Gender, Race, and Internal Colonization: An Asian Americanist Review of Traise Yamamoto's *Masking Selves, Making Subjects: Japanese American Women, Identity, and the Body*.

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1 In Asian American studies, it generally is presumed that what binds an otherwise extremely heterogeneous minority population is its historical, legal exclusion from the American body politic. In the nation's imaginary and laws, Asian Americans' claim to citizenship is a fragile thing-something abjured, withheld, and forged most dramatically during national crises. Traise Yamamoto's Masking Selves, Making Subjects: Japanese American Women, Identity, and the Body underscores the continued necessity for Asian Americans to claim America, a nation that incarcerated Americans of Japanese descent during World War II. That juridical vulnerability has particularly harmful repercussions for Asian American women, whose subjectivities and struggles against patriarchy, nativism, and racism are structurally circumscribed by what the Black feminist theorist Deborah King calls "multiple jeopardy." Yamamoto's study is an exceptionally eloquent example of an Asian Americanist contribution to the critical race feminism movement in the U.S.

2 Yet for me and for many other Filipino Americans, the question of citizenship is haunted by a legacy of American colonialism. The history of Filipinos in America runs counter to the above-described premise of exclusion in Asian American studies. In contrast to that of exclusion, Filipino American history has been one of violent inclusion in the United States empire, beginning in 1899 with the devastating Philippine-American War and the subsequent colonization of the Philippines. At least partially because of Asian American studies' emphasis on East Asian Americans, postcolonial and empire studies has been perceived as something "new" or peripheral within the field. Yet as this tension within Asian American studies occasionally threatens to fracture a relatively small community of scholars, the emergence of studies like Yamamoto's reminds us that gender-specific and ethnic-specific scholarship potentially bridges and contributes to both sides of this divide. Yamamoto states that the contours of a "critical humanism" emerge from the book's specificity. Instead, I would argue that Masking Selves, Making Subjects is an invaluable but sometimes flawed study of the gendered and raced effects of what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call "internal" colonization.

3 Yamamoto identifies in nuanced ways a Japanese American women's writing tradition, both a product and creative reappropriation of a specific history of internal colonization. This

is no easy task, for describing such a tradition has its particular pitfalls. Of some of these Yamamoto is keenly cognizant, such as an over-reliance on generational difference or the reinforcement of cultural and racial stereotype (i.e. the impassive, unfeeling Oriental or the generally feminized Orient, and the embodiment of these stereotypes in Japanese American women). Opening her introduction with a familial anecdote, Yamamoto forebodes the interpretative and historical irony that runs throughout the study. Yamamoto describes the "exceptionally closed" face of her grandmother in a 1938 family photograph. She muses the im/possibilities of reading a face that "understands its own readability." This face recognizes that it has no control over how it will be read, and it habitually constructs a protective mask. It is an historical product of the sheer need to survive the twinned forces of racism and sexism. Ironically, however, this impassivity is all too easily appropriated by Orientalism and converted into stereotype. Thus, Yamamoto revists a crucial question with which scholars of African American and Asian American literature still grapple: How are we responsibly to read such wary texts? The book's title puns on "masking" as an act or process emanating from dominant fiction as well as from the self; the title "suggests a process enacted by an agency separate from the socially defined self as well as a self whose agency is enacted in the process of masking." Thus, Yamamoto selects a trope-the mask-that relies on a basic division between surface and depth, a binary that becomes problematic since it invokes essentialist notions of "humanist interiority." Yamamoto wants to retain both a sense of constructedness and a kind of interiority-a "place for the self."

4 From the introduction on, the face and mask become the primary metaphors for and within Japanese American women's writing, especially autobiography. If all good (and bad) metaphors contain arguments, the argument here is that texts like Monica Sone's Nisei Daughter (1953), Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's Farewell to Manzanar (1973), and Yoshiko Uchida's Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family (1982) all employ a kind of "tonal masking" for their "own ends." Yamamoto's often-dazzling close readings provide both the teacher and critic with superb models for analyzing Asian American literature, African American literature, and other literatures wherein an engagement with the terrain of double consciousness is essential.

5 But other pitfalls, Yamamoto does not so gracefully negotiate. For example, in early chapters Yamamoto spends some time on United States-Japan relations as historical backdrop to her analyses of a wide array of cultural and literary texts: late nineteenth-century and late twentieth-century Western travel writing about Japan, classic Hollywood movies like Teahouse of the August Moon and Sayonara, and James Michener bestsellers. Yet while

Japan's relationship to the United States is likened to that of colonized and colonizer, Japan's imperial ambitions and history in Asia receive nary a comment. This is an unfortunate omission that could have been corrected by the explication of a short but intriguing footnote on the "Occupation narrative." A book that inspires and reminds the teacher of literature of the immense value of close reading, Masking Selves, Making Subjects at times falters when it tries its hand at broader cultural claims. In one particularly jarring example, Yamamoto tries to intervene in the fairly longstanding controversy over cosmetic surgery, particularly eyelid surgery, in some Asian American communities. Yamamoto takes issue with critics who denounce those who undergo the surgery as motivated by racial self-hatred and "trying to look white." Yamamoto then mulls the possibility that this "practice" may in fact constitute "an act of contestation and complicity, an act of reappropriation as well as an act of reinscription that foregrounds the impossibility of any 'pure' space of resistance or affirmation." I think it more productive to consider the route offered by legal theorist Patricia Williams who suggests that the eugenicist application of new technologies indicate a new human desire not to change but to flee one's body.[1]

6 While *Masking Selves, Making Subjects*'s forays into broader historical and cultural argument occasionally falter, the best chapters are those wherein close literary readings compose the bulk of the chapter and anchor the larger, theoretical argument about the staging of the narratorial self in Nisei and Sansei writing. If this is a book that divides its chapters by historical period and generation, the chapters themselves return repeatedly to the significance of generational tension within Japanese American women's literature. The final chapter on Japanese American women's poetics, in the work of Kimiko Hahn, Janice Mirikitani, and Mitsuye Yamada, powerfully describes the structural failure of both memory and narrative to recall the presence of the mother. Yamamoto argues that the representation of the lost mother-and, implicitly, that of the daughter-poet's grief-can never be complete. Yet this lost presence can be summoned by these texts: "Paradoxically, it is in their ability to evoke but not re-present the mother that the limits of language gesture toward the fullness of being." On that elusive yet powerful final note, *Masking Selves, Making Subjects* sounds the call for a new generation of critical race feminists.

[1] Williams writes: "Sometimes I feel as though we are living in a time of invisible body snatchers-as though some evil force had entered the hearts and minds of an entire epoch and convinced them that they should shed their skin, cut off their noes, fly out of their bodies, leave behind their genetic structure as they climb up the DNA ladder to an imagined freedom," The Rooster's Egg: On the Persistence of Prejudice (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 241-2.