Elsie sees her as "temperamental" (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 20). Once again, Miss Sasagawara's behaviour is overly scrutinised by her community members who manifest an intra-Nikkei tribalism through negative labelling. The narrator sees her as not a conversation partner but the *subject* of a discussion to fill the community's "monotonous days" in camp (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 26). The story reveals instances in which Miss Sasagawara's right to privacy is confiscated by United States authorities and by community members. One instance is the episode when mister Sasaki wanted to help her clean the dusty barrack with a hose, instead of a pail, as she intended to do: "What are you trying to do? Spy on me? Get out of here of I'll throw this water on you!" (Yamamoto, 2006,

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p. 21).

Miss Sasagawara, possibly afraid to be spied upon and anxious about her arrival in a new imprisonment camp, is visibly distressed about the presence of an unknown man in the barrack. Consequently, she refuses the man's help, kicks him out of the barrack, throwing water at him after warning she would do so (c.f. Yamamoto, 2006, p. 21). Cheung's observation reiterates Miss Sasagawara's personality features and describes her as an "acutely self-conscious" character (1991, p. 112). Constantly aware of her camp surroundings and fellow imprisoned Nikkei, Miss Mari Sasagawara develops a high sensitivity towards elements that might disrupt her regular rhythm. She is community-conscious, and her excessive self-awareness is a personal and professional trait that hinders her adaptability to camp life. In this environment, authorities trample upon privacy and intra-community shared space. Her community awareness extends to her being conscious of her bad reputation among community members. In one instance, Mari Sasagawara contradicts the rumours and "madwoman" label given by Nikkei members. She speaks against that bad reputation and voices that she has no malicious intentions towards some Nikkei children: "Don't be afraid of me. I won't hurt you" (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 28).

In camps, privacy was no longer a luxury the Nikkei could easily access: they had to live with strangers and use unpartitioned showers and latrines. For a private person like Miss Sasagawara, overstepping her boundaries is, in fact, a form of attack. To face it, she retaliates and confronts the man. The reader is informed that Mister Sasaki exaggerates the seriousness of a particular situation and that the woman is a private and timid person. Even so, the label of *madwoman* sticks to Miss Sasagawara and would fuel other rumours.

As the case above portrays a situation of miscommunication, disrespected privacy, and broken social boundaries, there are other instances in which Miss Sasagawara's privacy is disturbed, and her community misunderstands her. One episode stands out within "Legend": the arrival of Kiku in the showers' section while Miss Sasagawara was there at midnight to avoid other Nikkei women. Visibly stressed by the fact that she was seen naked by another woman, Mari does not respond to Kiku's greeting (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 22), which makes Kiku perceive her as rude.

In another instance, Mari prefers to return from a medical checkup in a rather bad condition because she fears going to her barrack with the ambulance man, George. She is afraid to be touched and does not want the medical personnel "pawing" her (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 26). Her fear had made her run away from the hospital, but the personnel recovered her. At the camp hospital, employees and other patients would arrive where her bed was, check on her, and stare at

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her uncontrollably with a "concentrated gaze" (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 26). The narrator reveals Mari Sasagawara's perception and reveals that she was conscious of the attention she was drawing, as she "continued to look at the same piece of the floor [and] seem[ed] wryly amused with the entire proceedings" (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 26).

Mari becomes an object of curiosity and is followed by everyone's gaze. She was gazed upon before, as she worked as a ballerina and performed on stages in front of audiences. However, the context and audience are different in this instance: she is in camp, in an improvised hospital, having people round up close to her bed to stare at her while she is unwell. Mari becomes the strange person, the *other,* a person people would gossip about, and not a ballerina who receives appreciation for her performance (see Yamamoto, 2006, p. 26-27). With no one to confide in (her father is not portrayed to be Mari's confidant) and bottled-up pressure, Miss Mari Sasagawara's mental state worsens. She gets sent to a sanatorium for months (cf. Yamamoto, 2006, cf. 28): as other community members send Sasagawara to the sanatorium, it means that the imprisoned Nikkei could get out of camp, only in exceptional cases, such as a medical emergency that could not be treated in the improvised camp hospital.

On her return, she is no longer afraid of people and begins giving dancing classes to camp children, including Kiku's younger sister, Michi. She is no longer a "madwoman" but a "friendly being" (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 28) who smiles and laughs. She talks to Kiku, Elsie, the children, and other community members. She organizes a dance at the Block Christmas party and receives a gift from a Japanese American Santa (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 30). Her transformation made the community stop perceiving her as the *other*: Mari Sasagawara, now a teacher and a good communicator, is one of their own, at least for a while. That the woman is made to undergo institutionalized treatment as a result of her othering is an illustration of the double imprisonment of the Nikkei community. That she is "recovered" as a result could be seen both as a containment of her gendered sensitivities and as a repression of her exacerbated sense of self.

At the end of the war, circa 1944-1945, United States authorities became more lenient with granting permission to the Nikkei to leave the camps. For example, Kiku received permission to leave camp and to opt for college in Philadelphia. From Kiku's observations, the readers understand that the action occurred at a time when the United States government decided to change the legislation concerning the Nikkei enrolled in the United States Army and when the U.S. establishment devised the *Renunciation Act of 1944* (or *Public Law 78-405 1942*).

Under this Act, American citizens of Japanese ancestry could renounce their American citizenship and be sent to Japan (see the *Renunciation Act/Public Law 78-405*, 58 Stat. 677). At

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the same time, United States legal institutions decided that American citizens of Japanese ancestry must not stay in camps, as it was illegal to keep them there without any proof of sabotage or ill-doings against the country. Nevertheless, some American citizens of Japanese ethnicity did renounce their American citizenship to be able to remain in camps. These individuals were afraid to return to their homes, and their fear came from the uncertainty of how White Americans might welcome them.

In such circumstances, the enclosed spaces of the camps seemed safer than an uncertain environment outside the fences. In this story, there are no mentions of the Act itself or renunciators, but the analysis reveals to the reader that the camps are to be closed soon enough. From Kiku's observations, the readers can observe that Nikkei individuals who reintegrate into society after three years in camps help others reintegrate. At the end of the semester, she aims to popularize the university to other people still in camps (cf. Yamamoto, 2006, p. 30).

Back in Arizona, Elsie reveals to Kiku that Miss Sasagawara was sent to a mental asylum in California, as she had exhibited strange behaviour. A few secondhand experiences (from the Sasakis and Yoshinagas) deemed her behaviour unconventional: she was gazing at her neighbours horseplaying outside. Mrs. Sasaki was outraged at the woman's curiosity. She scrutinised her, as Miss Sasagawara "had one finger in her mouth as she gazed, in the manner of a shy child confronted with a marvel" (Yamamoto 2006: 31). Another event that influenced Mari Sasagawa's internment in a mental institution was that once, at night, she was in the Yoshinaga's barrack and was looking at Joe Yoshinaga, her neighbour, while he was sleeping (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 32), scaring the young man. While hearing the secondhand experiences from Elsie, Kiku doubts the stories, as the storytellers are unreliable and like to exaggerate. Once more, characters misinterpret Miss Mari Sasagawara's actions, as they are unaware of her context and Mari's perspective. Once more, though, containment and repression prove insufficient for Mari Sasagawara and reiterate her double otherness.

After the camps were closed in 1945-1946, the Nikkei regained their physical freedom. Some connections formed behind the barbed wires were lost as people left camps and relocated to other U.S. cities. Some Nikkei wanted to avoid returning to the West Coast due to the existence of anti-Japanese feelings. However, that was not the case in Mari Sasagawara's situation. She did not reach out to Kiku or others in camp but did, in fact, publish a poem in a poetry magazine. The poem, although "tantalizing obscure" (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 32), explains Miss Sasagawara's situation to both Kiku and the readers altogether: the story was about a father, Mister Sasagawara, the Buddhist minister, and a daughter, Miss Mari Sasagawara herself. The poem itself is not

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provided in the story, but yet again, readers can access it through Kiku's secondhand account.

The readers are informed that the story's main subject is a man in pursuit of "Nirvana, that saintly state of moral purity and universal wisdom" (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 32). According to Kiku's interpretation of the poem, the man was constrained by his duties to provide for his family, thus felt mentally imprisoned until the death of his wife. While others pity him for his misfortune, the loss of responsibility helped him achieve the desired freedom (although he was physically in camp, the minister felt free to meditate and reach the desired Nirvana). Without another confidant in her family after the loss of her mother, Miss Sasagawara must spend her time with her father only, a person who becomes self-absorbed in his desires and does not empathize with her. The same poem gives insight into her relationship with her father, in which Mari Sasagawara is her father's "companion", as follows:

> But say that someone else, someone sensitive, someone admiring, someone who had not achieved this sublime condition and who did not wish to, were somehow called to companion such a man. Was it not likely that the saint, blissfully bent on cleansing from his already radiant soul the last imperceptible blemishes (for, being perfect, would he not humbly suspect his own flawlessness?) would be deaf and blind to the human passions rising, subsiding, and again rising, perhaps in anguished silence, within the selfsame room? The poet could not speak for others, of course; she could only speak for herself. But she would describe this man's devotion as a sort of madness, the monstrous sort which, pure of itself and so with immunity, might possibly bring troublous, scented scenes to recur in the other's sleep. (Yamamoto, 2006, p. 33).

As portrayed above, his endeavours negatively affect his daughter, who feels pressured by the historical and familial contexts and repeatedly gives in to the pressure. She does not acquire the "sublime condition" and does not wish to do so. Her father's self-centred mission (perceived as "madness" by Mari) makes her feel alienated within her father-daughter relationship: her previous strange behaviour is explained by his father's lack of interest and empathy towards her vulnerable condition. The father is engulfed in personal endeavours, which he puts above anyone else, including his daughter. When her father is too busy following his meditative efforts and does not see his daughter's struggles, she is "disintegrating right under his saintly nose" (Cheung, 2006, p. xiv-xv). According to Cheung, "the line between sanity and insanity is hard to draw in this story" (Cheung, 2006, p. xx). Mari Sasagawara, repeatedly labelled a "madwoman" by other characters, also marks her father as suffering from "madness". On the other hand, when Miss Mari Sasagawara is away from her father's ignorance and the camp environment, her behaviour changes for the better. Cheung explains this phenomenon and indicates that Mari Sasagawara's degrading

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mental state is a way she struggles to resist the incarceration and ignorance of her paternal figure, the only parent she has left (cf. Cheung, 2006, p. xx).

3. Conclusions

Upon analysing how the historical context of the Japanese American imprisonment camps has affected the detained Nikkei female characters, it has been revealed that the author's rendering of silences and voices could simultaneously oppress and liberate Nikkei women. The analysis has illustrated many instances of White-Nikkei tribalism and intra-Nikkei tribalism, which surface and resurface within a silence-voice interplay. In terms of the White-Nikkei tribalism, Yamamoto's depiction of the Poston camp environment hints at the mass incarceration of Japanese and Japanese Americans. Her characters suffer abrupt socio-political and personal transformations that highlight the gravity of the phenomenon: human rights are trampled upon by U.S. authorities, who confiscate the civil rights and freedom of over 120,000 Nikkei in the 1940s.

In terms of the intra-Nikkei tribalism manifestations, "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" reveals how Nikkei community members scrutinize and isolate one another, regardless of the imprisonment context. Instead of manifesting group cohesion, some Nikkei members retreat within their prejudices and isolate a vulnerable member, perceived as "different", outside the norms: Miss Mari Sasagawara. Hisaye Yamamoto develops upon the often-overlooked power of unjust judgement, a judgement without trial, a judgement where the victims are silenced/muted (Miss Mari Sasagawara), and the perpetrators speak and condemn without proof (U.S. authorities, Kiku, Elsie, Mister Sasaki). By depicting Mari Sasagawara's situation at a personal level, Yamamoto parallels the general condemnation of Japanese and Japanese Americans to mass imprisonment, as orchestrated by the U.S. establishment. Nikkei members who pronounce judgment against Mari Sasagawara fail to see how a more significant perpetrator - the U.S. establishment - is the element that ought to have been ostracized and opposed, and end up replicating.

Regarding the silence-voice interplay, it has been highlighted that one's voice through direct interventions can discriminatorily oppress a fellow community member (see the recurrent gossip belonging to Kiku, Elsie, and the Sasakis) and lead to Miss Sasagawara's isolation and mental alienation. Simultaneously, one's voice could empower a Nikkei victim, such as Mari Sasagawara, and subvert Nikkei and reader expectations. Sasagawara's few textual interventions subvert Kiku's expectations, especially with the help of the poem presented at the end of the short story. This poem clarifies her falsely perceived mental derangement and her complex artistic sensitivity. The poem accounts for Sasagawara's agency and subverts the rumours, repeated

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scrutiny, and name-calling depicted within the short story. In extension, the reader's expectations are also subverted, as, at times, the reader might have been swayed by Kiku's judgement of Sasagawara, for instance.

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