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Maryn J. Rolfson

Foul Play

A Comparative Look at Community Fragmentation and Gender Roles through Internment and Relocation of Japanese Canadians and Japanese Americans

In the fall of 1942, Kayo Soga Takahashi passed away in a sanitarium in Sandon, British Columbia (BC), while her family labored on a sugar beet farm in Southern Alberta. The last time that she hugged her husband and children was in early April of the same year, when she was taken into government custody due to her failing health and the federal order for expulsion of Japanese Canadians from BC (P. Takahashi, 2020). While the Takahashi family were among the 6,000 Japanese Canadians who opted for voluntary relocation in response to the War Measures Act expulsion order, 15,000 Japanese Canadians were incarcerated in internment camps in interior BC (McAllister, 2006).

Members of the Japanese community across the Pacific Coast of the United States and Canada were forcibly removed from their residences by the federal government and interred at large camps or "ghost towns." Canadian and American governments enacted this measure in reaction to the attack on Pearl Harbor committed by the Japanese government; however, the majority of those detained in these camps were citizens of their respective countries, through either naturalization or birthright citizenship (Sugiman, 2007). The compositions of the Japanese North American communities were shaped by the respective unique decisions that the Canadian and American governments made regarding camp structure, gender role performance within camps, and relocation practices. A review of contrasting policies of filial and communal fragmentation, movement, and dispersion along the intersectional lines of gender, age, ability, class, and citizenship in American and Canadian Japanese internment reveals long-term sociological impacts. Policy and practices that encouraged assimilation to white culture in racial incarceration during WWII led to more spatial and social separation in the Japanese Canadian community than in their American counterparts. A consequential loss of support systems may have exacerbated intergenerational trauma.

Nikkei Communities Before Internment

Before WWII, *nikkei* (Japanese emigrants and their descendants) communities looked similar on many fronts in Canada and in the US, but were governed by different immigration and labor policies. At the turn of the twentieth century, labor contractors in both countries incentivized Japanese labor migration by promising wealth and quick citizenship (Ayukawa, 1999). Racial prejudice and unfounded fear of economic competition grew in white communities on both sides of the border and came to a head in 1907, when violent race riots occurred in San Francisco and Vancouver (Roy, 2015). Asiatic Exclusion Leagues were created forthwith, which exerted pressure on local and federal governments to create policy that restricted *nikkei* rights and further immigration (Niwayama, 2010). One member of the BC parliament claimed that growth of the Japanese population was "a serious menace to living conditions" (Roy, 2015).

Both countries engaged in Gentlemen's Agreements with Japan in 1908; the American agreement halted issuing passports to skilled and unskilled Japanese workers seeking immigration, while Japan promised Canada that no more than 400 agricultural laborers or domestic servants would receive visas per year (Roy, 2015). This restriction did not apply to female immigrants, and thus the migration of 'picture brides' grew substantially in the first quarter of the century (Ayukawa, 1999). These women migrated through the practice of arranged marriage, their photograph being the only interaction with their future spouse preceding immigration. Often, these 'picture brides' found themselves in compromised positions of lower-class standing, economic vulnerability, and lonely immersion in foreign customs once they arrived in Canada. In 1924, the Canadian and Japanese governments extended the visa limitation policy to include women and dropped the quota to 150 visas per year. The initial exclusion of women from the agreement nods to these governments viewing women through a patriarchal lens, whose fates undeniably followed their husbands and fathers, rather than viewing them as autonomous agents (Oikawa, 2011). In the US, the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 halted Japanese immigration completely.

Issei (first-generation Japanese immigrants) in the US could not hold citizenship, while the *nisei* (second-generation Japanese descendants) held voting and labor rights through birthright citizenship (Ayuwaka, 1999). Canada was constrained by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and could not deny naturalization rights to both the *issei* and *nisei*. However, the BC government used fishing licensing restrictions, denial of franchise, and restrictions from entering professional careers (such as law and phar-

macy) to limit *nikkei* citizenship rights. Members of white communities and local politicians in both countries openly and severely discriminated against the Japanese community through rampant "No Japanese" policies in employment and forced segregation in public spaces. Ian MacKenzie, a Member of Legislative Assembly in Vancouver, said, "economically, we cannot compete with them; racially we cannot assimilate them; hence, we must exclude them from our midst and prohibit them from owning land" (Roy, 2015). The anti-Japanese sentiment on both sides of the border was motivated by idealized white supremacy and economic fear.

This disenfranchisement fostered *nikkei* communities that had to be self-sufficient socially and economically. Many *issei* settled in hubs around mills, mines, and fish farms, with the area around Hastings Mill in Vancouver known as "Little Tokyo" (Ayukawa, 1999). An abundance of Buddhist and Presbyterian churches, Japanese language schools, and community sports leagues kept these *nikkei* communities closely knit (Niwayama, 2010). Baseball was especially popular among the *nisei*, with the Nippons in Seattle and the Asahis in Vancouver competing regionally (Regalado, 2000). In the 1920s, a YWCA affiliate was created for *nisei* women which held classes in dance, flower arrangement, and cooking (Roy, 2015). Notably, this gendered split between sports leagues and homemaking groups was perhaps both a product of and a tool used to encourage assimilation. The *nisei* sought to demonstrate loyalty to the nation of their birth by creating the Japanese American Citizens Association in 1930 and the Japanese Canadian Citizens Association in 1936. These organizations produced newspapers that promulgated alliance to their country of residence, publicized businesses, and renounced Japanese citizenship. Life in a *nikkei* community before the outbreak of WWII was close-knit and prosperous, even under legal and economic restrictions.

Internment and Relocation

American Policy and Practice

In February 1942, the United States government ordered 112,000 *nikkei* to leave their coastal homes and enter ten internment camps overseen by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) (McAllister, 2006). Conditions were poor in these camps, which included barracks-style housing and mess halls provided by the WRA. Gender role performance in the camps changed due to several factors, including labor policy, housing conditions, and recreation. All laborers in the camps, regardless of gender, were paid $16 per month (Regalado, 2000). Many women who were previously

housewives saw their wages equalize with their husbands, and accepted leadership opportunities within the camps. The barracks-style housing and state-provided meals meant that there was less need for housework that was traditionally completed by women. Additionally, reduced autonomy in favor of WRA regulation at the camps meant that there was less dependence on the men in families and households to make decisions for the family. All of these factors contributed to increased independence and awareness in *nisei* women at the camps. Changing gender role performance is shown acutely through the popularity of women's softball.

Women took the lead in creating sports leagues for themselves. The WRA intended the provision of sports equipment to be used as an assimilation tool; however, many sports were already popular in the *nikkei* community, and incarceration provided an unexpected opportunity to compete against previously formed community teams without travel distance as a barrier (Regalado, 2000). Perhaps sports gained such popularity because the potential for victory signified control over some aspect of life. Female softball players quickly gained local fame at the camps, receiving substantial coverage in the newspapers. Many of these periodicals romanticized these athletes by focusing on a "gay smile" or "cuteness" rather than athletic ability, but there was opportunity for female ambition in sports nonetheless (Regalado, 2000). The WRA began terminating Japanese American incarceration on January 2, 1945, when it was deemed unconstitutional, and most *nikkei* returned to salvage or restart their lives on the Pacific Coast (Roy, 2015). However, changed gender role performance and communal unity through adversity left a lasting mark on the U.S. *nikkei* community.

Initially, President Franklin D. Roosevelt intended to relocate Japanese Americans across the country, moving "one or two families to each county as a start" (Robinson, 2012). He subscribed to Darwinian racial principles that pushed for the dispersion if not expulsion of minority groups into white American society, so as to assimilate and Americanize them. When Roosevelt died and President Harry S. Truman took over, he did not share Roosevelt's zeal for redistribution, and newly freed *nikkei* moved through chain migration (Hong, 2013; Robinson, 2012). For the most part, they resettled as families in California, Oregon, and Washington, where they lived before, but several moved to Detroit, Chicago, New York, and rural Western communities. Of those who returned to their previous properties on the Pacific Coast, three-quarters had lost their assets due to fire-sales or deterioration (Roy, 2015). Japanese American–proclaimed allegiance to the U.S. was made clear during the war

and remembered afterwards by the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, an all-*nisei* battalion who served with great distinction in the Italian campaign (Roy, 2015). Their pursuits were highly publicized, along with 33,000 other *nisei* who served in the Armed Forces.

Canadian Policy and Practice

In February of 1942, 15,000 Japanese Canadians were ordered to leave British Columbia. They were held at the Hastings Park Exhibition Grounds (a livestock barn) in Vancouver, and transported via train to fifteen camps, separated by gender, age, ability, class, and/or citizenship (Ayukawa, 1999; Oikawa, 2011; Sugiman, 2007). All properties and assets were liquidated by the British Columbia Securities Commission (BCSC) and used to pay 'rent' at said camps. Seventy-five percent of interred people were Canadian-born citizens, but all were deemed enemy allies. Able-bodied men were sent to work camps, railway camps, and road construction camps in interior BC, Alberta, and Northern Ontario. Many *issei* and *nisei* resisted and were incarcerated in Prisoners of War camps in Ontario. Thus, women, children, and elderly men were over-represented as occupants of the camps built from abandoned mining towns in the mountains. Climate and primitive housing made conditions harsh for these occupants. Canadian *nikkei* were responsible for providing their own food and means of survival, so domestic gender roles were expected to continue, despite the government-enforced fragmentation of families. This meant that women were often left alone to find means to provide economically, care for their children, and continue with housework while incarcerated.

Conditions in these camps were extremely poor, and active assimilative practices made life difficult for incarcerated *nikkei*. Two families shared each 24 x 16 foot shack, which were not sufficiently insulated for bitter Canadian winters. These camps were sites of "erasure," intended to strip the *nikkei* of the rights of citizenship and assimilate them to white Canadian culture (McAlllister, 2006). Children were not provided education until the camps had been in operation for over a year, and, even then, only rudimentary education was provided by unqualified *nisei* university students based on a curriculum that emphasized Canadian nationalism (Ayukawa, 1999). In 1943, Christian churches stepped in to provide high school education. Speaking Japanese was prohibited and policed. Because the camps were created out of pre-existing mining towns, the white community that lived there before internment was seen as authoritative, along with the federal police who strictly monitored entry, exit, and dis-

cipline in the camp. In other words, "white authority was inherent," and their lack of belonging was always evident to the incarcerated *nikkei* community (Oikawa, 2011). Poverty was rampant at the camps, which caused division in families and communities.

Gender role performance, particularly racialized gender performance, was encouraged in the camps. Bathhouses were constructed on the camps, despite the fact that the *nikkei* in Canada generally had not continued this Japanese practice upon migration (Oikawa, 2011). To some, this gendered space was a symbol of communal unity amid suffering; to others, it was a site of dispute due to limited hot water. Young women joined social groups where they could learn "*hakujin* [white] housework," such as making cakes and sewing (Oikawa, 2011). Meanwhile, young boys formed sports leagues and Boy Scout troops (as a demonstration of Canadian loyalty), with the Tashme camp's troop being the largest in the British Commonwealth with over 200 members. Unlike the U.S. camps, young women did not participate in organized softball. Oikawa describes Yoshiko's experience as a young girl in her kindergarten's production of the Nativity of Christ. The sole Caucasian girl in her class was chosen as Mary, who is the pinnacle of white, Christian femininity, while all Japanese girls were given the role of shepherds, who are traditionally male. Furthermore, in 1942, the Canadian government declared that children of *nisei* women and white men would be released from incarceration and "recognized as Canadians in the full sense of the word" (Oikawa, 2011). The notion that white women might marry *nisei* men was utterly excluded from the policy, as the Canadian government assumed that white women were preserved as wives for white men only, and that whiteness was passed down patrilineally, not matrilineally. In doing so, they also inadvertently acknowledged that race is a social construct. Thus, in many ways, racialized gender roles were encouraged in internment camps by the Canadian government and the BCSC.

During incarceration, individuals were constantly separated from their families and relocated. Most fathers were separated from their families for several years. Pressure to end family separation from the letter writing campaigns of incarcerated *nikkei*, including many letters written by women, eventually terminated forced separation (Oikawa, 2011). However, in 1943, the BCSC began to deny relief payments to single men, forcing them to return to work camps. In 1945, the Canadian government administered a "loyalty survey," in which the *nikkei* had to choose relocation east of the Rocky Mountains, or repatriation to Japan (Niwayama, 2010). The results of said survey further determined movement from camp to

camp, as the Canadian government gathered individuals based on their perceived 'loyalty' to Canada and their citizenship. Eventually, 4,000 *nikkei* were deported, over half of them being Canadian citizens. Japan did not recognize *nisei* citizenship in Japan, and these 2,000 individuals were rendered stateless persons. The BCSC tirelessly promoted eastern migration to little avail; this migration was encouraged through gendered means, as they provided men with agricultural jobs and women with domestic service (Roy, 2015). In August of 1944, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King said that "it would be unwise and undesirable" for both white residents of BC and for Japanese Canadians to congregate on the Pacific Coast (Roy, 2015). The relocation program sent the *nikkei* across the country in order to encourage assimilation and decrease potential racial hostility. Relocation, facilitated by filial and communal fragmentation, continued until the federal government allowed *nikkei* re-entry to BC in 1949. Through deportation, dispersion, and assimilation, the Canadian government effectively prevented the establishment of the post-war Japanese community in Canada.

Impacts of Internment and Relocation Policy

The Canadian government's active efforts to dismantle family and community ties during its administration of Japanese internment camps affected the current composition of *nikkei* communities and the way that Canadian *nikkei* process intergenerational trauma. This is made clear as we juxtapose their experiences to their U.S. equivalents. While the number of Japanese Americans was nearly seven times that of Japanese Canadians at the time of internment, the similar compositions of these pre-war communities allow us to draw a few conclusions about the impact of internment administration.

Some notable differences can be measured, while some lasting impacts run deep in the psyche of a battered community. One measurable difference is the recruitment and advertisement of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and 33,000 American *nisei* veterans, to the nearly negligible number of *issei* and *nisei* Canadian citizens given the opportunity to enlist to the Canadian Armed Forces (numbered at less than 100) (Ayukawa, 1999). National attitudes and loyalty within the *nikkei* community were greatly influenced by these demonstrations of patriotism, or lack thereof. Secondly, the rate of interracial marriage sits at over 90 percent in the Canadian *nikkei* population, while American *nisei* married mostly other *nisei* (Sugiman, 2007; Tsuda, 2012). In other words, the Canadian

government was successful in its aim to disperse, assimilate, and divide the Japanese Canadian community. American *nikkei* moved as community and family units after internment and were able to preserve some sense of community identity. It must also be recognized that transnational ethnic networks have emerged in the past twenty years in both nations (e.g., Pan-American *nikkei* Association), seeking to promote ethnic and professional connections (Tsuda, 2012).

Perhaps a discrepancy between the remaining *nikkei* communities in Canada and in the U.S. is the way that each supports its own members in their grief, resulting in more intangible losses (Sugiman, 2007). Social networks and systems of support aid individuals in working through trauma, and intergenerational trauma is no exception. While *nikkei* on both sides of the border suffered at the hand of their governments, the intentional dispersion of Canadian *nikkei* rendered them alone, without filial or communal support. *Sansei* (third-generation Japanese descendants) and *yonsei* (fourth-generation) express concern about over-assimilation to American culture and a loss of ancestral identity in both nations (Tsuda, 2012). One study found that many American *sansei* and *yonsei* have visited Japan or learned Japanese, especially as compared to their *nisei* progenitors (Tsuda, 2012). However, it may be that the constant displacement and dissolution of social support in Canadian *nikkei* communities created a void of relief from trauma. Several articles cite hopelessness, uncertainty, and reluctance to remember the internment among surviving Canadian *nisei*, *sansei*, and *yonsei* (McAllister, 2006; Oikawa, 2011; Sugiman, 2007). Through institutionalized separation and relocation, Canadian *issei* were dropped into eastern communities, despite having lost social and economic networks, advancing in age, being linguistically disadvantaged, and becoming demoralized from internment (Ayukawa, 1999). Sugiman (2007) explains that Canadian *nisei* grieve "a forced assimilation that they were born into, their culture and community . . . taken away from them before they could live it" (p. 64). Further research into the psychological and sociological impacts of dispersion on the Canadian *nikkei* community is needed in order to adequately treat intergenerational trauma. A better understanding of shifting social support since WWII on both sides of the border will allow the *nikkei* community to seek complete remembrance.

Figure 1. Kayo Soga Takahashi's immigration papers circa 1942.

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