The Development of Female Identity in Asian American Women's Memoirs

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1. Introduction

This paper studies memoirs by two Asian American female authors, a Japanese American writer Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and Jade Snow Wong, a Chinese American writer. Even though both authors lived in and wrote about the period of the Second World War from the perspective of an Asian American, their life narratives differ tremendously. Namely, during WWII, Chinese Americans, unlike Japanese Americans, were not considered a national threat and therefore avoided close scrutiny, while Japanese Americans were relocated to different internment camps where they would remain for an unspecified time period. Memoirs by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and Jade Snow Wong were chosen to be analyzed in this paper since both authors can be deemed as the pioneers of Asian American women's literature, as well as because they both problematize the Second World War period.

This paper is divided into six main sections. After the introductory part, the second section explores the origins and the history of the concept of life-writing. Leaning on the work of Smith and Watson, the third section will explore the autobiographical subject, while the fourth section is dedicated to the topic of immigrant autobiography. The fifth and the sixth sections each focus on one autobiography by an Asian American female author, which are Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*, an autobiography that she co-authored with her husband James D. Houston. The last section serves to conclude the paper.

Autobiographies written by J. Wakatsuki Houston and J. S. Wong perfectly illustrate the intersectionality of Asian American identity. Therefore, it is the aim of this paper to provide further insight into this intersectionality and multiplicity of identity positions which, along with being created, also operate as creative forces themselves in the process of writing an autobiography. Therefore, no precedence is given to any determinants in analyzing the above-mentioned works. Instead, a narrower perspective is taken, appreciating individual experience.

2. Defining the concept of life-writing

The concept and the practice of writing about oneself, although may seem like a simple matter, cannot, according to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, be considered as such, since the writer becomes, "in the act of writing, both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation" (1). By providing the etymology of the word "autobiography", Smith and Watson offer its brief definition, since in Greek, autos signifies "self", bios "life", and graphe "writing", which in the exact order mean "self life writing" (1). As for a more recent definition, they provide a French theorist's, Philippe Lejeune's definition, who offers the following: "We call autobiography the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality." (qtd. in Smith and Watson 1).

Additionally, J. A. Cuddon defines autobiography as "an account of a person's life by him- or herself" (63). However, he addresses the unreliable nature of an autobiography, stating that disagreeable facts sometimes get repressed, and the truth gets distorted "for the sake of convenience or harmony and the occlusions of time may obscure as much as they reveal" (63). He further notes that the term appears to have been first used by Robert Southey in 1809 (63). Interestingly, while most critics still cite Southey's anglicizing of the three Greek words as the first use of the name in English, Smith and Watson suggest that the term autobiography was first coined in the preface to a collection of poems by the eighteen-century English working-class writer Ann Yearsley (*Reading Autobiography* 2). Furthermore, Robert Folkenflik, in his extensive study of the term autobiography, states that the term, along with its synonym self-biography, appeared in the late eighteenth century in both England and Germany, without any signs of mutual influence (Smith and Watson 2). He also notes that the French word *les memoirs* was commonly used to designate "self life writing", until the twentieth century, when the word "autobiography" was more commonly used to describe such life writing (Smith and

Watson 2). However, the distinction between autobiography and memoir is not based on the difference of kind since they can both be subsumed under the term of life-writing or self-writing. There are, however, some formal differences that help us differentiate between the two. According to M. H. Abrams, "autobiography is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself", (Abrams 22) and is not to be confused with the memoir, in which the author does not only focus on their developing self, but also on the people and events the author has witnessed (Abrams 22). Both *Farewell to Manzanar* and *Fifth Chinese Daughter* have an "autoethnographic" dimension, focusing on cultural peculiarities and traditions of their respective cultures. What is more, both narratives could be considered more as memoirs than autobiographies, since the focus is not on the individual's personality and his life (Eakin 2), but on the reporting and observation. In other words, both narrators assume the role of auto-ethnographer, explaining to the uninitiated the customs of the Asian American community. In both cases family serves as "the key environment in the individual's formation (…) which serves as the community's primary conduit for the transmission of its cultural values" (Eakin 85). The transmission of cultural values is, however, in both narratives something highly ambivalent. Furthermore, both authors focus on a particular period of their life, especially Jane Wakatsuki Houston, whose memoir describes her three-year interment experience in the period between 1942 and 1945. What is more, due to interment that resulted in the interruption of familial life and the inability to perform expected familial roles, the question of family is still prevalent in Wakatsuki Houston's narrative, as well as it is in Wong's. Jade Snow Wong disregards even the use of the first person, which is, according to Eakin, "autobiography's dominant key" (ix), and proceeds to write her memoir from the third person narrative voice.

In the eighteenth century, the appearance of the figure of the "Enlightened individual" made autobiographies, as studies of notions such as self-consciousness, self-knowledge, and self-interest, as well as the meaning of public achievement, popular and sought after by the

growing reading public (*Reading Autobiography* 2). However, it does not mean that the practice of self-referential writing arose only at the end of the eighteenth century. On the contrary, to support the argument of the practice of self-referential writing before the eighteenth century, Smith and Watson include terms used prior to the period:

> But the relatively recent coinage of the term autobiography does not mean that the practice of self-referential writing began only at the end of the eighteenth century. In earlier centuries, terms such as "memoir" (Madame de Staël, Glückel of Hameln) or "the life" (Teresa of Avila) or "the book of my life" (Cardano) or "confessions" (Augustine, Rousseau) or "essays of myself" (Montaigne) were used to mark the writer's refraction of self-reference through speculations about history, politics, religion, science, and culture. (3)

What is more, although generally not recognized, an autobiography written by Margery Kempe in ca. 1432 is said to be the first full autobiography written in English. Namely, *The Book of Margery Kempe,* is a book in which she narrates her life as a display of "*pe hy & vnspecabyl mergy of ower souereyn Sauyowr Cryst Ihesu"* (qtd. in Mason 209).

2.1 Authenticity of self-referential writing

In defining life-writing, J. A. Cuddon points to the possibility of fictional character of self-referential writing. As a case in point, Cuddon uses Rousseau's *Confessions,* published posthumously in 1781 and 1788, stating that they "are unreliable as literal truth" (63) and that they have a different literary value, perhaps that of being one of the most influential books ever written (63-4). St. Augustine's *Confessions,* on the other hand, Cuddon deems as the first autobiography of any note. Written in the fourth century, a work which Cuddon describes as a deeply personal account of spiritual experience, as well as an extremely deep psychological self-analysis is that which, as he suggests, becomes commonplace only in modern times (63).

Smith and Watson make similar claims to Cuddon's, cautioning that autobiographical narrating and history writing are not synonymous, even though people sometimes take

autobiographies as a source of historical evidence (10). They further claim that life narratives, such as autobiography and memoirs, cannot be taken primarily as historical records, since they present a person's subjective truth, rather than fact (10). What is more, even though life narrators are, in a sense, making "history" by chronicling an event, a time period, or a community, they are, at the same time, "performing several rhetorical acts: justifying their own perceptions, upholding their reputations, disputing the accounts of others, settling scores, conveying cultural information, and inventing desirable futures among others" (10). That is why, according to Smith and Watson, autobiographical text requires reading practices "that reflect on the narrative tropes, sociocultural contexts, rhetorical aims, and narrative shifts within the historical or chronological trajectory of the text" (10). In other words, life narrators unavoidably refer to the world outside the text that is the ground for the narrator's lived experience, while, at the same time, it is in part comprised of fantasies, subjective memories, dreams, and cultural myths (9).

3. Subject of memoirs

According to Smith and Watson, the complexity of life narratives is especially visible through the constitutive processes of autobiographical subjectivity, which is dependent on memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency (15), which will be dealt with separately in this section.

3.1 Identity and embodiment

According to Smith and Watson, identities are created in language, i.e., they are discursive. What is more, identities are not innate, we are not born with a fixed set of characteristics (33). M. M. Bakhtin, in his four essays "The Dialogic Imagination", characterizes discourse as internally dialogical (269). Similarly, Bakhtin argues that consciousness, and identity as a category of consciousness, is also dialogical since it is always involved in social interaction (Smith and Watson 34). According to Smith and Watson, "identities, or subject positionings, materialize within collectivities out of the culturally marked differences that permeate symbolic interactions within and between collectivities" (33). Regarding autobiographical acts, the narrators, that is, the writers, position themselves by acts of identification or differentiation (Smith and Watson 34). In connection to the intersectionality of identities, Smith and Watson suggest that

> The effects of this multiplicity of identities are not additive but intersectional. That is, we cannot just add the effects of one identity to the effects of another to understand the position from which someone speaks. To speak autobiographically as a black woman is not to speak as a "woman" and as a "black." It is to speak as blackwoman. To speak as an Australian indigenous man is not to speak as a "man" plus as an "Australian" plus as an "Aboriginal." There is no universal identity of "man" or "woman" outside specificities of historical and cultural location (36)

In a similar vein, Anne E. Goldman suggests that, when reading autobiographical narratives, neither race nor gender, nor any other identity determinants, should be given primacy. In other words, instead of making broad claims about autobiographical narratives, reading autobiography should take a narrower approach, focusing on and honoring the particular, distinct individual narratives, while also paying attention to "the discursive and historical contexts in which such scripting is conceived, produced, and read" (Goldman xxxii, xxvi). What this approach can help us understand is that race, and all the other identity determinants, is not an "irreducible category", but that it is "formed by and informing the whole range of social, historical, political, and cultural circumstances within which the subject locates herself" (Goldman xxxi). Goldman's individualistic approach is thus suitable for understanding the complexity of defining ethnic autobiography, immigrant autobiography, including Asian American autobiography.

Life-writing necessarily links subjectivity, memory, and the material nature of the body, since the body can be seen as a site of autobiographical knowledge precisely because memory itself is embodied. Consequently, autobiographical narrators as such are embodied subjects (Smith and Watson 37). Furthermore, human consciousness, and inherently memory, is grounded in different systems, such as biochemical, physiological, and neurological systems. But it is embodied even beyond its personal internal systems. Embodied subjects are located in culturally different ways or, to put it differently, "the narrating body is situated at a nexus of language, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and other specificities, and autobiographical narratives mine this embodied locatedness" (Smith and Watson 38).

What is more, by writing life narratives, narrators can negotiate, contest, revise, or engage cultural norms. In doing so, they reproduce, question, subvert, or change discourses at power that define and distinguish what is normative from what is considered to be ab-normative (Smith and Watson 41-2). The question of ethnicity and ethnic identity is also connected to the

bodily experience. Namely, according to Nagel, ethnicity is most closely related to the issue of boundaries, which "determine who is a member and who is not and designate which ethnic categories are available for individual identification at a particular time and place" (154). Interestingly, both Wakatsuki Houston's and Wong's narratives describe a conflict arising from the rejection of the available ethnic category, and a struggle to negotiate and change it. Ethnicity, by commonly being reduced to the color of one's skin, has often been viewed as biological in the United States (Nagel 154). However, ethnic identity is not innate, but situational and changeable (Nagel 154). Barth sees ethnicity as the product of social attribution, which Nagel describes as a "labeling process engaged in by oneself and others" (154).

In other words, individuals are able to perform their ethnicity differently depending on the situation and the audiences. Furthermore, ethnic identity can be defined as "the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual's self-identification and outsiders' ethnic designations – i.e., what *you* think your ethnicity is, versus what *they* think your ethnicity is" [emphasis in the original] (Nagel 154). Finally, the ability to perform different identities available to the individual "produces a 'layering' (…) of ethnic identities which combines with the ascriptive character of ethnicity to reveal the negotiated, problematic nature of ethnic identity" (Nagel 154). The 'problem' of ethnic identity and its performability is the reason for considerable criticism directed towards both memoirs. Namely, they are accused of exoticizing Asian culture, while at the same time idealizing the Western one. However, such criticism could be accused of disregarding the ability and the intention of the author to consciously construct their identity. It should however be noted that ethnicity, as well as other determinants of identity, should not be conceptualized as a "pure and irreducible category" (Goldman xxxi), but should rather be seen as being shaped by circumstances.

3.2 Memory and experience

The importance of memory lies in the fact that the autobiographical writer is dependent on access to memory in order to tell a story of the past, but also to situate the present relative to that experiential history. Hence, memory serves both as the source and the authenticator of autobiographical acts (Smith and Watson 16). Contrary to popular belief, the process of retrieving memories is not passive, since the subject actively creates the meaning of lived experiences in the act of remembering. Thus, memories are not replicas of past events, but their interpretation (Smith and Watson 16). Additionally, memories are contextual, in other words, remembering happens in particular circumstances. Similarly, in an autobiographical narrative, the memory that is evoked is specific to the contexts of telling and the time of writing (Smith and Watson 18). Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, for example, set out to write Jeanne's life narrative using a tape recorder and a 1944 yearbook that was put together at Manzanar High School organized in the facility in which she had been interned. The yearbook was extremely valuable to them since it documented not only the graduating seniors, but the entire landscape:

> It documented the entire camp scene—the graduating seniors, the guard towers, the Judo pavilion, the creeks I used to wade in, my family's barracks. As the photos brought that world back, I began to dredge up feelings that had lain submerged since the forties. I began to make connections I had previously been afraid to see (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston).

For Jeanne, to openly write about her experiences in Manzanar meant to include more that day-to-day life inside the compound; it demanded coming to terms with the long-repressed feelings and the impact the interment had on her entire life. When it comes to the politics of remembering, it determines what is recollected and what is left out, and is, as such, central to

both cultural production of knowledge and to an individual's self-knowledge (Smith and Watson 19).

Autobiographical narratives, among other things, serve to be read in the context of larger cultural issues, as well as against the dominant ideology (Smith and Watson 19). As an example of the politics of remembering, the dominant American perception of the Japanese American internment can serve as the case in point. In an interview for the University of Hawaii, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, co-authors of *Farewell to Manzanar*, recall that a lot of people in the U. S. in the pre-World War II years and after had the perception that the Japanese Americans were in grave danger because of the general panic and hysteria of the period. While it might have been true, according to Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, the problem was that the Japanese people could have been protected differently, not by being taken into camps protected by barbed wire and having guns pointed at them (Friedson 60).

In connection to the politics of remembering, Robert T. Hayashi finds the creation of the Manzanar National Historic Site particularly troubling, since he sees the focus on one particular memory as too narrow in the context of its history (52). Others have also expressed their concerns about the production of a too limited interpretation of the site of Manzanar, such as Inyo County Assistant County Administrator Paul Morrison, fearing the erasure of the histories bound to Manzanar:

> We believe that the site should be interpreted in its entirety. Nobody has mentioned that "Manzanar" means "apple orchards." There are apple orchards. They were part of the country's farming industry years and years ago, and it is a Native American site. So we would like to see that the site is interpreted in its entirety with Native Americans, the

Japanese that were interned there, and the farming interests of the country. (qtd. in Hayashi 53)

Furthermore, since memory finds itself entangled with cultural politics, it is therefore not entirely privatized, but can be considered also as a collective activity, especially because society consists of various communities of memory, such as familial, religious, racial, or ethnic communities (Smith and Watson 20). Memory, although generally perceived as immaterial phenomenon, arguably, always exists in materiality, be it in the materiality of sound, text, or any kind of object, while it is also materialized inside our bodies, in our brains. It is evoked by the senses – smell, touch, sound, and taste, or by objects or events that bear importance to the narrator (Smith and Watson 21). This phenomenon of materiality of memory can serve as a trigger for evoking memories, much like the Manzanar yearbook prompted Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston to start writing her memoirs, or how the aroma of the madeleine arouses Proust's narrator's memory of his past.

The dynamics of memory might pose a particular problem when it comes to remembering of traumatic memories as in Wakatsuki Houston's case. According to Ruth Leys, traumatic experience "refuses to be represented *as* past" (2) being "perpetually reexperienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present" (2), and "frozen in time" (2). On the other hand, Michelle Balaev in her book *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* suggests a new trend in literary criticism on trauma. Although Balaev theorizes about fictional works of art, her analysis can arguably be applicable to autobiographical narratives as well. The relationship between psychic trauma, memory, and landscape is of crucial importance to Balaev's study, which merges trauma studies with ecological theory – allowing for a new way of conceptualizing trauma. Namely, Balaev's concept of trauma is spatial in focus rather than temporal. It involves place and landscape, and in doing so it exceeds the discussions of trauma as *a phenomenon* frozen in time or, better still, as "a timeless event that is not fully registered

in the first place but experienced as trauma only belatedly, when it resurfaces in flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and repetitive reenactments" (Rodi-Risberg 148). In her study, Balaev argues that the descriptions of the physical environment where a traumatic experience occurred are inscribed with past experience and help to position a character within a particular sociocultural context that, subsequently, influences the recollection and working through of trauma (Rodi-Risberg 149), which is what will be argued in relation to Wakatsuki Houston's memoirs. In connection to life narratives, for those suffering from traumatic memories, autobiographical acts can, although not necessarily so, be therapeutic, an act which Suzette A. Henke calls "scriptotherapy" (Kaplan 228).

Experience is another important aspect of autobiographical subjectivity, and much like memory, contrary to what would seem logical, it is not simply personal. Experience itself is an interpretation of our past, but also of our present, which depends on where we figure culturally and historically in a specific present moment. As such, experience is also mediated trough memory and language (Smith and Watson 24). Joan W. Scott states that experience is not something that can be possessed by individuals, but that the individuals are "subjects who are constituted through experience" (780). According to Scott, experience is not the authoritative evidence that is the foundation of what is known. On the contrary, it is "that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced" (780). In a similar vein, autobiographical subjects also view themselves as subjects constituted through experience that is a part of their identities (Smith and Watson 25).

According to Scott, experience is an indispensable part of our everyday language. It is used to talk about what happened, to establish similarities or differences, and for asserting undisputable knowledge. It serves both as an interpretation of something and is, at the same time, in need of interpretation (797), which underlines its linguistic and textual nature.

3.3 Agency and subjectivity

Autobiography, in its tradition, has been read as a narrative of agency, a proof and an exercise of free will and living freely (Smith and Watson 42). The concept of "free will" is rooted in a historically specific discourse about the Enlightenment individual. Smith and Watson regard erroneous the perspective which is based on an ideological concept that all humans are individually mature and free to make decisions, and which views it as a "natural" aspect of existence (Smith and Watson 43). As such, autobiographies, read as records of exercise of free will, are nowhere close to simple when it comes to explaining the matter of how subjects construct their agency in life narratives.

Subjectivity and its complexity have been a matter of discussion for many thinkers. According to Althusser, all individuals become subjects functioning relative to ideology. For Althusser, ideology "transforms" all individuals into subjects by means of what he calls "Repressive State Apparatus", which functions predominantly by coercion. His examples would be institutions such as the Army and the Police (Althusser).

Political theorist Elizabeth Wingrove, in rethinking Althusser's theory about subjectivity argues that, since in a society there exist multiple ideologies, agents are bound to change themselves and their worlds, thereby constituting a process of reconfiguration which is repeated *ad infinitum* (Smith and Watson 43). Nevertheless, the result of that perpetual reconfiguration is the emergence of new possibilities for both knowing the system and knowing oneself as a subject within that system. Both memoirs to be analyzed include what Wingrove calls the "process of reconfiguration", since both authors change their consciousness and their positioning inside the matrix of the American society in the period of the Second World War.

Similarly, feminist philosopher Judith Butler notes that the question of agency is reformulated into a question of how signification and resignification work. Butler therefore

suggests that identity should be understood as a signifying practice, which entails understanding "culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life" (184). What is more, there is no unity of discourse, but a plurality of discourses "coexisting within temporal frames, and instituting unpredictable and inadvertent convergences from which specific modalities of discursive possibilities are engendered" (184). Additionally, agency arises in the process of signification. According to Butler, it is the binary opposition in the contemporary political discourses of identity which establishes the "I" and which concretizes itself as a necessity, while concealing the discursive apparatus which constructed it in the first place (184). Furthermore, since the intelligible subjects depend on, or better still, are bound by available discourses, Butler deems the process of subjectivity, which includes agency, as performative. Theorizings of subjectivity and agency as in part engendered by ideology, discourse and the negotiation of the available positions offered above can therefore serve as a critical framework for the way in which the act of narrating life can be constructed, in other words, how a narrator, even is seemingly deficient, can exercise agency in different ways (Smith and Watson 45).

Finally, although life-writing narrators often get perceived of as coherent, unified identities telling unified stories, it is probably due to the myth that the identity is unified, stable, and fixed. What Smith and Watson propose is to approach autobiographical stories as a performative act. They furthermore claim that by theorizing memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency, we begin to realize the complexity and the performative nature of autobiographical subjectivity (48).

4. Immigrant life-writing

According to Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, much like immigrants have often been seen as less than fully American, so has immigrant life-writing often been marginalized by the American autobiographical scholarship. Wong furthermore points to the fact that that the premise that the autobiography is a characteristically American genre has not been contested by many scholars (Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 299). Nevertheless, William Boelhower's book *Immigrant Autobiography in the United States: Four Versions of the Italian American Self* is significant because it is the first book-length study on immigrant autobiography (Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 299).

Boelhower constructs a model in which all immigrant life-writing takes part. Accordingly, immigrant autobiography must "organize two cultural systems, a culture of the present and the future and a culture of memory, into a single model" (qtd in Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 299). Sau-ling Cynthia Wong in her reading of Boelhower's theory of immigrant autobiography finds the omnibus terms conceptually problematic since it categorizes the foreign-born, the first generation and the American-born, the second generation into a single immigrant experience. (301). Consequently, Wong calls for a more careful use of the term immigrant autobiography. She further notes that the American-born do not have direct memories of their ancestral country and culture, but that it is mediated by their parents, who have also experienced a lot of changes having moved to the United States (Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 301). However, Wong points out that the immigrants are not always aware of their "Americanization", and that such a realization could potentially be psychologically threatening. What is more, the first-generation immigrants and their second-generation, American-born children often have conflicts in the form of cultural confrontation (Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 301).

Such a confrontation, based on the cultural differences between generations is present both in Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and in Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar.* According to Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, Jade Snow Wong in *Fifth Chinese Daughter* situates her narrative in terms of the rebellion against Old World values, but, at the same time, forms a much more complicated narrative in terms of this confrontation (302). Jade Snow Wong's father, who is from her perspective a relentless traditionalist, is, as we find out from her memoirs, against footbinding and in favor of women working and getting an education, at least to a certain extent. What is more, he feels no disjunction between his deep-rooted Confucianism and Western ideas, having fused with one with the other (Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 302). Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, on the other hand, confronts her ancestral tradition by wanting to convert to Christianity or by getting into cheerleading, an activity which she thought would make her seem more Anglo American.

Another difference in which the process of "Americanization" plays out for the first and the second generation is that the first-generation or the foreign-born immigrants must, if allowed by law, be naturalized, while the American-born are automatically granted citizenship. Subsequently, they don't have the same expectations about the opportunities that may await them in America (Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 302). What is more, the second generation or the America-born writers use English by necessity and by right, often having been brought up monolingual. The first generation, however, start out with their mother tongue only to use English as a second language (Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 302).

Even though Boelhower's synthesis might be a workable model for Asian American texts, there are additional reasons why Sau-ling Cynthia Wong finds his omnibus term immigrant autobiography more confusing than helpful, especially when it comes to Chinese American microtexts. Wong argues that the Chinese immigrants have a different relationship to the Judeo-Christian tradition than the other European immigrants, like the Italian or Jewish,

for example. Therefore, the meaning of America is different for Chinese American compared to European immigrants. Wong further suggests that the European-origin myths, such as “lost Eden”, “a new Adam to be reborn”, “the Old World renewed”, “the New Jerusalem”, and “the City on a Hill”, don’t really apply when it comes to Asian Americans generally (Wong, “Immigrant Autobiography” 304). For those coming from the real Orient it would be impossible to think of America as, what Boelhower terms “a type of fabulous new Orient” (Wong, “Immigrant Autobiography” 304). Instead of it being a symbolic journey, the idea of going to America on the part of Chinese immigrants is more pragmatic. Chinese emigrated to America around the 1840s, after the United States expanded westward. Reasons for their leaving their homes were due to the Opium Wars, heavy floods, the loss of land and civil strife (Li 1). According to Ronald T. Takaki, very few Chinese women came to America at the time:

> In America, Chinese women found themselves in a world of men. In 1852, of the 11,794 Chinese in California, only seven were women — a ratio of 1,685 males to every one female. Eighteen years later, of 63,199 Chinese in the United States only 4,566 were female — a ratio of fourteen to one. Chinese women worked in a variety of occupations: they were housekeepers, servants, laundresses, seamstresses, shoemakers, cooks, miners, and fisherwomen. But overwhelmingly, especially in the early years, Chinese women were prostitutes. In the 1870 census manuscripts, 61 percent of the 3,536 Chinese women in California had occupations listed as "prostitute." (121)

Reasons why there were considerably less Chinese women than men are multifold. Firstly, women were confined to their homes, the private sphere, where they served the old-aged parents-in-law and took care of the children, while men functioned in the public sphere (Li 1). Secondly, early Chinese immigrants did not have the intention of staying in America for long. They intended to earn enough money and return to China. What is more, the job opportunities limited Chinese to working in railroad construction sites or mines, which meant that they had

to move often while they worked for unequal wages. Furthermore, before the Second World War, Chinese were discriminated against legally, the Chinese Exclusion Act that passed in 1882 was not abolished until 1943 effectively discouraging women from accompanying their husbands (Li 1, 2).

The fact that Chinese American experience contextually differs from the experience of the Western immigrants, be it symbolically, geographically, historically, politically, or in any other respect, calls for a different model for reading this corpus of life-writing. Similarly, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong proposes a model for reading autobiography that is not predetermined and that does not follow a fixed set of characteristics. Consequently, she calls for a model capable of conceiving multiple "provisional axes of organization" (Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 308) which allow for grouping autobiographies by not only their authors' immigrant status, but also in other ways, such as by treatment of Americanization, ethnicity, social class, narrative point of view, historical period, gender, etc. (Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 308). Referring to Bergland's redefinition of the "I" of autobiography, which he defines as a "speaking subject inscribed by multiple discourses, positioned in multiple subjectivities and situated in multiple historical contexts" (qtd. in Wong, "Immigrant Autobiography" 308), Wong concludes that "immigrant autobiography can no longer be conceived of as an unalterably demarcated segment of reality with a single set of inherent features" (308). Accordingly, Jade Snow Wong's memoir *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar* are to be analyzed not exclusively in terms of immigrant status, but in terms of other particular approaches.

5. Chinese American women's memoirs: *Fifth Chinese Daughter* by Jade Snow Wong

Fifth Chinese Daughter (1950), a memoir written by Jade Snow Wong tells her life story which revolves around the conflict between her immigrant parents, especially her dominant father, and herself, as she opposes their authoritative patriarchal upbringing and embarks on her coming-of-age journey of self-realization. The civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, and the rise of multiculturalism prompted the emergence of Chinese American literature in the 1970s (Li 5). Chinese American women's literature entered the world of the mainstream American literature by works of Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, Gish Jen, Fae Yenne Ng, Mei Ng, and became one of the most important ethnic literatures, having been recognized both by mainstream American literature and worldwide (Li 5). Jade Snow Wong is credited as the pioneer of Chinese American women's autobiographical writing. She wrote her autobiography *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and published it in 1950, thus becoming the first Chinese American woman to write an autobiography focusing on a Chinese American character (Li 17). It was also the most read work by a second generation Chinese American, until Maxine Hong Kingston published *The Woman Warrior* in 1976.

In her reading of Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Li studies Chinese American family as a site of oppression, but also as one of empowerment. According to Li, "the point of departure shared by Chinese American women writers is the silence of their history" (13). What is more, the racial oppression of minorities in the United States is often characterized as "feminization" since the sexism-inspired silencing of women has always been fruitful. Chinese American women have been portrayed or constructed as "alien, ahistorical, voiceless Oriental objects" (Li 13), silenced both by Orientalists and white racists. Life-writing helped Chinese American women reclaim their subjectivity, but before that, to find their own

voices. What is more, autobiographical writing served as a powerful tool for subverting stereotypes constructed by the mainstream society. Similarly, Susan Stanford Friedman asserts:

> Women's autobiography comes alive as a literary tradition of self-creation when we approach its texts from a psycho-political perspective based in the lives of women. Historically, women as a group have never been the "gatherer of men, of lands, of power, maker of kingdoms or of empires" …. Nonetheless, this historical oppression has not destroyed women's consciousness of self…Women have shattered the distorting identities imposed by culture and left "the sign" of their "presence" in their autobiographical writing. (qtd. in Li 14)

Chinese American women's life-writing is therefore extremely important as an exploration of female subjectivity, and a cease in their silencing. Chinese American women's memoirs is, according to Lorde, "the transformation of silence into language and action as an act of self-revelation" (qtd. in Li 15).

5.1 Consciousness between two cultures

Jade Snow Wong's father arrived in the United States in 1903 from Zhongshan, Guangdong Province, after which his wife joined him 18 years later with her two elder sisters. Jade Snow Wong was born in 1922 into a big Chinese immigrant family in San Francisco's Chinatown. Her father had a sewing factory in a basement in Chinatown, as the whole family helped to keep the business going. Jade Snow helped her mother with cooking and other household chores, along with attending both her regular school and a Chinese school in the evening. She finished Mills College in 1942. After that, she worked as a secretary in a military factory during the Second World War. Wong wrote *Fifth Chinese Daughter* (1950) and *No Chinese Stranger* (1975). She was awarded an honorary doctorate of humane letters from Mills College. She married a Chinatown native artist Woodrow Ong in 1950 with whom she ran a

ceramics business and later a travel agency in San Francisco. She was a successful ceramics artist whose work has been showcased around the world. Jade Snow Wong died in March 2006 in San Francisco, at the age of eighty-four (Li, 17-18).

Thanks to its huge popularity, critics, both from China and the US have commented on Wong's work. According to Amy Ling, Wong's writing has double tones. She asserts that Wong's memoirs, while seeming polite and restrained on the surface, nevertheless addresses the topics of sexism and racism by carefully including details and anecdotes which point to Wong's awareness about the issues without addressing them directly (Li 18). This duality, however, is not clear to everyone. Patricia Lin Blinde, for example, criticizes Wong's literary choice of autobiography, and suggests that Wong possesses a "view of life as self-determined totalities" (qtd. in Yin and Paulson 53). Kathleen Loh Swee Yin and Kristoffer F. Paulson challenge Blinde's analysis of *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and propose that the world that Wong faces is not the world of totalities, but a fragmented and confusing place, a place in which she searches for a balance for her subjectivity (59).

What is more, Wong's memoir points to her awareness of the confusion and conflicts of growing up between two cultures. An episode which Wong records in her memoir serves as the first textual evidence of her awareness of cultural differences that slowly reveal themselves to her consciousness. One such situation occurs when Jade Snow hurts herself at a school playground and her teacher comforts her in her embrace. This experience is new and unusual to Jade Snow since she never experienced it from her parents. It therefore arouses ambivalence in Jade Snow. Although she initially feels wonderful, the feeling soon metamorphoses into shame and panic which prompts her to flee the school playground. Consequently, the incident prompts Jane Snow to start questioning the two cultures: "to compare American ways with those of her mother and father, and the comparison made her uncomfortable" (Wong).

5.2 Confronting the traditional culture in the immigrant family

Blinde's suggestion, namely, that Wong is not aware enough of the unfair treatment of herself in comparison to her brothers has been challenged by Yin and Paulson. Blinde suggests that Jade Snow's unfair treatment "never precipitates any real anger" and that she "proceeds to live in accordance with the terms which denigrate the female sex" (qtd. in Yin and Paulson 54). Yin and Paulson contradict these suggestions and claim that Wong is "intensely aware of the injustice of her apparent insignificance as a girl and strives to break through the bonds of Chinese tradition in which she has been so strictly brough up" (54). This is particularly obvious when Jade Snow's father refuses to support her financially through her education because he prioritizes his sons' education, since they are the ones to carry on the family name. On the other hand, Jade Snow, being a woman, is only to educate herself to be a good mother, a premise she strongly opposes:

> How can Daddy know what an American advanced education can mean to me? Why should Older Brother be alone in enjoying the major benefits of Daddy's toil? There are no ancestral pilgrimages to be made in the United States! I can't help being born a girl. Perhaps, even being a girl, I don't want to marry just to raise sons! . . . . I am a person, besides being a female! Don't the Chinese admit that women also have feelings and minds?" (Wong)

Therefore, it could be argued against Blinde's characterization of Wong as an individual possessing a "view of life as self-determined totalities" (qtd. in Yin and Paulson 53). On the contrary, Jade Snow does not succumb to a binding philosophy of her father, but decides to question it and to confront it. Jade Snow decides to pay for her education on her own, defying both societal expectations of her role as a Chinese American woman, and the authority of her parents (Yin and Paulson 55).

According to Yin and Paulson, Blinde's inaccurate reading of Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter* lies in the fact that she does not recognize or understand "the divided voice" of Wong's narrative. What is more, Blinde is reading Wong's work exclusively as an autobiographical writing, while Yin and Paulson find that Wong's work is not strictly autobiographical in its form. They explain this on the example of Wong's choice of the third person narrative voice. Wong's disregard for the first-person narrative voice and other autobiographical modes points to the fact that her narrative ought to be read as a memoir, which has previously been discussed in this paper.

5.3 The narrative voice in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*

Jade Snow Wong writes her memoir in the third person narrative voice. In their reading of *Fifth Chinese Daughter,* Yin and Paulson propose that by using the third person narration the reader is always aware of Wong being at the same time both the protagonist and the author (57). What is more, they claim that it is Jade Snow Wong who writes the narrative biography of Jade Snow, which results in dissolving the singular "I" into the objective third person "she" (Yin and Paulson 58). They thus conclude that the genius of Wong's writing resides in "the tension of its inherent paradox" (58), which is the fact that Wong, although creating arguably objective and fictive character of Jade Snow, the character cannot be removed from the author because they are one and the same person (Yin and Paulson 58).

This paradox, tension, division, or contradiction is present in the form of third person narrative voice. Subsequently, the reader is made aware of "the divided consciousness of the narrator in the divided voice of author and character" (Yin and Paulson 58). Finally, Snow's choice of a rather unusual form is said to arise directly from her ethnic identity (Yin and Paulson) 58). In a preface to her 1989 edition, she notes: "Even written in English an 'I' book by a Chinese would seem outrageously immodest to anyone raised in the spirit of Chinese propriety" (Wong). Therefore, it could also be concluded that, by rejecting the "I" form and the

individual ego, the author creates a fictional character within competing discourses, which are, for Wong at least, "the many opposing demands of her Chinese American heritage" (Yin and Paulson 59).

Additionally, in her reading of Wong's autobiography, Deborah L. Madsen employs the contemporary postmodern framework according to which autobiographies, in particular ethnic autobiographies, are always characterized by multiple subject. More specifically, Chinese American autobiographies "can be seen as 'fractured' and as riven through with competing racialized discourses of self that cannot allow an image of coherent, universal subjectivity to dominate'" (Madsen 344).

Jonathan Culler explains that the writer depends on the reader's interpretive competence to understand that the text she is reading is literary and not entirely factual. What is more, the meaning of the text is realized in the act of reading. In the case of autobiography, the act of reading produces a meaning structure that relates to some cultural encoding of subjectivity (Madsen 346). As such, autobiographical subject is "the construction of language used to actualize cultural and linguistic expectations of the "universal subject'" (Madsen 346).

According to Madsen, autobiography perpetuates what James Clifford calls "the myth of coherent personality" (qtd in Madsen 346), or what Sidonie Smith calls the "universal subject" (qtd in Madsen 346). According to Betty Bergland, the autobiographical "I" is defined as "a speaking subject inscribed by multiple discourses, positioned in multiple subjectivities and situated in multiple historical contexts" (qtd in Madsen 346). Autobiographies of Chinese American authors, by representing both "Oriental" and "Occidental" discourses and their relationship, point to the hybridity of Chinese American subject (Madsen 347). Furthermore, it is said that the conventions of autobiography are racialized in that the narrative point of view switches from "Chinese" to "American" and back again, thus disturbing the discourses and the

racial differences. The genre of autobiography most directly invites the reader to assume that subjectivity and narrative are to be seen as identical (Madsen 347).

In the case of autobiographies of Asian American writers, there are certain expectations about the Occident's Oriental Other. Subsequently, Chinese American autobiography is fragmented by competing discourses of racial and cultural difference since the authors want to simultaneously authenticate their Chinese ethnicity and American nationality or citizenship (Madsen 347). Consequently, racial authenticity defined by the dominant culture is being questioned and subverted by offering "an unstable conception of subjectivity and written by cultural discourses of race (Chinese-American, Oriental-Occidental) rather than as writing these discourses" (Madsen 347). According to Madsen, Jade Snow is an example of an autobiographical subject written by discourses of race. Additionally, her choice of the third person narrative voice "refuses any simple ontological identification of narrator-protagonist with the subject(ivity) represented in the text" (347). According to Madsen, Jade Snow Wong represents herself as "an indivisible hybrid of Oriental and Occidental perspectives" (349)

Interestingly, Jaime Cleland contends that even though referring to oneself in third person is a "Chinese habit", it is not a habit that Wong could not break. In other words, Cleland wants to point out that the third person narration is a conscious choice Wong makes. Namely, as critics and writers started to develop an Asian American canon, Jade Snow Wong's work became scrutinized. Wong was especially under attack for exoticizing Chinese culture. Elaine H. Kim, for example, considers Wong "psychologically vulnerable" to racist demands (qtd in Cleland 62). Cleland, on the other hand, compares her writing before *Fifth Chinese Daughter* to examine the changes in Wong's self-representation, but also the extent of exotic stereotyping in her previous works.

For that purpose, he compares Wong's earlier essays published in the magazine *Common Ground* in 1945 and 1948. While suggesting that the early works do not vindicate Wong in connection to capitulating to her white readers' tastes, he also points to the complexity of Wong's position as an Asian American writer in the postwar era, offering a more sympathetic reading. Contrary to Kim's suggestions about psychological vulnerability of the author, Cleland argues that "Wong's construction of different selves for different audiences indicates her artistic and psychological strength" (62). Similar to Yin and Paulson's reading, Cleland suggests that Wong creates the figure of "Jade Snow" in order to meet the orientalist expectations necessary to meet to get her work published, but, at the same time, separating herself from those same expectations, thus maintaining control over the text (62). What is more, Cleland contends that "any autobiographical protagonist is necessarily a construction" (63).

Accordingly, Tina Chen argues that the Asian American identity entails impersonation, "a specific act that involves the assumption of a public identity that does not necessarily belong to 'someone else' but that has been assigned to and subsequently adopted by the performer in question in order to articulate an identity comprehensible to the public" (qtd in Cleland 63). Wong's strategy is similar to what Chen defines as "impersonation". Wong, by adopting a pen name, which is an English translation of her Chinese name, narrates a story of that other self in the context of the readers' expectations (Cleland 63). Compared to the smaller audience of an anti-racist magazine *Common Ground* in which she previously published her work, *Fifth Chinese Daughter'*s third person narration helps Wong define and construct her autobiographical persona while negotiating readers' expectations of Asian American identity and her own self-perception. The persona that Wong creates is, according to Cleland, "foreign" both to her white audience and, to an extent, to her own self-perception (73).

Finally, Cleland suggests that Wong's writing before and after *Fifth Chinese Daughter* serves as evidence of her constructing Jade Snow as a fictional character created to meet reader

expectations and to provide access to the exotic. However, the "'fictionalized' third-person Jade Snow represents not an 'internalization of the outside gaze' as much as a strategy for separating herself from the gaze" (Cleland 73). Wong distinctly separates her personal from her public life. In her personal life, she went by name Constance or Connie, which she never uses in her writing, shielding herself from the public gaze (Cleland 74). Finally, it could be argued that by strictly defining and separating personae, Wong manages to negotiate audience expectations of a Chinese American woman in the context of the American society in the 1940s and 1950s, while still maintaining a separate private persona (Cleland 78).

5.4 Competing perspectives and a developing sense of hybridity

Jade Snow Wong's memoir also has an "autoetnographical" dimension. For example, Jade Snow includes detailed descriptions of Chinese cuisine and rituals. One scene in particular depicts a ritual performed by Jade Snow's grandmother in which Jade Snow is scared by a live turkey her grandmother prepares for the Thanksgiving. Cleland's reading of this scene serves as evidence for downplaying the assimilation of Wong's family. This scene, however, arguably also points to the deconstruction of Wong's exoticism. Namely, in a scene with Jade Snow's grandmother, on her mother's side, she writes: "A vivid memory Jade Snow was always to associate with Grandmother had to do with a live turkey her father brought home one American holiday week" (Wong). As it has been mentioned before, Jade Snow is terrified by the live animal. The grandmother then performed a ritual to "out the scare" from Jade Snow: "the Grandmother lit a fire in her bronze brazier and threw in a small lump of 'Bok Fon', a white mineral with herbal properties. In the semidark room, she began to chant softly: "Out with the scare which is hiding in our Jade Snow…'" (Wong). In this scene Wong is focusing on depicting the exoticism of the described ritual, while, at the same time, the scene can serve as evidence of deconstruction of that same exoticism, considering the fact that the turkey is being prepared to celebrate American Thanksgiving (Cleland 67).

Further in the narrative, at the time when Jade Snow attends college, she really starts living a double life. This is reflected in the apparent shifts of narrative point of view from "Oriental" to "Occidental" perspective (Madsen 351). According to Madsen, this resolves the conflict between her first-generation, foreign-born parents and the second generation, American-born Jade Snow (351). This idea is also reflected in Wong's text when she muses: "[s]he no longer attempted to bring the new Western learning into her Oriental home. When she entered the Wong household, she slipped into her old pattern of withdrawal, and she performed her usual daughterly duties [...] in the role of an obedient Chinese girl" (Wong). Jade Snow, although perceiving herself in Occidental terms outside her home, nevertheless perceives her own family and herself in Orientalist terms (Madsen 352). The end of the narrative, however, is marked by a developing sense of a hybridity of Chinese and American cultures. Namely, in the closing scenes of Jade Snow's memoir, she is sitting in her pottery shop's window in Chinatown: "Chinatown was agog. A woman in the window, her legs astride a potter's wheel, her hair in braids, her hands perpetually messy with sticky California clay, her finished products such things as coolies used in China, the daughter of a conservative family, running a business alone- such a combination was sure to fail!" (Wong).

The Chinese American subjectivity performed by Jade Snow can be read from the scene. Jade Snow is wearing her hair in traditional braids, but is sitting astride, she "scandalizes the Chinese community for her public disregard for propriety and for embracing Western values of independence and self-reliance" (Madsen 352). What is more, the narrative point of view in the last few pages of Wong's memoir shifts in a complex interplay from Orientalist to Occidentalist perspective (Madsen 352). Wong describes a scene in which two white Army officers discuss her operating the potter's wheel, thinking that Jade Snow must kick the wheel with her feet and comment: "[t]hat seems unnecessarily primitive [...]. But that's just the trouble, you can't teach the Chinese anything new!" (Wong). Although there is a motor that

drives the wheel and it is in plain sight, they cannot see it due to their Orientalist prejudice. Subsequently, at the end of the narrative, Jade Snow is able to manipulate both the Orientalist and Occidentalist prejudice, occupying "a privileged subject position as a 'westernized Chinese' or 'Orientalized American' which lends her a privileged narrative perspective upon her own life events" (Madsen 352).

Finally, Madsen concludes that *Fifth Chinese Daughter* destabilizes "the concept of the autobiographical genre as a set of expectations or values, as cultural norms, that assume the existence of the universal or self-identical subject" (352). Wong defies the generic conventions of life-writing and racializes them by manipulating the narrative perspective, but also by not allowing for an easy identification of the autobiographical subject with the narrator. As a result, the readers' expectations about what is American or Occidental and what is Chinese or Oriental are being challenged (Madsen 352). Finally, Asian American writers are both Asian and Western, and write from "a complex cultural location that is characterized by both Oriental and Occidental values and perspectives" (Madsen 535).

6. *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston coauthored her memoir *Farewell to Manzanar* with her husband James D. Houston and first published it in 1973. The memoir largely focuses on Jeanne and the Wakatsuki family's experience at Manzanar War Relocation Center in the period from 1942 to 1945. Due to the U.S. government's fear of collaboration between the Japanese government and people of Japanese ancestry, the Japanese American minority group suffered the imprisonment in detention camps during World War II. Altogether, around 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry, including both citizens and permanent resident nationals, were incarcerated during the wartime years in what were called relocation centers, situated in abandoned places in the interior United States (Kashima ix). They were sent to imprisonment centers, deprived of legal counsel and trials, without being charged, and, in most cases, without any justifiable reason, to be incarcerated for an unspecified amount of time (Kashima 211).

Even though this calamitous experience was extremely significant for Japanese Americans, within the context of a world war, it attracted comparatively little attention from the wider American society, since the American media, military leaders, and politicians focused on the global events taking place in the European and Asian arenas (Kashima 4). What is more, the U.S. government used its own euphemisms to address its wartime actions, including the internment camps. According to Kashima, terms such as "assembly centers", "relocation camps", and "evacuation" mask the hostility of involuntary removal of people from their homes to unpleasant living environments, such as flea-infested stables, dusty fairgrounds, and poorly built barracks in desolate places that were the harsh reality of Japanese Americans during those years (9). For example, the term "evacuation", which the U.S. government used during World War II, did not involve removing a group of people to a safe place in order to avoid a dangerous situation, on the contrary, it was used to mask the actions the government took to contain unwanted citizens (Kashima 8).

Besides American government's war-time euphemism, there is another important matter of terminology to be discussed. It concerns the Japanese American generational categories. Namely, it seems to be a sociological fact that only people of Japanese and Korean ancestry use specific terms to differentiate succeeding generations from the original immigrant generation, unlike most immigrant groups in America who identify the first generation, and all the others are categorized as American-born (Kashima 9). The original immigrants from Japan are called Issei (first generation) and most of them immigrated to the United States between 1890 and 1915; their American-born children who were almost all born before the Second World War are called Nisei (second generation); interestingly, they also have a term for a Nisei who spent a part of their childhood in Japan and are called Kibei. The third generation is called Sansei, most of whom were born during or after the Second World War; the fourth is called Yonsei; the fifth Gosei, while the sixth generation is known as Rokusei (Kashima 9-10).

It is also worth mentioning that the Issei were Japanese nationals since, due to the *Ozawa v. United States* case from 1922, Japanese immigrants were denied the right to naturalization, having been officially pronounced "aliens ineligible for citizenship" by the U.S. Supreme Court (Kashima 14). However, subsequent generations of Japanese Americans were considered to be American citizens on account of being born on the American soil. Most of the imprisoned Issei have died at Manzanar, while the Nisei approached their retirement years, and even though their collective and personal tragedies have been assuaged by the passage of time, the social effects of the wartime are continued in the form of the stigma of the wartime imprisonment (Kashima 209).

6.1 Manzanar war relocation center: The repercussions of internment

The imprisonment trauma had many sociopsychological repercussions. Besides the personal traumatic experience, the interment had a negative effect on intrafamilial, interpersonal, or intergenerational relationships. When it comes to the impact on

intergenerational relationships, the ongoing nature of the imprisonment experience is especially visible. In other words, that wartime events transcend the people who experienced them (Kashima 217). Additionally, the intergenerational difference is also visible in the Nisei's (second generation) unwillingness to speak about the experience, while the Sansei (third generation), Yonsei (fourth generation), and the following generation expressed the need to know more about the experience of their ancestors, not having been in the camps themselves (Kashima 217). Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, who also experienced interment as a child wrote her memoir *Farewell to Manzanar*, prompted by the curiosity of her nephew, who was born in Manzanar, but didn't know anything about it, especially because his parents didn't want to talk about it.

6.1.1 Making Manzanar accessible

In an interview with Anthony Friedson, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and her husband and co-author James D. Houston, among other things, discuss where the idea for the book came from. Namely, while doing research for *Farewell to Manzanar*, they encountered some books on the topic, all of which belonged to the domain of academic studies of the political background or the sociology of internment, and, what is more, they were not written by Japanese Americans. The reason that Jeanne's experience was translated into the form of memoir is because they wanted to make the experience accessible. Additionally, the field or oral histories about the experience was unexplored (Friedson 53). Another reason, mentioned before, is the reticence of the people who experienced internment to talk about it. Because of that, not even the children who were born in Manzanar knew much about it. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston talks about how her nephew made her think about Manzanar, and consequently, write about it. Since, like many others, he didn't know much about the experience, Jeanne's nephew asked her how the experience in Manzanar made her feel. According to Jeanne Wakatsuki

Houston, everyone talked about what they did in the camps in a safe, superficial way. That is when Jeanne realized that she too suppressed the experience to a great extent:

> He just sat there and looked at me very strangely and then he said Auntie, how did you feel about that? For the first time, I stopped and allowed myself to feel about it, and it was devastating. I realized why my sisters couldn't talk to their kids about that. So I started to cry and I was real upset. I said well, maybe I'll tell you another time. I talked to Jim about it and said that, I've really got something going on here. Then I started crying all the time. I had about. . . how many nieces and nephews were born in camp? There were a handful. I have a very large family. And I thought, my goodness, for the family legacy I owe it to them, I should be able to write a biography, tell them about it, or something. (Friedson 55)

After that, Jeanne started discussing the matter with her husband, who also didn't know much about her experience, at that point as they started working on the book. Although most people were reluctant to talk about their experience, there are parts in the book that describe events that Jeanne didn't experience firsthand. The parts of the book which were written by her husband James are mostly stories told by Jeanne's relatives, which are marked by italics to indicate that they exist outside the voice telling most of the story (Friedson 59).

When it comes to the title, James D. Houston explains that the "farewell" in the title does not refer entirely to the physical place of Manzanar, but to the state of mind it created, something, which he points, Jeanne took with her to the point when she could say farewell to that:

> reaching the point where she could say farewell to that, to the view of herself that went along with that, the sense of shame, the sense of humiliation, the deep-seated sense of low self-esteem ... all comes of having been imprisoned at the age she was, without understanding it, thrown into questioning her national identity, her personal identity—

> all ultimately reaching the point where she can say goodbye to that, and move on, out on her own personal evolutionary path, whatever that might be. (Friedson 62)

They further conclude that it is not only the meaning of the title, but also the point of the book. Jeanne's experience in Manzanar, which they define as a highly focused ghetto pushed to the extreme, becomes a metaphor for the collective experience, especially of minority Americans, who move from one kind of ghetto to another (Friedson 62). What is more, Jeanne's story is not only about the physical survival in harsh circumstance, it is also about the emotional coping with the experience, since, as Jeanne has stated, rather than focusing on the political, the book centers at the inner life and her growth from her young self towards and through adolescence in such a way that it is accessible and relatable to a lot of people who live under similar circumstance with which they need to come to terms (Friedson 62).

6.2 Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston: biographical notes

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston is the main author of *Farewell to Manzanar,* a memoir she co-authored with her husband James D. Houston. She was born on September 26, 1934, in Inglewood, California. Her parents were Wakatsuki Ko and Rigu Tsukai Wakatsuki, who were both first generation immigrants from Japan (Issei) to the United States. In 1886 Japan first allowed its citizens to emigrate, which led thousands of Japanese from her father's district to leave the country in search of better opportunities. Wakatsuki Ko, Jeanne's father, followed behind and reached Honolulu, Hawaii in 1904 (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). [1]In the early 1910s, Japanese women were rare on the mainland, one for every seven or eight men. Most

[1] After spending a few weeks in Hawaii, Ko accepted an offer by a lawyer from Idaho who offered to pay for his travel and provide room and board in exchange for three year's work in his household. As we find out from Jeanne's autobiography, he worked in Idaho as a chauffeur, a mechanic, a general handyman, a valet, and a cook. He also perfected his English, which he had started learning before he left Japan (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). He even started studying law at the University of Idaho, aiming toward a law degree, but left college after he had met his future wife. Rigu Tsukai Wakatsuki's father came from a family of stonecutters around Niigata, the inner coast of northern Japan. She, however, was born in Hawaii (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston).

men had to take their chances on a “picture bride” or travel back to Japan to find a wife. Due to that, Rigu Tsukai Wakatsuki was “worth a lot” and was supposed to marry rich. However, Jeanne’s parents met one summer morning at a wholesale market where her mother’s family sold produce, and her father worked as a manual worker. Rigu Tsuki Wakatsuki was seventeen at the time, “small, buxom, with a classically round face of a kind much admired among Japanese” (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston 14.16). Her father, Wakatsuki Ko was then twenty-five and spent his summers working around the territory of Spokane, and is described in the following manner:

> He liked to shoot pool in his spare time, he played cards and dressed like a man from a much flashier part of the country. He was also pitching for a semi-pro baseball team called *Nippon*. We have a picture of him down on one knee for the team photo, in the front row, his mitted left hand resting on the other knee, his thick hair loose, his eyes showing a cocky confidence. His lean jaw bulges slightly, as if holding a small plug of tobacco, in the manner of Ty Cobb, whose style was the one to imitate about that time. (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston)

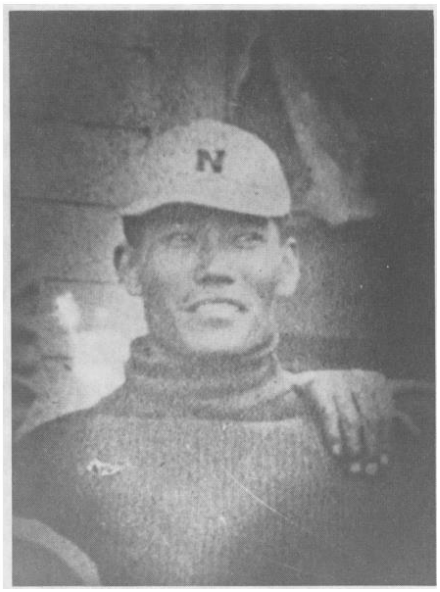

Figure 1. Ko Wakatsuki pitching for a local baseball team called Nippon. Spokane, Washington, ca. 1912

Figure 2. Ko and Riku Wakatsuki. Wedding picture, 1916.

Although Jeanne does not include any pictures in her autobiography, a scene described in the paragraph above was published as a part of the interview she gave together with her husband for the University of Hawaii.

Hoping to marry their child into a rich family, Jeanne's mother's family didn't approve of their relationship. The first time her mother ran away with her father, her brothers caught her, brought her back to the family farm, and locked her inside. The second time, however, they managed to get away, got married, and went to live in Salem, Oregon, where Ko worked as a cook in a restaurant and Rigu as a nurse and a dietician, until she bore their first child in 1916. After that, she had a child about every two years, and bore nine children in eighteen years (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). Since the beginning of their life in the U.S., Jeanne and her family, experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity, due to the animosity towards Japanese American, widespread at the time. This discriminatory attitude was exacerbated by the Pearl Harbor Attack in 1941. On the night when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Jeanne's father burned the flag he had brought with him from Hiroshima thirty-five years prior, along with anything that might suggest he still had any connection with Japan. The precautions he took were not of much help, since not only was he an alien, but also he had a fishing license, which, in the early days of the war, meant that the FBI would arrest him for the fear he was somehow contacting enemy ships (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). Ko Wakatsuki got arrested two weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor by the FBI, who were questioning everyone suspected of loyalty to the Emperor. The FBI deputies seemed to be acting out the general panic, seeing the most mundane every-day household items, such as kitchen knives, cameras, lanterns, flashlights, or toy swords as the tools for sinister deeds (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston).

In February of 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which meant that the War Department had the authority to define military areas in the western states and to exclude from them anyone they deemed threatening to the war effort. A that time, Jeanne's father Ko was imprisoned at Fort Lincoln, at an all-male camp for enemy aliens, and the rest of the family was removed to Boyle Heights, a minority ghetto in downtown Los Angeles, at that time inhabited by a few hundred Terminal Island refugees. Terminal Island was completely cleared in late February 1942 by the navy, since they deemed it dangerous to have that many Asians, even though most of them were American born, so close to the Long Beach Naval Station, which was on the opposite end of the island (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston 10.8) Having moved to Terminal Island, Jeanne and her sister May and her brother Kiyo enrolled together in the local school, which posed as one of the first experiences engraved in Jeanne's memory as clear instances of racial prejudice:

> This was the first time I had felt outright hostility from a Caucasian. Looking back, it is easy enough to explain. Public attitudes toward the Japanese in California were shifting rapidly. In the first few months of the Pacific war, America was on the run. Tolerance had turned to distrust and irrational fear. The hundred-year-old tradition of anti-Asian sentiment on the West Coast soon resurfaced, more vicious than ever. Its result became clear about a month later, when we were told to make our third and final move. (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston)

It wasn't long after the Executive Order 9066 that the evacuation to Manzanar Camp began. Manzanar camp, situated in Owens Valley, California, was the first of the permanent camps to open in March 1942 (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston).

6.3 The landscape of Manzanar as the evidence of racial oppression

At that time, the animosity towards Japanese Americans often resulted in physical attacks in the streets of California towns. Because of such incidents, Jeanne admits there was a sense of relief among her and her brothers and sisters, especially because they didn't know where they were going (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). Upon their arrival to Manzanar, Jeanne describes the landscape of the camp:

> The first thing I saw was a yellow swirl across a blurred, reddish setting sun. The bus was being pelted by what sounded like splattering rain. It wasn't rain. This was my first look at something I would soon know very well, a billowing flurry of dust and sand churned up by the wind through Owens Valley. We drove past a barbed-wire fence, through a gate, and into an open space where trunks and sacks and packages had been dumped from the baggage trucks that drove out ahead of us. I could see a few tents set up, the first rows of black barracks, and beyond them, blurred by sand, rows of barracks that seemed to spread for miles across this plain (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston)

Furthermore, she suggests that the barracks were constructed in a hasty and slipshod manner:

> After dinner we were taken to Block 16, a cluster of fifteen barracks that had just been finished a day or so earlier—although finished was hardly the word for it. The shacks were built of one thickness of pine planking covered with tarpaper. They sat on concrete footings, with about two feet of open space between the floorboards and the ground. Gaps showed between the planks, and as the weeks passed and the green wood dried out, the gaps widened. Knotholes gaped in the uncovered floor. (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston)

Additionally, the interior of the barracks is described, stating that each barrack was divided into six units which were about the size of a living room, which had one bulb and one

oil stove for heat. Jeanne's family of twelve people were assigned two such rooms (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). What Houston describes to be especially difficult was the lack of privacy, not only in the main living space, but also, even more importantly, when it came to using restrooms. Jeanne describes her mother's "quest for privacy", which meant, if necessary, walking across the camp to find latrines with the best partitions, since women made their own. In the spring of 1942, big carton partitions were a common sight, and eventually they became sturdier, and even gossip would spread about which block had better partitions. What is more, many women would wait until late at night to use the latrines, which, as Jeanne points out, is ironic, because midnight was often the most crowded time of all (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). Even though people in Manzanar managed to cope with the circumstances, i.e., the open toilets, the packed sleeping quarters, the communal mass halls, the experience was extremely humiliating, or, in words of Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, it was "an open insult to that other, private self, a slap in the face they were powerless to challenge" (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston).

Gregory Toy in his analysis of *Farewell to Manzanar* focuses on the landscapes as evidence of racial oppression, but also resistance. According to Toy, Manzanar served as a nexus for "overlapping histories of environmental and social injustice, an animated site for exploring how the project of US empire-building has depended on the racialization of people and the differentiation of space" (26). Toy further suggests that "the infrastructure produces and is produced by the built environment, [and thus] it naturalizes settler colonial and imperialist ideologies of racial control – concentration, incarceration, and segregation – in urban and rural spaces" (26). Manzanar, for Toy, is not only the place that marks the peak of anti-Japanese sentiment, but a continuation of racial violence in Southern California, which is especially articulated through racial geography of the United States. Racial geography, which, according to Toy, works to either assimilate or alienate specific populations (27) on the

example of Manzanar led to implacable injustice that Japanese Americans had to face. Even so, this injustice was distorted in the public representations of the camp, especially since the US government arranged for the recreational activities to take place at the site, such as baton practices, baseball, or swimming. Additionally, both government propaganda and mass media sources leaned towards portraying Manzanar as a happy place, even a holiday site, rather than as an internment camp (Colborn-Roxworth 193).

6.4 Breaking free – creating alternative narrative plots

According to Geok-Lin Lim, female writers whose ethnic community is patriarchal causes feminist and ethnic values and identities to intersect in conflicting, or even violent ways (579). In androcentric ethnic societies, the woman is usually marginalized, mute and invisible, or constrained to "limited stereotypical roles of possession – child or mother, domestic worker, or sexual object" (Lim 580). Stepping outside the constraints of limited stereotypical roles may thus be read as subversive of patriarchal hierarchy and, by implication, of one's ethnic community (Lim 580). However, it could be argued that Geok-Lin Lim's reading is perhaps too exclusive, since it is unlikely that the subversion of patriarchy was Wakatsuki Houston's principal narrative concern, considering the circumstances of the interment that the author has suffered. However, the memoir does lend itself to the traditional feminist reading given the fact that the author focuses to a great extent on her feminine identity. Nonetheless, since it seems that all her efforts are made to make her, not more feminine but 'less ethnic', the question of gender and femininity could be understood as a coping mechanism at the time she was forcefully ethnicized, together with her entire community.

According to Lim, by rejecting the stereotypical race and gender plot, Asian American women had to invent new plots that would nevertheless encompass the issues of race, class, and gender. One of the alternative plots to the representation of woman as a victim of patriarchy is that of "the disempowering of the central male figure in the Asian kinship nexus by a racist

and classist white American society" (580). Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, in her memoir *Farewell to Manzanar* illustrates the gradual emasculation of the powerful father figure. Wakatsuki Houston explicitly states that before the internment "Papa had been the patriarch" (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). In the scene in which Papa is arrested by the FBI for being "an alien" who held a commercial fishing license, Jeanne describes her father in the following manner: "He had become a man without a country. The land of his birth was at war with America; yet after thirty-five years here he was still prevented by law from becoming an American citizen. He was suddenly a man with no rights who looked exactly like the enemy" (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston).

Lim suggests that Asian American daughters portray their fathers in the moments of humiliation and futile struggles against the authority of the dominant white society and that, in doing so, they are expressing their ethnic protest against racism, as well as providing evidence of patriarchal incapacity (Lim 580). However, this kind of reading could prove to be too exclusive, given the circumstances of the Second World War and the fact that Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston was only seven in 1941, when Pearl Harbor is bombed, the event that would change the trajectory of her life forever. The fact that Wakatsuki Houston was so young, allows her to center on her family and not on the political aspects of the tragic experience (Davis 359). Contrary to Lim's reading, the story of her father's moral, psychological, and physical decay could be understood as "a metaphor for the insidious effects of racism on longtime Japanese residents, and on young Japanese American citizens" (Davis 360).

What is more, Wakatsuki Houston describes that Papa returns a changed man from North Dakota, where he had been imprisoned at Fort Lincoln, in an all-male camp for enemy aliens. She describes this change in a scene of her father's arrival to Manzanar:

> The door whished open, and the first thing we saw was a cane—I will never forget it—poking from the shaded interior into sunlight, a straight, polished maple limb spotted

> with dark lidded eyes where small knotholes had been stained and polished. Then Papa stepped out, wearing a fedora hat and a wilted white shirt. This was September 1942. He had been gone nine months. He had aged ten years. He looked over sixty, gaunt, wilted as his shirt, underweight, leaning on that cane and favoring his right leg. He stood there surveying his clan, and nobody moved, not even Mama, waiting to see what he would do or say, waiting for some cue from him as to how we should deal with this. (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston).

Additionally, in her reading of the scene, Lim focuses on the father's cane, which she reads as "a symbol both of his weakened physical self and also of his demoralized spirit" (581). Even after his limp goes away, the father continues to use the cane, using it to inflict pain on his family members.

> When he was angry he would wield it like the flat of a sword, whacking out at his kids or his wife or his hallucinations. He kept that cane for years, and it served him well. I see it now as a sad, homemade version of the samurai sword his great-great-grandfather carried in the land around Hiroshima, at a time when such warriors weren't much needed anymore, when their swords were both their virtue and their burden. It helps me understand how Papa's life could end at a place like Manzanar. He didn't die there, but things finished for him there, whereas for me it was like a birthplace. The camp was where our lifelines intersected. (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston)

The physical assaults, according to Lim, are interpreted as a consequence of the humiliation of the imprisonment, which distorts his patriarchal values into abusive machismo (581). In addition to that, the father's identity, which is "inextricably bound up with a samurai, a male warrior, genealogy" (581) becomes outdated and useless in the new context. The final remarks, however, about the intersectionality of Manzanar, are crucial for the analysis of the new plot,

since it, according to Lim, represents “one daughter’s ruthless rewriting of the race and gender plot” (581) since “Asian patriarchal identity dies at that very intersection of the birth of feminist consciousness” (581).

Elaine Kim challenges such a perspective, claiming that the lives of father and daughter do not diverge, but intersect when “the girl rejects her father in favor of acceptance by whites, limiting him, in a sense, to the role of a Japanese father that frightens off white boyfriends” (Davis 360-1). Therefore, it could be argued that it is not feminist consciousness that Wakatsuki Houston seeks, but a solution to the insidious racism she experiences. What is more, the fact that Manzanar was “like a birthplace” for Jeanne and the opposite for her father could also be explained in terms of the age difference between the two of them. This enabled her to adapt more easily to life in camp, as well as to grow in ways that most likely would not have been possible, weren’t it for such a distressing experience. (Davis 360).

6.4.1 Manzanar and the liminality of Japanese American identity

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston’s narrative, which is a representation of childhood in an internment camp provides valuable insights into a “disruptive historical and cultural experience” (Davis 357). According to Davis, ethnic life writings of Asian American writers negotiate identity politics and, in doing so, “become experimental and revisionary narratives which challenge textual authority and prescriptive paradigms” (357). Wakatsuki Houston’s negotiation of her position as a Japanese American in the period of World War II forefronts the problems of citizenship and nationality and the modes of self-representation in such a context (Davis 357). The fact that the memoir centers on her childhood experiences through the narrative voice of an adult is in itself a distinctive representation perspective (Davis 357). Focusing on childhood experiences serves as a highly effective means to convey two

fundamental concerns of ethnic writing: “the performance of selfhood and how meaning itself evolves” (Davis 358)

The concept of America and the American dream is often an integral part of the Asian American child’s perception of socio-cultural and spatial contexts (Davis 359).

Similarly, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston desires to become “the idealized white female future, the girl as bride and queen” (Lim 581). This is easily deduced from a scene in which Jeanne feels envy seeing an orphan being confirmed in a Catholic ceremony:

> This girl had already been baptized. What I witnessed was her confirmation. She was dressed like a bride, in a white gown, white lace hood, and sheer veil, walking toward the altar, down the aisle of that converted barracks. Watching her from the pew I was pierced with envy for the position she had gained. At the same time I was filled with awe and with a startled wonder at the notion that this girl, this orphan, could become such a queen. (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston).

Soon after Jeanne decides to be baptized, a decision which is met with her father’s strong disapproval. Lim notes that the father recognizes his daughter’s need to assimilate as a subversion of his control (582). As a result of her father’s disapproval to get baptized, Jeanne is unable to materialize her fantasy to become “the white-gowned princess” (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston).

After having been released from Manzanar, Wakatsuki Houston describes feeling “true shame” caused by the internment experience. The chapter “Double Impulse” describes Jeanne’s return to freedom and tells a story of a classmate being genuinely surprised that Jeanne could speak English, a remark which served as an epiphany for Jeanne:

> But at age eleven, I couldn’t believe anyone could think such a thing, say such a thing about me, or regard me in that way. I smiled and sat down, suddenly aware of what being of Japanese ancestry was going to be like. I wouldn’t be faced with physical

> attack, or with overt shows of hatred. Rather, I would be seen as someone foreign, or as someone other than American, or perhaps not be seen at all (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston)

For Lim, the shame that Jeanne experiences after Manzanar, and her internalized belief that such treatment was deserved urges the young girl both "to disappear and the desperate desire to be acceptable" (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). Subsequently this translates into Jeanne's desire to assimilate, which represents another form of death of ethnicity (Lim 582). Similarly, Linda Trinh Moser suggests that the period of internment is marked by Jeanne's devaluing her Japanese heritage and it is marked by her "desire to be acceptable to the very people who incarcerated her" (Davis 361).

According to Lim, Wakatsuki Houston finds a solution to her problem in femininity: "I knew intuitively that one resource I had to overcome the war-distorted limitations of my race would be my femininity" (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). In "The Girl of My Dreams" chapter, Jeanne competes for the title of the annual carnival queen of her high school in San Hose.

> I couldn't beat the other contestants at their own game, that is, look like a bobbysoxer[2]. Yet neither could I look too Japanese-y. I decided to go exotic, with a flower-print sarong, black hair loose and a hibiscus flower behind my ear. When I walked barefooted out onto the varnished gymnasium floor, between the filled bleachers, the howls and whistles from the boys were double what had greeted any of the other girls. It sounded like some winning basket had just been made in the game against our oldest rivals. (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston)

[2] Bobbysoxer is a term used to describe teenage female fans of traditional pop music popular in 1940s, in particular that of singer Frank Sinatra. The name bobbysoxer was used since they wore the then-popular bobby socks.

For the ceremony, however, Jeanne accepts her parent's attitute that “too much exposure was unbecoming” (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston) and her mother ends up picking out “a frilly ball gown that covered almost everything and buried [her] legs under layers of ruffles” (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). Suprisingly, Jeanne completely agrees and concludes: “I had used a low-cut sarong to win the contest. But once chosen I would be a white-gowned figure out of *Gone With the Wind;* I would be respectable” (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). However, s she is approaching the throne at the ceremony, Jeanne’s internal monologue illustrates her struggle with her self-image:

> I wanted to laugh. I wanted to cry. I wanted to be ten years old again, so I could believe in princesses and queens. It was too late. Too late to be an odori dancer for Papa, too late to be this kind of heroine. I wanted the carnival to end so I could go somewhere private, climb out of my stuffy dress, and cool off. But all eyes were on me. It was too late now not to follow this make-believe carpet to its plywood finale, and I did not yet know of any truer destination (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston)

Patricia Sakurai in her reading of the scenes explains that Wakatsuki Houston’s “attempt at playing all-American girl allows her no sense of ‘at-homeness’ whatsoever, further emphasizing the specific form of femininity and sexuality she is expected to enact as an Asian American woman” (qtd. in Davis 362).

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston’s memoir narrates a search for identity and self-validation in the liminality created by the context of harsh racism that resulted in internment. Interestingly, Wakatsuki Houston’s memoir proved to be fruitful for the traditional feminist reading, although we could argue that such an approach is too narrow and too exclusive, given the context of the narrative. One explanation for the prevalent feminist reading of the memoir could be the fact that, according to Helena Grice, Wakatsuki Houston was less focused on the “politically

reconstructive function of her telling" than with a "confrontation with her own unmanageable history, and her subsequent recollection of her past" (qtd. in Davis 362). Manzanar has become for Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston "much more than a remembered place it had become a state of mind" (Wakatsuki Houston and Houston). This location, according to Davis, becomes "the central metaphor of the child's experience of physical and psychological liminality" (362). Narrating her life, however, proved to be a healing exercise for Wakatsuki Houston, as she confronted her own tragic history and a process of self-validation in the context of rejection (Davis 362).

7. Conclusion

Given the fact that autobiography has for long been considered a characteristically American genre, it is important to note that immigrant life-writing has often been marginalized, especially that written by women. Nevertheless, autobiography and memoirs helped Asian American women to find their voice and to create their own subjectivity. What is more, they served as a means to question, challenge and subvert dominant discourses that prescribe what is acceptable and what is not.

Both memoirs analyzed in this paper challenge conventions of the genre, as well as the expectations that the Western readers have concerning Asian American memoirs. Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, published in 1950, is considered to be the first memoir written by a Chinese American woman about female subjectivity. Jade Snow Wong challenges the stereotypical race and gender plot. Namely, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* defies the myth of coherent personality, since the text does not offer an easy distinction between the narrator and the autobiographical subject. Wong writes her memoir in the third person narrative voice, thus making it difficult to identify the narrator with the autobiographical subject. What is more, by manipulating the narrative perspective, Wong subverts the concept of life-writing and complicates the idea of the subject.

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's memoir seeks a different constitution of an ethnic identity outside the limited number of representations available to Japanese Americans in the period of World War II. What is more, her narrative tells a painful story of a childhood interrupted by interment and the struggle to understand and form her ethnic identity in such dire circumstances. Subsequently, the question of ethnic identity further problematizes the complexity of nationhood and affiliation in the context of the United States during the Second World War (Davis 366).

Finally, it could be concluded that both memoirs demonstrate the capacity of identity to sustain numerous ideological conflicts, as well as to contest and negotiate cultural norms. Namely, by abandoning the constraints of limited stereotypical roles, and by creating alternative race and gender plots, these authors are questioning, changing, and subverting the dominant discourses created by the mainstream society and, consequently, by their ethnic communities.

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Abstract

This paper examines the development of the representation of identity in Asian American women's memoirs in the period around the Second World War. More accurately, it is interested to see how memoirs can serve as a tool to create Asian American woman as a subject or, in other words, how Asian American women use the genres of life-writing to create alternative ethnic and gender narrative plots, thus subverting discourses of power, while also defying the Western expectations about the Oriental other. The paper offers the analyses of Jade Snow Wong's memoir *Fifth Chinese Daughter* and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar,* a memoir which she co-authored with her husband James D. Houston. The paper does not aim to make broad claims about Asian American women's memoirs, but takes a narrower approach by focusing on individual narratives, while also paying attention to the historical, discursive, social and political contexts in which the memoirs were created.

Key words: Asian American Women's Literature, *Fifth Chinese Daughter, Farewell to Manzanar,* Jade Snow Wong, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, James D. Houston, memoir, ethnic autobiography