

WHEN NIKKEI WOMEN WRITE;  
TRANSFORMING JAPANESE CANADIAN IDENTITIES  
1887 – 1997

by

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## ABSTRACT

Describing historical accounts of Canadian Nikkei<sup>1</sup> experience, historian Midge (Michiko) Ayukawa (1996) writes that these accounts represent "history in the passive voice, and that it is necessary to retell it with the eyes and ears of the people who were directly involved" (3). For Nikkei women, "history in the passive voice" has either completely overlooked their experiences or narrowly defined their social role in terms of domesticity and submission to a patriarchal authority. The dominant image of the Japanese Canadian woman has been that of the "good wife, wise mother" (Ayukawa 1995). This ideal image of womanhood emerged as a component in the dramatic processes of social reform in Meiji Japan (1868-1912). Both Caucasian and Nikkei historians have sustained the power of this mythical image by characterizing those experiences that exceed its conceptual boundaries as merely idiosyncratic. Simultaneously, however, Nikkei women have been weaving narratives of their history which both duplicate and subvert this image of quiet domesticity.

This study contrasts processes of identity formation in twentieth-century writing by and about Canadian Nikkei women. I approach these narratives by first analyzing the categories of race, class, ethnicity, culture, and gender that historians, anthropologists, literary theorists, and theorists of ethnicity have constructed in order to interpret and contain them. I then examine how the narratives engage with three dominant discourses of being, namely those concerned with food, sexuality, and the transmission of culture.

For several reasons, I treat this body of writing from an interdisciplinary and multi-theoretical perspective. My sources include published and unpublished texts from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, history, literature, and geography. These texts embrace a wide range of genres, among them fiction, poetry, autobiography, the essay, the journal, the letter, so-called conventional scholarship, and responses to an ethnographic questionnaire that I have collected. The texts are also informed by both Japanese and "western"<sup>2</sup> cultural ideas and

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<sup>1</sup> "Nikkei" are individuals of Japanese descent living outside of Japan.

<sup>2</sup> Some researchers favour the upper case "Western" to describe North American and European theoretical traditions across disciplines (Mennell 1985). I include in the category of "western" all those

practices, and sometimes by several additional cultural influences. Their writers create a complex interrelation of textual identities which invites a range of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Thus I examine the texts by engaging with a number of theories, including deconstructive postmodernism, deconstructive feminism, feminist anthropology, feminist history, and close textual analysis.

I base this study on the theoretical premise that to treat narratives of experience rigorously, the researcher must regard the texts as both objects of study and authoritative critical voices (Cole and Phillips 1995; Chow 1993; Trinh 1989; Clifford and Marcus 1986). Therefore, I look to writing by Nikkei women for its reflections on Nikkei women's experiences, but also for guidance in interpreting the texts under study. As well, I read these texts for their critical comment on the conceptual categories that conventional scholarship has used to manage the unruliness and ambiguity of Nikkei women's narratives and experience. By welcoming the categorically disruptive, my analysis offers a theoretical perspective that may help to ensure a creative interrelation of theory and praxis.

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ideas that become a body of thought as they are used to distinguish them from "eastern" or "oriental." With the success of European and American imperialist projects from the nineteenth century to the present, this "setting-off against the Orient," as Said calls it (*Orientalism* 3), exceeds national boundaries. One can say, then, that there are critics of Japanese ancestry, residing in Japan and elsewhere, who write from a western point of view. Thus, I depend on the lower-case "western," to emphasize the constructed nature of western ideology, as opposed to the stricter geographical or political connotations suggested by the proper noun.

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## Introduction

### *Stories*

Existing records tell us that in 1887 Mrs. Washiji Oya (nee Yo Shishido)<sup>1</sup> became the first woman to arrive in Canada from Japan. Many women followed Mrs. Washiji, seeking adventure, fortune, and escape. Others came simply out of duty, joining sojourning husbands who had decided to remain in Canada. These pioneers usually found waiting for them a life of labouring at tasks that most had never imagined existed or might ever be required of them. Many worked alongside their husbands in logging camps and sawmills. Many were in charge of the domestic chores in the camps. Some worked as domestics in Vancouver. Others found they had been tricked into prostitution. Still others, on seeing the men they were to marry, chose lives as independent entrepreneurs.<sup>2</sup> Yet fully a century later, historian Midge (Michiko) Ayukawa (1988) observed that the written history of Canadian Nikkei was still the history of men.

Women do appear in histories of the Nikkei in Canada, but usually only as insignificant actors. Those who write in praise of Nikkei women (Takata 1983; Adachi 1976; Ito 1994; *A Dream of Riches* 1978) generally restrict their accounts to the women's contributions as settlers, not of a corner of Canada, but of a rowdy lot of immigrant men who needed the stability that women, as these researchers say, provided. Even accounts that chronicle the talents and non-domestic activities and successes of Nikkei women subordinate these endeavours to the successes of men:

With quiet courage, patience and dignity, most adjusted to their new habitat and matured as wives and mothers. Unlike the men, the Issei women cannot be singled out for unique or outstanding achievement. Takata 18<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is the form Ayukawa (1988) uses to record Washiji's name; Takata (1983) records Washiji's name as "Yo Oya." Ayukawa records most Nikkei names according to Japanese custom, that is surname first. I follow the custom used by each writer I discuss.

<sup>2</sup> The greatest number of pioneer women arrived in the years 1919–1925, usually as the bride in a shashin kekkon or photo marriage. These women became known as "picture brides."

<sup>3</sup> Issei, nisei, sansei, and yonsei refer respectively to the first, second, third, and fourth generation of Nikkei. Shin issei (new issei) and shin ijusha (new immigrant) both refer to the first generation of post-war immigrants to Canada from Japan. The practice of naming generations in Canada is central in Nikkei discourse, and reflects not just notions of the "home"

Thus, these written histories are also a record of the disjunction between the concrete experiences of women and textual interpretations of those experiences.

This inconsistency multiplies when we read the conventional<sup>4</sup> texts in light of the journals and letters Nikkei women were writing as they lived their “insignificant” lives. These interpretations of Nikkei society speak of another community, one in which women comply with a patriarchal structural framework while variously subverting it. In the 1930s and 40s, the nisei who were coming into their own (Kitagawa 1985) began writing in the *New Canadian*.<sup>5</sup> Here they published letters, essays, poems, and speeches all telling of worlds in which Nikkei women were negotiating between the familiar confines of Powell Street and the “white” world outside, between ideas of what was “womanly,” and the women they knew themselves to be. Compounding this reality is a third community of multiple differences that we meet in the body of writing which Nikkei women have been publishing since the 1980s: histories, essays, translations of journals, poetry, fiction, and geographical works. In these texts, identities and experiences form and transform through the intermingling of individuals and groups, ideas and

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culture as foundational, but historical events such as immigration policies (Okano 1992; Omatsu 1992). I discuss generational discourse in greater detail throughout the study.

<sup>4</sup> Relying on James Valentine’s (1990) and bell hooks’s (1990) discussions of marginality, I define as “conventional” or “mainstream” those texts and ideas which sustain received notions in a culture, such as Canada, which may be perceived to have a dominant centre and marginalized “minority.” My use of the terms “conventional” and “mainstream” has connotations of constancy that also relate to Estellie Smith’s (1982) treatment of the “traditional” as it is categorically applied to sociocultural systems.

Insofar as it maintains the centre by being defined against it, the margin (and “minority” writing) is a mainstream phenomenon. But marginal discourse may transform dominant experience or perceptions; or enable the transformation of its own interlocutors. In my use, “marginal” signifies a liminal threshold and is generally synonymous with “transformative.” As such, marginal or non-mainstream Nikkei writing is that which undoes ideological stereotypes of Nikkei experience. This writing may also, but need not, transform experience by departing from prevailing writing styles. This definition (and the experience of being marginalized) is informed by, but does not depend exclusively on, ideas of race. That is, an individual of Japanese ancestry may write a conventional text. However, because the degree of that writer’s assimilation into dominant Canadian society is, itself, part of a racialized process, race remains an influence on the text’s production.

<sup>5</sup> The *New Canadian* newspaper began publishing in Vancouver in 1938. The editorial board described the *New Canadian* as “the voice of the nisei,” a designation that the great numbers of vocal nisei contributors generally confirmed. During the Second World War, the *New Canadian* was the only Nikkei publication the government allowed to continue.

things, in ways that defy the familiar and easy categorizations of the early stories. My study draws these textual worlds together as a way of examining the processes of identity formation that occur in the spaces where the worlds meet.

### *Questions*

I negotiate this textual landscape for the answer to several questions. What processes have shaped the categories of being on which various groups of Canadians (including Nikkei) rely to form their ideas of "Nikkei women"? What have government leaders and policy makers imagined "Canada" to be, that non-white citizens must campaign to have the abrogation of their human rights recognized and redressed? In addition to "family," what spheres of activity and achievement have been significant in Nikkei women's experiences? What are the important symbols and material practices in Nikkei women's cultures? What are the sources of stereotypical notions of Nikkei women? In all the writing about the primary roles of Nikkei wives and mothers, where are the bodies that enact those roles? And finally, what does the "transmission of culture" mean within intercultural<sup>6</sup> families? The range of my sources and the breadth of these questions clearly require an interdisciplinary approach.

### *Approaches*

As the term suggests, interdisciplinary research happens between disciplines. The nature of interdisciplinarity resists precise definitions and may involve variations on a number of approaches. Interdisciplinary research may include collaborative multidisciplinary projects (Rossini and Porter 1984), the recombination of disciplines into "hybrid fields" (Dogan and Pahre 1990), or scholarly contributions by "adisciplinary" researchers, that is, researchers whose individual approaches exceed disciplinary boundaries (Clark and Wawrytko 1990). Whatever form it takes, the theoretical elegance of interdisciplinarity lies in the accommodating nature of its emphasis on process. Data need not be sculpted to fit any one disciplinary paradigm; no topic is out of bounds. From an interdisciplinary standpoint, even the idea of "topic" resembles a

synthetic process more than it does subject matter or content (Klein 1990). In fact, the University of British Columbia defines as interdisciplinary research that “cannot successfully be addressed within the bounds of a single established discipline” (University of British Columbia 1995). Appreciating the relevance of an integrative interdisciplinary approach to Nikkei women's writing requires that we consider the ways in which bringing specific disciplines together overcomes the limitations of a singularly disciplined study.

History provides rules of evidence and methods of documentation that are useful tools for a thorough recording of significant events in Nikkei history. Cultural anthropology is helpful in the interpretation of cultural symbols and the transmission of culture within families. Literary analysis aids a close textual analysis of the writing. Yet the disciplinary divisions of this short list are also porous. For example, because anthropological methods have begun to incorporate the theories and styles of literary criticism, its particular contribution to the analysis of culture is already somewhat “impure.” As well, each of these disciplines has been influenced by theories that are, themselves, interdisciplinary. Feminism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism have all changed the ways in which researchers define and invoke the ideological territories of history, anthropology, and literature. Faced with this shifting theoretical ground, on what specific points of intersection can we depend when applying these various disciplines and theoretical approaches to the texts under study?

In this particular project, a number of concerns need to be considered before responding to that question. Implicit in any examination of identity is the question of authenticity. In the case at hand, a feminist concern with reading and writing the space of Nikkei women's identities risks “setting the record straight” by replacing the incorrect with the correct Nikkei woman.<sup>7</sup> Granting Nikkei women subjectivity by “giving” them voice simply fixes the category of “Nikkei womanhood” on a different side of the same subject/object binary; it does not challenge the

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding my use of this term, see Chapter Two.

<sup>7</sup> Rey Chow (1993) poses a cautionary question concerning investigations of subjectivity: “Is there a way of ‘finding’ the native without simply ignoring the image, or substituting a ‘correct’

processes that produced that ideological framework. Venturing the latter alternative, I look to Nikkei women's writing as a way of understanding how Nikkei women came to be represented as silent objects. For this purpose, rather than being content with revising an incomplete or inaccurate historical record, I invoke elements of poststructuralism and postmodernism in order to examine ways in which the language of taxonomy constructs the meanings of subjectivity. That is, I seek out those confluences of ideology, historical events, and politics that named the categories ("race," "class," "gender," and so on) on which researchers have depended as objective descriptions of social reality (Scott 1988; Fowler et al. 1996).

This is not to say that reassessing historical records is unimportant. Especially as translations of issei women's journals become available, researchers are filling large gaps in recorded Canadian history (Ayukawa 1988 and 1990; Oiwa 1991; Makabe 1995). However, as Fox-Genovese (1982) reminds us, simply adding women to history does not, in itself, constitute a challenge to the conventions of historiography (and anthropology, I would add) that excluded these stories in the first place. Nor will the matter of voice quietly resolve itself once that textual adjustment is complete.

In addressing these concerns over the treatment of "women's" history<sup>8</sup> it is helpful to consider their counterpart in the cultural constructionist debate over native voice.<sup>9</sup> In his discussion of this debate over Hawaiian culture Jeffrey Tobin (1995) observes:

So far, Natives have been able to enter the anthropological discourse only as "the native point of view." A Native may even become an anthropologist. But if she dares to claim subjective authority to expound on her own culture, she is instantly re-relegated to the status of informant—a voice to be interpreted. The cultural constructionist's commitment to historicize, contextualize, or otherwise analyze the Native voice invariably serves to shut that voice out. (161)

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image of the ethnic specimen for an 'incorrect' one, or giving the native a 'true' voice 'behind' her 'false' image?" (29).

<sup>8</sup> Because historical discourse has traditionally implied a male subject, researchers must be prepared to hunt for Nikkei women's histories in unconventional ways and places. Gail Nomura (1988) comments on American issei women's recorded history: "In writing their tanka [a poetic form], they were conscious of their role in recording their history—a history they believed would not be included in general histories about American immigrants. One issei poet, Keiko Teshirogi, wrote: 'Not recorded in immigrant history / Your struggles are inscribed / In the depths of my heart alone'" (224).

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix Two.

As is apparent from my discussion of Imada Ito's journal in particular, many Nikkei women express significant aspects of their subjectivity in private, and often realize the fullest expression of identity only in their imagination. To grant that these quiet subjectivities are the authors of their histories and cultures requires a disorienting adjustment of disciplinary authority. As Haunani-Kay Trask (1991) notes, "anthropologists without Natives are like entomologists without insects" (162).

Such an adjustment of scholarly tradition is obvious in Ayukawa's reflections on her project of translating Imada Ito's journal. Ayukawa recalls being puzzled by Mitsuru Shimpo's initial translation of excerpts from the journal, and surmised that Shimpo was limited by more than his ignorance of what he described as Mrs. Imada's "quaint" Japanese: "Dr. Shimpo stated that he had great difficulty reading and understanding her prose *and he mocked its lack of order*" (Ayukawa 1989, 7; emphasis mine).<sup>10</sup> Ayukawa's translation of the original journals includes self-reflections on the frailty of a monolithic disciplinary authority. What Shimpo interprets as narrative weakness, Ayukawa understands as the logical outcome of writing in snatches—in those rare quiet moments between working in the woods or cooking for work crews and caring for home and children. Without sacrificing the expertise and skills of the historian,<sup>11</sup> Ayukawa also depends on her knowledge as a nisei daughter "who had observed

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<sup>10</sup> Ayukawa discusses Shimpo's position regarding Mrs. Imada's journals, including his claim that he was responsible for prompting Mrs. Imada to record her experiences ("Imada Ito-san no Shi ni Omou," *New Canadian* 13 and 17 November 1987; 7). Shimpo found Imada's "quaint" Japanese untranslatable because he was unfamiliar with Imada's blend of a Meiji Hiroshima dialect with Canadian Nikkei neologisms. He also, writes Ayukawa, was puzzled by what he calls the "disconnected" quality of the writing. Ayukawa seems to find Shimpo's own attitude quaint, and suggests in her foreword to the journal that had Shimpo been a Canadian Nikkei with roots in Hiroshima province, intimate with both the dialect and experience of Mrs. Imada (as she is), he probably would have had less trouble. Regarding one of Shimpo's linguistic adjustments Ayukawa (1988) writes: "If [Mrs. Imada] had retained the original word, someone like myself would not have had any difficulty. His editing made my task more complicated" (8). Throughout her translation, Ayukawa also makes reference to her own mother who, because she was a contemporary of Imada's, was able to contribute to the translation.

<sup>11</sup> At the time, Ayukawa was a student. She completed the first part of her translation, "The Memoirs of Imada Ito, a Japanese Pioneer Woman" (1988) as a fourth-year honours essay during her tenure as an undergraduate student in history. The second section, "Bearing The Unbearable" (1990), constituted Ayukawa's M.A. thesis. She has since completed a Ph.D. in

[issei women] at close range for many years" (1990a, 8). Ayukawa explains the several factors she includes in her phrase, "close range." Her mother, Misayo Ishii, was also an issei woman who came to Canada as a picture bride from Mrs. Imada's prefecture, at approximately the same time. Recognizing the legitimacy of this experiential proximity, Ayukawa also grounds her disciplinary authority in this intimacy with her mother's similar dialect and experience, and with that of other issei women in her community. In fact, Ayukawa cites Mrs. Ishii as often as she does any other source. Treated with such attention and respect, the stories of Nikkei women stand as authoritative historical and anthropological accounts, rather than as objects of study to be explained.

Examining the construction of subjectivity, then, is a complex undertaking that demands far more than transposing one category into the terms of another. It involves disentangling a number of polarities: inevitable differences from chosen ones (Phillips 1992),<sup>12</sup> the universal from the particular (Mukherjee 1994), and, as other theorists have also argued, imaginative, straight-talking theory from the obscurant version (Lyman 1994, Childers and hooks 1990). However, such research also requires that scholars recognize the dynamic continuity that holds such polarities in place. For instance, throughout this study, I describe the state of being "inside" or "outside" a community. Yet insisting on an either/or definition of belonging obscures the varying degrees of "inside" that exist. Nikkei women create many communities within the Nikkei community, some of which overlap with the larger Canadian society. Furthermore, degrees of belonging also come about through various processes of exclusion, such as one community member recalls: "Japanese and gay? Not possible. Who ever heard of that?" (Mochizuki 13).

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history. During the Second World War, Ayukawa was interned with her family in Lemon Creek. She obtained her B.Sc. from McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario) in 1952 and her M.Sc. from the same university in 1953.

<sup>12</sup> Phillips is concerned here with the varying feminist positions on the status of sexual difference as it pertains to issues of justice: "[. . .] notwithstanding the conceptual difficulties feminists have raised around the distinction between sex and gender, we will continue to need some way of disentangling the differences that are inevitable from those that are chosen, and from those that are simply imposed" (23).

How do I meet the challenges of a project (the interdisciplinary “problem”) that involves examining the ideological structures of a theoretically infinite number of often apparently contradictory processes? Can we treat disciplinary unruliness critically without needing to make sense of it?<sup>13</sup> Because part of this project involves examining the structures of my own exclusions, I revisit history, anthropology, and literature, adjusting the angle of my gaze as I go along, shifting the weights of deconstructive postmodernism and deconstructive feminism, feminist anthropology and feminist history. I attempt, by degrees, to release my perspective from the familiar—exclusive—constraints of Theory by a promiscuous<sup>14</sup> engagement with theories. Throughout that process, I continue opening the texts of Nikkei women’s writing, in order to find them and (some of) the texts of my own knowledge and experience strange.<sup>15</sup>

### *Strategies*

I have organized my material under two headings (“The Self in One Another” and “The Body in Metaphor and Reality”) of two chapters each. Chapter One begins laying the groundwork for this interdisciplinary approach to Nikkei women’s writing by analyzing the ideological structures of several categories of being: “race,” “class,” “culture,” “ethnicity,” and “gender.” Because my goal is to examine how the fashioning and use of categories of being shape identities, defining those concepts also includes understanding the many ways in which

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<sup>13</sup> By “making sense” I mean the way that ideology seeks to order or rationalize the ambiguity out of contradiction (Coates 1988) to the point where we can speak of “common sense,” or that which “goes without saying.” My hesitancy to “make sense” reflects a commitment to let ambiguity be.

<sup>14</sup> Handler (1985) prescribes bringing texts together “promiscuously” or indiscriminately as a way of dislodging the familiar (180).

<sup>15</sup> I am invoking Miyoshi Masao here. Miyoshi (1991) roundly criticizes the tendency of western readers to “tame” marginal texts in general and Japanese literature in particular by “neutralizing” them: “A strange text is acknowledged to be strange, and this tautology thrusts the text out of the reader’s proximity. One opens a book in order to close it, as it were” (10). Miyoshi protests the type of distancing relationship with the other that blocks a real “encounter”(10) with the text.

I agree with Miyoshi that western fascination has rendered “marginalized” or “minority” texts both exotic and universal. As we see with Miyoshi’s own reading of certain Japanese women writers, however, cultural or racial proximity to a text is no insurance against this theoretical distancing (Yoko Kitazawa, director of Asia Japan Women’s Resource Center, identifies “a surprising lack of understanding about feminism” among Japanese men “we call

the concepts are sculpted to fit particular situations. In this concern with process I depend on two models: Michael Omi and Howard Winant's (1994) theory of "racial formation" and Robert Miles's (1988) paradigm of "racialization."

Omi and Winant explain racial formation as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (55). Racial formations occur as links are made between social structure and cultural representation. "Racial projects do the ideological 'work' of making these links" (56). In this study I examine several events which I call "projects": assimilation, internment, redress, multiculturalism. For this reason, Omi and Winant's conception of the racial project is helpful in identifying the links between, for example, the representation of Nikkei as "enemy aliens" during the Second World War and their internment in road camps, ghost towns, and prisoner-of-war camps. This theoretical model also accommodates exclusions involving ideas of class, gender, and ethnicity that have specific material realities for certain groups identified by race.

Because I am primarily concerned with the representations rather than the events of a history of exclusion, Miles's concept of racialization is particularly useful in recognizing how these representations reflect

[. . .] a process of signification in the course of which the idea of 'race' is employed to interpret the presence and behaviour of others, a conceptual process which can guide subsequent action and reaction. This complex of signification and action, where it occurs systematically over periods of time, has structural consequences. (9)

The process of racialization is, for several reasons, an ideological one. Racialization assumes that ascribed characteristics occur naturally; it locates the source of the problem in the arriving group, and it obscures the agent of the signifying process. Immigrants from Japan become "Japanese immigrants" with whom Canadian citizens must interact, a race whose arrival has created a "race relations problem."

While both of these theories contribute to the way I conceptualize race, and to the way I approach the texts under study, in no conscious way do I privilege these two perspectives. I

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'intellectuals'"(33).). I am suggesting that to recognize a text's strangeness is to accept that

agree with Frankenberg (1993) and Trinh Minh ha (1989) that systems of domination are clearest to those oppressed by them. With Frankenberg, I generally regard those who are the targets of racism to be "racially different from white people, and from each other" (12). Thus, I interweave Nikkei and non-Nikkei perspectives throughout my analysis. These combined perspectives help me to discriminate among the material implications of social relations that are ordered by race; while the stakes are usually higher for those who are the targets of racism, all are affected.

Personal reflections and research on the uprooting and internment of Nikkei during the Second World War have emphasized the racist nature of those actions (Mulroney 1988; Adachi 1976; Kogawa 1981). Relinquishing the scholarly preoccupation with race as "real" need not hinder investigations into such racism as an expression of what Frankenberg calls the "real, though changing, effects of race in the world" (11). Accepting that race is a social construction informed by a complex process of signification prepares investigators to analyze just how that racism has been nurtured by the conceptual specifics of race, such as the historical willingness to view Nikkei as indelibly and foremost "Japanese."<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the twentieth century in Canada, social taxonomy has been a racialized discourse. That is, Canadians have imputed belonging, and its concomitant idea of nation, according to criteria of inalienable race; having been assigned "minority" status, non-whites sustain the white national centre by occupying its margins. In the years leading up to the Second World War, Canada implemented official projects of assimilation in order to achieve national economic and political growth without sacrificing the idea that maintaining a white Canada was a worthy and necessary goal. The uprooting, internment, and dispersal of Nikkei

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familiar unitary theoretical approaches are incomplete.

<sup>16</sup> Miles (1988) cautions that many social scientists that define race as a social category nonetheless adopt an analytical framework that resembles the nineteenth-century model of scientific racism. That is, they depend on the category as both explanans and explanandum, whereby they "constitute 'race relations' as a discrete object of analysis, about which theories can be formulated, tested and reformulated" (8). Frankenberg's emphasis on race as a social construction avoids such pitfalls because it emphasizes the unstable nature of the construction as a process in flux, rather than a discrete, fixed category.

during and after the war represent one extreme end of official assimilation. In Chapter One I examine some of the many ways in which Nikkei writers have engaged energetically with the discourse of assimilation.

At its most tolerant, the official multiculturalism of the 1970s and 80s represents a sophisticated version of 1940s assimilation. As the Multiculturalism Act defines it, the ideological pliability of Canada's "fundamentally" multicultural nature means that Canada's true nature could be invoked as evidence that exclusionary practices like the internment were idiosyncratic "mistakes" in our history.<sup>17</sup> Yet Nikkei also exploited the policy in their campaign to have the internment redressed. By examining accounts of resistance and other oppositional textual representations of the internment years, I demonstrate how, despite the stereotypical images of silent suffering and willing assimilation, Nikkei women have been active and vocal throughout these projects of silencing.

Following the established tradition in social science, researchers have also incorporated the discourse of assimilation in their analyses of marriage practices and the transmission of culture among Nikkei. Generally, researchers studying Nikkei intermarriage accept marriage to someone outside a Nikkei community as a reliable index of assimilation. Complementing this assumption in both scholarly analyses and popular discourse is the stereotypical idea of women as the bearers and keepers of culture—the most "traditional" members of community who transmit culture as they socialize children. The logic of this assumption impels us to consider marriage between a Nikkei man and a non-Nikkei woman as the ultimate signifier of cultural assimilation.

In Chapter Two I begin testing this logic by examining popular and academic discourse about the effects of intermarriage on individual and group ethnicity, and on the transmission of culture within the family. For Nikkei discourse concerning intermarriage I consult issues of the

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<sup>17</sup> Mulroney 1988.

*New Canadian* from 1938<sup>18</sup> to the present. When the *New Canadian* first began running articles on the topic, Nikkei generally agreed in print that intermarriage was a likely route to assimilation, although they expressed strong and varied opinions about the desirability of that outcome. As the adult children of intermarriage became vocal, opinions have further diversified. Many of these adults identify strongly as Nikkei, and are active in community affairs. Reading these accounts, watching my children negotiate their own racialized identities,<sup>19</sup> and witnessing signs of my family's increasing identification with, and participation in, Okinawan communities has caused me to question further the cultural threat posed by non-Nikkei mothers of Nikkei children. Therefore, as one way of getting theoretically "closer" to the practice of intermarriage, I have supplemented this section with a survey<sup>20</sup> designed to explore textualized accounts of cultural transmission in intercultural families.

I emphasize the supplemental nature of this information for two reasons. First, as this is a study of Nikkei women's writing, I did not want to lose sight of my primary focus. Second, given the small sample size and qualitative nature of my research, I have not treated the responses to these questionnaires as a challenge to the substantial body of quantitative research into intermarriage. Nonetheless, the narratives of non-Nikkei women married to Nikkei men suggest that intercultural families often exhibit behavioural signs of Nikkei ethnicity, and that non-Nikkei mothers are transmitting Nikkei and/or Japanese culture to their mixed children, at the expense of "their own." Overwhelmingly (and often in spite of what both partners say they prefer), mothers in these families are the spouse most actively involved in the transmission of culture to their children. This persistence of culture in spite of (or, as I discuss below, because of) intermarriage challenges the predictive value of many categories of being.

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<sup>18</sup> I do incorporate other Nikkei sources, including fiction and scholarly analysis. However, many nisei whose prime marrying years coincided with the formation of the *New Canadian* in 1938 relied on the newspaper as a forum for their concerns and opinions. This practice has yielded a synchronic record of the opinions of a vocal cohort group that was directly affected by intermarriage, a helpful counter- or sub-text to the dominant discourse.

<sup>19</sup> I am not Nikkei and am married to an Okinawan Nikkei.

<sup>20</sup> For an example of the questionnaire, and details regarding the parameters of this survey see Appendix Three, "Research Design of the Intercultural Traditions Survey."

In Chapter Three I extend my analysis of identity formation by examining the metaphorical and material significance of food in Nikkei women's writing. There is already a well-established anthropological tradition of investigation into the primacy of food as a cultural symbol (Lévi-Strauss 1969; Douglas 1966; Pitt-Rivers 1968), but although fiction and poetry have always incorporated images of food, literary theorists have only recently shown increasing interest in the significance of food as a metaphor for language (Furst 1992). Among literary theorists there is also growing interest in food and eating as forms of resistance (Schofield 1989; Van Herik 1985; Ellman 1993). Because food has occupied a central position in many different discourses for so long, and because women have always been intimately connected with food in its various forms—to the point of being food for their infant children—this is perhaps the most interdisciplinary chapter.

Here I address the pervasiveness of food as a symbol of identity by tracing its incorporation as language and as a central component of mythology. Both western and Japanese creation myths posit a foundational symbolic connection between food, language, and identities of the individual and nation. Despite this transnational importance of food, many theorists of ethnicity and critics of official multiculturalism in Canada limit food to the status of metaphor, signifying assimilation and trivial ethnicity. Yet in the writing of Nikkei women, food is a primary site and vehicle in the construction of individual and communal identities.

These texts demonstrate how the state used food as a means of controlling ethnicity during the uprooting and internment of Nikkei during the Second World War. Those held in Hastings Park before being sent to camps or finding themselves otherwise dispersed were fed communally an inadequate, mostly non-Japanese, diet. By contrast, Nikkei men sent to road camps were beguiled with large amounts of delicious food—fuelled for their task of building roads and railways for British Columbia. As Nikkei women write about food, they recount processes by which they ordered their disrupted environments and resisted disciplinary food practices. In their narratives they also inscribe various transformations whereby food becomes a vehicle of desire and a creative element in the formation of unconventional selves.

The unconventional self is a major theme in Chapter Four. In this section I review some of the particular ways Nikkei women writers articulate desire by writing “through” the body.<sup>21</sup> Nikkei women have always been writing alongside, and back to, the histories written from within their communities—stories that sketched the faintest outlines of their bodies and then fleshed them out with images of maternity and wifely submission. They are also writing back to the histories written by those outside their communities—stories that sketched the exotic body. Often, stories from both sides of the ethnic boundary simply left an empty “woman’s” space. Sometimes Nikkei women write in response to these images, adjusting the outlines with their versions or layering other images over top. But Nikkei women have always been writing, and when we read these “old” stories alongside the contemporary, it becomes clear that feminist history is not simply a matter of filling in textual blank spots. Rather, taken together, Nikkei women’s stories interweave, “working off” each other, offering a complex re-imagining of history through the body.

One textual response of Nikkei women to conventional textual images of themselves has been to write a desire that lies outside the boundaries of submissive heterosexuality. Thus, the writing of lesbian desire is a central project in some texts. To date, Mona Oikawa and Tamai Kobayashi have dedicated their writing to the construction of a lesbian Nikkei imaginary. In addition to countering historical interpretations of a singularly heterosexual community, this writing challenges linguistic boundaries. In place of a symbolic system defined by separation from the mother, Nikkei lesbian writing privileges a “mothertongue” (Kobayashi and Oikawa 1992; Uyeda 1994). “Mothertongue” refers to a way of speaking and being that is inextricable from desire—as speakers define it—and which situates women in a sexually and ethnically “disrupted space” (Oikawa 1993, 54) independent of the male symbolic order. This

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<sup>21</sup> “Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word ‘silence’, the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word impossible and writes it as ‘the end’” (Cixous 256).

“mothertongue”<sup>22</sup> creates a sisterhood that provides conceptual room for marginalized ethnic identities and for sustained union with the mother. The literal exercise of the metaphorical mothertongue in lesbian sex also erases conceptual divisions between language, food, and desire.

Hiromi Goto has introduced another significant textual image that synthesizes the body and desire in what I call the “bawdy Obāchan.” Unlike the good wife/wise mother image of the pervasive “Meiji woman” ideology, the bawdy Obāchan is scripted as irreverent, raunchily sexual, sporadically maternal, and, above all, vocal. This image is not yet a common figure in Nikkei women’s writing, but it departs so drastically from received images that it creates an imaginary space of abundant possibility. From this place, Roy and Mary Kiyooka and Daphne Marlatt have woven together the story of Mary Kiyooka, a woman raised during the Meiji era to be both a samurai and a dutiful wife.

The textual gaps in Nikkei women’s history are emblematic of the experiential chasms between old and young Nikkei women. Effects of assimilation such as the loss of language, the scars of the internment, and detachment from Nikkei cultural values are among the many factors that combine to alienate young women from old and, hence, from themselves. In *CHIRASHI stories from the garden* [sic], Baco Ohama attempts to bridge these chasms. Like Joy Kogawa’s novel *Obasan* and Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Ohama’s text depends stylistically and thematically on listening to one’s Obāchan’s stories, partly as a way of discovering self and community, but also as a way of communicating and knowing. Of course, there is an irony in these writers representing and encouraging listening—an action that requires the suspension of language—by filling a book with language. This irony is not lost on Ohama. One way she addresses the challenge is to incorporate large expanses of “empty” space on the page. For their part, Kogawa and Goto both rely on the image of the absent and “speaking”

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<sup>22</sup> This “mothertongue” is not identical to that which Roy Kiyooka imagines in *Pear Tree Pomes* [sic]. Regarding this distinction, see the discussion of Mary and Roy Kiyooka in Chapter One.

mother. This idea of an extended or expanded form of listening may suggest passivity,<sup>23</sup> but it also represents a challenge to dualistic constructions of action and non-action, speaking and silence. Each of these writers who tests the definition of "speech" encourages us to consider the larger notion of how we construct comfortable conceptual limits.

In this textual zone of apparent paradox interdisciplinarity meets both its object and itself. Throughout this study I speak of theory that happens in the spaces where worlds meet, in gaps and fissures, and what may seem unlikely places. I also refer to texts under study as both theoretical sources and voices of authority. I maintain that there is a need for theorists to "submit" to the conventionally labelled "voices of experience," and to recognize the potential for ideological violence<sup>24</sup> in the apparently self-reflexive and egalitarian theories of cultural construction. Taken together, these adjustments compose what I call the "theoretical pause" that is necessary to hear Nikkei women's writing speaking "in its own theoretically informed voice."<sup>25</sup>

In my analysis of identity formation, I generally defer to the subjective definition of group membership. Canada's uprooting and internment of Nikkei is an extreme, but nonetheless real, example of the danger in defining group membership from outside the group. Regardless of differing types of status in nationality, ethnicity, and subjective definitions, during the Second World War Nikkei the Canadian government defined and interned Nikkei as "enemy aliens" because of their imputed group membership as "Japanese." One appropriate response to this

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<sup>23</sup> In another of Ohama's texts she writes of how she waited for stories "that I would need to tell" (*Red Poems of Rain and Voice* np). In his review of this volume, Scott McFarlane describes Ohama's "paradoxical" account of "speaking silence," poems that "are examples of the poetry's new found self yet simultaneously they construct that self as a passive object, as a body unto which things are being done" (*Bulletin* April 1996: 21).

<sup>24</sup> Predominant in the liturgy of cultural construction is an insistence that social systems (including cultures and their traditions) are discursively constructed or "invented" in endless processes of transformation, and that all traditions are political, because all cultural actors have political aims. The possibility of cultural construction being a source of ideological violence lies in its potential as a tool that researchers may (and do) use to counter or discredit cultural explanations by members of the cultures that they study.

<sup>25</sup> "One way [to apply theory and subvert existing power relations], I believe, is to read Asian American texts as theoretically informed and informing rather than as transparently referential

tradition is to accept the validity of subjective identities. The necessity of subjective identification becomes apparent as I examine factors such as intermarriage and the existence of micro-communities (such as Nikkei lesbian communities) that are formed, in part, by exclusionary practices of dominant communities. Mindful that language is a critical component of subjective identification, I do not follow the convention of italicizing "foreign" words that have not entered the English lexicon (in some communities). The definition of common usage is heavily dependent on a number of contexts, and language usage varies greatly within and among communities of diversity. Therefore, unless I am citing a writer who uses italics, I leave all words in plain text.

At the outset, I made a point of characterizing this study as a "theoretical pause" in the on-going critique of Nikkei women's writing. As the "rest" is a component of the musical score, so too I am convinced that the fullest critical response to a text depends on attending to the worlds that meet in its pages. By "worlds" I mean all of those informing contexts: voluntary and imputed belonging to categories of being; membership in multiple communities; the interrelations of individual and group identities; mythologies; histories; desires. Recent critical writing (Goellnicht 1997; Uyeda 1993; Oikawa 1992) suggests that many scholars are no longer prepared to storm texts with theory, but are willing to acknowledge and explore the influence of those texts on the theories we use. If such an approach is possible, then we have arrived at a place where critical response involves painstakingly educating oneself in the worlds of the text. Because the reader comes to this task with a critical attitude informed by her own contexts, examining those contexts is integral to this exercise. Because even more irony may exist in basing a critical study like this on the need to suspend one's critique than in expressing the need for silence by writing a book full of words, this is perhaps the place to invoke "the autobiographical gesture" (Fowler et al. 41).

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human documents over which we place a grid of sophisticated Euro-American theory in order to extract meaning" (Goellnicht 1997, 340). Also, see Ueda (1993).

I exchanged the comfort of my kitchen for this academic challenge with personal goals in mind. I wanted to learn about my family's Nikkei history, and I wanted to see if I could "manage" university. As I went about the concrete task of realizing these goals, each new "discovery" led me to redesign my plan. The gaps in Nikkei history directed me to Nikkei groups that were gathering and recording the history of their community, then to the writing of Nikkei women. My sons' growing familiarity with receiving racial slurs and with being publicly identified as "beautiful blends" had me hunting for books about intermarriage and raising mixed children. My growing anger at the impact of racism on Nikkei experience caused me to admit my own privilege and begin challenging the legacy of racism with which I had grown up. With the help of computer skills I was acquiring I stumbled on "lost" members of my birth family. Through this latter episode, I learned that family members had hidden chunks of my history because grandparents had been raised in Indian residential schools, and no one in the family knew how to reconfigure "Métis" as a source of cultural pride on the prairies in the 1940s.

These autobiographical specifics represent the most significant intersections of experience and theory that have occurred in the course of my research. In fact, many times these specifics overwhelmed my scholarship with the combined weight of emotion that they produced. At times personal experience decided the direction my research took. Experience has always been "there" in the way I read the text, and in the way the text works on me. In these respects, my research has been altogether a personal endeavour. But at the point where I was about to translate this private research journey into a public, written text, I was compelled to tame my self-reflexivity—rein it in—also learning that, too often,

[. . .]the self-reflexivity of a politics of location devolves into solipsistic autobiographical anecdotes whose relevance is not always apparent, but whose folksy inanity is all too clear. (Yamamoto in Fowler et al. 42)

In the course of this study, I have acknowledged my self-reflexivity as relevant but I have also examined it for structures of exclusion that have silenced Nikkei women's texts, before attending to the texts on their own terms. The most obvious autobiographical gestures are likely those in the section on intermarriage. One effect of the scholarly analyses of intermarriage and

the narratives of the women who responded to my questionnaire has been to highlight the contingency of the taxonomies that scholars have, at different historical junctures, accepted as occurring naturally. The categorical excess in these and other narratives elicited in me a sense of belonging. This perception suggested that clearly defined communities are forming along more complex axes of inclusion and exclusion than many current structures allow.<sup>26</sup> Obscuring my experience in this area would have replicated the same authoritative objectivity that I reject elsewhere as “discursive violence.” Where the hand of this researcher is less obvious, the theoretical pause ought to be apparent in what is not said, and in the tentative beginnings of unlearning masterful approaches.

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<sup>26</sup> *Interrace*, (“America’s #1 magazine for interracial couples, families and people”) has been published in the United States since 1989. The magazine has a substantial “personals” section that runs ads for individuals seeking either a multi-racial mate or an interracial relationship. In 1994, 1000 people joined the annual “Interrace Cruise” sponsored by the magazine. One of the discussions on the cruise involved “uniting all interracial couples to gain political and social significance” (*Interrace* 6 (1995): 4).

## Chapter One

### Creating Categories of Being

#### *Becoming the Japanese Canadian Woman*

The journals and oral histories of the first women to arrive in Canada from Japan in the early twentieth century contain certain predictable details of their early years in Japan: birthplaces, recollections of childhood and families, and the circumstances surrounding each one's transition from "daughter" to "picture bride." Each of these accounts also includes an "arrival scene," a familiar convention in travel writing and ethnographies of that time. The arrival scene still plays a central role in contemporary ethnographic description, "anchoring that description in the intense and authority-giving personal experience of fieldwork" (Pratt 1986, 32). In the less disciplined genre of travel writing, the arrival scene also bears the weight of authority, especially because so many of these accounts involve imperial encounters between the European traveller and the colonized native (Pratt 1992). However, in the hands of Nikkei women, these arrival scenes displace the familiar locus of authority. While they are elsewhere the conventional objects of ethnographic investigation, the picture brides who author the arrival scene construct agency as they construct counter-representations which are consistent with what Pratt (1992) calls "autoethnography" (7).<sup>27</sup>

I left Japan at the end of December 1913, and New Year's Day came halfway through the trip; I got to Victoria in January of the next year.<sup>28</sup> It was a 6,000 ton, Japanese merchant ship called the Canada Maru, and it pitched a lot because it was right in the middle of winter, but

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<sup>27</sup> Pratt describes autoethnographies as self-representations constructed by the colonized that engage with the terms of the colonizers' representations in a process of appropriation and transformation. The autoethnographic text is heterogeneous in form, and intended for a heterogeneous audience. The heterogeneity and ambiguity of the autoethnographic text distinguish it from the authentic and essentialist discourse of native nationalism. See Appendix Two, "Native Nationalism and Cultural Construction in Hawaii."

<sup>28</sup> Maki Fukushima departed from Kobe, as did many of the women who came to Canada in the early twentieth century. Tami Nakamura recalls that the sailing from Kobe to Victoria took approximately two weeks (Makabe 133). Because Nakamura does not mention adverse weather or seasickness, it is possible that good weather facilitated her crossing. Nakamura likens the crossing to a school outing, on which she "had a lot of fun" (133). Other writers who mention longer sailings also emphasize the rough seas. Imada Ito spent the entire twenty-four days' sailing in her bed, unable to eat for most of the time (Ayukawa 1988, 21). Kiyooka describes the crossing and her subsequent seasickness as something she "survived" (Kiyooka 51).

I didn't have any feeling I'd come through a terrible experience. At the time, a 20-year old girl was very naïve, and even if she was suffering, she couldn't say anything about it. I was going as a bride, but I only had a little bedding and nightwear, and only a few extra clothes. My father bought me a blanket in Kobe because he thought it would get cold when the boat went through the Russian Sea. As for English, I came without knowing a word, not even "yes" or "no." I didn't study it at all beforehand.

When we landed in Victoria, I met my husband for the first time. I didn't have any particular feeling when I saw him. I wasn't excited about it, because I didn't have any idea of being married. I felt the same as if I'd been at home in Japan. He bought me an outfit of Western clothes, and we announced the marriage to the people he knew at the immigration centre, and then we went to Vancouver the next day. (Makabe 48-49)

At several points, this account by Maki Fukushima both reports and interprets her arrival in Canada. Fukushima explains that she is silent about her discomfort on the voyage because the cultural mores she had learned in Japan taught her it was inappropriate for a young woman to be otherwise. In spite of this injunction against complaining, Fukushima's list of the few items in her meager trousseau suggests that her material reality was inconsistent with her bridal role. The combined effect of each disjunction between her subjective self and the roles she was expected to perform left Fukushima unmoved by the sight of her husband, "because I didn't have any idea of being married."

While the image of Fukushima's arrival is poignant, care must be taken not to read the passage atavistically as evidence that the system of arranged photo marriages was inherently flawed or immoral. For instance, when Adachi cites the lack of physical affection in photo marriages as the cause of loneliness among "most of" the picture brides (91), he overlooks the fact that these young women neither expected, nor necessarily desired, overt expressions of affection from either a Nikkei or a Japanese husband.<sup>29</sup> As Fukushima stresses, emotion and physical attraction mattered far less than did the chance of an adventure:

All I wanted to do was to go and see America, so it wasn't anything specially [sic] emotional. I didn't even wonder what would happen if I didn't like my husband. [. . .] When you get used to people, you end up getting attached to them, and so you can put up with them. It doesn't matter if you get married just through pictures, or if you get married after meeting the man, it depends on how you act, for the marriage to become a success. (48)

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<sup>29</sup> Adachi constructs an image of the picture brides as romantic revolutionaries who expected to exchange "traditional" concepts of marriage with "that of a Western ideal based on the interplay of the subjective feelings of two presumably equal and independent individuals" (90). These first women to emigrate certainly emerge as adventuresome in their own accounts, but rarely do they appear in search of romantic love.

Adachi's account does agree with those of the picture brides regarding their larger disappointment, namely the material reality of drudgery and poverty that soon dashed their hopes for wealth and excitement. The weight of this disappointment may be one reason that Fukushima does not reflect on her exchange of the symbols of Japanese civilization for those of the west. Once in Victoria she yields her Japanese trousseau—including the symbol of her father's desire to protect the daughter against foreign elements (the blanket to guard against the cold "Russian" current)—up to the suit of Western clothes that her husband provides.

In contrast with Fukushima's somewhat more typical marriage circumstances, Hana Murata came to Canada as a replacement for her sister, a picture bride who had become sick in Canada and died after her return to Japan. Murata's marriage almost stalled over her brother-in-law's interim relationship with another woman who was now pregnant with his child.

I had all the new wedding things that my parents had bought for me, and I was wearing an old Western dress of my dead sister's. It must have been the year the First World War ended, 1918, I forget the name of the ship, but I came with a whole lot of other brides. I was 24.

When the boat got to Victoria, my husband wasn't even there to meet me. He'd sent somebody else, though. Since there was nothing I could do about it, I waited in a hotel, and he came along a few days later. No wonder he was late. When I got to the house in Vancouver, I found that woman living in the house, and she wouldn't leave. It seems my husband was embarrassed in front of the other relatives, but they'd had a child. That's how it came about he couldn't separate from her.

Again, what the body is draped in—in Murata's case, the symbolically ambiguous funereal shroud of her dead sister's wedding dress—holds particular relevance for the role the body is called to perform. "That woman" had written Murata's parents telling them she was living in their son-in-law's house, pregnant with his child. The son-in-law manages to convince his in-laws that this is not the case, and they give their permission for the marriage. Amid the confusion, Murata has no "leeway to say what [she] wanted, one way or the other" (76) and is married to her brother-in-law. Voiceless, and cloaked in her sister's garments, Murata is doubly displaced in this system: not only is she a substitute bride, but her position has already been usurped by the woman who preceded her to Canada. In concert with the more clearly fictive voices of later generations of writers, these ambiguous autoethnographic voices complicate the unified image of Nikkei women that conventional histories have drawn.

## *Gender*

In Nikkei social reality, the significance of generation for both men and women has been inextricably tied to gender. Thus, Nikkei acceptance of behaviours and norms that they hold to be “naturally fitting” (Wong 114) for both genders shapes the texts by various Nikkei writers that characterize issei as the most “traditional” or the “most Japanese” (Okano 1992; Kogawa 1981; Takata 1983; Adachi 1976). This study focuses on “unnatural” or “ill-fitting” experiences and accounts that conventional scholarship has overlooked. Tracing the points of intersection between the “written by” and the “written about,” I examine the ways in which ideas of gender have interacted within ideas of class, race, ethnicity, and culture to shape, and continue shaping, the lives of Nikkei women. I engage Ayukawa’s model of “the familiar” as both an index of theoretical rigour and as a useful theoretical perspective on the writing of Nikkei women. In the process, gender emerges as a cultural testing ground for race, ethnicity, and class,<sup>30</sup> and the ideological gap between theory and praxis narrows.

The gap between theory and praxis is a subject that feminist criticism has occupied itself with across disciplines. Confronted with representations of the past that have narrowly circumscribed or ignored women’s experiences,<sup>31</sup> feminist historians have been concerned, not just with adding women to history, but with recording and analyzing how women have functioned in a “male-defined world” (Lerner 359). Therefore, the feminist history project is one that considers gender and the experiences of women as legitimate bases for the analysis of the

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<sup>30</sup> In her essay “Ethnicizing Gender,” Sau-ling Cynthia Wong notes: “Gender roles, invested with strong emotions concerning what is “naturally fitting,” become a convenient locus for testing out and codifying cultural meaning” (114). Wong is describing an effect of diaspora; however, I think a similar process of defamiliarization occurs with the ideological dislocation of “writing back.” Although sansei or yonsei writers may consider themselves inheritors of a bicultural or multicultural ancestry, initiating the process of redressing textual subjectivities inscribed by others demands new methods of conceiving and signifying the jarring altered reality, as did their ancestors’ physical dislocation.

<sup>31</sup> History that examines the big moments of social change sometimes avoids the fact that those moments have often been ones of loss for women. For example, the Renaissance in Europe was a time when women were increasingly “domesticated,” and when the persecution of “witchcraft” increased (Kelly-Gadol 809).

production of knowledge (Scott 1988; Lerner 1979; Smith 1985; Kelly-Gadol 1976; Fox-Genovese 1982). While anthropology may be said to have paid more scholarly attention to the experiences of women, anthropologists have generally recorded and interpreted women's experiences as representations of role-appropriate behaviours. These interpretations have emerged from a disciplinary tradition of studying other societies in the quest for generalizable laws of human behaviour, or for interpretations that help the anthropologist understand her own society. Based on the intimacies of fieldwork, feminist anthropologists have become dissatisfied with conventions that require them to rationalize or justify this intimacy by objectifying it scientifically (Cole 1992; Van Esterik 1995). Such "contemporary" anthropology, as Cole describes it, redesigns itself as a self-reflexive enterprise, and acknowledges and emphasizes its textual nature. While the feminist arm of the contemporary discipline shares in the larger project of self-reflexivity, feminist anthropology is primarily occupied with exploring the subjective experience of women "within the analytical context of sociopolitical relations and ideological constructions of dominance and oppression" (Cole 123).

Whatever the discipline, feminist criticism agrees that experience is essential to the construction and application of theory. The subjective voice is thus (theoretically) granted theoretical authority. Since individual experience is a conglomerate expression of multiple categories of being, race and ethnicity must be considered as formative concepts in the lives of all women. Listening becomes a major task for the researcher. This listening is not confined to the hiatus between the interview question (or the discovery of archival materials) and the researcher's interpretation. Rather, it is that lengthier theoretical pause during which the researcher attends to the authority of her "source." It follows, then, that theoretical listening is a posture or attitude characterized by submission.

Common in conventional research is the tendency to treat the functioning of society over time as something that happens to women. This is history as "an external process" (Carroll 88), "history in the passive voice" (Ayukawa 1994) that defines "woman" as the theoretical object of study. My study begins with three premises: 1) that gender, "that set of arrangements by which

the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human social intervention" (Greene and Kahn 1985), is an ideological construction: 2) that the various ways in which citizens (inside and out of the university) understand and communicate ideas about gender all have material implications for the manners in which individuals experience, record, and interpret women's social realities; and 3) that gender is also always shaped by (at least) its interaction with ideas of race, ethnicity, class, and culture.

A central theme in the writing about Nikkei women has been the stabilizing influence they exerted in the early pioneering days. These first women to immigrate are described as the "rock, the foundation of the community" (Ito 1994, 73). The women brought "solace to the home and stability to the community" (Takata 18). They managed "to consolidate the life of the Japanese in Canada, to transform the largely itinerant life of the immigrants into that of settlers with families and a deeply rooted interest in the country as a permanent abode" (Adachi 64). Significantly, it is not "women" who transformed the community, but women functioning in the roles of "wife" and "mother."

These interpretations of the early years portray the idea of "woman" as being co-extensive with the naturally fitting roles of "wife" and "mother." This discourse of the natural either omits or presents as idiosyncratic women's experiences that are inconsonant with those roles (McFarlane 1994). In the latter case, women who did not participate as wives and mother signify the end of community.

Returning to Toyo Takata's (1983) summary of issei women's contributions to the Nikkei community, we learn that these pioneers were well-educated women with many skills and talents. Often they endured inattentive husbands with propensities for gambling. In addition to maintaining a household and caring for children, the women all worked outside of the home, many of them alongside their husbands in logging camps. Yet Takata writes:

Unlike the men, the Issei women cannot be singled out for unique or outstanding achievement. But they were no less pioneers as they shared in the sorrow, struggle and sacrifice to settle in Canada. For it was they, above all, who comforted, admonished, nurtured and guided their sons and daughters. That was their foremost and finest contribution. (18)

Takata acknowledges that issei women worked in the marketplace. However, consistent with perceptions of women's proper place (in both Japan and Canada), his account fixes women's share of the pioneering struggle within the private sphere of domesticity. Control over the public domain emerges as a male prerogative. Thus, Nikkei men enjoy the rightful claim to whatever limited ownership and control legislation and public opinion permitted immigrants at this time—and men win the recognition of public achievement. Because the Canadian public sphere was for Nikkei men a new and relatively hostile domain, their achievements were yet more significant than they might have appeared "back home." Conversely, however difficult women's labour might be, it was considered neither unique nor outstanding because women performed it within the confines of familiar domesticity.

Ayukawa (1992) regards the metaphorical "Meiji woman" to be the "outstanding feature" (62) of issei women's participation in Nikkei society as "domestics":

The lives of these women tend to reflect the constraints of the Meiji gender ideology that they were taught as girls in Japan. These gendered expectations influenced their immigration to Canada, and shaped their lives once they arrived. ("Good Wives and Wise Mothers" 105)

Ayukawa is careful to emphasize the constructedness of the "Meiji woman" ideology: it was always a set of "gendered expectations" (105) that girls were taught from their early years:

The females were taught that their primary duty was to serve the males, to be good wives and wise mothers. They were taught from childhood not to seek personal happiness and pleasure. Thrift, endurance, diligence, compliance, modesty, and reticence were set forth as the ideal characteristics of a *Meiji* woman ("No Golden Leaves" 62–63).

Service to men was generalized to three spheres that encompassed the whole of a Meiji woman's life: as a daughter she was expected to be obedient to her father, as a wife, to her husband, and as an aging mother, to her adult sons. This Confucian model of obedience in daily life collided with the egalitarian principles of the Meiji Civil Code which stressed women's equality under the law, an inconsistency between policy and practice that Fujiwara (1994) asserts was already commonplace in Japan by the 1870s.

We might ascribe this apparent inconsistency to the existence of the separate spheres of *honne* and *tatemae* (Lebra 1976, 136). *Honne* refers to one's inner, real desires or convictions, and *tatemae* concerns principles or rules which determine outward actions. Social actors can

then explain behaviour that may appear inauthentic or hypocritical<sup>32</sup> by the coexistence of these two realms. The discrepancy between women's equality under the law, and the private reality of their subservience to patriarchy dissolves if we understand that the motivations behind the apparent discrepancy reside in separate and distinct spheres. In fact, Esenbel (1994) argues that Meiji Japanese survived their government's imposition of so-called civilized western forms in the public sphere by finding refuge in a more eclectic private sphere (145).

The apparent hypocrisy may also reflect Japan's ambivalence toward a reconstruction of womanhood that was, in this case, a domestication of an imported philosophy. Certainly, the Meiji woman of Nikkei discourse eclipsed the more egalitarian social system prior to the Reformation. Japanese scholars who had visited North America in the 1870s found appealing its "Cult of True Womanhood," characterized by the "motherly" virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Herzog 1983, xix). Soon Japanese intellectuals transformed this cluster of precepts into the "Japanese" notion of "ryōsai kenbō" or "good wife, wise mother," what Cherry Kittredge describes as a "classic Western model of ideal womanhood" (49).<sup>33</sup> Scholars then marketed this ideology in their journal *Meirokezasshi*, a publication that Ryoichi Fujiwara (1988) says enjoyed a circulation comparable to daily newspapers of the time. By 1899, the Meiji government had ordered each prefecture to have at least one high school for girls with a standardized ryosai kenbō curriculum, rendering literal Ayukawa's assertion that Japanese society "taught" its young women how to be good wives and wise mothers (Kittredge 1987, 49).

A definitive element in the discourse of Japanese (Canadian) womanhood is the paradoxical manner in which communities have applied this ideology. Where, in late

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<sup>32</sup> "Japanese, unlike Americans, can easily accept duality in their lives; in other words, what appears on the surface may not necessarily correspond to the inner reality. Americans would tend to think that the inner reality is in some way 'more real' and would, therefore, try to bring the inner to the surface. They would consider that to be honesty" (Hamabata 1990).

<sup>33</sup> Just as the influence of the Cult of True Womanhood is evident in popular discourses of "femininity," so too, the ideology of the Meiji woman persists in contemporary Japan: Kittredge notes that many dictionaries still define those women who are "onna-rashi," or womanly, as "kind, gentle, polite, submissive, and graceful" (32).

nineteenth-century Japan, to be a Meiji woman was to adopt a western ideal, in Canadian accounts of women who immigrated to Canada from Meiji Japan, the same ideology signifies behaviour and attitudes considered traditionally Japanese. Locating the source of the ideology of womanhood outside each group's experiential realm had concrete implications for the daily lives of actual women. Significantly, it meant that in both nations women were structurally necessary to the smooth functioning of patriarchy. However, by defining womanhood as foreign, or utterly other, the ideology rooted women in that familiar spot on the dark side of men, doing what is said to come naturally,<sup>34</sup> namely raising healthy children to be good citizens. Thus when Takata describes the "issei woman" his depiction coheres with this ideal of the Meiji woman.

A final point regarding Takata's assessment of issei women's achievements is its relation to the significance of family in Japanese and Nikkei culture. From its earliest days, Vancouver's Nikkei community was organized according to the discourse of family. Commonly translated as "family" or "household," *ie* refers in a much broader sense to ideas of family ("familism") that inform and shape Japanese society generally. As Bachnik (1994) explains, the concept of *ie* (and the idea of the self within *ie*) is less structural than situational. That is, because the concepts of self and *ie* are both constructed in terms of shifting spatial and temporal contexts, the perception and experience of self in relation to *ie* is neither constant nor absolute. Transformed expressions of *ie* persist in contemporary analyses of Nikkei society (Adachi 1976; Maykovich 1976 and 1980) even if the discourse is officially a remnant of feudal social organization.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In an essay published in *Meiropuzasshi* in 1875, Masanao Nakamura argued that women were "naturally endowed" with a strong moral and religious sense, and more qualified to rear children than men (Kittredge 49).

<sup>35</sup> Heine notes that *ie*, included in the Meiji Civil Code (1898–1947), "as a microcosm of the oligarchy of the state, is said to foster values of communal loyalty and a self-sacrificing attitude that stem from an individual's affiliation with an expansive structure generating an innate mystical or intuitive unity of consciousness among all those who participate" (34). Recently, *ie* has been invoked as evidence for a variety of interpretations of Japanese society, ranging from centrist analyses of Japanese uniqueness (Long 1987; Nakane 1970; Doi 1973) to radically decentring arguments for Japan as a postmodern society (Barthes 1982).

Although its roots lay in the Japanese discourse of *ie*, the Nikkei idea of family reflected the particulars of immigration to Canada, and integration within Canadian society.

The immigrant family closely adhered to the traditional Japanese structure, which might have had similarities, to some extent, with the structure of any family. But among the Japanese [Canadians], the roles which individual members of the family played were explicitly defined; rights and obligations were not merely implied but were defined in express and minute detail. (Adachi 116)

However, instead of an extended *ie* network, the Nikkei community was surrounded by a sea of outsiders. If traditions and bloodlines were to continue, "male" and "female" roles had to be entrenched structurally. This demanded that the cultural dissonance between the idea of "woman" as a symbol of domesticity be reconciled with the reality of Nikkei women labouring in the marketplace. Many women achieved the reconciliation by simply disregarding the ontological separation between "work" and "family" (Makabe 1995). Others, like Takata, redefined women's equal participation in the male domain as an expression of their faithful domesticity.<sup>36</sup>

As it did for many immigrant women, Nikkei women's participation in a "foreign" marketplace fostered a dependence on invocations of the "strong woman" myth (Freund and Quilici 1995).<sup>37</sup>

Most of these young people [boarding at Imada's house] were tall and well built. Three out of five were five feet seven or eight inches. The ones who returned after the war and the Meiji ones were the smallest I think. I myself am a small woman of not even five feet, but I was never surpassed by anyone as far as working is concerned. Regretfully though, in reading and writing I am "zero." (Ayukawa 1990a, 70)

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<sup>36</sup> The division between public and private, work and family, may appear unduly binaristic, especially given my characterization of Japanese models of subjectivity and cultural organization as more holistic than Western models. Certainly women's participation in the public sphere may be re-interpreted philosophically as supportive of male dominance, regardless of the actual tasks accomplished or comparable number of hours worked. This position requires a kind of conceptual analysis that is still under-represented in the literature on Nikkei society.

<sup>37</sup> In their study of women who immigrated to Vancouver from Italy and Germany, Freund and Quilici (1995) observed that, although many women struck out for Canada for adventure, freedom and travel, their imagined life in the "new" country clashed with the reality of hard, often menial, work that waited for them. In an attempt to reconcile this contradiction, the women constructed the idea of their domestic work as "worthy," and themselves as "strong ladies" (172).

To describe Mrs. Imada's accounts of her strength as "mythical" is not to imply that these accounts are exaggerated. Regardless of how Mrs. Imada went about her tasks, the nature and amount of her work required great strength. As Freund and Quilici found in their study, immigrant women often recast the most gruelling, unpleasant tasks in terms of the pride they felt in meeting their obligations. These researchers attribute this conversion to the women's need to survive the work and become successful. In the case of women with male boarders, the myth was a way for the women to redefine their relationship with the men in terms of family, "to ensure their own inviolability" (179). Freund and Quilici also observed that the women they studied had to resolve the inherent contradiction in conforming to a prescribed gender norm that was inconsistent with their interests: "By recognizing their own strength, housewives created a sense of 'womanliness' by which they could abide" (180).

Women's oral history narratives, therefore, are fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions. [. . .] Women may mute their own thoughts and feelings by describing their lives in ways that outwardly conform to acceptable behaviour. They may draw upon myths that are shared by individuals of their social group in order to fit into that group. (179)

At various moments in their histories, and in the histories of their texts, Nikkei women writers continue to evoke myth—sometimes as a way of rationalizing the intolerable, or as escape, or simply as a way of putting desire to words: "lies and truth dissembled" (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 29).

### *Assimilation I*

Extending my discussion of the relations between gender, race, and nation, I turn now to the processes by which ideas of race interacted with related notions of class, culture, and ethnicity in the years 1877–1949<sup>38</sup> to structure the popular image of a thoroughly British corner of North America.<sup>39</sup> I also explore the manner in which this interaction has, throughout the twentieth century, defined and maintained boundaries of exclusion between a dominant "white" Canadian centre and a non-white periphery. For Nikkei in Canada, three central programs have

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<sup>38</sup> These years cover the period from the arrival of the first recorded Japanese immigrant to Canada up to the year in which Nikkei were granted the franchise and allowed to return to the west coast of British Columbia.

created and maintained this national schematic: the Canadian government's assimilation project in the decades leading up to the Second World War; the wartime uprooting and internment of Nikkei; and the inscription of official multiculturalism in Canada's Multiculturalism Act (1988). These programs have imposed an identity of compulsory ethnicity on Canadians of Japanese ancestry, regardless of citizenship, history in Canada, or manner in which individuals might choose to identify ethnically.<sup>40</sup> I turn now to further ways in which processes of identity formation, as they are articulated in Nikkei women's writing, engage with the ideologies underlying these racial projects.

In order to examine the ideological bases underlying structural categories of identity I spend some energy and space examining the terms of categorization. However, this study is, above all, a reflection on the processes of subject formation and the concrete effects of ideological categories, as Nikkei women write about them. Therefore, rather than survey all dominant discourses of subjectivity in Canada, I concentrate on instances of critical engagement (and, by implication, the terms of such engagement) by Nikkei women writers with those discourses.

One such example is Midge Ayukawa's translation of Imada Ito's detailed journal of her years in Canada (1911–1971). Ayukawa's translation is an important addition to, and adjustment of, a historical record that has either overlooked or devalued the experiences of the first women to emigrate from Japan to Canada. Ayukawa's research introduces the reader to the transformative power of subversion by Nikkei women. In areas as diverse as her incisive reflections on the patriarchy of dominant Canadian and Nikkei societies, the record of her mother's linguistic assistance, or her own academic achievements, Ayukawa shows us what, and in what manner, Nikkei women have achieved in spite of the social and cultural constraints

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<sup>39</sup> Stevens (1912) describes British Columbia as the "keystone of the British Empire" (3).

<sup>40</sup> "The possibility of ethnicity becoming a compulsory or inescapable label in a state with an official multicultural policy submits family genealogy, or biology, as a prerogative for subjectivity, thereby failing to furnish the subject in question with agency, or limiting that agency within an environment that might be exclusively constructed by displacement [. . .]" (Kamboureli 27–28).

imposed on them. Following Ayukawa, I offer my own reflections on an ideological system that has offered Nikkei women only a negative space in the historical account of Canada.

### *Before Community*

I began this chapter by considering recollections by Nikkei women of their first days in Canada, arrival scenes constructed in the process of reconstructing memories. As a background to these accounts, I revisit the arrival scene, this time as a daily newspaper recorded it. The identity of the first Japanese to arrive in Canada is uncertain, but among those early arrivals was a group of three hundred and thirty-five sailors from the Japanese naval training ship, *Tsukuba*, which docked in Victoria, British Columbia for three weeks in 1880. The Victorians were curious and, judging by one account of a ball which the Japanese had attended, somewhat titillated:

More courteous, urbane or hospitable gentlemen than the Japanese could not be found aboard any ship. Captain (Norimichi) Aiura and his staff were everywhere conspicuous for their kind and gallant attention. (cited in Takata, 12)<sup>41</sup>

In this newspaper article, the reporter's choice of adjectives suggests that he or she supposed the Japanese visitors shared a common humanity with their Victorian counterparts. Here cultural difference is mainly a matter of degree, and the courtesy, urbanity, and hospitality of the Japanese unequalled. In this era of short-term visits and early immigration, British Columbians did not yet consider that the few Japanese visitors and sojourners posed a threat to provincial economics or social life. As well, the Japonisme that had infected the upper class of nineteenth-century Europe may have caused especially those European settlers in positions of power to receive the early arrivals from Japan graciously.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Regarding the similar brief honeymoon stage of admiration American Nikkei enjoyed, see Montero 1980.

<sup>42</sup> Karatani (1989) discusses attempts by the fin-de siècle European modernists to find in things Japanese an escape from the restraints of their century: "The Europeans found in 'Japanism' [sic] a way out of their own century: they discovered a world without a point of view (a subject), one indifferent to all meaning" (262).

However, as the century waned, non-Asian British Columbians began identifying immigrants from Japan as an even greater threat than they had the Chinese who pioneered in many of British Columbia's earliest settling industries and joined the rush for gold in 1858.<sup>43</sup> Canadians made comparisons between Japanese and Chinese on several different levels, but the factor that most influenced policy and public practice directed at Nikkei in the early twentieth century was the matter of assimilation. As the commissioners concluded in the *Report on the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration (1902)*:

The consensus of opinion of the people of British Columbia is that they [Japanese] do not and cannot assimilate with white people, and that while in some respects they are less undesirable than the Chinese, in that they adopt more readily our habits of life and spend more of their earnings in the country, yet in all that goes to make for the permanent settlement of the country they are quite as serious a menace as the Chinese and keener competitors against the working man, and as they have more energy, push and independence, more dangerous in this regard than the Chinese. (397)

Already, European settlers who were now business, spiritual, and government leaders in the colony were sorting the untidiness of immigrant behaviours according to what they agreed qualified as recognizably "Canadian" against that which was appropriately "ethnic." In the category of "our habits of life," the commissioners included such practices as dress, diet, and language. To adapt to "Canadian" behaviours in these areas was to be a desirable immigrant. Yet to attempt the challenge of permanency—of becoming Canadian rather than just appearing Canadian—was to invite alarm and exclusion. Appreciating Nikkei women's responses to this heavily qualified acceptance involves examining the limits Canadian social policy and practice placed on "ethnic" assimilation.

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<sup>43</sup> Until their forced dispersal during and immediately following the Second World War, Japanese generally settled and remained in British Columbia. They chose this area not only because of its convenience as the point of disembarkation, but also because of its topographical and climatic similarity to many areas of Japan. Many of British Columbia's resource-based industries needed labourers. The companies made securing and maintaining such a position relatively easy by the system of hiring and supervision of Japanese immigrants via a Japanese "straw boss." By January 1942, there were 22,837 Japanese in Canada, 862 of whom lived outside of British Columbia. By January 1945, there remained 15,610 Japanese in British Columbia, approximately 10,300 of these in governmental "Housing Projects," that is, internment and road camps. Also by this date, 8,244 Japanese had been "relocated" east of the Rocky Mountains (*Report on Re-Establishment of Japanese in Canada 1944-1946*, 26). Thus,

When the politicians, labour leaders, and general public spoke of the assimilation of Nikkei in early twentieth-century British Columbia they were generally describing the ultimate stage in a process of naturalization.<sup>44</sup> As discussed above, after a brief initial stage of curiosity, and even admiration, toward the immigrants from Japan, members of the dominant society began asserting negative differences that they perceived separated them from non-white immigrants. The final stage of naturalization involved complete assimilation to so-called Canadian ways, a stage that the proponents of assimilation overwhelmingly identified as an impossible goal for Japanese immigrants. This perceived impossibility effectively consigned Nikkei identity to the realm of compulsory ethnicity. Each of these stages has been prompted or animated by particular historical and social contexts that I discuss below.<sup>45</sup>

From their first contact with the Chinese and Japanese, it was obvious to the citizens of this young province that the men who came from China and Japan seeking their fortunes in Canada were, above all, different from themselves. However coloured it was by the fashionable Orientalist exoticism of the day, the flutter that this difference caused in the *Colonist* reporter cited earlier seems largely the effect of a mildly sensationalist sense of novelty. The feeling was mutual: Japanese who arrived in Canada around this time also recorded exaggerated

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general references to Japanese or Nikkei experience in Canada prior to the War may be understood to mean experience in British Columbia.

<sup>44</sup> This more or less commonsensical notion of assimilation was used at this time as an imperative call to become "like me." Because it was spoken by the leaders of a British colony, the call to assimilate was, essentially, a call to join with a dominant (in this case British) group, what has been distinguished theoretically as "amalgamation" rather than assimilation. (Driedger 1989, 39–40). In written accounts of the day, amalgamation is generally synonymous with intermarriage. As Park uses it, assimilation signifies a process of synthesis into a completely new group, not necessarily achieved through marriage. Whether we describe it as amalgamation or assimilation, the process of becoming a part of the Canadian community entails achieving some degree of conformity, of being "like" a Canadian. Therefore, I use the one term, assimilation, in order to focus attention away from defining the dominant centre to the ways in which Nikkei have responded to this demand.

<sup>45</sup> By "stage" I am not referring to chronological time periods, but ideological phases or trends. In some cases, these stages correspond to a time period, for instance the "honeymoon" stage of the early years of twentieth-century immigration from Japan. However, marginalized individuals may experience these stages repeatedly throughout a lifetime: "Meena shook her head impatiently. 'First Americans look right through you. When they finally see you, they stare because you're foreign. When the novelty wears off, they insult you. You're invisible again'" (Davenport 70).

impressions of the physical appearance and behaviour of the white Canadians whom they encountered in similar ways. Vancouver whites were “very low [morally base]” (Makabe 1995, 63); an immigration worker was “big as a giant” (Ayukawa 1988, 22).

This sense of difference resembles that which Goldberg (1993) identifies as being “descriptive” rather than “putative” (56).<sup>46</sup> At the turn of the century, exchanges between Canadians of European heritage and arrivals from Japan were somewhat freer of the restrictive relations of power that structured later interactions between Nikkei and other Canadians. Japan had joined with Britain, Russia, France, and Germany in crushing the Chinese during the Boxer Rebellion of 1901, and had confirmed its status as a friendly power by signing the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 (Adachi 44). If the Japanese and Canadians found each other threateningly strange during these early encounters, it was perhaps as much a result of burgeoning nineteenth-century nationalism as it was the effect of obviously racist ideologies.<sup>47</sup>

As I discuss below, this descriptive sense of difference persists in certain late twentieth-century discourses of race. However, early immigrants to Canada soon found their hosts exercising an entire system of exclusionary practices based on putative difference. These exclusions relied on the vocabularies of race and class, and were underwritten by an urgent sense of what was moral:

They constitute an entirely distinct class or caste. They have their own virtues and vices, their own moral standards and religious beliefs. The Orientals cannot be assimilated. (Woodsworth 154-155)

Although it bears no trace of the admiration in the *Colonist* report of the Japanese sailors' visit, the tone of Woodsworth's account is neutral. The passage describes an Oriental realm of being which is external and opposed to an Occidental one. As well, the power gradient is toward the Occidental realm; were it possible or desirable, assimilation would occur in that direction. When

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<sup>46</sup> Differences become putative once descriptive terms (for example, kinky hair versus straight hair; light skin versus dark skin) are invoked in order to exclude individuals who possess those markers of difference.

<sup>47</sup> K. Anderson 1991; Bhabha 1990; Kristeva 1991.

Woodsworth made this observation in 1927, the government's "project of assimilation" as I describe it, was firmly in place in British Columbia.

By this date, the *Report on Oriental Activities Within the Province (1927)* and the commission of 1902 had also confirmed that racial difference was ultimately what made immigrants from Asia inassimilable.<sup>48</sup> That is, although Japanese immigrants appeared quite able to adopt the practice of "Canadian" ways, their membership in another race prevented them from becoming "an integral part of our race" (*Commission 1902*, 380). Blood was the ultimate hurdle to integration; white Canadians considered it "a proper exercise of [their] authority to exclude from [their] shores people who will not inter-marry" (382). In fact, the possibility of their assimilation was expressed as a "danger" the citizenry must guard against in order to keep Canada "for men of our own race, instead of being overrun by an alien race" (382). Throughout this first stage of naturalization, ideas of race and class determined the broadest parameters of assimilation in Canada.

### *Race and Class I*

As a concept, race has enjoyed a vigorous history. Although he identifies race as a creation of modernity, Goldberg locates evidence of the underlying ideology of race in the western medieval concept of "monstra"<sup>49</sup> or the monstrous. By pre-modern times, the monstrous was replaced with the image of the "savage man":

The generic image of the savage represented violence, sexual license, a lack of civility and civilization, an absence of morality or any sense of it. Thus, with the psychological interiorizing of the moral space in late medieval thinking, the savage man came to represent the wild man within—sin or lack of reason, the absence of discipline, culture, civilization, in a word, morality—that confronts each human being. (23)

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<sup>48</sup> The *Report on Oriental Activities Within the Province (1927)* included Indians as Orientals.

<sup>49</sup> "The colonial legacy manifested the 'non-white' body as a sign of the monstrous 'asiatic', then later as a deviancy to be assimilated, and more recently as a variance that is scripted as the 'multicultural' (Miki 1998, 87). See Cavell (1997) regarding the racialization of space in the debate over ("Oriental") "monster" houses in late twentieth-century Vancouver. See also Mitchell (1995).

Throughout the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment, explanations of difference had focused on either the religious or rational differences that were accepted as inevitable, natural divisions between groups (Barker 1947; Goldberg 1993; Said 1979). Although social thought articulated difference in non-biological terms, assertions of particular differences based on moral or rational grounds often overlapped or coincided with an empirical and hierarchical categorization of biological race. Thus, Europeans easily invoked Aristotle's doctrine of "natural slavery" as justification for the forceful and categorical conversion of American Indians to Christianity (Goldberg 25).

The imaginative hold that these models of difference had in early twentieth-century British Columbia is evident in the Royal Commission of 1902 and *the Report on Oriental Activities Within the Province* (1927). The documents describe immigrants from Japan and China, and their Canadian-born children, in terms of their filth, degradation, and moral depravity. Canadians were evaluating the worthiness of Chinese and Japanese in terms of degrees of removal from cleanliness and "civility." Therefore, what white officials described as the greater cleanliness of the Japanese was one indicator that the Japanese were more likely than the Chinese to assimilate to Canadian ways. Considering that Nikkei were compelled by this time to assert their common humanity,<sup>50</sup> it seems that non-Nikkei perceptions of racial difference as putative rather than descriptive had been quickly and solidly entrenched.

Soon after groups began arriving in Canada from non-European countries, early twentieth-century political rhetoric expanded the terms of non-white immigration from natural difference to inevitable conflict:

The Oriental immigration problem is one of vital importance to Canada, not only because of any racial pride or sentiment which may exist, but because the problem as to which is to be the dominating race on the North Pacific Coast of this continent, Oriental or Occidental, is one which must be solved. (Stevens 1)

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<sup>50</sup> Rigenda Sumida (1935) acknowledges "racial" differences between Caucasians and Japanese, while stressing what he describes as fundamental similarities: "At the same time it must be remembered that the Japanese are human beings and fundamentally no different from any white, yellow, or black race in their social instincts and desires" (8).

Here it is not the presence of other races per se that Stevens cites as problematic for British Columbians, but the question of which race is to dominate.

Historical records and analyses of this period in Canada usually articulate the struggle for domination of provincial matters as an economic matter of class (Creese 1988; Warburton 1981). Even those contemporary analyses one might describe as sympathetic (Young and Reid 1939) explain the discriminatory treatment of Asian immigrants as the logical and inevitable outcome of unfair economic competition. Reporting to the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Young and Reid identify “[Japanese Canadians] struggle for status” as the cause of discriminatory actions against them (36).

Scholarly debates over the origins of labour unrest and discriminatory practices directed toward Asians in the early part of the twentieth-century persistently organize the social confusion of the times within the two discrete categories of “class” and “race.” These discussions routinely grant the two categories explanatory value, and invoke class and race as the causal elements of social conflict. Even analyses which suggest that the two categories interact in the struggle for status (Roy 1989) frame their debate in essentialist terms which in turn rely on commonsensical notions of the constituent elements of “race” and “class.”

Skin colour, however, was less relevant in determining attitudes than the phrase “a white man’s province” suggests. Antipathy to immigrants was sometimes as much a matter of “class” as of “race.” Japanese traders, diplomats, and military heroes were welcome visitors; Japanese workingmen immigrants were not. (Roy 1989, x )

In the preface to her text, Roy acknowledges the conceptual complexity or “imprecision” of the term “race” (viii). She considers two theoretical options for her study. The first is to confine the definition of race to immutable physical characteristics like skin colour, and thus characterize race as an important but not essential factor in the discriminatory attitudes and practices towards Asians in British Columbia. The second option is to accommodate the broader definition popular in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British Columbia that, Roy notes, includes social, cultural, and economic components. Roy rejects the latter definition because “its imprecision can muddy the analysis” (viii). According to Roy, basing her argument on the narrow definition of race frees her to make the concomitant conclusion that “British

Columbians did not necessarily display racial hatred when they opposed Asian immigration and employment" (viii).

Such theoretical decision-making may yield a precise argument within the limits of its terms. However, dependence on the narrowest definition of race may also obscure the agency of those who were the targets of discriminatory economic practices in early twentieth-century Canada. In her contribution to an essay contest, high-school student Josie Yano articulates the dehumanizing effects of that discrimination:

The politician began to regard us like a machine the capitalist owns, something out of which to make money, something to which demands could be made but given only food enough to work on, something to be employed but only to his advantage. (*A Dream of Riches* 93)

Adjusting the boundaries of race will not describe the territory contained within those boundaries. To begin to understand the social and historical moments that create the experiences of discrimination, an analysis must first examine how it is that race came to be a concept so malleable and adaptable to intellectual manipulation.

One of the challenges in writing about race and ethnicity in Canada is that the two concepts have been (and continue to be) used almost interchangeably.<sup>51</sup> In part, this is because theories of ethnicity began appearing much later than theories of race. However, slippage also occurs between categories because individuals define "group" differently. Sociologists distinguish, for instance, between "open" and "closed" groups. The open group allows outsiders to participate, while the closed group excludes outsiders by the ways in which it defines itself and by establishing rules that restrict participation (Weber 1968). Biologically defined races may appear to be closed groups.

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<sup>51</sup> However, in volume four of the *Report of the Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, the commissioners assert that race is limited to "national group, and carries no biological significance" (xxii). On the other hand, ethnicity depends on "a sense of identity rooted in a common origin, mainly in the biological sense, whether this common origin is real or imaginary" (xxii). While the terms of the Commission seem to invert the more common acceptance of race as biological and ethnicity as a matter of perception (see the discussion of situational ethnicity in Chapter Two), their emphasis on ethnicity as a *sense* of biological identity suggests that the commissioners agree that ethnicity is more a matter of perception than biology.

Conversely, ethnic communities, especially from the perspective of situational ethnicity, may be seen as open groups. With variations in subjective definitions, the status of organizations changes. Rex (1986) defines as "closed" those communities that discourage the participation of outsiders, see their members as mutually responsible and interrelated, and recognize leadership. In fact, individuals may treat ethnicity in terms of its potential as a community, without participating in ethnic communities in which they have membership rights.<sup>52</sup> We might describe such individuals as "lapsed" or "non-participating" members of a group. We might also perceive this voluntary aspect of ethnicity as evidence that what we easily call ethnic "groups" are only "quasi-groups" (Rex 10). I expand this discussion of ethnicity below.

Of those early social scientists and historians who wrote about Canadian Nikkei (Young and Reid 1939; LaViolette 1948; Lyman 1968; Ward 1978), most have followed the race relations model established by Robert Park and the Chicago School.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the ethnic pluralism of multicultural<sup>54</sup> Canada has either been neglected in theory (Driedger 1989),<sup>55</sup> or recast in terms of race. My task in the sections on race and ethnicity is, therefore, to untangle the ways in which these two concepts have been used in the shaping of Nikkei women's identities.

The earliest discussions concerning race relations with arrivals from Japan were based on the findings of the Survey of Race Relations conducted by a group called the "Pacific Coast Executive Committee" in 1923. The study was intended to encourage understanding of relations between Orientals and whites in the coastal regions of western North America, and was led by sociologist Robert E. Park. As the study was based on Park's (1950) theory of race

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<sup>52</sup> This is the potential of situational ethnicity, in which "[e]thnicity functions primarily as a resource" (Rex 27).

<sup>53</sup> The first department of sociology in North America was established at the University of Chicago in 1892. The early sociologists who studied there, including Robert Park, were known as "The Chicago School."

<sup>54</sup> Here I refer to multicultural identity, not official policy.

<sup>55</sup> In addition to his emphasis on multiculturalism, the interdisciplinary focus of Driedger's research is particularly relevant to my treatment of race and ethnicity.

relations, it accepted the notion of race as the given which predetermined the conflict that characterized relations between whites and Orientals.

Briefly stated, Park's theory identifies several inevitable stages in the race relations cycle: contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation. Park accepts that several factors influence the occurrence of racial differences. He intimates the importance of social and physical distance on perceptions of race, calling race relations "the relations of strangers" (*Race and Culture* 114). Those outside the group apply the articulation and perception of race differences to the relevant group, but these differences are also a function of the group's consciousness of itself.

Although Park asserts that racial differences were naturally occurring phenomena, he describes racial differences as "symptoms of differences in custom, tradition, and religion, and of sentiments appropriate to them" (114). This acknowledgement of an informing practice before or beneath race hints at Park's suspicion that categorical thinking encourages an uncritical dependence on received terms. Park's assertion of an ideological precursor to race also expresses his conviction that the force of history competes with that of biological racial inheritance:

The Jew, however, emerges finally from the ghetto and with the natural vivacity and intellectual virtuosity that is his heritage, enters into all the varied interests of this modern cosmopolitan life. (*Race and Culture* 247)

Over time, Park changed his opinion that the final stage of the race relations cycle was inevitable, admitting that, although immigrant groups may eventually be completely assimilated to the host society, other patterns of integration may also result:<sup>56</sup>

race relations will assume one of three. . . configurations. They will take the form of a caste system, as in India; they will terminate in complete assimilation as in China; or the unassimilated race will constitute a permanent racial minority within the limits of a nation state, as is the case of the Jews in Europe. ("Introduction" xiii)

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<sup>56</sup> This shift in Park's thinking came about partly because he had originally based his theory of race relations on assimilated populations in Europe, a pattern that was inconsistent with the Black ethnic groups he studied in the United States. As well, the Black Chicago students he was teaching challenged Park's position on assimilation (Driedger 1989, 29). See, for example, Franklin Frazier (1957), *The Negro in the United States*.

Park may still be declaiming here that groups possess an essential, pure identity as a result of their race. Yet his prediction suggests that, in the course of relations between groups—however essentially defined they may be as races—variables such as culture, nation, class, and the emergent category of ethnicity also participate.<sup>57</sup> I continue my discussion of assimilation below, particularly in relation to Nikkei responses to the dominant discourse of assimilation among British Columbian politicians and the general public. At this point it is important to note that, although the 1920s and 30s saw an increase in the number of factors that social scientists agreed influenced inter-group attitudes and behaviour, researchers still viewed class and race as discrete entities. These newest categories represented conceptual strands that might be interwoven in the fabric of social relationships, but could still be separated easily and examined for their particular nature.

Regardless of this shift in social thought,<sup>58</sup> early studies of Japanese Canadians upheld Park's theory of race relations and the inevitability that racial difference begets conflict.<sup>59</sup> Scholarship of this time echoes the tautological reasoning exhibited by witnesses to the Royal Commission of 1902. As Reid and Young explain, "race conflict" occurs because "the results of more efficient competition set off one group—in this case, the foreigners—against another group—the native-born" (xxv). These researchers attribute more significance to race than class as a factor in the cycle of inevitable competition because immigrant "race and culture run counter to, and antagonize, the ingrained patriotic prejudices of the native population" (xxvi).

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<sup>57</sup> Omi and Winant (1994) describe as "insurgent" (14) the theories of ethnicity which were beginning to circulate in the United States during the 1920s and 30s. Omi and Winant note the significant challenge that theories such as Park's posed for the biologicistic explanations of difference which had been popular up to that point.

<sup>58</sup> For instance, at the University of McGill in the 1930s and 40s, Everett and Helen Hughes, students of Park in Chicago, were already adjusting the assimilationist element in Park's theory to accommodate the persistence of ethnicity among French-Canadians. See also, Horace Miner (1939).

<sup>59</sup> Because examining race and ethnicity in Canada entails examining conflict, conflict theory is a useful tool. However, in the face of the most extreme conflict (such as the internment), individuals still organize meaning around symbols and exhibit individual and collective will (however informed it is by conflict). In order not to set arbitrary and restrictive limits on my investigation, I have allowed my perspective to be shaped by both conflict (Marx 1971; Park 1950) and order (Weber 1968; Parsons 1951; Merton 1968; Porter 1965; Gans 1979) models.

Thus race conflict is both the cause and result of competition: “[c]onflict ensues when there is an awareness and identification of the competitors by each other” (xxvi). By selecting out race as the pre-eminent cause of conflict, such reasoning can be said, in Miles’s term, to “racialize” difference.

Discussions of the race relations cycle sometimes cite race as a symptom of other differences which precipitate competition and accommodation between groups. Partly because it views the factor of competition as persistently significant in the race relations cycle, racialized discourse also articulates the interactions between Japanese and white Canadians in terms of a complementary struggle between classes. In the early days of immigration, “class” was often used synonymously with “race” to signify the distinctiveness of Asians and whites.<sup>60</sup> As Park explains, in these circumstances competition between classes is the practical result of the “spontaneous, more or less instinctive defense-reaction” of race prejudice (*Race and Culture* 227). Young and Reid describe this practical result of the contact between immigrant and native groups as a “continuous, impersonal process implicit in the idea of the struggle for subsistence” (xxvi).

Conflict between immigrant and other Canadians often did take the form of competition between classes. However, to describe that competition as an impersonal struggle separable from ideas of race obscures the social realities of perceived and ascribed race that determined the early twentieth-century class structure. In the conclusion to his report on “Oriental Standards of Living,” Carrothers (1939) acknowledges the discriminatory wage practices of employers, by which workers of Asian ancestry (Chinese, Japanese, and Indian) were routinely paid at a lower rate than their white co-workers. Carrothers argues that Orientals dominated certain occupations not, for instance, because Asian workers were excluded from the professions and many other occupations, but because Oriental workers were “naturally” suited to such occupations as market gardening.

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<sup>60</sup> See testimony in the *1902 Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration*.

Others (Adachi, 1976; Kitagawa 1985; Ward 1990) have discussed the manner in which the denial of the franchise and the discriminatory nature of employment practices aimed at Orientals in the first half of the twentieth century confined Nikkei to the lowest strata of low-paying jobs. Some Asians also lived in poverty because they sent remittances back to families in Japan and China. Nonetheless, in the common euphemistic discourse of the day, Carrothers stresses that Oriental standards of living are generally low,

not because they are accepting lower wages than those paid the White workers, but because the conditions in the labour market are such that the employer is in a position to pay the Oriental a low wage, and the Oriental is in a position to accept the lower wage because of his lower standard of living but with no planned intention of depriving the White worker of a job. (281)

As Carrothers explains it, economic exchange is not between raced employers and employees, nor is there personal competition between workers. Rather, wages are paid because of objective material conditions originating somewhere outside of, and disconnected from, the affected actors. In other words, race is coincident with class.

Carrothers's reasoning is representative of the ideological chasm that has typified discussions of British Columbia's social structure. Throughout this century in Canada, the academic tendency to chose as its parameter of study either race or class has yielded a body of research that neglects the manner in which the consciousness and material realities of race and class operate to determine the relative positions of the racially marginalized worker and the white employer.<sup>61</sup>

Many social scientists and historians have characterized race—and its concomitant racism—in Canada as an expression of “white” dominance over “coloured” minorities. However, the exercise of the discourse of race in these early days of the twentieth century also intersected with ideas of nation and citizenship rights in ways that have been muffled by the sophistication of the discourse in the late twentieth century. For instance, just as First Nations fishers joined with white in the strikes of 1893, 1900, and 1901, several chiefs invoked the discourse of nationalism as they encouraged the government to restrict immigration from Japan

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<sup>61</sup> Regarding the debate over race and class in British Columbia, see Appendix One.

only: "The Japanese know they don't belong to this country. They make their country good on our money. That is why our country does not improve any" (*Royal Commission* 1902, 347). By the time Young and Reid published *The Japanese Canadians* in 1939, immigration restrictions had transformed what scholars and government and labour leaders still discussed as British Columbia's "Oriental Problem" into what was in reality the "Japanese Problem."

In addition to the passing of Chinese Exclusion Act in 1923, the head tax of \$50 that had been levied against Chinese immigrants in 1886 was, by 1904, raised to \$500. Immigration from China had essentially ceased by 1925. From 1936 until 1940 there was a net decrease in the number of Chinese entering the labour market. As well, the majority of Chinese in British Columbia were men whose wives and children were in China. With no Chinese entering the province and few births likely, the threat which British Columbians perceived in Chinese immigration was no longer an issue. In the same time period there was a net increase of 2,959 Japanese individuals entering the work force, the overwhelming percentage of whom were married men whose wives were of childbearing age (Young and Reid 1939; Roy 1989). Thus, in the decade preceding the Second World War, it became obvious that in addition to Canada's "Oriental problem"<sup>62</sup> being a Japanese one, it was also largely a British Columbian problem that exclusionary practices had limited further to Japanese immigrants to that province.

### *Assimilation and Evangelism*

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<sup>62</sup> Overt use of the phrase, "Oriental problem" decreased at about the same time that the federal government dispersed Nikkei east of the Rocky Mountains after the Second World War, that is, when the significance of their impact on British Columbia's economy and social life decreased. Resistance to the campaign for redress may be interpreted as evidence that public perception of Nikkei as a disruption to dominant ways of being and perceiving "Canadian" may have just gone underground for a time. Once the "model" Nikkei minority began demanding reparation, the "Oriental" problem returned.

We can identify a parallel circumstance in psychological counselling in the 1960s in the United States. As Blacks began to assert their constitutional and citizenship rights, counsellors interpreted this disruption to the status quo as dangerous, aggressive, but especially, "Black" behaviour, to the point that therapeutic interventions were intended more to help therapists cope with this "Black problem" than to address the underlying etiology (Helms 1990). In both cases, the problem of exclusions based on race remains secondary, or even invisible.

The assimilative arm of Christian evangelism provides more benign examples of the way racial categorization was applied to non-European immigrants to North America. Yasu Ishikawa came to Canada in 1919, and moved to Prince Rupert in 1924 with her husband and young children. There she found that the children of Japanese immigrants "had to" (Makabe 117) attend the kindergarten operated by the Anglican Church. With a variety of social programs, the Anglicans socialized the Prince Rupert Nikkei into white Canadian society:

In the Anglican Church, the white missionaries tried to put the Japanese among the white people. They taught us all kinds of things, from the English language to etiquette, and they introduced us to white people's families. They did everything they could for the Japanese to assimilate to Canada. The Japanese owe these missionaries a big debt. (Makabe 117)

A parallel structure of Nikkei social institutions persisted alongside the Anglican ones. Ishikawa's husband was chairman of the Prince Rupert Kyowakai, or "harmony association" and "all" Nikkei children attended the after-hours Japanese language school in town (117). Because Ishikawa was a midwife, many of the Nikkei women visited her rather than white doctors for counselling and family planning advice. And despite her gratitude to the missionaries and her acknowledgement that few Prince Rupert Nikkei "had a pure Japanese style" (117), for some time into the war Ishikawa remained determined to return to Japan. It seems that a residue of behavioural ethnicity survived the church's attempts at assimilating the Nikkei into the structures of white society.<sup>63</sup>

Churches emphasized their regard for Nikkei as foreign by describing their domestic involvement with the immigrants and their Canadian-born children as "missionary" work. The Baptist Church, for instance, designed a visitation program aimed at women who had emigrated from Japan. In the early years of Asian immigration to North America, the Missionary Women's Society sent out seven hundred "friendly visitors" (Fisher 167) who offered the Christian gospel to new immigrants along with English language lessons. As the field supervisor reported: "We find the Japanese women are the most desirous, as well as the most patient and persistent in study of the new and difficult language" (167).

The Baptist women acted in harmony with the National Council of Women in identifying the socialization of immigrant "maidens" as a new phase of Canadian "woman's work" (Aberdeen 202):

Are they [immigrants] to be a source of strength or of weakness? We recognize that these strangers need binding together with ourselves by a power far stronger than can be supplied by the laws or government, and is not that power largely in the hands of women? (202)

However, the zeal with which these visitors relied on racial categorization as both the starting point and rationalization of their evangelizing obscured the diversity of their target group. One delegate to the 1928 meeting of the Missionary Council informed the gathering that "[. . .] many discerning Orientals have criticized this well-meaning visitation as 'savouring of patronage and intrusion'" (Fisher 168). Yet admonitions like these which counselled moderation depended on the maintenance of racial categories, in that the church based conversion of this target group on their identity as Japanese immigrants.

The nature and urgency of the church's larger mission made Christian enthusiasm for solving British Columbia's Oriental problem particularly relevant.<sup>64</sup> Denominations that emphasized a social gospel enthusiastically applied the theoretical racelessness<sup>65</sup> of Christianity and Christ's commission to preach the gospel "to all the world" (Matthew 28:19). Of the voluntary social organizations that served immigrants, churches participated most intimately with the new arrivals, providing language lessons, women's meetings, Sunday School, church services and suppers, and emergency shelters designed specifically for new immigrants. These social services were free, yet involved the entire family in a relational system of commitment reminiscent of the circle of *on* (debt) and *giri* (obligation) into which the immigrants had been

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<sup>63</sup> For more detailed discussion of behavioural and structural assimilation and ethnicity, see Chapters Two and Three.

<sup>64</sup> I do not mean to replicate contemporary usage of terms (such as "Oriental") that current scholarship and usage have come to define as euphemistic. My initial inclusion of these terms will be marked by discussion of the term and/or quotation marks; thereafter, I depend on the reader's understanding that I am aware of the term's limitations.

<sup>65</sup> "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

socialized in Japan.<sup>66</sup> Because immigration fractured the bonds of *on* and *giri* for many Japanese, freedom from obligation entailed a costly independence, especially for women faced with intolerable marriages.

After leaving her duplicitous first husband, Hana Murata found herself in a second troubled marriage with no offers of help from other Japanese. She recalls seeking refuge from her violent husband in a shelter run by the Methodist church:

People like me without money, they let us stay for nothing. [. . .] The one person that helped me out from beginning to end was the missionary. I didn't know anything about Christianity, but I thought Christians were good people. When I was in the home, I studied the Christian religion a little with the teacher, so I became a Christian. (Makabe 79–80)

From a cynical perspective, successful evangelism of Nikkei women in need may be explained as a completed economic exchange: those who enjoyed the services offered by the missionaries “paid” by converting. However, this assimilation by conversion was required of all seekers, including whites.

The form of assimilation required by the churches that most resembled that demanded by the larger society involved the notion of fellowship. While the particulars of conversion were universally applied, “foreign” converts were only suited for fellowship after undergoing a second stage in their spiritual transformation:

I have seen many instances of an American group eager to do anything possible to help the Orientals, and yet hindered by their own unwise generosity, which prevents that essential development of the Orientals to the point where real fellowship can exist. (Fisher 198)<sup>67</sup>

Reverend Hinman explains this notion of “development” as a process by which Japanese<sup>68</sup> converts mature to a state of independence and what he calls “a high degree of appreciation of

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<sup>66</sup> Montero (1980) also translates *giri* as “right reason,” which discharges the term somewhat of any onerous connotations of duty and responsibility. Rather than involving a tangible or monetary debt incurred and repayable, the concept of *on* refers more to a relational state of reciprocity into which every Japanese is born. Gift-giving is one of the more common emblematic signs of *on*, in which the giver establishes a kind of social credit and the receiver a debit. *Giri* might be described as the avenue of discharging one's *on* throughout a lifetime, although final “repayment” is never made. For a discussion of *on* and *giri* see Lebra (1976).

<sup>67</sup> Fisher (1928) identifies this speaker as “Reverend George Hinman.” Hinman's statements appear to be extracted either from exchanges at the International Missionary Conference of 1928, or from an unidentified written report or letter. Fisher does not cite the source.

American ways of thought and life" (171). For Nikkei women, this development included adopting a (white) Christian idea of womanhood that meant raising their children in "Christian and Western homes" (Van Dieren 82).<sup>69</sup> Until that point, real fellowship (what Hinman calls "satisfactory, natural fellowship") is impossible. Thus, while conversion erases the distinction between the lost and the saved, the Japanese also had to surrender their Oriental ways at the altar. In fact, Hinman proposed that the races be kept in separate churches until this "psychological kinship" was achieved (171). For Japanese converts who found themselves ostracized from the Nikkei community<sup>70</sup> for seeking "outside" help,<sup>71</sup> and who had assumed the burden of indebtedness to the church, the task of complete assimilation within the church may have been a small price to pay for acceptance.

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<sup>68</sup> Both Fisher and, in those passages cited by Fisher, Hinman, use "Oriental" and "Japanese" interchangeably. Because this particular segment of the Council's Missionary Report addresses the aggressive visitation program aimed at the Japanese, it seems the ministers are implying Japanese immigrants when they refer to Orientals. For instance, in one paragraph Hinman proposes that "development of the Orientals" is the answer to "developing satisfactory relations between the Japanese and American communities" (198). As far as Fisher and Hinman may be regarded as representative of the larger clerical body, the position of the Missionary Council parallels that established by the Royal Commission (1902), namely that Japanese immigrants, as members of the Oriental "race," differed naturally from "Occidentals." Similarly, Fisher's and Hinman's use of the term "American" may be understood to include Canadians given the mandate of the Council as a North American body.

Other factors influencing the wider use of "America" to signify Canada generally—but British Columbia in particular—at this time, include the status of the territory as a colony of Britain, and what has become a fairly common proclivity for Americans to subsume various Canadian individuals and realities within the ideological boundaries of "America." See, for example, the inclusion of several Canadian writers claimed as "Asian American" in the essays contained in King-Kok Cheung's *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*. The essayists in this volume explain this strategy by pointing to parallels in Canadian Nikkei and American Nikkei experience (Cheung, 28) and by exhorting a self-conscious pan-Asian ethnicity that exceeds the pitfalls of nationalism and Orientalism (Lee 249). These essays then invoke historical events such as immigration legislation and internment policies and practices that are particular to Nikkei experience in the United States, thus erasing relevant Canadian particulars that inform and define Japanese Canadian writing. More seriously, the manner in which this practice homogenizes, and sometimes erases, the diversity of Canadian Nikkei experiences also evokes the manner in which racist discourse throughout this century has diminished Nikkei experience in Canada and the U.S.

<sup>69</sup> Also cited in Ayukawa (1995) 114.

<sup>70</sup> Unless otherwise noted, by "(the) Nikkei community" I mean the various and changing groups of individuals who identify and participate in social practices as Nikkei. Participation in a physical collection of individuals may foster identification with a community, but it is not necessary for individuals to have a sense of community—to perceive of themselves as members; it is enough that they imagine "comradeship" (B. Anderson 1991).

### *Assimilation and Morality*

In the North America of the 1920s, the concept of race was the commonsensical basis or starting point for the popular models of assimilation. Even those humanitarians who sympathized with the Japanese immigrants and chastised their fellow politicians and citizens for their "race prejudice" insisted that harmony and justice would only prevail after non-whites were assimilated. In his effort to explain the opposition to Orientals along the Pacific coast of North America, Theodore Boggs (1926) suggests four causes of white resistance against Orientals: race prejudice, unfair economic competition, rapid increase in the number of Japanese in Canada, and the impossibility of "racial assimilation." Boggs systematically explains away the first three factors with a variety of statistics and scientific arguments that fail him when it comes to assimilation. This final and "fundamental" argument rests, he claims, on "the fact that the Oriental because of his color is not assimilated through intermarriage" (319).

Boggs's explication of the manner in which intermarriage blurs categorical distinctions between class and race extends the discussion of exclusion beyond Roy's insistence on definitional "precision." Both analyses stress that at various times throughout the nineteenth century, white workers and politicians levied charges of unfair economic competition against immigrants from Europe as well as Asia.<sup>72</sup> Both observe that, because Asian immigrants were denied the educational opportunities, enfranchisement, and visible sameness with whites that most European immigrants enjoyed, the argument could be (and was) applied against Asians indiscriminately. Based on these common observations, Roy asserts that the interaction of colour and economics diminishes the relevance of colour, while Boggs observes that the interaction decides the foundational role that colour plays in the structuring of economic arguments against an Asian presence in Canada:

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<sup>71</sup> Ayukawa makes this point in "Good Wives and Wise Mothers," 114.

<sup>72</sup> On the exclusion of other, non-Asian immigrants and disadvantaged whites, see also *The Jade Peony*. "Frank had grown up in work camps, been taught much by his father, who slaved

If the Oriental had a white skin and therefore was as readily capable as the Irishman and Italian of being assimilated through intermarriage, the economic argument would be no more sound when applied to him than it was when applied to cheap laborers from Europe. (317)

Boggs shares with economist Henry Angus a perception of assimilation (still common to structuralist theories in the social sciences)<sup>73</sup> as a process of structural and behavioural phases which culminates in the physiological blending of races. In this model, the first and easiest stage of cultural assimilation is that period during which immigrants become familiar with and exchange the norms and practices naturally occurring in their racial group for the norms and practices of the receiving country. In the second stage, the immigrant population “loses” its racial identity through intermarriage. The third stage is that point at which immigrants are capable of “mixing with other races so as to produce a homogeneous type with characteristics which are considered desirable” (Angus 455).

At the time Angus and Boggs were writing, intermarriage was unthinkable. Young people were counselled that marriage with someone from another race would either be “barren” or result in offspring “likely to display undesirable mental and moral characteristics” (Angus 456). Were a child of such a union declared “normal,” suggests Boggs, experiences of intermarriage in Asia and Africa prove that, nonetheless, the child would be treated as a “pariah” by both Oriental and Occidental races (320).<sup>74</sup> Angus argues that intermarriage should be avoided until prejudice against the children of such marriages was negligible (456). Since they were convinced that such acceptance was the remotest of possibilities, both Angus and Boggs supported the policy of restricting immigration of Orientals to Canada.<sup>75</sup>

Nonetheless, Angus and Boggs condemned “racial prejudice” on both theoretical and practical grounds. They were highly critical of legislation and other types of social policy and

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beside him, and his fellow labourers. They were natives, Hindus, and runaway city men of all sorts, depression-broke and desperate” (111).

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Gans (1979) and Fugita and O'Brien (1991).

<sup>74</sup> “She [novelist Rumer Godden] kept breaking rules throughout her life. As an adult, she scandalized the gin-drinking, polo-playing English snobs of Calcutta by opening a dance school. Only Euro-Asian women did that, whined the snobs—thus started the Rumer rumour that she must have mixed blood” (Chandler 1998, C6).

<sup>75</sup> *New Canadian* 22 March 1940: 2.

practice that were designed to exclude, or had the effect of excluding, groups of individuals based on ascribed racial characteristics. Angus, especially, was aware of the irony inherent in contemporary Canadian notions of justice and democracy that granted rights only to citizens of certain races:

The illusion is the more natural as the tone of political history as taught in our schools contributes to foster it. We teach children irrespective of race that taxation without representation is a form of oppression, and we praise rather than blame men who have struggled for political rights and for political equality with those more privileged than themselves. (449)

Angus criticized any discourse of democracy which implied exclusion, especially in such phrases as "public opinion" and "our national heritage" (453). As he wryly observes: "The strictly accurate phrase, 'Canadians on the provincial voters' list,' which does exclude Canadians of Asiatic descent, is never used" (453).

If Angus and Boggs perceived that their struggle for justice only minimally affected the political and social systems of the day, perhaps it was because they both interpreted the racial prejudice that defined those systems as a problem of individual psychology which might be cured or overcome. However, once certain traits and practices are considered naturally and inevitably linked to the given of race, it is only by altering race that individual prejudices toward it can be altered. Therefore, if race is "permanent," as Angus argues (453), individual conceptions of racial groups are irrelevant.

Just what Henry Angus means by "race" is unclear. He describes race as "more obvious" than nationality, a state which, unlike culture, is given rather than acquired (453). In other words, Angus criticized the euphemistic nature of public discourse in a way that was uncharacteristic for his time, yet stopped short of subjecting his own racialized discourse to the same rigour. If Angus had recognized the contradiction inherent in his exhortation to change an unchangeable racial essence, perhaps social change would have seemed possible. As it is, Angus's discourse "makes sense of" this contradiction by simply omitting it from his critique.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> For discussion of ideology as a process of making sense of ambiguity, see Coates (1988) and Bonnett (1993).

Both he and Boggs ultimately decided that immigration from Asia be suspended, thereby maintaining the very steady state they criticized.

The British civilization of western Canada had produced a morality that was, effectively, a kind of sameness. Although some European settlers suffered exclusions similar to those experienced by Asians, it took less time for white immigrants to acquire the obvious physical and linguistic signs of sameness. Conversely, the physical appearance, language, and cultural practices which accompanied the arrivals from Japan and China were more apparently (and, in the case of appearance, irremediably) different from those of the earlier British immigrants. For (British) morality to be maintained, behaviours and attitudes that exceeded the boundaries of the "civilized" must be named, contained, and repressed. Thus, by articulating exclusionary legislation and social practice in terms of race, and aiming it at those immigrants most obviously different, British Columbians relegated those of Asian ancestry to the fringes of provincial society. Because they were racially different, the Japanese were immoral; because they were immoral, they must remain distinguishable and separate. The tautology ensured that the homogeneity of morality remained unpolluted by either social or biological mixing.<sup>77</sup>

Significantly, health officials and politicians usually presented their evaluations of cleanliness and related morality as being independent of the discriminatory practices that defined the limits of possible cleanliness that immigrants may achieve.<sup>78</sup> Simultaneously, the

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My use of verb tense may seem particularly awkward in this section. I rely on the "literary present" in my discussion of texts, regardless of the date of publication. Without overtly complying with notions of the autonomous subject, I do discriminate between past and present tenses where there is a clear distinction between text and individual. For instance, my observation that Angus "describes" race as more obvious than nationality relates to the nature of his discourse, while my comment that he "perceived" his criticism of justice to be ineffectual concerns a personal position he held. The distinction may not always be clear, but I have chosen this position as a tactic for emphasizing the way that discourses of the "past" insist themselves on present thinking and realities.

<sup>77</sup> Organizing society around the dichotomy of purity and impurity was, of course, not a peculiarly western practice. As I discuss below, scholarly and popular discourses in Japan also rely heavily on this distinction.

<sup>78</sup> For both Japanese and Chinese, these practices included, for instance, wage rates tied to race, and exclusion from many social services. The cleanliness of Chinatown was further affected by such factors as an inadequate sewage system, and the overcrowding that was

same evaluations were invoked to justify the exclusions. In *Vancouver's Chinatown*, Kay Anderson discusses the dominant early twentieth-century perception of Chinatown as a "celestial cesspool," and the conviction that immigration from China posed a health threat to Vancouver citizens:

"Chinatown" was for its representers an incubator of vice and disease that threatened to corrode the pure "stock" of a race and nation. If eugenists [sic] were correct, as many Canadians believed them to be in the 1920s, race deterioration, even suicide, would follow where the "unfit" encroached. Legislators took this as their call to action. As guardians and enforcers of European domination in a British outpost, they attempted to contain the disease-carriers by restraining their mobility and opportunities. (140)

As Chinese and Japanese familiarity with Canadian ways increased with their length of residency in Canada, white Canadians persistently differentiated themselves from Asians. We only need review the media caricatures of Nikkei in the years leading up to the Second World War to observe the force of this differentiation. Faced with citizens who were proving themselves adequate to "Canadian" ways, but whom they believed to be undeserving of equality,<sup>79</sup> dominant Canadians rationalized their exclusionary practices by asserting the irrationality of these non-white groups. If, as John Locke taught, rationality is the emblem of human subjectivity, it is also the limiting condition for moral treatment (Goldberg 27). Officially, then, it was Asian immorality and irrationality, and not "racial prejudice" that demanded exclusion.

Although most historians have characterized Asian Canadians as mute, passive victims of this exclusion (Lee 1976; Ward 1990; Sunahara 1981; Adachi 1991),<sup>80</sup> the least we can say

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attributable to restrictive covenants in many Vancouver neighbourhoods (K. Anderson 1991; Adachi 1991; Roy 1989).

<sup>79</sup> The idea of equality as a right that is inalienable and given for some, but must be earned by others has been central to discussions of the multi-ethnic composition of Canada since immigration first began. This flexible treatment of the concept of equality coincides with the tendency to perceive of and treat certain Canadians as "much more equal" (Driedger 1989) than others.

<sup>80</sup> In *Kodomo no Tame ni,--For the Sake of the Children*, Dennis Ogawa criticizes the theoretical position which emphasizes the victimhood of those targeted by racism because it "overlooks and underrates the various forms of responses developed by the ethnic community" (137). It is this history of being overlooked that motivates my interest in the responses of Nikkei women to their social realities, including racism. In no way do I mean to diminish either their suffering, or the responsibility of policy makers and the general public as agents of that racism.

of early twentieth-century Nikkei is that they were expressing their own representations of "Canadian" filth. Maki Fukushima recalls her first impression of the logging camp that, in 1914, was her first home in Canada:

We got to the camp, and it was such a filthy place. I was told to go into the bunkhouse. When I did, I could see the sky through the cracks in the ceiling. You heated the place by putting big pieces of firewood in the stove, but that was a worry because it might cause a fire. I thought, oh what a miserable place, there's nothing like this in Oshima, so how can there be one in America? (Makabe 49)

Fukushima is not shy of founding her cultural observations on racial premises. Yet while she judges Canada<sup>81</sup> by its degrees of difference from Japan, she evaluates Canadians by their actions rather than the condition of their environments. This is not to say that Fukushima's observations are, necessarily, more fair or insightful than are those of her Canadian contemporaries; she also passes judgement on the morality of those she considers outside of her racial group. However, her account suggests that being the target of oppression has made her knowledge of oppression more acute:

You could say the people in Vancouver are very low; if you belong to a different race, then they take away your jobs. In B. C. I was always sure that the Japanese were going to be discriminated against. I thought the children couldn't go far in the world. They would have to follow their father and become gardeners or run a little store, and that was maybe the highest they could go. (63)

At the time she is telling her story (approximately 1983), Fukushima is enjoying the distancing benefit of hindsight, and the understanding gained from almost a century of living in Canada. By her own account, Fukushima's initial reactions to the filth of the camp were limited by pragmatism: "But I didn't have time to think about being surprised. There was work to do right away" (49). Just as Fukushima had no time for misgivings or despair, she expressed admiration when the other picture brides who followed her into the camp showed similar restraint:

In one row [of buildings] there was a young wife who'd just come from Japan, and it was her first time in a place like this, so I felt sorry for her. But she was really well-behaved, and didn't mope. (52)

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<sup>81</sup> At this time, Japanese (in Japan and those newly arrived in Canada) referred to Canada and the U.S. as "Amerika."

Another facet of Fukushima's pragmatic viewpoint which helps us appreciate the discourses of racial difference popular at this time is her emphasis on the importance of language in the shaping of race. Regarding the common perception that Japanese were naturally equipped to work harder than whites, Fukushima recalls: "Since we didn't understand the language, we worked as hard as we could" (57). A common language would not have ended racial strife. However, greater facility with English language and gestures would at least have equipped the new immigrants to sort through the swirl of attacks in the press, the legislature, and on the street. Even Fukushima's experience as a domestic in the home of a white family does not arm her with the knowledge of Canadian ways (including language) that Muriel Kitagawa suggests was absorbed by women during the course of such employment:<sup>82</sup>

When I worked as a housekeeper, that's when I got closest to English, but when you just clean the house and do the washing, you don't need words. You get there and say "Good morning" and when you leave "Goodbye," and for the rest, you can get along without saying anything. (57)

In fact, what distinguishes Fukushima's racial discourse from that of the dominant white population is its ambiguous engagement with ideas of racial difference. Fukushima describes herself as "a real Canadian," who has never "be[en] of any use to this country" (65). She denies devotion to either Canada or Japan, and admits:

I can't turn my back on Japan, no matter what happens. But I've been living in Canada for 70 years, and the government is taking care of me, so I can't reject this country either. My home is here. (65)

While this final paragraph of Fukushima's account displays obvious connections with ideas of nation, place, and citizenship, it also invokes the concept of an essential identity which, Fukushima seems to say, eludes her. The only action symbolic of her Canadian identity is a neutral type of non-resistance. When she ponders the notion of actively contributing to the country—expressing loyalty rather than simply not being disloyal—Fukushima concludes that her only "worthwhile" contribution has been "to work seriously."

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<sup>82</sup> "As young Japanese women learned from their mistresses, they learned the arts of western cooking, western housekeeping, western clothes and styles. Of necessity they adopted these

Kaoru Ikeda's attempts to name her community indicate a similar ambiguous engagement with racial difference. In one journal entry, Ikeda calls her fellow community members "Japanese," "Japanese in Canada," "loyal Canadian citizens," "Japanese Canadians," "Nisei born in Canada," "naturalized Canadians," "Nikkei," and "pioneers" ("Slocan Diary" 120–121). Ikeda's list of identifiers is indicative of the community's diverse origins: by the time of this entry (December 1942), approximately sixty percent of Nikkei were "Nisei born in Canada" (Adachi 1976; 424) Ikeda also uses the various labels as indicators of ancestral heritage and degrees of loyalty.

However, Ikeda's dependence on a variety of labels to identify community members with the same national origins carries a political aspect as well, because it characterizes the contingent, racial basis of the attitudes of white Canadians. In her record of the hysteria following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Ikeda notes that white Canadians treated Nikkei as "Japanese." She recalls the nightly blackouts and confiscation of Nikkei possessions such as radios, cameras, and fishing boats:

Although this did not last more than a few days, it was enough to create rumours and fear among the population that Japan was coming to bomb them and that the Japanese would organize riots. Mobs harassed the Japanese and I even heard they set fire to homes and they beat people up wherever they could find them. (120)

Ikeda uses the identifier, "the Japanese" to refer to both the Japanese military (who were sure to bomb Canada and cause riots) and those Nikkei who were attacked because of that certainty. This ironic use suggests that those who harassed the Nikkei were prompted by what Henry Angus termed the "obvious" quality of race.<sup>83</sup> Whereas discriminatory legislation aimed at

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things until they became the natural heritage of the Nisei growing up in a world more Canadian than Japanese [ . . . ] (*This is My Own* 219).

<sup>83</sup> During the war years, the significance of physical characteristics in determining race was also apparent in the badges non-Nikkei Asian North Americans wore during the Second World War, proclaiming "I am Chinese" or "I am Korean." Several writers continue to plumb the irony in this situation. For example, although the badges are apparently necessary because non-Asians cannot distinguish among Asians, in *The Jade Peony*, Meiying secures a badge for her Nikkei boyfriend Kazuo so they can appear in public together. His apparent "Chineseness" thus officially inscribed, Kazuo strolls freely around Hastings and Main Streets, "between the boundaries of Chinatown and Little Tokyo" (Choy 223–24).

Nikkei was tied to national origin (actual and ascribed<sup>84</sup>), individual instances of aggression often occurred because Nikkei physically resembled what dominant British Columbians had determined to be “Japanese.”

The ambiguity of Fukushima’s and Ikeda’s inscriptions of racial identity<sup>85</sup> contrasts sharply with the categorical imperatives of corresponding dominant discourses. In a small textual space, both Nikkei women describe themselves and members of their communities with a variety of modifiers that are incorporated in contemporary discourses elsewhere as oppositional distinctions between “us” and “them.” For example, the act of excluding Nikkei from the franchise until 1949 was a clear and strong indication that, for non-Nikkei, the “Japanese in Canada” simply could not be “loyal Canadian citizens,” as Ikeda says they are. This semantic and philosophical fusion of opposites suggests that Nikkei women’s writing engages differently with categories of being than does that of their non-Nikkei contemporaries.

For many Canadians, early twentieth-century ideas of differences were grounded in duality. As discussed above, one way to deny Asians citizenship and equal treatment under the law and in social exchanges was to assert that their nature was essentially non-Canadian. In turn, the category of “Canadian” was defined by transient and polarized notions of cleanliness and filth, morality and vice, and so on. If a group was deemed pure and moral, the likelihood of their assimilation to Canadian ways was assured. And if those in the dominant population did not want the qualifying group to assimilate, categories could be re-defined or new ones created. In any case, these markers of difference were viewed as independent of the historical and social

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Hisaye Yamamoto plays with the idea that the badges are necessary for non-Asians by having a Nikkei character mistake, if not the “obvious” signs of race, at least the implications of those signs: “The old man was on a concrete island at Seventh and Broadway, waiting for his streetcar. She had looked down on him benignly as a fellow Oriental, from her seat by the window, then been suddenly thrown for a loop by the legend on a large lapel button on his jacket. I AM KOREAN, said the button” [“Wilshire Bus” 36; emphasis in original].

<sup>84</sup> By the phrase “ascribed origin” or “ascribed identity,” I am referring to identifications assigned to the individual by another. In her study of psychological theories of “racial identity” Helms (1990) uses the term “ascribed” to mean the individual’s affiliation with a particular racial group (5).

<sup>85</sup> Helms (1990) defines racial identity as “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (3).

events on which they were contingent. Exclusionist discourses thus interpreted the high birth rate of Nikkei in the early twentieth-century as a result of natural Japanese fecundity and competitiveness,<sup>86</sup> and a sign of Japanese intentions regarding “peaceful penetration” of Canada:

There is a Japanese woman for every man who wants one and has the wherewithal. As a result, there is a continuous peaceful penetration by reason of which the Japanese are breeding themselves into possession of a rich share of the businesses of British Columbia. (MacInnes 19)

These discourses did not entertain the possibility that the birth rate was a temporary demographic bulge resulting from equally temporary alterations in immigration patterns.<sup>87</sup>

This early stage of immigration was, perhaps, the easiest or most likely time for difference to be polarized and signified in racial terms. White settlers in British Columbia had already invoked race in order to justify their displacement of the various tribes of First Nations peoples whom they encountered on their arrival in North America. Also, while the historical particulars of the discourse against First Nations differed from that against Nikkei, both discourses drew on the same Orientalist imagery. The *Report on the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs* (c.1876) chronicled what commissioners described as the inherent traits and practices common to all First Nations. In his report, Commissioner Gilbert Malcolm Sproat describes the colonization of the First Nations as a project of civilizing Indians out of their “idle habits” and “foolish” ways (7-8). Because the European settlers used such terms pejoratively to evaluate rather than describe specific group behaviours or physical features, they could easily apply the terms universally. For instance, Governor George Simpson (c.1787-1860) of the

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<sup>86</sup> “In regard to ‘children’, it must be remembered that this description covers all under 18, which age in the Oriental is marked by a greater advance towards adolescence than in the case of the white races. There is little doubt that the great majority of these are not ‘children’ in the sense in which the word applies to most other immigrant races, but are potential competitors in industry from the moment of arrival” (*Report on Oriental Activities Within the Province* 9).

<sup>87</sup> For instance, at the same time that the “Gentleman’s Agreement” of 1908 set a limit of 400 on the number of Japanese male labourers allowed to immigrate from Japan, the largely male community began sending for brides. In the first year of the new agreement, for instance, 566 women, most of them picture brides, immigrated from Japan. As this pattern continued, the Nikkei birth rate “naturally” increased dramatically (Ayukawa 1994; A. Kobayashi 1983).

Hudson's Bay Company refers to his Metis wife as his "japan helper [sic]," and "tender exotic" (cited in Van Kirk, 35 & 39).<sup>88</sup>

As stated above, Nikkei discourses of difference were not, necessarily, based less on essential ideas of race than were those of their white neighbours. What distinguishes Nikkei discourses from non-Nikkei is the fact that the former were not so dependent on the notion of dualism. The insignificance of dualism as a foundational principle in Nikkei writing is particularly apparent in two groups of texts: those informed by Buddhism, and those that incorporate a postmodern resistance to the unitary subject and binary constructions. The accounts by Maki Fukushima and Kaoru Ikeda discussed above are two texts particularly shaped by Buddhist teachings on the irrelevance of dualism.<sup>89</sup>

The *Teaching of Buddha [Bukkyoseiten]* explains the absence of dualism expressed in the concept of "universal oneness":

People cherish the distinction of purity and impurity; but in the nature of things, there is no such distinction, except as it rises from false and absurd images in their mind. In like manner people make a distinction between good and evil, but good and evil do not exist separately. Those who are following the path to Enlightenment recognize no such duality, and it leads them to neither praise the good and condemn the evil, nor despise the good and condone the evil. (122)

In my discussion of food and sexuality I discuss in greater detail the idea of interrelation as a corollary to universal oneness. For now, it is enough to say that the absence of dualism also pertains to individual agency: not only does Buddhism teach that there is no distinction between the entities of good and evil, but that human existence also is a matter of interrelation and connectedness. So it is that texts by writers like Fukushima and Ikeda, who are or have been practicing Buddhists, inscribe quite seamlessly what may appear as contradiction.

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<sup>88</sup> "America became enamored with novel industrial technologies in the late nineteenth century, and images of native people were among the first to be viewed on film. These images were part of Orientalism—a public fascination with native as well as Asian peoples that tended to see them as freaks of nature and exotic curiosities" (Jojola 403).

<sup>89</sup> Regarding the significance of Buddhism in the social realities of pioneer Canadian Nikkei, also see Sumida (1935). At the time of Sumida's study, approximately 60% of Nikkei claimed membership in the Buddhist Church (140).

*Race and Class II*

To understand the significance of class in the social reality of Canadian Nikkei we also need to trace the manner in which Nikkei racial identity—*ascribed and perceived*—has been constructed over time. For Nikkei, as for every “ethnic” group in the multicultural nation, the notions of class and race simply cannot be analyzed as discrete and “frozen” categories:

Forms of property and labour enshrined in Canada, from the first land grabbing and occupation to now, have been wholly organized by and inscribed with the difference of “race” and ethnicity. There is no “class” here without “race.” (Bannerji 1995, 33)

As we see throughout this study, because Canada has codified cultural diversity in terms commonly connected with race, each aspect of social experience in the life of ethnic Canadians is racially inflected.<sup>90</sup> At each stage of their history, Nikkei participation in labour and economics has been interpreted as the participation of a “visible minority,” that is racial, group.

In tracing the persistence of racial difference, it is helpful to examine how research on the history of Nikkei society in Canada (especially regarding their exclusionary treatment by other Canadians) has concentrated on illustrating the pre-eminence of class conflict. One reason for this scholarly preference is the significance of competition as a paradigm in the early theories of race discussed above. Within the dualistic paradigms of western philosophy, difference could only be postulated as the opposition and, therefore, negation of an entity. Immigrants who began arriving in Canada with their peculiar customs, language, and appearance did not fit within the conceptual boundaries of belonging to either charter group, especially given the resistance European settlers showed to accommodating themselves to the ways of the First Nations they had encountered on their own arrival. This difference was the

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<sup>90</sup> As I discuss below, the Multiculturalism Act specifies diversity as “race, nation or ethnic origin, colour and religion” (386). At various points since the Act was passed, official government and popular discourses have identified the latter categories as either originating in, or coinciding with race. Arguably, religion need not necessarily coincide with race. However, given the strong religious identifications of Canada’s two charter groups (French Catholic and English Protestant) at Confederation, and the slight treatment of religion in the Act, it would seem that religion, too, is subsumed by race.

difference of strangers, the difference of the “not us” that, once named as “race,” enforced social distance and reinforced the necessity of competition.<sup>91</sup>

In their analysis of race in the United States, Omi and Winant (1994) argue that class is not a useful paradigm for understanding race, although the particulars of class conflict are helpful in understanding class as a product of struggle. Their insistence that race is the exclusive determinant of class relationships and identities cannot account for the significance of class in relations between dominant Canadians and Nikkei. Ideas of class played a major role in cases where non-Nikkei Canadian workers cited unfair economic competition as, for instance, the reason to impose immigration restrictions on Japan.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, I think it is useful to reflect on particular historical incidents in which race has affected patterns of significance in class. One instance of this effect relates to the split labour market analysis of class that has dominated Canadian research into Nikkei social history.

The split labour market approach distinguishes among workers a dominant group that is challenged and undercut by a pool of “cheap labour.”<sup>93</sup> What may be described as more “purely” class conflict occurs between management and the dominant workers in an effort to control profits. Racially inflected conflict occurs when the dominant group perceives a threat in the pool of cheap labour that is identified as non-white. In pre-war Canada the dominant group of workers consisted of white British settlers and European immigrants. In the decades leading up to the Second World War, the cheapest labour pool consisted of either Asian workers who were brought in as indentured workers for specific purposes (such as the building of the

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<sup>91</sup> “It is the essence of race relations that they are the relations of strangers [ . . . ] (Park 1950, 114). So related, belonging becomes “we the natives”; inferiority, “they the natives” (Trinh 1989, 52). See Julia Kristeva’s *Strangers to Ourselves* for a psychoanalytic re-imagining of contact with the foreigner as an opportunity to confront our own dark side: “To discover our disturbing otherness, for that indeed is what bursts in to confront ‘that demon,’ that threat, that apprehension generated by the projective apparition of the other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid ‘us’” (192). I am not convinced that acknowledging the tendency to regard the disconcerting foreigner as the *unheimlich* (as Kristeva explains Freud) will result in any more regard for the foreigner than have the attempts of anthropologists to find themselves in the “native.”

<sup>92</sup> Even within the United States, treating race as an exclusive determinant of class relationships does not explain diversity and conflict within racial groups.

railroad), or other non-European immigrants who could only find employment on the lowest rungs of the most poorly paid positions. As mentioned above, white European immigrants were able to work their way up out of this pool of workers, while the visibly different non-European workers found themselves locked in the pool of cheap labour by the attitudes of the dominant society and structural obstacles such as their lack of franchise.

Labourers from the dominant group asserted the importance of racial identity to their collective identity by creating (in concert with "management" and labour leaders) further structural obstacles such as the "Asiatic Exclusion League," the "Anti-Chinese Association," the "Anti-Chinese League," the "Anti-Chinese Union," and the more subtly named "Workingmen's Protective Association" (Roy 1989; Adachi 1976). Through a variety of exclusionist practices and policies, these organizations worked to protect what were seen as "white" interests. Although it was commonly assumed that Asian workers would earn lower rates of pay than white workers, it was as commonly feared that the same workers would, if given the opportunity, demand pay equity (Carrothers 1939). As mentioned above, the extent of the perceived threat that Asian workers posed for white economic security is apparent in the militaristic language used to describe their increasing numbers. Metaphors such as Asian "invasion" and "peaceful penetration" betrayed workers' concerns that their jobs were threatened. Articles and letters in the contemporary media show that many British Columbians also portrayed Nikkei involvement in economics as a front for Japanese military penetration into Canada.<sup>94</sup>

As particular instances of shifting group loyalties demonstrate, the circumstances under which dominant Canadians deployed these militaristic metaphors suggest that racial cleavages

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<sup>93</sup> See Edna Bonacich (1980) for an explanation of split-labour market theory.

<sup>94</sup> For examples, see the *Victoria Colonist*, the *Vancouver Province*, and *Macleans Magazine*. The endemic nature of British Columbia's anti-Asian sentiment and behaviour in this time period has been thoroughly documented (Reid and Young, 1939; LaViolette 1948; Ward 1990; Roy 1989 and 1980; Creese 1988). These studies all treat race and class discretely and, with the exception of Ward (who locates the source of anti-Asian sentiment in latent racism), emphasize economic competition as a causative factor in racial exclusion. The discourse of "Asian penetration" continues today in media descriptions of the failing Asian market as the "Asian flu" that may spread to Western finance. For instance, earlier this year CBC radio news reported that Australia had "caught" the Asian flu (4 March 1998).

cut across class lines in conflict among workers. For example, accounts of labour strife in the British Columbia fishery in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries note the racial configuration of the various protests. Each of the strikes by fishers in 1893, 1900, and 1901 featured exclusionary tactics aimed at reducing Nikkei participation in the industry. A more systematic approach to this aim was achieved when, in 1923, the Department of Mines and Fisheries began reducing the number of licenses issued to Nikkei fishers. The licenses were decreased by 40% the first year and then by an additional 10% each year until, as Peter Ward records, "they were all eliminated by 1937" (122). Sources agree that, in each instance of unrest in the fishing industry, capital, that is the cannery management, exploited racial allegiances to secure the lowest price.<sup>95</sup>

The configuration in these accounts is that of whites competing against Japanese: "Consequently persistent white demands for Japanese expulsion from the fisheries was the product of competitive pressures as well as prevailing racial attitudes" (Ward 123). Even those accounts which mention that First Nations fishers cooperated with their white counterparts in each of the strikes describe this amalgamated group racially as "white." Kitagawa reflects on this intersection of class and race:

The white man found B.C. first, discounting the Indians, and even if he couldn't work and develop all of it himself, he regarded every advantage, every profit, every blessing as his sole prerogative and right. When another people of another colour tried to stand up proudly, the white man slapped him down for daring to presume they were as good. How dare the cheap coolie labour aspire to stucco homes, cars, fine furniture, and higher education! (*This is My Own* 243)

The "white man" Kitagawa describes here is compelled by a sense of proprietary rights. Regardless of his nationality or ethnicity, this settler's whiteness is a metonymic representation of the British colonizer. By rights then, the resources of the province—including its pool of cheap ("coolie") labour—are his. Moreover, in the span of one or two generations, the position of colonizer is available not just to the British, but to any English-speaking "white" immigrant. By Kitagawa's reckoning, whiteness in British Columbia coincides with privilege; it is the outermost

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<sup>95</sup> For examples see Ward 1990; Takata 1983; Ito 1994; Adachi 1976.

covering over the layers of nationality, ethnicity, education, and social position to which imperial Britain imputed social worth. As well, it coloured the egalitarianism that the moderns believed predicted individual standing. Whiteness was the basic tool of survival that might become one's birthright,<sup>96</sup>

the basic and the vulgar snobbery behind all the technical and fine-sounding phrases used to describe what is called the "Japanese problem." . which isn't a problem of the Japanese, but the problem of the white man's queer idea of exclusive superiority. (*This is my Own* 243)

The privilege of whiteness was significant enough, in Kitagawa's words, to "discount" peoples displaced by the British settlers. Whiteness obscured the racially heterogeneous composition of the strikers who attempted to eliminate Nikkei competition. Because dominance in British Columbia was encoded as whiteness, those who supported the economic interests of the dominant group (such as First Nations fishers) could be subsumed within the category of "white," redefined as white, regardless of their race. First Nations fishers held out with white for higher fish prices from the canneries; Nikkei fishers accepted less. British Columbians had inherited from the first settlers a royal prerogative, and they exercised it roundly against those whose projects were seen to conflict with white interests.

### *Class and Simultaneity*

Group loyalties among workers in British Columbia were not only determined by economic agreement. The concerted attempt to exclude Asians underscored economic allegiances of the early twentieth century. Just as the "Minimum Wage Law" of 1925 was

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<sup>96</sup> The idea of the "acquired natural" resembles the "naturalization" or "habitualization" of Russian Formalism (Shklovsky 1965). Briefly, habitualization is a process by which habitual activities (or objects and ideas that are habitually observed and used), become, by that familiarity, unconscious. "Defamiliarization" is the discursive process by which the familiar becomes strange again. As Kitagawa uses the idea of the acquired natural in relationship to "birthright," learned behaviours and or characteristics that are intimately known and practiced may appear natural or inherent. Thus, non-British European immigrants who adopted the hallmarks of imperial whiteness may be said to have acquired, somewhat precariously (see anti-Semitism, for example), what is commonly believed to be inherited by blood—through the process of familiarization. As I discuss in Chapter Two, Kitagawa (1985) also applies the idea of the acquired natural to the process by which Canadian culinary customs became the Nikkei's "natural heritage" (219).

intended to limit Nikkei participation in the lumber industry,<sup>97</sup> many saw the aim in reducing fishing licenses as an attempt "to phase the Japanese out of the fishing industry altogether" (*A Dream of Riches* 51). If Nikkei met conflict in the workplace it was not, necessarily or simply, because these conflicts were motivated by class. For Nikkei, the workplace was that place of "trying circumstances" (Young and Reid 36), "the stage on which they competed with white labourers inculcated with racism" (Makabe 12).

In the process of examining the fugal<sup>98</sup> relationship of race and class in the experience of Nikkei in Canada, we have also to remember that those who emigrated from Japan had already formed identities based on Japanese notions of class. In "Good Wives and Wise Mothers" Ayukawa criticizes the selective historiography of *Kanada Doho Hatten Taikan* (*Encyclopaedia of Japanese in Canada*):

Although the majority of the picture brides were hard working, uncomplaining working class or farm wives, they are not the women who were celebrated by the early twentieth-century Japanese community. The print of that period extolled the virtues of the women who lived comparatively more comfortably. (117)

The inclusion of biographies of only the "comfortable" in *Kanada Doho Hatten Taikan* suggests that the intellectual designers of the Meiji reformation project may have been reluctant to expose the economic inequities of the day which motivated a great deal of the early emigration to North America.<sup>99</sup> Yet important as Ayukawa's adjustment of the Japanese historical record is, correcting the appellation from "middle" to "working" class may trap analysis within still another

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<sup>97</sup> At this time, Asian workers in the lumber industry were generally paid less than \$.40 per hour, while white workers were paid about 25% higher wages. The Minimum Wage Law required that employers pay their employees a minimum wage of \$.40 per hour. "It seemed reasonable to expect that, if an employer found himself obliged to pay his Oriental workers 40 cents an hour, he would be willing to pay his White workers more, or, alternatively, that a large additional number of White workers would be introduced into the industry" (*Report of the British Columbia Department of Labour, 1927*, F43; cited in Young and Reid, 44).

<sup>98</sup> I am using "fugal" in the musical sense of a contrapuntal composition which develops the theme of exclusion, by a complex interaction and development of its parts, in this case "race" and "class."

<sup>99</sup> Ken Adachi (1976) describes the emphasis on industrialization and rapid increase in population during the Meiji period: "The surfeit of mass humanity resulted in a surplus of labour in rural areas, which in the early years of Meiji could not be absorbed by factories in towns, but struggled or competed for work in the countryside. Thus there was congestion in the villages,

categorical designation without detailing those behaviours and attitudes that signify or give a shape to the category as individuals use it.

In their essay, "Japanese Canadians and the Racialization of Labour in British Columbia Sawmill Industry," Audrey Kobayashi and Peter Jackson cite immigration regulations as a major reason "that it was mainly women from the poorer families that emigrated (while wives of merchants and diplomats remained with the family in Japan)" (12).<sup>100</sup> They continue to say that, once in Canada, the women from these families "were encouraged to work in the most menial jobs as domestics, agricultural workers and cannery line workers" (12). If we associate "working-class" with poverty, it appears that Kobayashi and Jackson support Ayukawa's position on the working class status of the "picture brides."<sup>101</sup>

However, elsewhere Ayukawa (1994) describes "most" Japanese women immigrants of this time as well-educated members of the "upper strata" of their natal villages (269). My earlier characterization of early Japanese immigrants as a "pool of cheap labour" seems to discount further Ayukawa's apparent contradiction of her own description. Did these women come from the working, middle, or upper class?<sup>102</sup> Is there a way to understand this contradiction without indulging in the ideological erasure of "making sense" as Boggs and Angus do? These questions may be addressed by considering the perspective of their articulation and, once again, the perception that a category such as "class" refers to an observable reality.

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and standards of living remained low. These conditions, of course, were to be powerful and compelling arguments for emigration" (15).

<sup>100</sup> Kobayashi and Jackson develop more of an argument in support of immigration regulations, such as the Chinese Head Tax instituted in 1886, as the reason for the poverty of Chinese immigrants. They say that Japanese immigrants "were included by default" in anti-Asian regulations that were disallowed after treaties were signed between Britain and England (13). These include such immigration legislation as the Alien Labour Act of 1897, which banned Japanese and Chinese from employment in a number of areas, and the Immigration Act of 1900 which required that immigrants pass an English Language test.

<sup>101</sup> The description of early Japanese immigrants as "poor" or "working-class" is a consistent representation in the historical record. See Adachi 1976; Ward 1990; Roy 1989; Sunahara 1981; Young and Reid 1939.

<sup>102</sup> Ayukawa explains that these "working class" picture brides could be described as being from the "upper strata" because "even among farmers in a village there were different 'classes' or 'levels'" (personal communication 1 August 1998).

First, I need to distinguish between the ideas of class, status, and estate.<sup>103</sup> Following Weber, I connect class with the exercise of economic exchange in a multiplicity of markets. Thus classes of individuals may be said to share various market situations for the purposes of shared interest. The shifting nature of markets, and their significance as constructed rather than given categories, cause me to disagree with Marx over the foundational nature of class conflict. To insist that the conflict between groups is, fundamentally, a matter of class is, I think, to create coherence for theory's sake, to deny that behind a question there may only stand another.<sup>104</sup>

While the system of estates is part of European discourse, it holds particular resonance for discussion of Japanese who emigrated during the Meiji era.

An estate comes to constitute itself as community in which the consciousness of kind generated by the possession of a shared culture binds members closely together. Estates are also organized in systems of higher and lower estates. The higher estates claim a greater degree of esteem or honour than the lower ones, and so long as the system remains stable, they succeed in getting this claim recognized by those beneath them. (Rex 12–13)

Scholars usually discuss social position in Tokugawa Japan in terms of a class system. However, Tokugawan social order more closely resembles the system of estates that Rex describes. As will become apparent in my introduction of Kiyooka's (1997) discussion of social order, position, status, honour, and inheritance were all integral aspects of membership in one of the four categories (samurai, farmer, artisan, or merchant) of Tokugawan (1603–1868) society. Another important consideration is the compulsory nature of the Tokugawan system. Furthermore, when we consider the mandatory nature of membership in the Tokugawa system, especially for those in the outcaste group of burakumin,<sup>105</sup> we see that the intersections

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<sup>103</sup> Here I also rely on Rex's (1986) discussion of these categories.

<sup>104</sup> "To state the obvious, the historian must undertake the prior, and in part subjective, tasks that only the historian can do: to turn the noise into coherent voices through which the past may speak to the present and to construct the questions to which the past may give the present intelligible answers" (O'Hanlon and Washbrook 149).

I am disputing not that conflict is a social constant, but the tendency for materialist analyses to explain the disorder as a result of a constructed category.

<sup>105</sup> Burakumin or "people of a special community" were formerly known as "eta," meaning "filth" or "heavily polluted," or "hinin," meaning "non-human." In some cases Japanese also imputed this identity to Koreans, Ainu, and Okinawans. While Japan has officially granted burakumin equal status with other Japanese, informal exclusionary practices persist (DeVos and Wetherall 1974; DeVos and Wagatsuma 1966; Suzuki and Oiwa 1996).

between this system and class, although binding, are less significant than its overlap with estates.

Unlike classes and estates, status groups survive democracy and economic vagaries, and do not depend on descent. Ethnic groups may share certain features with class, status and estate groups:

[. . .] the actual relations which arise between such [ethnic] quasi-groups may take a variety of forms, depending not on ethnicity itself, but upon other variable factors, including what characteristics are honoured, what legal rights are assigned to or obtained by the groups and what control they have over property. (Rex 14)

As is evident from this intrusion of ethnicity in my discussion of race and class, the experiential interrelations between these ideological categories hinders any isolated treatment of them:

All our ordinary stories are changed in time, altered as much by the present as the present is shaped by the past. Potent and pervasive as a prairie dust storm, memories and dreams seep and mingle through cracks, settling on furniture and into upholstery. Our attics and living-rooms encroach on each other, deep into their invisible places. (*Obasan* 25)

The refusal of the past to stay past, or of "homelands" to stay put, means that an analysis of class, race, status, and ethnicity can realize its reliability only through a productive surrender to ideological "encroachment."

I return, then, to the question of the "working-class" picture brides. When Kobayashi and Jackson group agriculture with other "menial" work, they are making a connection that is true within a certain sphere of Canadian understanding. Although in Canada farmers once enjoyed relatively high status, they are now poorer (and more poorly regarded) than when they settled the west in the early twentieth century.<sup>106</sup> Many farmers have lacked the resources to keep pace with the development of new technologies and concurrent specialization, and the income on even more small farms has fallen below the poverty line (Furniss 1988).<sup>107</sup> The relative

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<sup>106</sup> Although Canada had no official "poverty line" at the time, the 1971 Census found that 36% of farm families surveyed had incomes below the Economic Council of Canada's "low-level income cut-off" line, compared with the 15% of urban families whose incomes were below that level (Shaw 1979). The 1991 Census reported that the average income of farm families was still below the national average (Table 2), even though most farm families were, by that time, receiving the greater portion of their income from off-farm employment (Table 5-2).

<sup>107</sup> There are clear exceptions to this generalization, and inconsistencies in its construction. With industrialization, the size of farms increased greatly and farming came to require large

textual invisibility of Nikkei women farmers may therefore be partially understood as an outcome of their employment in the lowest stratum of a poorly regarded, low-income occupation.

By contrast, agriculture has enjoyed a consistently elevated position in Japan, both materially and mythically. Throughout the two hundred and fifty years of the Tokugawa period, the economy of Japan was largely agrarian.<sup>108</sup> Tokugawan society related the nobility of one's status to the agrarian productivity of one's role. Thus, farmers enjoyed a social position second only to the elite class of samurai. Below farmers and samurai were the artisans and craftspeople that contributed to the good of society, although not in any fundamental way. Lower yet on the scale were merchants, those who contributed little to the social good and made their living off the needs of others.<sup>109</sup>

With the modernization of the Meiji period (and the official abolishment of the Tokugawan system), the agrarian society of the Tokugawa era became idealized as the essential Japan.<sup>110</sup>

The amplification of the agrarian myth and the concurrent decrying of urban values was accompanied by concrete policies and plans, debates and dialogues, about how to insure stability in an agricultural arcadia [sic] on the verge of destruction. (Ivy 1995, 71)

Those who emigrated from Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries took with them this mythic sense of agriculture's importance to society. Thus, while immigrants who were members of farming families in Japan may have arrived in Canada materially "poor," they were still from the "upper strata" of their villages. If the immigrants engaged in "menial" work in Canada, it was not always because they occupied a similar social rank in Japan. Similarly, although Japanese merchant families may have been wealthy, they did not, necessarily, enjoy an elevated social status.

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amounts of capital investment. Purchasing a farm in toto is out of reach of most Canadians; farms are generally inherited, if the farmer manages to keep financially solvent.

<sup>108</sup> However, as Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney stresses, "even during the Early Modern period [1603–1868], 'agrarian Japan' ironically meant 'predominantly agricultural' in occupational identity but 'predominantly nonagricultural' in income activities" (*Rice as Self* 91).

<sup>109</sup> These classes were not thoroughly homogeneous. For instance, merchants who were viewed as profiting through serving others were regarded more highly than those who profited themselves only (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993).

However, as much as considering place in relation to class and status increases our appreciation of the past, it does not correct “faults” in the historical record. Knowledge of Tokugawan social structure is not the key to understanding the reality of class in the lives of Japanese immigrants. If anything, the fact that early Nikkei history is peopled by workers who functioned materially in one social structure while bearing the historical consciousness of another entrenches and multiplies textual contradictions and inconsistencies. Even if researchers content themselves with majorities or dominant cases that can be accommodated within a theoretical structure of class, this simultaneity of remembered past and lived present exceeds the constraints of any such structure.

As I discuss in successive sections, the contradictions inherent in the co-existing expressions of class and race spill over into all spheres of Nikkei women’s experience. Any unitary or easily generalizable theoretical perspective on Nikkei history and social reality is challenged by the certainty that an individual may be appropriately characterized as both “working class” and “upper class”—and by the infinite play of regressions within those categories.

Growing up at the turn of the century in Tosa (Kochi City), the favoured and feisty daughter of a well-educated samurai, Masaji Oe, who developed the *lai* school of swordsmanship, she [Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka] was expected to marry and perform the conventional roles of unquestioning wife and mother. Unconventional by character and training (she received much the same training as her father’s male Kendo-students), she accepted the marriage arranged by her father and, in 1917, found herself sailing to the relatively uncivilized West Coast of Canada to join her emigrant husband. Even as she embraced this adventure, she could not then have anticipated selling vegetables to make ends meet for their large family in Depression-era Calgary, nor could she have imagined themselves being forced out of the city in 1942 to an abject plot of land in northern Alberta which had somehow to be farmed for the family to survive. (*Mothertalk* 1)

Before she ever left Japan, Kiyoshi Oe was raised to be both conventional and radical. She lived at once the realities of “female” and “male” experience, instructed in bushido<sup>111</sup> along with her father’s male students, while expected to fulfill the stereotypical adult role of the Meiji

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<sup>110</sup> See also Gluck 1985; Harootunian 1988.

<sup>111</sup> Bushido (the way or ethics of the samurai) refers to the samurai’s code of honour, a complex system of morality and behaviour. Although modern Japanese regard bushido as a foundational symbol of samurai culture, samurai moral ethics existed throughout the medieval period, well before the term was coined in the Tokugawa era (Ikegami 1995).

woman. Yet because Oe was a woman, those “Japanese” role expectations included adoption of a Canadian identity (“Mary Kiyooka”) through marriage and immigration, and what might be described as the exchange of membership in the samurai class for that of the “poor Canadian farmer.”<sup>112</sup>

From the perspective of split labour market theory, or any other structural system of class analysis, Kiyooka’s altered class status after immigration can only be described as an exchange. Whereas in Japan Kiyooka belonged to an honourable, highly respected group in terms of status and estate, with immigration to Canada she became a member of the working class, one of that cheap pool of labour that is racially defined through the differential exploitation by capital. But whether an analysis emphasizes the significance of race in Mary Kiyooka’s economic reality, or narrows the definition of race to emphasize the effects of class, this bipolar categorical demand for “either/or” creates a third category of unexplained remnants which Kiyooka mines for her own analysis.

After watching a telecast of England’s Princess Diana moving through crowds of “all sorts of people” (22), Kiyooka reflects that such mixing of the classes was unheard of in Tokugawa Japan. She then juxtaposes the early modern period in Japan with her observations of late twentieth-century Canada:

I’m not too sure how class works in Canada where all kinds of people mix freely but I’m sure it’s there. Most people want to be different. You don’t see bankers hanging around with truck drivers in the local pub. The rich and beautiful never belong to the same clubs as you or I do. (*Mothertalk* 22)

Kiyooka’s choice of the Tokugawa era as a contrast to class in postmodern<sup>113</sup> Canada is not, I think, a casual one. Kiyooka might have invoked memories of her own experience of the later

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<sup>112</sup> “If I were a man I wouldn’t be here in Canada. I would have succeeded him [father]” (*Mothertalk* 20-21).

<sup>113</sup> Here I am using the term temporally, as a label for the period following what has come to be called the “modern” era, loosely speaking, the late twentieth century. I am not dismissing the political and aesthetic expressions entailed by the term “postmodernism,” or the reality that these two spheres are not necessarily exclusive. After all, any periodization is at best incomplete. Therefore, I characterize late twentieth-century Canada as postmodern to emphasize the synchrony in Kiyooka’s explanation. That is, describing contemporary Canada in

Meiji era as a basis for comparison, as often happens in nostalgic remembrances of homeland.<sup>114</sup> Instead, Kiyooka cites an era that predated her own life in Japan, yet continued to influence ideas of class throughout the later processes of reformation and modernization.<sup>115</sup>

As a samurai, Kiyooka's father served the clan Yamanouchi that began at the dawn of the Tokugawa. In several ways, *Mothertalk* divulges Kiyooka's abiding sense of the Tokugawa era as a temporal reality in her contemporary experience. Kiyooka chooses the feudal name, "Tosa," to refer to her home city of Kochi, a place she describes as "my heart's true country" (14). Marlatt<sup>116</sup> imbues Kiyooka's connection to historical events of this era with a sense that

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terms of the ancient "Tokugawa" is also, I suggest, as much a conceptual exercise as it is a matter of marking years.

<sup>114</sup> Kiyooka was born in 1896, almost two decades into the reformative years of the Meiji era.

<sup>115</sup> For discussion of the persistence of Tokugawa ideas of class, see Ohnuki-Tierney (1993) and Ivy (1995). Regarding the theoretical costs of emphasizing periodization over social realities, see Miyoshi and Harootunian (1989), especially Karatani Koojin, "One Spirit, Two Nineteenth Centuries."

<sup>116</sup> *Mothertalk* is a collection of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka's stories about her life, as told to her son Roy, with the translating assistance of Matsuki Masutani. Roy rewrote the translated interviews, as poet and novelist Daphne Marlatt explains, in his English version of Mary's Tosa dialect ("Introduction"). Throughout his life, Kiyooka (1926-1994) was involved in a variety of artistic expressions: abstract painting, poetry, photography, collage, music, video and film production, and sculpture. Roy Kiyooka died as he was working on the manuscript of *Mothertalk*. Kiyooka's daughters asked Marlatt (who lived with Roy Kiyooka from 1975 until 1981), to edit the last version of the manuscript, which she did.

In addition to being a tale of Mary Kiyooka's life, *Mothertalk* is a story of language. Roy's art contains a plenitude of (his mother's) language, and always he talked about his place in that language: "she alone reminds me of my Japanese self by talking to me in the very language she taught me before I even had the thot [sic] of *learning* anything [. . .] I find myself going home to keep in touch with my mother tongue [. . .] rudimentary [. . .] my cleft tongue [. . .] the nameless Jap in me [. . .] a language I began to acquire even as I suckled on her breast" (*Mothertalk* 182-83). Marlatt is fascinated with her own place in "mother talk" (see, for instance, her "Musing with Mothertongue," and *Touch to my Tongue*). And, although she is committed to writing from and through the/her body or, in Douglas Barbour's words, "the proprioceptive moment" (8) Marlatt has not compromised her larger concern with the place of women in the world.

Marlatt describes Roy's manuscript as "a free-floating succession of stories that jumped around in time and place. Factual biographical material had been dropped out and stories were linked thematically or verbally rather than chronologically, sometimes not linked at all, and sometimes repeated elsewhere in the manuscript" (5). Marlatt then rewrote the manuscript, relying on it and information provided by family members. Marlatt manages to restore the chronology of Mary's narrative and retain a sense of certain motifs Roy had emphasized in his version while adding, she says "only a handful" of her own words (6).

There is no way to identify one correct "you" ("The rich don't belong to the same clubs as you and I do") from this mountain of speakers and listeners. Mary may have been addressing Roy at this point. The tenderly iconoclastic artist and professor who lived the appearance of

they are past; the events live in “the vivid memories of her father” (2). Marlatt also describes that link as a “reaching back.” The materiality of the metaphor suggests retrieval: memories may be recalled much as one takes down a book from the shelf. But if we understand the preposition “of” to indicate possession (reaching back through the father’s memories rather than through memories about the father), we see that the events are retrievable because the father’s memories are present in the daughter. In this sense, Kiyooka’s interpretive incorporation of the Tokugawa era depends less on a nostalgic borrowing of its terms than it does on an understanding of that historical period as a component of her experiential reality.

Having identified herself as “working class” (“The rich and beautiful never belong to the same clubs as you or I do.”), Kiyooka qualifies her membership in that class with a remark about her elite Tokugawan status: “Though I was brought up with all the advantages of a samurai’s daughter, I’ve spent my whole life with ordinary people” (22). The first statement places Kiyooka and the listener together, outside of what she distinguishes as the Canadian upper class—“the rich and beautiful.” In Kiyooka’s next sentence we see that this assessment is not a comment on the citizen/emigrant’s fall from the home nation’s upper class into the immigrant (lower) class of the host country:

Though I was brought up with all the advantages of a samurai’s daughter, I’ve spent my whole life with ordinary people. I don’t have any rich friends. I only know such people on TV and I see how charming they can be but they’re not the kind of people I’m used to. (22)

The “advantages” of the samurai class did not, necessarily, involve wealth. Those samurai who lost their lord and, therefore, their income (as Kiyooka’s father did), retained remnants of their status as members of the elite.<sup>117</sup> Thus, to describe her elite samurai family as materially “poor” (18) is to admit poverty, not commonness. By sustaining this status of “elite

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relative poverty (by choice or by necessity) in Vancouver’s east end, seems to chuckle at the spiritual and emotional poverty of an upper class defined by wealth alone.

<sup>117</sup> During the Tokugawa period, if a lord or daimyo was killed in battle, his vassal samurai became known as ronin. Within the daimyo’s house or ie, vassalage relationships were structured hierarchically. Without their daimyo, ronin lost their actual power and wealth and, therefore, their actual prestige. What status ronin continued to enjoy pertained more to remnants of respect and honour that society accorded them. With the democratization of the

poor” in the description of her present status in Canada, Kiyooka’s analysis also releases the notion of class from the definitional boundaries of nation. Kiyooka was a member of the elite in Japan and, according to her analysis, remains a member of the elite in Canada; neither country can either exclude or claim her.

The large geographical and temporal scales in Kiyooka’s interpretation of class save it from being a microcosmic, idiosyncratic representation. Kiyooka brings the historical weight of multiple eras in both Canada and Japan to bear on the social circumstances of a particular late twentieth-century Canadian reality. From this perspective, the imprecision of class and race does not limit, but enables their interpretation.

A significant challenge in engaging conceptual imprecision as an analytical tool is language. It is one thing to revel in the social complexities of a life story such as Mary Kiyooka’s, quite another to express them in a theoretical language that does not reduce those complexities to inherited structural dichotomies. We see an example of this tension in *Racist Culture*, as Goldberg wrestles with the problem of how best to signify the intersecting aspect in the discourses of race and class. He settles on the phrase “the racially marginalized” to distinguish the “lower” class:

It explicitly captures the class dimension of economic marginality; it references the ghetto as the spatial location of the racially marginalized [. . .]; it differentiates those who are racialized but nonmarginal from those who deeply experience the material effects of exclusion, namely, the racial poor; and in foregrounding the processes of marginalization, it refuses moralistic judgements as first causes of the marginal. (173)

Postmodernism and poststructuralism have combined in an enthusiastic rewriting of the nominal. The emphasis on process (Harvey 1989); the fiction and deceit of the autonomous subject (Foucault 1972); and the endless deferral of meaning in a process of signification (Derrida 1974) all provide us with an abundance of nouns that have been “verbalized” (“racialized,” “marginalized”). It is likely altogether clear that a term such as “marginalization” entails the notion of process. Nonetheless, there are remnants of both autonomous subjectivity

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Meiji period, the samurai class was technically dissolved. For discussion of samurai status see Ikegami (1995).

and moralism in Goldberg's neglect of political agency, as well as in his determination to limit an individual's experience of class to an objectifiable location in the present.

By supposing a process of marginalization that acknowledges political agency, I am imagining the potential in the margin as a location of choice. In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, bell hooks explains her marginalization as chosen:

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality that is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance—as location of radical openness and possibility. (153)

Necessary as efforts to expose the systemic nature of exclusionary practices are, we risk removing agency as we relieve the targets of marginalization of responsibility for their social position. When that happens, and it is apparent from the way the lives of Nikkei have been written about that it happens regularly,<sup>118</sup> the social and cultural dislocations that define Nikkei experience are homogenized to a definable limit. That is, the contradictory multiplicities of time, economy, geography, desire, fear, and accident that give class all its stubborn irregularities are filed down to the point where class appears as concretely real as does race.

Moreover, Goldberg's model makes a moral judgement by ordering the categories of injustice: the "racialized" suffer, but the "racially marginalized" suffer more. This hierarchy may well accommodate a materialist analysis, but such an analysis is compromised by its disregard for the persistence of past racial marginalization in the symbols and experiential reality of the present, however privileged.

Those of us who live, who "make it," passionately holding on to aspects of that "downhome" life we do not intend to lose while simultaneously seeking new knowledge and experience, invent spaces of radical openness. (hooks 148)

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<sup>118</sup> One example of this type of writing is the discourse of victimhood that has built up around the uprooting and internment of Nikkei during the Second World War. This emphasis on Nikkei as innocent victims has offset the popular tendency in the prewar years to imagine and portray Nikkei as "enemy aliens." The counter-ideology had political significance in obtaining redress of that injustice. However, this emphasis on victimization has also erased the experiences of many Nikkei and diminished the significance of wartime Nikkei resistance that did occur. For an example of the discourse of victimhood, see Sunahara (1981). For examples of resistance, see Oiwa (1991) and Takashima (1971).

As hooks explains, it is only by gripping that past concrete place in the margins, that the margin can be reconfigured as a place of resistance in the present. "This is not a mythic notion of marginality. It comes from lived experience" (150).

To accommodate this experiential fusion of past and present, an analytical model of class might consider current social status as a finite pause in an infinite, non-linear motion such as a melodic progression. Then current status is, like an isolated chord, dependent on several tones heard simultaneously. If the isolated sound is a single tone, its meaning within the entire progression nonetheless depends on its relation to adjacent sounds and silence, just as the progression finds its full meaning by its place in the larger musical piece. When a musical chord sounds, the trained or simply appreciative ear hears an entire sound rather than a group of single notes. Just so this model accommodates the simultaneous multiplicity of class and status as more than the interplay of structural categories, even more than the intersection of conceptual ones.

With the metaphor of the musical progression in mind, I return to Kiyooka's explanation of class.

When Father enrolled me in public school he wrote *sizoku* [samurai class] as our status in the school register. When I enrolled George and Mariko [Kiyooka's two eldest children] I entered them as *heimin* [commoners] because they belonged to the Kiyooka side of the family. Well into the Meiji period the Kiyookas would have had to bow if a samurai like my father passed by. In those days the class you were born into defined your political status. (26; translations in original)

Here Kiyooka reinforces her characterization of class as heritable by describing the persistence of the Meiji class system in the *Taishō* (1912–1926) and *Showa* (1926–1989) eras in which her children were born and began school. This persistence was both conceptual, in that Japanese in one era perceived class according to the standards of a past era, and structural, since this perception was formalized in the registration process.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> While certain dramatic shifts may coincide with the reign of a particular Emperor (and, therefore, a new era), I am not suggesting here a direct or causal relationship between changing traditions and historical period: "[. . .] divisions according to era names such as Meiji, Taisho [sic], or Showa make one forget relations to the exterior and construct a single, autonomous discursive space" (Karatani 1991, 192). It is more significant and relevant to this discussion of

Kiyooka's awareness of her individual irrelevance in this process and in the structural determination of her children's social class is apparent from the ironic presence of the "I" in this passage. Since George and Mariko were raised in Japan by other family members, it is unlikely that Kiyooka personally enrolled her children in school.<sup>120</sup> A surrogate parent probably fulfilled this responsibility and registered the children according to the class of their father, despite the nobility inherited by their mother at birth. Kiyooka is effectively a disposable member of her own class. Although social position in the Meiji era determined that Kiyooka was registered as "samurai," her husband's commoner family would have deferred only to her father, not to the daughter whose status was officially defined by birth only until the time of her marriage. Thus, Kiyooka's use of the first person in this passage may reflect her oblique refusal of a system that defines the subjectivity of a woman according to her relationship with a man.

Nonetheless, there are moments when Kiyooka expresses pride that the Tokugawan social system is evident in her contemporary reality as an "ordinary person."<sup>121</sup> She relates her diligence in maintaining essential "samurai" values such as the balance between giri (duty, or custom) and ninjō (human feeling):

Giri-ninjō [sic] is the very heart of the samurai's way of life. [. . .] Whenever I go to Nippon [Japan] I always take herring roe and kelp for my old Tosa friends. If I don't they'll think Master Oe's daughter has misplaced her giri-ninjō. (23)

Of all her children, says Kiyooka, her son Roy shows the most evidence of "bushido," even more than either her son or daughter who grew up in Japan. This observation suggests that Kiyooka is confident of her ability to live as a samurai, in spite of the gender-based class system, and to transmit that cultural knowledge through concrete practice.

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class that Kiyooka names and defines the persistence of traditions in terms of a past (Meiji) era that was defined as a time of change.

<sup>120</sup> Kiyooka might have enrolled George, since she was in Japan with him when he came of age for school, but her statement that she enrolled both of them suggests that another family member physically registered the children (*Mothertalk* 67).

<sup>121</sup> It is significant that Kiyooka never uses the official label of "commoner" that she attaches to her children and husband.

The apparent contradiction in Kiyooka's refusal and acceptance of the Tokugawan system also suggests that Kiyooka is aware that social position, like any other construction, is based less on essence than it is on contingency.

I guess you could say that my fate began to unravel when my well-meaning father made his big mistake: You see he thought that Papa [Kiyooka's husband] belonged to the Kiyooka clan in Akaoka who were prosperous farmers and not the Kiyookas of Umagi who were just plain farmers. He never intended me to marry a country bumpkin without any patrimony. (28)

Matsuji Oe's error may have been his assumption that he was marrying his daughter to a well-placed farmer. But the way Kiyooka tells it, her father's mistake may also have been in trusting the unscrupulous marital go-betweens who "only cared for their commission" (28), in blessing the "mistaken" union, or in complying with a class system that stripped Kiyooka of her birthright of nobility. In fact, not clarifying which step in this chain of events she regards as her father's "big mistake" relieves Kiyooka's marriage to a commoner of any causal weight. The event is simply one note in the progression of the contingent processes of belonging.

### *Culture*

I dress with culture  
every single morning.  
I eat my culture for breakfast,  
and bag it for lunch and it simmers  
in a slow cooker while I'm out at work.  
I eat culture for dinner then I bathe in it  
and it's my sleeping partner at night. (Goto 1994, 218)

In November 1994, the Vancouver *Bulletin* ("a journal for and about the nikkei community") began running a column entitled "East Meets West." As the editors describe it, "East Meets West" was to be a monthly feature "that will hopefully illuminate for our readers some of the customs and oddities that are peculiar to the Japanese" (December 1994, 18). The feature writer, Lotus Miyashita, explains a variety of cultural practices over the months, including

topics such as Oshōgatsu (New Year's); love and marriage; Japanese etiquette; and the inscription of English words and slogans on Japanese products.

As we see in the column on Oshōgatsu, defining the parameters of “east” and “west” is a central preoccupation of the feature.

You might sing Auld Lang Syne which says something about “old acquaintances” being forgot and never being brought up again. The Japanese also have similar attitudes towards “out with the old, in with the new.” However, while we are celebrating with drink and/or watching the big red apple fall in Times Square [. . .] many Japanese families (and Japanese Canadian families too) are busy preparing for the new year's festivities, which can sometimes last for a few months. Traditions vary and what our foreparents [sic] brought over have become a distinctly Japanese Canadian celebration. The following describes some common New Year's activities in Japan. (Dec. 1994, 19; italics in original)

Here, the “east” is a geographical region (Japan) populated by a homogeneous people who celebrate common New Year's activities. Both the people and the festivities are defined as “Japanese” predominantly because they exist in Japan. By contrast, Canadian Nikkei are a diverse group identifiable by a variety of signifiers: “we,” the colloquial “you,” “Japanese Canadians,” and, by implication, the descendents of “our foreparents.” Whereas Japanese perform only Japanese celebrations, Canadian Nikkei participate in Scottish, American, and Japanese Canadian festivities, but—because they have become “distinctly Japanese Canadian”—not Japanese ones.

Miyashita's contrast between the diverse “we” and the homogeneous “them” recalls the conspicuous diversity in Kaoru Ikeda's description of her community. In the former case, I suggested that the variety of signifiers in Ikeda's description indicates an ambiguous engagement with racial differentiation. That is, Ikeda appears to be maneuvering consciously through an abundance of signifiers as a way of criticizing Canada's characterization and treatment of a diverse Nikkei community as “Japanese.” Miyashita's dependence on diversity as a characterization of Canadian Nikkei seems less *engaged with* than *entrapped in* racial discourse.<sup>122</sup> A strongly ironic voice infuses her interpretation of Oshōgatsu activities with

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<sup>122</sup> In her discussions with white women, Frankenberg identified the women's movements between “engagement” with and “entrapment” in the discourses of race (140). This fluctuation also appears within individual texts by Nikkei women.

skepticism. Regarding the ringing of the temple bell as a Buddhist symbol of overcoming passions Miyashita quips, "Who would have thought that passion is such a bad thing?" Department store gift sets are "overpackaged"; people are "supposed to be" friendly, and technology has taken "the romance out of the traditional mochi-making process."<sup>123</sup>

Among Canadians, such skepticism is popular in complaints that circulate about the "commercialization" of Christmas. Typically this is criticism aimed at the intimately familiar, a discourse underwritten with longing for an authentic tradition. Such criticism creates a community of complainers connected by a shared nostalgia for cultural practices which members describe in terms of a common past.<sup>124</sup> The familiarity of Miyashita's nostalgia for Oshō gatsu past aligns it with this criticism of and by the intimate. Yet Miyashita contradicts that position by stressing her philosophical and cultural distance from these Japanese traditions, and from a "Japanese" identity: "Traditions vary and what our foreparents brought over have become a distinctly Japanese Canadian celebration." This place of contradiction, where the west may be said to meet—and refuse—the east, is a primary site of the construction of Nikkei culture.

As with the conceptual categories of "race" and "class," the territory of Nikkei culture cannot be securely isolated from other expressions of identity-formation. However, I initially focus my discussion on writing that seems to be explicating only the meaning of culture in the lives of Nikkei women. Then, by tracing the pattern of symbolic relations among these various

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<sup>123</sup> Mochi is a kind of rice cake made by pounding cooked sticky rice with a mortar.

<sup>124</sup> Television advertising is, ironically, one of the most conspicuous agents of this nostalgic discourse surrounding "Christmas past." Common features in the advertising of nostalgia include snow, clean and well-dressed children, Christmas trees, turkey dinner, families reuniting, and stacks of brightly wrapped gifts. The sentimentality and repetition of these images exaggerate the notion of the Canadian past as a time of common experience, especially in contrast with the officially multicultural present that is evident in media coverage of what is now democratically termed "the holiday season." The multicultural Canadian "Christmas" is apparent also in the various ways schools negotiate the season, as columnist Michael Valpy articulates the challenge: "the annual Christmas pop-up controversy over whether some group's religion is being trashed or rammed down some other group's throat at school concerts" ("How Christmas Came to Withrow School," *The Globe and Mail* 16 December 1994, A2).

experiential realms I further explicate the processes of identity-formation in the writing of Nikkei women.

It is important to stress that, by describing Lotus Miyashita's nostalgic familiarity with "past" Japanese traditions as a contradiction of her stated exclusively Japanese Canadian identity, I have neither "found her out," nor am I implying that her understanding of (her) cultures is false. I may be less skeptical of contemporary Oshōgatsu festivities than is Miyashita, but to claim that her account is "wrong" is to insist on an absolute core of meaning in cultural traditions, an emphasis which I do not intend.

In fact, although Park (1950) agrees with W.G. Sumner that the folkways are "right" (27),<sup>125</sup> he is already moving from the idea of culture as a collection of objects and foreshadowing the theories of cultural construction that would not emerge for several decades:

It [cultural content] consists, apparently, in memories, that is to say, in tradition; in a relatively unorganized social experience, something which is, at any rate, less structure than will. (26)

The theoretical shift in attention to the role of meaning and symbols in cultural practice (Weber 1947 & 1968; Geertz 1973) represented the next serious challenge to the notion of culture as an external object, knowable by an ethnographic authority. Yet even Geertz's thick descriptions of his subjects and their cultural practices, and his desire to "converse with them" (24), yield to the seduction of that authority, becoming "mainly a conversation of "us" with "us" about "them"" (Trinh 1989, 65).

By the time theories of cultural construction (Handler and Linnekin 1984; Linnekin 1992) came under attack over the matter of ethnographic and native authority, it seemed that the question of cultural content was simply being elaborated. Geertz (1973) had already focused ethnographic attention on the context of cultural production:

As interworked systems of construable signs (what, ignoring provincial usages, I would call symbols), culture is not a power, something to which social events behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is thickly—described. (14)

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<sup>125</sup> "The 'right' way is the way which the ancestors used and which has been handed down. The tradition is its own warrant. It is not held subject to verification by experience. The notion of right is in the folkways" (Sumner 28).

Geertz agrees with the cultural constructionists on the representative nature of culture, and on the significance of discourse to interpretation.<sup>126</sup> This emphasis on process and conversation implies that the resultant ethnography will be dialectic. What actually emerges in, for instance, Geertz's interpretation of the Balinese cockfight, is an authoritative and unitary version of the ambiguous dialogue of fieldwork.<sup>127</sup> The force of this ethnographic authority is at odds with Geertz's descriptions of the democratic project of his symbolic anthropology, that "conversation" with the ethnographer's subjects. Furthermore, there is little room for ambiguity in Geertz's assertion that a good interpretation "takes us into the heart" (18) of the anthropological subject. In fact, despite its emphasis on discourse, process, and the fictional quality of anthropological analysis, the structural poetics of Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures* does not significantly reassemble the notion of the cultural fiction. Rather, Geertz's analysis clings to the idea of a substantive core of meaning which the ethnographer may imperially "penetrate" (24) and translate for the reader.

What cultural construction offers as an alternative to the stubborn essentialism and authority that cling to semiotic anthropology is its proposal that all cultures (including the academic ones) are symbolically constructed (Handler and Linnekin 1984; Linnekin 1992; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). What cultural construction risks by basing their investigations of cultures on this proposal is appearing to wrest control from cultural groups just as those groups are gaining—or claiming their rights to—self-determination.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Geertz qualifies the term as "social" and "human" discourse, by which he means the practices of culture and what actors say about those practices (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, 4-30). Regarding the importance of discourse as statements actors make about cultural practice, see Yanagisako (1985). For the distinction between the discourse of informants and the ethnographer's textualized account of that discourse, see Clifford (1988), especially "On Ethnographic Authority," 21-54.

<sup>127</sup> See Clifford (1988) for further comment on the authoritative voice in Geertz.

<sup>128</sup> Regarding the interaction of cultural construction and native nationalism see Appendix Two.

It is not simply the provocative language of cultural construction which challenges the projects of native nationalism and other marginalized cultures,<sup>129</sup> but echoes of the more familiar question, "who speaks?" that are contained in that language. That is, the description of cultural practice as "invented" may connote either ownership or accusation, depending on the identity and intentions of the speaker.

In the context of immigration and settlement in a new land, the sting of such "accusations" may, but need not, be particularly acute:

For the immigrant, the transition from a state of homesickness to a sense of place is an essential part of the acculturation process. This process is brought about by the reassertion of traditional cultural values, in conjunction with the development of new values, within a new physical and social environment. ("Landscape and the Poetic Act," 42).<sup>130</sup>

In this essay, Audrey Kobayashi displaces the concept of cultural practice as artefact by emphasizing context and articulation. This shift detaches the exercise of the poetic form of haiku from a unified categorization of it as an "old" tradition. Thus, it is not the essential identity of haiku as an old tradition, but the immigrant's valuation of it as such that determines the place of the concrete practice in the realm of Nikkei culture. "New cultural values" are determined by relocation, not by the inevitable invention of tradition. Similarly, the immigrant categorizes as "new" those practices developed in the context of the adopted homeland, just as Lotus Miyashita describes Oshō gatsu preparations in Canada as "distinctly Japanese Canadian."

At this point, Kobayashi's analysis is more in the tradition of Geertz's symbolic anthropology than cultural construction.<sup>131</sup> She emphasizes the importance of context in the re(production) of culture, and the necessity of discerning the meaning which actors attribute to

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<sup>129</sup> Because native nationalism is a particular expression of a more general political protest against hegemonic cultural rule, I substitute the phrase "marginalized cultures" for "native nationalism" (except where the argument for native nationalism refers specifically to prior claims on land, oceans, and so on) in order to establish relevance to the Canadian Nikkei context.

<sup>130</sup> "It is a reasonable assumption that an immigrant people such as the Japanese interprets its new environment with the values and attitudes of the old country, however open to change its members may be" (Montero 17).

<sup>131</sup> In conversation, Kobayashi smilingly dismissed this article as something from "a long time ago" (personal interview, Nov. 1992). For later discussions regarding the transformation of tradition and the constructed nature of cultural categories see Kobayashi 1992; Kobayashi and Jackson 1994.

its symbols. While Kobayashi interprets Nikkei culture for the reader in an impersonal tone, her interpretation seems free of the authoritative voice so present in Geertz's analysis.<sup>132</sup> Kobayashi is a scholar and a member of the community she is writing about, a metonymic representation of her own subject. This identity neither validates nor compromises her interpretation, but it does engage me as a reader more sympathetically than would a similar impersonal interpretation by an outsider. I assume that Kobayashi writes kindly of the elders in her community. Thus, when Kobayashi refers to the issei's "rigid adherence to tradition" (45), I understand the term "rigid" to mean "careful" or "rigorous" rather than, for instance, the more negative "inflexible" or "severe." The "pejorativeness" of any discourse is as dependent on its context (including the identity of those articulating it) as is the discourse itself.

The significance of identity is particularly relevant to the description of cultural construction as a "political" process. With respect to the debate between Trask and Linnekin concerning cultural construction (Appendix Two), Tobin (1995) observes: "The separation of political from spiritual motives is seen [by Trask] as a misrepresentation that lessens the legitimacy of the resulting act" (155). Community trust in Audrey Kobayashi as a worthy representative suggests that any separation of the political and the spiritual motives she might identify in the actions of fellow Nikkei would not invite this criticism.<sup>133</sup> In the section on redress, I expand my discussion of Kobayashi's analysis of the Nikkei community's strategic and overtly political engagement with cultural essentialism. For now, I would simply emphasize the importance of noting the direction in which the imputation of political motives flows:

The second element [in the transformation of the Nikkei community during the campaign for redress] was political strategy, directed outward from the Japanese-Canadian community. Credibility was established by representing the interests and wishes of a majority of the survivors, and by organizing an effective and professional lobbying campaign, built upon an

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<sup>132</sup> Kobayashi's intimacy with her community does influence her choice of vocabulary and betrays an alliance she seems at pains to conceal: "The act of composing a poem [. . .] provides meaning in a world from which meaning has been wrenched by the powers of bureaucracy" (47). Nonetheless, the one time in this essay that Kobayashi explicitly signals her personal involvement in the community ("I know an Issei man now nearly 90 years old" (47).), her incorporation of this connection is restrained, almost off-hand.

<sup>133</sup> Kobayashi is frequently invited to speak at Nikkei community functions and was a prominent member on the redress negotiating committee.

extensive civil and political network, and striking chords with other issues of political significance. ("The Japanese-Canadian Redress Settlement" 4)

There is no indication that, by separating out the element of political strategy in the Nikkei campaign for redress, Kobayashi has jeopardized, or has been seen to jeopardize, the legitimacy of the struggle.

By "the significance of identity" I am referring to the entire complex of contextual elements that interact in the formation of individual identity. These elements include ascribed and declared membership in the categories of "race" and "class." For instance, in identifying Mary Kiyooka's class, I would base my categorization on her relation to Canadian and Japanese structural organization from the Tokugawa era to the present, as well as on her own claims to membership in certain classes. Thus, I would describe Kiyooka's identity as "working class," "nobility," *and* "commoner." Because this categorization is based only on my understanding of the narrated record of Kiyooka's own interpretation, it is not exhaustive, nor can it be considered complete. In fact, at first glance the contingency of this framework seems to resist analysis. If Kiyooka's social position or status cannot be contained in one class, or even seen as having changed through time relative to an accepted structural organization, how is the course of her immigrant experience to be analyzed? Moreover, how are the particulars of Kiyooka's experience to be generalized in the theoretical process of understanding the larger class structure?

I am not claiming Kiyooka's analysis of class as authentic, or representative, or somehow more "accurate" than received academic models. Historically, the analysis of marginalized cultures in Canada has assigned authoritative status to the observer of culture, that is historians and social scientists who are not members of the community under study, or who, if they are members, subdue personal experience with scholarly discipline.<sup>134</sup> While that

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<sup>134</sup> Of course, the notion of "scholarly objectivity" which informed this separation of the personal and the academic has been convincingly challenged, especially by feminist theory's early insistence on the political nature of the personal. In turn, the equally hegemonic viewpoint of "white" feminist theories has been questioned by theorists of ethnicity and culture. See, for example Trinh 1989; hooks 1990; Bannerji 1995.

scholarly viewpoint is a topic that requires separate consideration, what I am suggesting here is that scholarship on cultural marginalization would benefit from the inclusion of analyses of class and race by those who experience the material realities of that categorization. As I discuss in relation to Ayukawa's translation of Imada Ito's journal, within such an analytical framework, informants become voices of authority, rather than objects of study. This recognition of the authority of experience must be distinguished from the idea of "giving voice," as a way to legitimize an academic project (Trinh 1991, 67). To acknowledge the pre-existing authority of informants involves a process of recognizing the value and fallibility in both voices: personal experience and formal scholarship. This standpoint shifts scholarly attention away from the tasks of documenting and interpreting cultural practice (and the attendant fixation on distinguishing between the authentic and the constructed) to an analysis of those pre-determined concepts that are easily accepted as an interpretive baseline. As I have shown in my discussion of various theoretical models of race, this paradigmatic shift has already begun in social science.<sup>135</sup> However, because the locus of authority still resides in the researcher, most of these theories remain locked in the pyramidal structure which situates the researcher at the pinnacle.

By considering analyses by those who are both the subject and object of their interpretations—and thus inside and outside the categories of interpretation—we begin to see ways in which analyses can fracture what authoritative models have viewed as inevitable ideological connections. Here, for instance, Lotus Miyashita's "East Meets West" column begins to explain the intricate manner in which connections between race and culture are (or may be) coincident, rather than inevitable. Miyashita comments on "Love and Marriage: Japanese Style":

With Valentine's Day making its way into lovers' wallets and hearts, what do our relatives across the Pacific think of this thing called love and everything surrounding it? The total concept hasn't quite made it over there—men are the only ones that receive gifts and women just give. Adding another twist to the tradition, women employees are expected to give *giri choko* (duty

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<sup>135</sup> For further examples of this shift in attention to the construction of the terms of research see also A. Kobayashi 1992 and 1993; Frankenberg 1993; and Kogawa 1981.

chocolates) to their bosses for 'thanks'. You may be asking 'thanks exactly for what'? Maybe it's for allowing these women the honour of serving o-cha (tea) to their bosses at staff meetings while their equally educated male counterparts watch on. (*Bulletin* Feb. 1995, 27; translations in original)

This passage suggests that Miyashita belongs to several communities. First, Miyashita establishes her hereditary right to Canadian and Japanese culture (as well as her right to interpret those cultures) by asserting a biological belonging to both communities ("our relatives across the Pacific"). Her North American identity is obvious in her cynical insider awareness of the commercialization of Valentine's Day, but also in her construction of Valentine's Day rituals as the normative standard against which Japanese understanding of "love and everything surrounding it" may be measured.

Miyashita is also able to transmit her insider knowledge of how love and duty are "gendered" in Japan by interpreting ritual practice and language for her cultural "relatives" in the Canadian reading audience. Valentine's Day in Japan is a faulty imitation of the real ritual because gifts are given only by women and out of duty to their employers, rather than as an exchange between lovers. Ironically in this instance, Miyashita portrays Canadians as the ones who manage the balance of duty and feeling (the ritual of love invades "wallets and hearts") central to Japanese culture. Miyashita's intimacy with Japanese and Canadian customs allows her sarcastic pun on Japanese honour. As the boss is honoured by the women employees serving tea, the women's honour is defiled by their male cohorts gazing at a scene more reminiscent (from a western point of view) of the geisha house or hostess bar than "the office." The men are multiply indulged: along with the ritual material gift, they also receive the honour and sexual pleasure that it is the duty of women to give. Although articulated by one person, Miyashita's interpretation is, in fact, a dialogue between two cultural positions. Miyashita's ancestry may be appropriately described as Japanese, but the cultural fluency derived from her Canadian identity situates her at once inside and outside of both Japanese and Canadian cultures. Her interpretation of this particular ritual is somewhat reified in that she presents the Canadian version as the "real" one. Nonetheless, her gaze is sufficiently bifocal that neither of her explanations can be unwaveringly connected to race.

If more obviously cultural constructionist analyses<sup>136</sup> do not achieve a similar dialogue over cultural representation it may be because authors of the analysis cannot manage the impossible escape from their own construction as a partial product of western discourse. The “authoritative ethnographer” and the “native informant” are, in Frankenberg’s terms, “coconstructed” categories inhabited by individuals who are involuntarily co-dependent. Consequently, an analysis that is explained or defended as “just my point of view”<sup>137</sup> cannot be detached from the discursive field of meaning that has contributed to the making of that view. While that field of meaning can be examined and subverted, it is only by including other points of view as authoritative voices that the categories can be transformed and anything approaching dialogue occur.<sup>138</sup> In Lotus Miyashita’s case, one individual occupies both fields simultaneously.

Because it is multiply authored,<sup>139</sup> a co-operative analysis of culture requires a broader definition of culture than symbolic anthropology allows, and a more rigorous examination of the dominant culture than cultural construction dares. In understanding culture as a system of contextual symbols of meanings with which individuals order their reality (Yanagisako 1985; Geertz 1973), an interpretative analysis of those symbols is generated from the researcher, and aimed at the cultural subject. Of course, the researcher is not unaffected by the exercise, but the significant interdependence of the researcher and her fieldwork other—as discursive categories—remains unexamined. As my extended discussion of Linnekin’s critical practice shows, cultural construction’s invitation to anthropological reflexivity is limited by the involuntary discursive identity of the investigator, regardless of the strength of her intentions or imagination.

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<sup>136</sup> For example, see Appendix Two for Linnekin’s analysis of “the Hawaiian warrior.”

<sup>137</sup> In response to my question about whether and how an anthropologist might write “humbly,” Linnekin responded that “this is just my point of view,” and “you can’t pander to anyone” (personal interview, Aug. 1996).

<sup>138</sup> “Tracking a discursive environment shows us how inhabiting it is not a matter of individual choice, any more than is the case for material conditions. Rather, subverting and transforming it both are long-term, collective projects” (Frankenberg 78).

<sup>139</sup> I am distinguishing co-operative analyses of culture from the multiply authored or dialogic interpretation, also referred to at times as “self-reflexive” ethnography. While any of these analyses may challenge ethnographic authority, they need not, since the ethnographer of a dialogic interpretation still retains a greater degree of control than the researcher involved in a co-operative analysis.

If cultural investigation is undertaken as a co-operative endeavour, culture may then be understood to include all the formative interactions among material practices, norms, and values with which members of contiguous communities order human experience. I make the contiguity, or meeting, of communities central to this definition of culture in order to highlight the significance of interactions between members of different cultural groups as an element in the transformation of cultural practices—the traditions of culture. This idea of contiguity includes the physical meeting of, for example, immigration and travel, intermarriage, and the attendant process of selecting as significant certain aspects of such meetings. But contiguity also refers to cultural interactions that are embedded in the exercises of reading, television viewing, formal education, and so on. Thus, contiguity embraces both imagined meetings and the imagined significance of physical meetings. While the idea of cultures as “coconstructed” is not new, this definition of co-operative culture foregrounds the idea of mutuality that is less explicit in other definitions. With this aspect of cultural transformation so emphasized, a co-operative analysis of culture is well situated to examine narrative authority and the construction of scholarly representations (and the attendant representations of race and class) as rigorously as it does representations by marginalized cultures.<sup>140</sup>

From this standpoint, Kobayashi's analysis of the Nikkei's transition from “homesickness” to “a sense of place” raises as many questions about Kobayashi's cultural and theoretical viewpoint as it does about the acculturation of immigrants:

For the immigrant, the transition from a state of homesickness to a sense of place is an essential part of the acculturation process. This process is brought about by the reassertion of traditional cultural values, in conjunction with the development of new values, within a new physical and social environment. (“Landscape and the Poetic Act” 42)

The immigrants' cultural practices were both contemporary in their lives and, in the Meiji era in which they were socialized, strongly and purposefully influenced by what was seen as western

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<sup>140</sup> This is not to say that these two categories of representation are, necessarily, exclusive of each other; I oppose generalizations of the scholarly and the marginal as a baseline for my argument. Idiosyncratic exceptions and challenges to “scholarly” hegemony may be cited (Bannerji 1995; Mukherjee 1994; Ayukawa 1988 and 1990a). However, because such challenges are, by definition, oppositional they reinforce the hegemony by their resistance to it.

culture.<sup>141</sup> How does Kobayashi's cultural experience as a sansei, or third-generation Canadian Nikkei, influence her implied description of her grandparents' culture as "old" and "Japanese"? Kobayashi suggests that the values which are a metonymic representation of the immigrants' "new" Canadian country are novel because the immigrants are encountering them for the first time. Are these "new" Canadian values then Kobayashi's traditional "old" ones? Once an ontological status is assigned to cultural values, can they be simultaneously "new" and "old"?

In the second passage by Kobayashi discussed above, the influence of cultural construction, while still implicit, is apparent:

The second element was political strategy, directed outward from the Japanese-Canadian community. Credibility was established by representing the interests and wishes of a majority of the survivors, and by organizing an effective and professional lobbying campaign, built upon an extensive civil and political network, and striking chords with other issues of political significance. ("The Japanese-Canadian Redress Settlement" 4)

Despite the detached, third-person voice of this passage, the writer's intimacy with the process she is describing establishes Kobayashi's involvement as an insider in the campaign for redress. Here Kobayashi's viewpoint on the content of culture is apparent in her candidness about the strategic political representations made by the community: Nikkei culture is diverse, vocal, politically astute and involved, aware of the value in coalition, and wealthy enough to undertake the massive and costly project of civic change. Most significantly, in contrast to the model of "old Japanese" and "new Canadian" cultures constructed by the earlier analysis, this passage displaces temporal distinctions with its construction of a "Japanese-Canadian" community of survivors. Although this survival refers specifically to the injustices of the Second World War, it evokes the greater history of injustice that has followed Nikkei throughout their history in Canada. Community diversity, rather than appearing as "division," or evidence of community weakness, is a cultural feature that can as easily be represented as a sign of community vigour, and utilized pragmatically to serve community interests.

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<sup>141</sup> "At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kadeima shared with the rest of Japan the contradictions brought about through the imposition of institutional change" (Kobayashi 1983, 314). On the incorporation of western ideology and cultural practice in Meiji Japan, see also Jansen and Rozman 1986 and Esenbel 1993.

### *Ethnicity*

Although the term “ethnicity” is commonly used interchangeably with “culture” in contemporary popular discourse, scholarly discourse in Canada has come to view culture as the practical evidence of race, and ethnicity as a condition of inequality among races.

Ethnicity involves social relations of inequality that arise as persons with different national and racial origins are organized in economic and social life. (Creese 56)<sup>142</sup>

As I stressed in my discussion of race, early scholarship on Nikkei in Canada treated social inequalities as specific manifestations of the larger issue of race. Scholars and public alike referred to these inequalities as “the Oriental problem.”<sup>143</sup> Although Young and Reid (1939) do not use the term “ethnicity,” their discussion of “the Oriental problem” introduces the idea of ethnicity by describing differences in physiognomy as “symbols of differentiation” (xxv), as well as markers of race. It is this sense of differentiation, of what multiculturalism now calls the “ethnic” Canadian as inescapably different from the “white” Canadian (rather than the more egalitarian differentiation of all Canadians),<sup>144</sup> that continues to shape Canadian understanding of race and ethnicity today.

In an effort to examine the ways in which Nikkei writers respond to the indeterminacy of “ethnicity” as it is used in Canada, I examine two of its critical components: perception and identification. The idea of perception that is inherent in ethnicity<sup>145</sup> may be the more obvious of

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<sup>142</sup> See also A. Kobayashi 1992.

<sup>143</sup> As discussed above, by 1939 the Oriental problem had already become a “Japanese problem”: “This dual menace of the rapidly increasing Japanese population and of the successful competition constitutes the present “oriental problem” [sic] on the North Pacific Coast” (Young and Reid xxiv).

<sup>144</sup> Kamboureli calls this kind of differentiation “the point where the difference that constitutes ethnicity is strategically renamed as otherness” (18).

<sup>145</sup> Of course, ethnicity is also an “idea,” as the fluidity of these definitions suggests. By the late 1960s, perception was also seen as indivisible from culture. In fact, the authors of *The Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* seem to recognize culture as the motivation (they call it “animating force”) behind the composite of practice and beliefs that were, before cultural construction, defined as culture (Vol. 4, xxxl). The commissioners blend perception and biology in their definition of ethnic group: “a sense of identity rooted in a common origin, mainly in the biological sense whether this common origin is real or imaginary” (xxiii).

these components, since for an individual to be associated with an ethnic group is to perceive, or have a sense of, belonging to that group.<sup>146</sup> Thus, in order for the ethnic organization which Creese names to occur, individuals must have a sense of common origins. This becomes especially critical when groups are physically indistinguishable from the dominant social group. Just as important, others must identify as common those origins that they do not share. In other words, ethnicity establishes the boundaries of belonging: it marks the outside limit of inclusion that is also the boundary of exclusion.

In his essay, "Japanese Americans: The Formation and Transformation of an Ethnic Group," Paul Spickard (1994) names four areas of experience which ethnic groups have in common: 1) shared ancestry; 2) shared interests; 3) shared institutions; 4) shared culture. Spickard's framework contrasts the relative involuntariness in the category of race with the significance of choice in the perceived belonging of ethnicity. Aside from the given of one's biological ancestry, ethnicity is, in varying degrees, a matter of preference: one's desires are organized behaviourally and structurally according to one's sense of belonging.<sup>147</sup> Spickard acknowledges that Weber's notion of "imputed common descent" (15) is reinforced by the power of kinship, an idea that I revisit in my discussion of intermarriage below. For now, it is necessary only to stress with Spickard that these lines of inclusion and exclusion are not fixed. Whereas the line between "us" and "them" is usually quite apparent to individuals on both sides of the division, that line "masks an underlying continuum, a hierarchy of groups with whom one is more or less willing to associate oneself" (371).

The theoretical sorting out of ethnicity has taken many forms and resulted in various arrangements of "micro" and "macro" ethnic identity along a "structural-symbolic continuum"

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<sup>146</sup> Regarding a sense of belonging as an indicator of ethnicity, see Weber 1978 on Heimatsgefühl or "native-country sentiment" (388). Driedger expands Heimatsgefühl to mean "feeling at home in a culture" (8).

<sup>147</sup> Neither of these perceptions, of ethnicity as an involuntary and voluntary category, fully addresses the operations of power involved in the formation of and identification with ethnic groups. "For those who experience racism or other forms of discrimination, however, ethnicity can mean the imposition of inequality, and the sense of belonging becomes a retreat from oppressive circumstances" (A. Kobayashi 1992, 10).

(Driedger 1989, 143). One way of entering the conceptual field of ethnicity is to consider expressions of ethnicity that the researcher might depend on as analytical factors. Driedger lists six "ethnic identification factors": ecological territory, ethnic culture, ethnic institutions, historical symbols, ideology, and charismatic leadership (143). Without incorporating Driedger's list as a way to organize Nikkei women's ethnicity, I refer to the factors throughout my discussion (as I do other indicators of ethnicity) as a way of exploring meaningful connections between various facets of ethnicity and different textual treatments of it. For instance, Japanese food enjoys what might be described as a commonsensical, structural connection with Japanese and Nikkei culture. However, as Nikkei women write about it, "Japanese food" also becomes a way of resisting or subverting representations of Japanese culture.

Driedger further subdivides "ethnic culture" into six "ethnic cultural identity factors": religious practice, endogamy, ethnic language use, ethnic organizational participation, attendance in parochial schools, and extent of ethnic best friendships (150-151).<sup>148</sup> As with the ethnic identification factors, I refer to these six additional factors without depending on their explanatory value. As an example, it may be of interest to consider exogamy an indicator of weak ethnic identification, but this does not explain the vigorous expressions of Japanese or Nikkei ethnicity within many of these marriages. Nor is it a simple matter even to define exogamy among, for example, yonsei or fourth generation Nikkei, when the popularly cited rate of exogamy among sansei is 90%.

### *Representing the Defensive*

Gillian Creese (1988) acknowledges that communal goals and desires have also been relevant in the formation of Nikkei communities in Canada, despite the pragmatic necessity to strengthen ethnic bonds as a form of defense against exclusionary practices by dominant

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<sup>148</sup> Minor variations of Driedger's Ethnic Cultural Identity (ECI) index are standard in many studies of ethnicity among Nikkei. See, for example, Kendis 1989; Kitano et al. 1984; Montero 1980.

Canadian society. A clear example of this blend of diverse communal desires and the pragmatics of defense is the manner in which the Powell Street riot of 1907 has been recorded.

The historical event is well-documented (Ward 1990; Adachi 1991; Iino 1983; Young and Reid 1939; Miki and Kobayashi 1991; *A Dream of Riches* 1977; Roy 1989; Omatsu 1992; Roy et al. 1990). These accounts generally agree about the escalating anti-Japanese sentiment and events leading to this unrest.<sup>149</sup> However, their divergent accounts of Nikkei resistance to the riot construct very different images of Nikkei ethnicity. Young and Reid, and Masako Iino are particularly brief about Nikkei reaction to the riot. This is consistent with the restrained, scientific tone of the former volume. Because Iino's essay examines the Japanese reaction to the riot, her coverage of Canadian participation is also minimal. Similarly, Miki and Kobayashi include only a short paragraph on the riot in the larger context of their coverage of the campaign for redress.

In accounts that examine this episode more deeply, the Nikkei emerge as a community of either passive victims (Ward) or overtly militant defenders (Roy, Omatsu, Adachi, and Roy et al.). In Ward's case, the image of the passive victim is integral to his portrayal of the psychology of racism, since the idea of autonomous subjectivity is incongruent with an analysis of spontaneous outbursts of latent racial animus. Where mention of Nikkei resistance is unavoidable, Ward characterizes it as a simple response to the secondary "brawl" that broke out the night after the riot (69–70). Ward cites Nikkei resistance to the initial attack, but credits

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<sup>149</sup> Briefly, on the night of 7 September 1907, a group of approximately 5,000, angered by recent increases in immigration, gathered in Vancouver for a rally sponsored by the Asiatic Exclusion League. After a series of inflammatory speeches urging immigration restrictions, the group marched through Chinatown and into Powell Street, where police and members of the Nikkei community subdued the crowd. A Royal Commission intended to investigate damages incurred by Nikkei followed the riot. Based on the damages both groups were said to have received, the government paid the Nikkei a total of \$9,000, and the Chinese Canadians \$26,000. Canada sent an envoy (Rodolphe Lemieux) to Japan to encourage the Japanese to restrict immigration to Canada. Japan responded with the 1908 "Gentleman's Agreement," voluntarily restricting emigration to Canada to 400 male domestic and agricultural workers annually. Exempt from this restriction were prior residents of Canada and their wives and children, contract workers, and agricultural workers brought in under special agreement as employees of Japanese landholders in Canada.

Vancouver police with quelling the riot which, he says, left “thousands of Chinese and Japanese quivering with rage and fear” (69).

Roy also distinguishes between the attack of the first night, with which the police were initially unable to cope, and the second. She begins describing the magnitude of the second night’s attack according to the press reports of “several thousand people gathered downtown to see further conflict” (193). She then reports that, having “easily repelled” an attempted attack on the Japanese Language School, “the Japanese had shown their ‘militancy’” (193). The account in Roy et al. is substantially the same: initially the police are unable to control the crowd, yet even without advance warning, the residents of ‘Little Tokyo’, the Japanese quarter, [. . .] were able to dispel the mob” (9). These two latter passages evoke images common in Orientalist discourse: Nikkei are violent militants, uncannily able to detect what other (white) groups cannot, and inescapably Japanese.

Adachi, Omatsu, and the writers of *A Dream of Riches* also engage with stereotypes of Japanese behaviour in their accounts of the riot, but in a much different way. *A Dream of Riches* is a slim photographic essay of the first hundred years of Canadian Nikkei history, and the account of the riot contained therein is quite short:

They [the rioters] swept through Chinatown, shattering windows and breaking into stores. When they reached Little Tokyo, however, the Japanese were ready. With bottles and clubs, shouting ‘Banzai,’ they met the whites head on. The whites soon wavered and retreated before this unexpected and fiery resistance. (31)

Consistent with Roy’s account, these Nikkei writers distinguish themselves from the residents of Chinatown, not, however, as militant Japanese, but as straightforward defenders of their particular (ethnic) piece of Canadian territory. This is bold-faced ethnicity declaring its rights linguistically and behaviourally, a vivid example of the conflictual definition of ethnicity that Creese describes.

The account in *A Dream of Riches* encapsulates Adachi’s lengthy interpretive account of the riot. Again like Roy, Adachi relies on military metaphors. Nikkei initially respond with “defensive tactics” (74), but soon plunge into the crowd on the offensive; they organize patrols and post sentries. As the title of his text (*The Enemy That Never Was*) suggests, Adachi’s aim

was to write a compensatory history of Canadian Nikkei and to expose the racist underpinnings of Canadian social policy.<sup>150</sup> What he was not prepared to do was reinforce the stereotype of Nikkei as a homogeneous group of slyly aggressive Japanese patriots. Thus he paints a generational portrait of the community in which the issei are "essentially" Japanese, and the nisei loyal Canadians burdened with "the smothering womb" (118) of issei tradition.<sup>151</sup>

Significantly, in Adachi's community militarism is not an attribute of even the "essentially" Japanese. Adachi traces issei tradition back to the "[s]ubmissive and long-suffering" (14) peasants of the Meiji era, many of whom hoped to avoid participating in the newly-instituted program of compulsory military service by emigrating to Canada. In fact, Adachi constructs aggressive resistance (such as that displayed by Nikkei during the 1907 riot) as, if not exactly quintessentially Canadian, at least a type of resistance necessitated by Canadian social conditions.<sup>152</sup>

Of all these accounts, Maryka Omatsu's relies most directly on common stereotypes of Japanese aggression as an explanation of Nikkei resistance, and as a characterization of desirable community traits. Omatsu briefly paraphrases Adachi's description of the events, but explains Nikkei resistance as concrete evidence of the issei's laudable racial pride and warrior spirit (52-56). Omatsu's creation of the Nikkei as a community of warring factions depends on an essentially racialized discourse that derives from ancient myths. This viewpoint is quite

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<sup>150</sup> "First, having been the victim since childhood of a particularly virulent strain of racism, I wished to reveal the demon in all its scaly ugliness and perhaps exorcise it" ("Preface" n.p).

<sup>151</sup> Writing by and about North American Nikkei has, until very recently (McFarlane 1994; T. Kobayashi 1992), featured this generational model of community. While some analysts treat the numbering and attributes of generations as given (for example, Montero 1980; Adachi 1976; Ito 1994), a fewer number of others identify this model as the effect of immigration, legislation, and exclusionary practices (including those directed at new, post-war immigrants from Japan by Nikkei with a longer history in Canada). See Okano 1992 and Wakayama 1992.

<sup>152</sup> Adachi's emphasis on the issei's pride in their origins seems less consistent with ideas of blood ties than with Weber's (1978) explanation of ethnic differentiation as a matter of pride, or a group's sense of being the "chosen people," although Omatsu's essentialist discourse also uses the term "chosen people" (55). In the process of exchanging the cultural comfort of their natal home for the strangeness of Canada, the issei recognized that they were an ethnic community. Again, part of this self-identification was necessary as a form of defense against the exclusionary racial projects of the dominant society. The "chosen people" is distinguishable

unlike that of the many other Nikkei writers who acknowledge the real effects of Japanese history (including “mythic” history) in the social realities of issei experience. In *Bittersweet Passage*, cultural practice is a conglomerate interaction of persistent heritable traits: Nikkei resisted the rioters because they believed in their descent from the gods of Japanese creation.<sup>153</sup> Omatsu also relies heavily on racial essence in her depictions of non-Nikkei actors, a strange choice in a text concerned to expose the racist nature of Canada’s treatment of Nikkei. This strangeness is, I think, sound reason to emphasize the idiosyncratic *Bittersweet Passage* as textual evidence of Nikkei diversity.

Perhaps “strange” is not the most helpful way to describe Omatsu’s use of race in her text. Certainly race remains a significant element in ordering ethnic experience from both sides of the ethnic border, and it is neither strange nor surprising that race is central to *Bittersweet Passage*. As I stress throughout this study, many writers—Nikkei and non-Nikkei alike—have equated assimilation with the loss of an ancestral (Japanese) “core” (23). What strikes me about Omatsu’s dependence on the concept of race is the timing of her choice. Why choose essential race as the conceptual framework for an interpretation of a historical injustice predicated on imputed race—especially when so many others have vigorously interrogated, and exchanged this framework for analyses grounded in historical context?

In fact, the community diversity suggested by these various interpretations means that arriving at a sense of ethnic belonging is no more a simultaneous moment in a community’s history than it is a step on the way to individual ethnic maturity. As recorded by Roy Miki in 1985, Muriel Kitagawa describes a process by which foreign cultural practices learned by the immigrant become her “natural heritage” (219). Yet in *Itsuka* (1992), having textually incorporated Kitagawa’s writings into *Obasan* in 1981, Joy Kogawa still portrays ethnicity as

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from the tribe by scale. That is, smaller divisions within the ethnic group (“chosen people”), primarily based on political organization, are represented by the “tribe” (Weber 1978).

<sup>153</sup> “But the issei [. . .] met the solid wall of white enmity with the comforting mythological belief that they had come from a land that was the offspring of two gods, Izanagi and Izanami, and from a people who through Jimmu, the first emperor, claimed direct descent from the sun

inescapably linked to racial and national origin; regardless of the immigrant's love of the adopted country, it can never truly be one's home.<sup>154</sup>

If, in reading these linkages between race and ethnicity, we take care to distinguish between the causative and the contingent, the differential meaning of the concepts themselves becomes clearer. For instance, in the above examples, Kitagawa is describing an exchange of cultural practice in the intimacy of the domestic setting: the white Canadian housewife is teaching housekeeping skills to the young Japanese "picture bride." Although the element of power in this case is organized by differences in class, race, and language, its importance is less significant than in the wider public realm. In fact, as I discuss in Chapter Three, when women from such different spheres come together in the home, especially as they are engaged in domestic affairs, their commonly disadvantaged position as women often overrides the significance of their relative positions in hierarchies of race and class. Thus, the relative insignificance of race and class—in this specific location—does not obstruct the process of transformation by which the immigrant domesticates "foreign" cultural practices.

Conversely, the context central to the passage quoted from *Itsuka* (f.n.153) is the public spheres of religion and government. The missionary, Miss Best, lives out the last days of her many years in Japan, looking, acting, and sounding more Japanese than Canadian, yet is one of a group of homeless "orphans." The irony is equally strong in Kogawa's portrait of Obasan as a fierce royalist. Obasan files her pictures of the British royal family in a scrapbook under the box of her own family photographs—separate and weighted with the emblems of her foreignness. Similarly, Obasan's mugs of the British king and queen are wrapped in sheets of the *Vancouver Province*, the newspaper that reproduced so much of the anti-Japanese rhetoric in the years leading up to the internment, the ultimate "evidence" of Nikkei alien status. Unlike

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goddess Amaterasu. [. . .] In 1907 the issei called upon this faith to repulse a huge and violent crowd of white hooligans in Vancouver" (*Bittersweet Passage* 55).

<sup>154</sup> Kogawa describes intense love for one's adopted country as a "disease," evidence of permanent foreignness: "Both she [Obasan] and Miss Best [the missionary to Japan] lived in the country of the heart. They knew whom they loved. They were afflicted with an interchangeable

the domestic exchange Kitagawa describes, Kogawa comments here on the power of public ideas of race to shape the reality of private lives. That is, without claiming a reality for race, she is emphasizing the concrete ways in which ethnic identity can still be contingent on ideas of race.

Although the concept of ethnicity may be ontologically emptied in this way of the ideas which shape it, the significance of minority status to ethnicity in Canada might be considered its central referent (Maykovich 1980; Zwicker 1993; Buell 1994; Koyanagi 1992). Kambourelis (1994) describes this type of ethnicity as “self-identification by negation” in her discussion of Canadian ethnic anthologies (23).

At the same time that we cannot ignore as readers the message that much of this [ethnic] writing seems to convey—‘this is what it is like to be ethnic, marginalized, discriminated against’—we must also remain alert to the risks involved when ethnicity is postulated in mimetic terms, in terms that tend to give it a valence based on an authenticity that the epistemology of the ethnic subject often takes for granted. (25–26)

Kambourelis’s advice acknowledges the contingency of the connection between race and ethnicity, and respects the voice of those who experience ethnicity in Canada, to a point. By alerting readers to expressions of ethnicity that are based on authenticity, Kambourelis is also invoking a discourse of authenticity. But if the sense of belonging is central to ethnicity, belonging cannot be imputed, or scaled by those who do not belong. In spite of outsider opinions on the deceptiveness of authenticity and mimesis, insiders create the ethnicity they desire or are convinced they desire.

Theoretical certainty about the constituent elements of ethnicity often leads to distinctions about which ethnic group members are “getting it right” in portraying their ethnicity. For instance, Kambourelis is critical of Hendrika Ruger’s portrayal of ethnicity in her preface to *Distant Kin*, an anthology of Dutch Canadian writing, because it portrays “a seamless ethnicity, a suturing of the diversities or conflicts that might be part of an ethnic community’s history” (27). Kambourelis’s insistence on disruptive ethnicity may also be read as prescriptive and

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disease. If Miss Best had become an unlikely Japanophile, Obasan was an equally unlikely royalist” (*Itsuka* 10).

theoretically invasive. Like Geertz's interpretive ethnography, in the process of attempting to uncover the "real" diversity beneath the cover of unity, Kamboureli's theory of ethnicity diverts attention from the reasons why individuals or groups engage in a particular construction of ethnicity. This insistence on diversity stalls on that same philosophical high ground as does the obverse insistence on racial homogeneity, where those external to the group are deciding the nature of ethnicity for those they deem "ethnic."<sup>155</sup>

When the critical study of ethnicity is intended to increase understanding of the multiple ways in which discourses of ethnicity are constructed, and to appreciate the effects of that discourse on the real lives of individuals and groups, it is more helpful to examine the conditions under which individuals engage strategically with authenticity (Grewal and Kaplan 1994). For instance, given the exclusionary treatment of Canadian Nikkei predicated on notions of their homogeneous racial Japanese identity, why does Omatsu trace Nikkei ethnicity through an unbroken ancestral line back to Japanese racial identity? This question resonates even more when the overwhelming Nikkei resistance to being identified as "Japanese" is considered.

Before further considering the element of resistance in Nikkei ethnicity, it is helpful to examine the influence of structural analyses in the research on ethnicity in Canada.<sup>156</sup> Theorists have relied on the cultural pluralism metaphor of the mosaic to describe the social organization of ethnic groups in Canada, as opposed to the assimilationist model of the melting pot used by theorists of ethnicity in the United States.<sup>157</sup> As the metaphors suggest, Canadians envision a

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<sup>155</sup> I intend this comment as an observation, not a rejection, of this position. In a place like Canada, where ethnicity, minority status, and social policy are inextricably linked, theoretical practice plays a significant role in the construction of ethnicity.

<sup>156</sup> Because Canadian researchers have depended on American social science in the study of ethnicity, I consider the American theories to have equal consequences in the Canadian context. As discussed above, this dependence on American theories has sometimes been at the expense of Canadian specifics, for instance differences between the uprooting and internment in each country.

<sup>157</sup> Driedger 1989 notes that terms like "mosaic" and "patchwork quilt" were being used as metaphors for ethnicity by students at McGill University as early as the 1920s. The difference between these two models is largely a matter of degree, since the process of assimilation is also integral to the Canadian notion of the cultural mosaic. See Porter (1977) for the relation of the cultural mosaic to class, especially as an impediment to social mobility. Regarding the

model of society that permits immigrant groups to preserve those signs of ethnicity coherent with their structural and behavioural assimilation as Canadians. In contrast, the American model demands a more complete assimilation of ethnic groups to "the American way" of life.<sup>158</sup>

Understandably, cultural pluralism in Canada stutters over this issue of ethnic coherence, or the matter of deciding which ethnic traits and practices are desirable. As discussed earlier, Canadians (specifically British Columbians) found Japanese immigrants acceptable until it appeared that the Japanese were quite able and willing to reproduce the cultural practices of British Columbian society, and competent to assume roles in the institutions of that society. That is, Japanese immigrants were seen as desirable, and their assimilation encouraged, until it appeared that their behavioural and structural assimilation was imminent. At that historical moment,<sup>159</sup> anti-Asian activity accelerated and then climaxed with the uprooting and internment of 1942.<sup>160</sup>

What complicates the functionalist model of structural assimilation as an index of "Canadianization" is its implicit assumption that participation in ethnic organizations is an index of persistent ethnicity. This theoretical assumption has dominated analyses of ethnicity in North America.<sup>161</sup> As I show with regard to Nikkei women's experiences, the design of this theoretical model has limited understanding of the contours of that experience:

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national distinctions between the American metaphor of society as a melting pot and the Canadian image of the mosaic, see Smith (1994), especially Chapters 6,7, and 8.

<sup>158</sup> Over time, significant adaptations to Park's theory of assimilation have enabled researchers to address evidence of persistent ethnicity that the "melting pot" model proved unable to explain. For a modified assimilationist model, see Gordon (1964). On the transformation of ethnicity as a means of assimilating, see Glazer and Moynihan (1963).

<sup>159</sup> This "moment" might be officially identified as 1927, the year of British Columbia's *Report on Oriental Activities in the Province* and J.S. Woodworth's *Strangers Within our Gates*. However, anti-Japanese rhetoric had been circulating widely in the media since shortly after immigration from Japan. The popularity of anti-Japanese sentiment was dramatically apparent in the riot of 1907.

<sup>160</sup> See Ward (1990) for a summary of increasing anti-Asian activities in the province. This is also the period when Boggs (1926) and Angus (1931) were offering moderate views of Nikkei in Canada. However, their more humanist positions still demanded a halt to Japanese immigration.

<sup>161</sup> For structural analyses of ethnicity see, for example, Porter 1977; Adachi 1976; Creese 1988; Fugita and O'Brien 1991.

Such functionalism effectively removes conflict, struggle and necessarily hard choices from historical process: society, like an organism, unfolds with its component members finding their appropriate niches. (Fox-Genovese 16)

Within a functionalist framework, the outline of the ethnic organization is simply drawn. Because the purpose of the ethnic organization is presumed to be the expression and retention of ethnicity, its members are assumed to participate in the organization for that purpose. In their attempt to demonstrate the persistence of ethnicity among American Nikkei in spite of a high level of structural assimilation, Fugita and O'Brien (1991) still insist on the direct relationship between the persistence of ethnicity and involvement in community organizations. They conclude that a high level of ethnic community involvement indicates a strong ethnic identification.<sup>162</sup> However to make explanatory connections between structures and participation, the goals of those involved in community organizations—the perceptual aspect of ethnicity—must also be examined.

One distinguishing factor in Nikkei community organizations is the generational identity of their members. According to Harry Kitano (1969), American Nikkei community associations (especially the local Japanese Association) in the years 1920–1941 played a strong protective role. Through the Japanese consul, the Association could deal with American authorities on behalf of the issei, who were still, at that time, Japanese citizens. As well, these groups moderated the process of acculturation and assimilation, proving “an important voice in keeping the ethnic community ‘Japanese’” (82). Adachi describes a similar situation in Canada, describing the Japanese consular representatives as “mother hens clucking over their brood” (42). Even if the consulate no longer performed a leadership role during the post-war years, the office was still influential.<sup>163</sup> However, in the same time period, Canadian Nikkei who emphasized their identity as “nisei” were exhorting their contemporaries to join community organizations as a means to assimilation into the dominant society, not as a way of preserving

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<sup>162</sup> Also see Montero 1980;

<sup>163</sup> “The consul was paid homage and deference as the official representative of the Japanese government; his position remained prestigious, his influence pervasive, and in the developing

ethnic ties.<sup>164</sup> Similar assumptions were made concerning the popularity of Japanese language schools at this time. Whereas whites expressed suspicion that the schools functioned as a nationalist arm of the Japanese government, some Nikkei regarded the schools as agents of assimilation, and believed “that moral values [shushin] taught at language schools were compatible with American values and helped Nisei become good American citizens” (Tamura 145).<sup>165</sup>

This study addresses the significance of the generational model of Nikkei society at various points. The importance of generation becomes especially acute among those Nikkei who identify the internment as a basis for community identity. Some Nikkei women writers have begun a gentle critique of the generational model, challenging its primacy in the formation of community. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Goto reminds the reader that there have been many uprootings. Although the circumstances differ, as a small child Naoe is forced out of her home and village with her family and dispossessed, having been deceived into thinking they belonged (8–11). Thus Naoe eventually comes to Canada as “shin ijusha” (a new immigrant) yet knowing intimately her own forced removal. Goto emphasizes the parallel by evoking Naomi’s musings on the lost Vancouver paradise in her choice of language for the child Naoe’s reflections on her own lost Eden (*Obasan* 58).

Tamai Kobayashi picks up the conversation in “Excerpt from a Work in Progress” (*All Names Spoken* 43–55). In this story, “sansei” Kathy somewhat nervously takes her lover Zen home to meet her mother, only to find that the two experience an immediate connection in spite of their apparent generation “gap.” Both Kathy’s grandparents and her lover were born in Japan. In many ways, then, Kathy’s mother and Zen are generational “cohorts,” having both

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social structure of the immigrant society, he enjoyed the highest status, at least among those who continued to identify themselves with Japan” (42).

<sup>164</sup> Articles in the *New Canadian* cautioned nisei about participating in groups activities that did not facilitate assimilation. See, for instance, 1Feb. 1939.

<sup>165</sup> Ayukawa argues that issei mothers “acculturated (transferred Japanese customs, etc. deliberately)” their nisei children as a way of helping them accommodate the “Japanese ways” of the issei and surviving the racism of the dominant society (personal communication; 1 August 1998).

experienced the conflict of being “[. . .] stuck in the middle. Trying to be Japanese for my parents and Canadian for myself” (46). Women writers may feel compelled to take up this discussion because the generational model of community is particularly oppressive for women whose experience is not actively heterosexual, or who perform outside of the roles of wife and mother.<sup>166</sup>

## *Assimilation II*

### *Internment*

Historians generally agree that the uprooting, dispossession, and internment of Nikkei during the Second World War was intended to disperse those of Japanese ancestry across Canada with the goal of assimilating them into the dominant Canadian society (Sunahara 1981; Miki and Kobayashi 1991; Ward 1990).<sup>167</sup> This event occurred in several stages that extended beyond the forced removal of Nikkei from the coast, including

[t]he failure to return property seized in the initial uprooting, the second uprooting east of the Rocky Mountains between 1943 and 1946, the deportation of 4,000 people in 1946, and the continued suspension of civil rights until 1949 [. . .]. (A. Kobayashi 1992, 2)

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<sup>166</sup> I say “actively” heterosexual because given a generational model of culture, not producing children is as alienating an exercise of sexuality as is being lesbian. In both *Obasan* (216) and *Itsuka* (57 and 83), Kogawa acknowledges the attendant marginalization of being unmarried and childless in the Nikkei community. That two women in one family remain unmarried (like Emily and Naomi) is a mutation worthy of scientific study: “Must be something in the blood. A crone-prone syndrome. We should hire ourselves out for a research study, Aunt Emily and I” (*Obasan* 8).

<sup>167</sup> Under the heading, “Relocation and Employment in Eastern Canada,” the *Report on the Administration of Japanese Affairs in Canada, 1942-44* outlines the federal government’s “policy of dispersal,” aimed at “reducing the undue concentration of Japanese in particular areas and occupations on the Pacific Coast [. . .]” (39).

In the same report, then Prime Minister W. L. Mackenzie King states: “There is little doubt that, with cooperation on the part of the provinces, it can be made possible to settle the Japanese more or less evenly throughout Canada. They will have to settle in such a way that they must be able to pursue the settled lives to which they are entitled, and that they do not present themselves as an unassimilable [sic] bloc or colony which might again give rise to distrust, fear and dislike. It is the fact of concentration that has given rise to the problem” (50).

Only Roy et al. (1990) de-emphasize the connection between the project of assimilation that the government established prior to the war and the wartime dispersal of Nikkei. They base their argument on a dubious parallel between Canadian prisoners of war in Japan and interned Canadians of Japanese descent (75% of whom were Canadian citizens). For one Nikkei scholarly response to this argument, see the review of *Mutual Hostages* by Audrey Kobayashi (1992–93).

The internment was the final stage in a racist project directed at Nikkei (A. Kobayashi 1992; Ward 1990; Sunahara 1981). Scholars have tried to establish justifiable cause for the government's action (Roy et al. 1992), but the weight of evidence—including personal testimony by Nikkei—disallows these claims. Comparisons have been made between the internment and apartheid (A. Kobayashi 1992), and with the activities of Nazi Germany (Kitagawa 1985). It is tempting to try and comprehend the political motivations and public acquiescence to this government action; perhaps understanding will prevent similar actions from occurring in future.

There is an absolute obscenity in the very project of understanding. Not to understand was my iron law during all the eleven years of the production of [the film] *Shoah*. I clung to this refusal of understanding as the only possible ethical and at the same time the only possible operative attitude. This blindness was for me the vital condition of creation. Blindness has to be understood here as the purest mode of looking, of the gaze, the only way to not turn away from a reality which is literally blinding. . . . (Claude Lanzmann, "Hier ist kein Warum," transl. by Felman 204)

Here Claude Lanzmann is describing his philosophical and theoretical approach to (or retreat from) the Holocaust. Although ranking injustices serves no fruitful purpose, the obvious must be stated: the Holocaust was of an entirely different order than the internment. Without comparing the two events, I would like to approach the internment mindful of Lanzmann's caution, because I think it is applicable to the interpretation of this injustice.

Attempts at understanding the psychological motivation behind Hitler's actions might arrive at a site of some ordinary madness. But still, says Lanzmann, there will persist an "unbreachable discrepancy" (206); however precise the diagnosis, we cannot make a reasonable connection between any psychosis and such an act. To understand is to bridge that chasm. To be blind to understanding is to acknowledge the chasm, but not be paralyzed by it; it is to admit the unexplainable reality, without explaining it away.

This attitude signifies another theoretical pause. If we agree to be blind to the "reasonable" interpretation, our gaze shifts from the ordinary source of the action and its perpetrators to the actions and perceptions of those who are its target. This process redefines analytical categories so that once again "passive victims" become "agents." The source of the theoretical interpretation also changes. Where it once originated in the researcher, it now

resembles a dialectic exchange between agents. The authority of the researcher and that of the agent are complementary because they are qualitatively different. Silence becomes an indispensable component of theoretical discourse.

Interpreting the assimilationist effects of the internment from this theoretical standpoint involves quantitative and qualitative changes in the approach to source materials. More attention is paid to personal exchanges such as journals and letters. The “vernacular” or “ethnic” press is granted equal standing with media in the dominant society. Resistance groups are identified, and their activities explored in depth. Authority of the Nikkei voice is acknowledged by granting it analytical space in the interpretation. In this way, researchers reduce the ontological and philosophical distance between the event and its analysis, surrendering to history in the active voice, as Ayukawa models for us.

In general terms, while the internment might be judged successful as a project of structural assimilation, the action prompted behavioural reactions in certain individuals and groups that suggest it also increased the level of diversity and cultural expression. Nikkei were removed from British Columbia’s “protected zone”<sup>168</sup> solely on the basis of their racial ancestry (*Report on the Administration of Japanese Affairs in Canada* 5).<sup>169</sup> No distinctions were made based on class or religion. However, community diversity soon became apparent in the way Nikkei exercised the limited choices they did have. Those with sufficient income could move to “self-supporting” communities outside of the protected zone, or go east of the Rocky Mountains. Those of the Buddhist faith primarily went to Sandon. The Anglican Church assisted its members to move to Slocan. Families of the men (mostly Japanese nationals) who were put to work building the Hope-Princeton highway were sent to Tashme (Adachi 257). These decisions were not, necessarily, indicative of individual loyalties, choice, or conviction: “My family were not

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<sup>168</sup> The protected zone was that area within 100 miles of the Pacific coast.

<sup>169</sup> Japanese nationals and able-bodied men were categorized as more dangerous than remaining community members. However, Canada’s own national interests seem to have played a part in this distinction: putting many of these men on work crews at critical defense sites such as railway lines posed a greater threat to national security than confining them to ghost towns in the interior would have. (Adachi 1976)

really members of a church but when we heard non-members could go with them [to Slocan] we applied to the Anglican church" (Ikeda 122). Nor were individual preferences necessarily honoured, even when choices were offered. In a letter to her husband, Chiyo Umezuki reported that "Mrs. Goto," who had decided to try working the beet fields in Alberta with her five children, was sent back to Slocan from Lethbridge "because the children were all girls except for one boy of fifteen" (Umezuki 2).

Economics were a major determinant in the pattern of movement, since the range of "choice" was commensurate with income. Of course, economic independence was not a reliable indicator of the desire for personal independence. Before the war, the Nikkei community had banded together in the face of oppression; now they were being forced to disperse at the moment of their greatest crisis. For many of those with financial means, the freedom to choose simply heightened their anxiety, and increased the number of officials they had to negotiate with:

What a hell this mess is. The Bank manager tried to get Ed a place in the more temperate beet fields, but that's out. Once we go to a beet farm we're stuck by contract; the same with a ghost town. If we didn't have to depend on the say-so of every town Council! (Kitagawa 127)

The internment also saw distinctions along gender lines become significant indicators of its effect on individuals. Kitagawa (1985) emphasizes the emotional and financial hardships women faced by being forced into a position of sole responsibility for their families. However, as Ayukawa (1992) emphasizes, despite these burdens, women who were mothers enjoyed the novel luxury of not working outside of their homes. This allowed them to learn Japanese arts, a process of enculturation that the demands of immigration had stopped. Ishikawa credits these cultural activities as an outlet for women who sought escape from the stress of camp life (Makabe 121). As well, for the first time, the economic differentiation that had previously favoured single men changed:

In the camps, the majority of the young men worked at manual jobs [. . .]. The status of the older nisei girls was different. The better paying jobs as stenographers, teachers, salesgirls and postal clerks were held usually by women. For the first time, they had status and were accorded some respect. They have never looked back. (Ayukawa 1992, 66)

Previously, these women would have found respect as adults only with marriage. Now, they were enjoying economic freedoms that would have been impossible to achieve in the Powell Street community. These freedoms were also unthinkable in the broader Canadian society because of the anti-Japanese policies and practices of the time.

Nonetheless, as much as “not looking back” is a metaphor for complete release from economic disadvantage, it could also be used to describe escape from a completely new type of cultural anxiety. Some of their “camp” jobs put the women in close contact with the British Columbia Security Commission that was responsible for the administration of the camps. These women had the responsibility of effecting rigid regulations, and were sometimes accused by other Nikkei of colluding with the Canadian government (Ayukawa 1990b, 5).

It is important to stress that Ayukawa's assessment of women's improved position of women is of a situation that happened *in* the camps, not *because of* the camps.<sup>170</sup> Writers asserting the benefits of internment sometimes overlook this distinction, either out of a need to justify actions now seen as unjust and racist, or simply to make sense of a life—to understand. Without apparent irony, Takata stresses that internment did not have to be unbearable for Nikkei:

On the contrary, most, both young and old, readily adapted to the life in limbo which might be agreeable so long as they ignored the realities of the 'outside world'. (134)<sup>171</sup>

In an early (1945-46) call for reparations on behalf of all Nikkei, Kitagawa (1985) was adamant on this point: good things happened in spite of the internment, not because the internment was a good thing.

Some good came out of the evacuation, not because the evacuation was good, but because the people had in them the guts to make good after misfortune. Let us not be fooled for one minute

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<sup>170</sup> Also, as with any other employment opportunities that women enjoyed at this time, the war—not the recognition of women's rights—determined the extent of these opportunities. Regarding women in the work force during the Second World War, see Pierson (1983, 1986).

<sup>171</sup> Takata is describing structural accommodation to social change. This perspective can only interpret individual adjustment to social conflict in positive terms. For this reason, Takata is able to list the professional achievements of Nikkei (such as novelist Joy Kogawa and scientist and broadcaster David Suzuki) as evidence that the sansei were unaffected by the internment (163–64). For an alternate reading of the effects of the internment, see my discussion of shame below, especially in relation to Suzuki.

by the fact that many of my people are better off today than ever before, because evacuation cut the ropes that tied us to a past. If they did not rise above their suffering, if they did not try to get the best out of a bad situation, these people would not be better off. (228)

An extreme position is that certain components of the uprooting and internment were consistent with a project of genocide. The gender segregation in Hastings Park, where Nikkei were held before being moved to the interior, was to some an emblem of complete assimilation.

This Livestock Building was reserved for women and children only, and menfolk were forbidden within which fact was explained cynically in a daily paper that "it was to prevent further propagation of the species." (Kitagawa 194)

This act was at once a symbolic emasculation of real Nikkei male bodies and a materialization of the stereotypically asexual Asian male figure. The significance of this segregation by sex is heightened by descriptions that liken Nikkei men to helpless caged animals (Kitagawa 115) or children seeking the comforts of the womb (T. Nakano 13). The symbolic significance is further enhanced by accounts of the tall, uniformed RCMP patrolling the grounds of "the Park" with their phallic billy clubs and guns, and by the irony of Nikkei women being attacked by those meant to "protect" them from angry Vancouver citizens (Kitagawa 1985, 91).<sup>172</sup>

The suggestion of genocide itself may be understood as an example of writing about the internment in the language of excess, as a way of signifying or representing the event as a complete denial of humanity. In addition to the representations of incarceration in the Livestock building of Hastings Park as a dehumanizing experience, accounts of the internment rely on metaphors of hell and the Holocaust. Often these metaphors gain impact from their contrast with the generally pastoral settings in which Nikkei were confined. In Chapter Three I discuss Takeo Nakano's appreciation for the natural beauty of the road camp at Yellowhead, and for the cozy domesticity of the men's dining car. Nakano contrasts these passages with others that jar by their emphasis on the men's sorry plight, "men who had fallen from a better state and had lost some of their human dignity by the fall" (*Within the Barbed Wire Fence* 23). Vancouver

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<sup>172</sup> While incidents such as this may be read as a metaphor for the internment as total victimization of an innocent people, the weight of textual evidence of Nikkei agency and resistance throughout the process goes against such a reading. Regarding the internment as a metaphorical rape of the Nikkei, see Sunahara (1981).

appears as the site of the lost Eden in Kogawa's novel, *Obasan*, and the beet fields of Granton the unforgiving hell at the bottom of the family's descent.

Although culture flourished and a body of literature grew out of the camps, this does not diminish the significance of the "descent into hell" as a historical event and as a recurring wound. "Consciousness of the psychic wound is itself wounding" (Lim 1986, 64). Nonetheless, some Canadian Nikkei consider the uprooting and internment as the central, defining focus of their community.<sup>173</sup> For proponents of this cultural perspective, ie is defined by the ability to trace one's lineage back to the internment:

Japanese Canadians, and Japanese Americans for that matter, all share a common bond. Our parents, grandparents and great grandparents struggled through and survived the war experience. Unlike any heritage in the history of the country, we were unwanted and ostracized. It is on this dark chapter in our history that we have built our identity today. (Koyanagi 3)

As I discuss below, the success of the negotiated redress settlement increased the appeal of this interpretation of community. Therefore, the sense of community identity as a product of wartime suffering may have its roots in the positive resolution of that injustice, especially as the settlement affirmed retroactively Nikkei rights of citizenship as loyal Canadians. It must be stressed that to suggest this one interpretation of community is held by all, or even a majority of Nikkei would be to deny the community's diversity. Postwar immigrants from Japan, families of intermarriage, and others who also consider themselves members of the Nikkei community but are silent on this issue may all have a substantially different view of the constitutive elements of community.

### *Redress*

Actions taken against Nikkei during the Second World War (and up to four years following the end of the war) were officially resolved by the redress agreement that the National

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<sup>173</sup> Some writers construct an image of the community being forged by the intense suffering of the internment. Nikkei response to the internment was varied: some resisted and were imprisoned; some co-operated with what seemed an inevitable force; some expressed resounding loyalty to Canada and enlisted; some never recovered from what they saw as a betrayal. However, all Nikkei suffered. This fact, and what A. Kobayashi (1992) calls the "transformation" of the community through the campaign for redress, are two significant, unifying

Association of Japanese Canadians negotiated with the Canadian government (A. Kobayashi 1992; Miki and Kobayashi 1991; Omatsu 1992). The terms of the agreement included: payment of \$21,000 to each individual who was interned, relocated, "deported," or otherwise deprived of human rights at that time; \$12 million to the Nikkei community, plus \$3 million to cover the costs of administering redress; \$12 million to create the "Canadian Race Relations Foundations"; reinstatement of any citizenship that was revoked at that time; the assurance that anyone convicted under the War Measures Act or the National Emergency Transitional Powers Act could have his or her name cleared; and a formal apology from the Canadian government.

An interdisciplinary approach is particularly appropriate to the study of redress and its implications for Canadian society as a whole. The scope of the redress issue is "political, economic, psychological, emotional and cultural, none of these being an independent factor" (A. Kobayashi 1992, 3). Moreover, as a historical event redress had important implications for literary, historical, and ethnographic interpretations of its components, especially as the construction of Nikkei identity is concerned. The agreement set a precedent for other groups who had been the targets of racist or unjust actions by the Canadian government.<sup>174</sup> By focusing on one group that was denied citizenship rights based on race, while emphasizing the broader issue of human rights, the negotiators also set a precedent for examining the operation of racism in Canadian society (A. Kobayashi 1992).

As the vehicle for restoring honour and dignity to the Nikkei community, redress became a symbol for transformation in the process of Nikkei identity formation (Omatsu 1991; A. Kobayashi 1992). Achieving a meaningful settlement through a process of negotiation allowed many Nikkei to revise opinions they had long held: that the Canadian government was

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historical events. In the process of reconstituting a community, invoking the same injustice that was used to disperse the Nikkei may be the only strategy adequate to the task.

<sup>174</sup> Several groups seeking compensation for historical injustices have cited the redress agreement reached between Nikkei and the federal government. See, for instance, Bolan (1994). In the Vancouver media, British Columbians debated Chinese Canadians' request for redress of the head tax in terms of its relation to the successful Nikkei campaign for redress. Then minister for Multiculturalism, Sheila Finestone, offered an apology to six different groups

totalitarian; that the internment was a blessing in disguise; that their forced dispersal across Canada was a good thing because it made them less visible and, therefore, less vulnerable to racial exclusion; that their identity as second and third generation immigrants was far more indelible than their identity as Canadian citizens (A. Kobayashi 1992, 3–4). In the larger—multicultural—Canadian context, the campaign for redress activated political resistance by a number of subordinated groups as a component of national identity. As part of the redress campaign, approximately 500 Nikkei joined together for the “Ottawa Rally” on Parliament Hill. Once there, they deposited 15,000 signed postcards in support of their struggle (Miki and Kobayashi 1992, 118–123). The rally

showed that if a ‘third force’ exists [in] Canadian politics it is most effective not as a narrow bid for power by minority ethnocultural groups reacting to a need to preserve old world traditions, but as an expression of the will to equality (A. Kobayashi 1992, 4)

Dignity and honour are two human qualities that Nikkei consistently mention in texts that address the impact of the internment and redress on the individual and on the community. Where the government’s wartime actions had stripped Nikkei of dignity and honour, a “just and honourable”<sup>175</sup> settlement would restore those fundamental qualities to community members individually and collectively. Some texts speak of this exchange in concrete terms, of dignity and honour being “taken” by the internment and “returned” by redress (Omatsu 1991). Other interpretations treat the process in terms of a transformation of consciousness, whereby redress became the means by which Nikkei recognized or acknowledged their pre-existent rights as Canadian citizens (A. Kobayashi 1992; Kogawa 1992).

These are not exclusive positions, nor exhaustive of other “insider” perspectives on redress:

Redress was a complex issue that reverberated in every nook and cranny of my community, and it was a volatile issue that, at times, threatened to divide us. In the process, though, it was a liberating issue that brought us together in our desire to reach a meaningful settlement. (A. Miki 12)

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that requested redress, but refused to pay reparations, protesting that “[t]he government cannot rewrite history” (Bolan 1994).

<sup>175</sup> This phrase is ubiquitous in Nikkei accounts of redress.

One expression of the division to which Miki refers is the difference of opinion that arose over whether to seek individual or group compensation.<sup>176</sup> Because this philosophical division highlights different group values, it is, itself, an expression of community identity. However, some Nikkei see in the division a weakness that government officials, reluctant to negotiate, were manipulating "to define us to their advantage" (Kogawa 1992, 182).

Each of these perspectives represents a negotiation between ascribed and voluntary identity. Omatsu's perception that tokens of Nikkei culture had been taken and returned is consistent with her presentation of culture as artefact. A subtext of *Bittersweet Passage* is Omatsu's summary of Nikkei history in Canada. This historical record constructs culture as a collection of heritable traits that suffer dilution and extinction over time and distance away from Japan, the originary site of that culture. Time away from tradition is measured in generations:

Roger's taciturnity was surely another manifestation of nisei self-control and an indication of our generational differences. It was as though with each decade spent away from that chain of volcanic islands in the Pacific Ocean we were losing our ancestors' iron-like Japanese core. (23)

Thus even the shame which Omatsu presents as being at the root of the Nikkei's damaged psyches bears generational markers. Dignity and honour were returned to all community members. However, each generation experienced the shame that the uprooting and its consequent actions had activated according to what that generation understood (or was constructed as understanding) shame to be, and what material implications that idea of shame had on individual lives. Omatsu indicates that, after achieving the redress settlement, Nikkei found themselves "proud of being Japanese Canadian. As Joy Kogawa has expressed it, 'finally we could feel comfortable in our skin'" (*Bittersweet Passage* 171). In *Itsuka*, one of

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<sup>176</sup> Briefly, the community was divided over whether to negotiate for individual or group compensation. This debate reflected two viewpoints that were presented as being characteristic of different types of Nikkei. Those urging collective compensation (led by the National Redress Committee, later reformed and named the Japanese Canadian National Redress Association of Survivors) characterized the struggle for individual compensation as greedy and disrespectful of their elders. These issei, the Survivors claimed, were uncomfortable with the public airing of a shameful past. Those urging individual compensation (represented by the National Association of Japanese Canadians, the umbrella organization of Canadian Nikkei) enjoyed the support of

Kogawa's characters explains this harmonizing of the individual and the public sense of the Nikkei self as between being able to "finally feel that I'm a Canadian" (286).

It may be that for some Nikkei this harmony between an intellectual knowledge of the right to belong and public acknowledgement of that right happened relatively quickly. But several writers refer to the reconciliation as a complicated and painful process of "healing," a discourse that has also dominated testimony on the impact of the Indian residential school system on First Nations in Canada:

At a public community meeting in 1984 David Suzuki said, "As an adult, I ended up in psychoanalysis and was shocked to discover that virtually every psychological problem I had traced right back to the evacuation." Before redress the community similarly seemed to be in a state of psychosis. But by bringing a shameful past into the open and, more importantly, by demanding and fighting for its rights, the community became engaged in an important healing process. (*Bittersweet Passage* 171)

Regardless of the tenuous nature of the implied link between psychoanalysis and psychosis, Omatsu's characterization of Nikkei as "psychotic" before redress constructs the community as an afflicted whole. In *Obasan* and *Itsuka*, Kogawa also uses the metaphor of disease to explain the impact of the internment in particular and racism in general, on the Nikkei community. Earlier I observed that relying on biological metaphors of the body and disease in the discussion of exclusionary practices (such as racism) may shift the focus from individual responsibility for racist acts to a perception of racism as something that might be "caught" like a virus, and from which the individual or group may, in time, recover.<sup>177</sup> In this case, the metaphor of disease is doubly confounding because it relieves the instigators of responsibility.

The Nikkei community was indeed ailing from the internment (Kogawa 1981 and 1992; Adachi 1976; Oikawa 1992; Nakano 1980), but rather than rely on the metaphor of disease,

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the majority. This division led to bitter exchanges throughout the campaign; see issues of the *New Canadian* 1984–1988.

<sup>177</sup> In fact to "recover" from a bout of racism one may need to "cover again" the predisposing causes of the act. For example, in his "Acknowledgement" to Nikkei, then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (1988) prefaced his public acknowledgement of the injustice of the uprooting and internment with the qualifying phrase, "Despite perceived military necessities at the time[. . .]" (*Itsuka* n.p.). These words might be understood to imply that the government of the day had just cause for their actions. Also implicit in his statement is the idea that an analysis of wartime

some writers characterize the event as a wounding attack that separated community members from their homes and from their identities:

The Park [Hastings Park] had its share of drunkards and gamblers, but the great majority were a psychologically bruised, badly puzzled and frequently apathetic group of people, though they attempted to continue their precious practices of religious worship, concerts and meetings and tried to achieve some semblance of order and unity in the midst of broken lives. (Adachi 247)

Just as the testimonies by First Nations peoples correlates with the high rate of psychological disorders in First Nations communities with the abuse suffered in residential schools, Adachi's description assigns responsibility for the Nikkei's "psychological bruising" to the instigators of their wartime abuse. Conversely, Omatsu's use of an extreme form of mental illness to describe this condition of injury introduces the possibility that, because they were mentally compromised, Nikkei were complicit with the injustice. Omatsu supports this analysis by her interpretation that certain cultural mores held by the Nikkei were evidence of their "Japanese" or "issei" passivity (*Bittersweet Passage* 55–69). To describe the community as being in a state of psychosis also implies that those who were targeted by wartime injustice were the Canadians who had lost their grasp of reality. Conversely, it was the Nikkei's realization of the acute division between Canadian tenets of equality and their material experience that led to the redress of that inequitable situation. Thus, as a rhetorical strategy, describing the psychologically broken state of the Nikkei community as a psychosis may underscore the degree to which the community suffered the consequences of racism without extending our knowledge of the parameters of racism.<sup>178</sup>

For different reasons, the ambiguity in Omatsu's analysis of community suffering is consistent with the treatment of shame in her text, and in others (Adachi 1976; Kogawa 1981 and 1992; Okano 1992). Omatsu chooses not to specify who possesses the "shameful past" (171) that is called up and exorcised. We are to understand, I think, that each aspect of this

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actions as "unjust" is possible only in retrospect, thanks especially to our present understanding of what being a multicultural nation entails.

<sup>178</sup> "We must learn that a struggle must continually be waged against racism and its horrible consequences, which are always felt in the daily lives of quite particular human beings" (Ed Broadbent, "Foreword," *Bittersweet Passage* 14).

episode in wartime history (including Canadians' response to the events of those years right up until the redress settlement was reached) bears a trace of shame that belongs to each person affected by the injustice. The official acts and public acquiescence to those acts were "shameful," but so is the process of raising that subject in public (171), or any of the many other 'shame-causing' situations which might call in question one's *giri* (duty of keeping one's name and reputation unspotted by any imputation)" (Adachi 89). Examining the possible meanings of shame for the Nikkei community may help us as readers to appreciate the significance of Art Miki's description of the campaign for redress as the "struggle to win the approval of the Canadian public" (9).

To understand the significance of shame in relation to critical events in the history of Nikkei in Canada, one has to appreciate that Japanese culture is "socially preoccupied."<sup>179</sup> Therefore, within that culture, status, role-appropriate behaviour, and commitment to one's intimates shape material reality and the individual's sense of self (Lebra 1976). Within those three categories, shame operates as both a prime motivation and punishment for behaviour.

*Shikata ga nai*. It can't be helped. There is nothing to be done. Its goodness lies in a certain acceptance, a giving of oneself to the world as it is. But it can modulate into resignation, passivity. So one doesn't speak because there is no use in it, *shikata ga nai*, no use calling so much attention to oneself, to one's family, no use to shame others, both inside and outside. (Yamamoto 139)

The extent to which shame remains a powerful force in Nikkei culture is apparent in Yamamoto's reflections and in Adachi's explanation of "shame-causing" behaviour.

At the most elementary level, the individual and the group are believed to share the same pride and shame. From a very young age, a child is taught appropriate behaviour by her family and teachers, who stress that inappropriate behaviour will embarrass or bring shame to the family, school, town, and so on. The threat of isolation from the group is commonly used as a deterrent to bad behaviour. As well, caregivers sensitize children to the idea of punishment by

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<sup>179</sup> Lebra uses this term as a descriptive "label" for Japanese culture (2). To be "socially preoccupied" is to be highly sensitive to the others in one's social environment: "When the individual experiences inner pleasure or pain, joy or suffering, hope or despair, he tends to be

an outsider to gain compliance. Thus, while the child may act (or not act) out of guilt or embarrassment, or even out of fear over the imagined consequences, it is the concept of shame that is invoked to give moral force to these imagined consequences.

Among older children and adults, shame also arises when one's actions are inappropriate to one's recognizable role or status. Here status involves one's gender (recalling that a woman ought to be *onna-rashii* or "like" a woman), level of education, position in a company, socio-economic class, position in the family or community, age, and so on. This kind of role-appropriateness includes one's behaviour as well as one's clothing and accessories (including make-up), the level of language spoken, and the amount of respect one deserves. Lebra attributes this commitment to status-appropriate behaviour with a strong regulatory function:

Status orientation with a deep sense of pride and shame is among the factors embedded in Japanese culture that keep dependency from going too far. A proud person will not automatically ask or accept help from others; he will first weigh the risk of shaming himself by having to be helped against the risk of going without needed help to keep his status intact. (80)

However, it is the weight of having shame exposed—individual shame known to the group, and group shame known to those outside the group—that also determines and regulates behaviour. Lebra stresses that a private sense of shame is often sufficient punishment for humiliation. Furthermore, collective shame heightens when a dishonourable act becomes known outside the group. "The worst crime of a group member, then, is to expose the group shame" (36).

Among Nikkei, the meaning of shame was another aspect of culture that varied according to generation. The *issei*, who were raised according to Japanese cultural values, are often perceived as perpetuating ideas of shame without hesitation (Adachi 1976; Kogawa 1981; Kitagawa 1985). Their *nisei* children identified in shame a weighty contrast to the apparently carefree freedom of their classmates. This contrast between the "old" Japanese ways and the "new" Canadian ones was described as the root of the "bitter conflict with this rigid [Japanese] system" (Adachi 118). As others have observed, the transformation of culture in successive

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preoccupied with his relationship to some *hito* [person]" (2). Except where specified, my

generations often displays exaggerated tendencies in certain areas (Lebra 1976; Maykovich 1980; Kendis 1989). In Canadian Nikkei society, I would identify cultural norms around shame as one such area.

### *Multiculturalism*

While the transformation of communal identity facilitated the redress process, the greater political context had also changed dramatically since the internment (A. Kobayashi 1992). This institutional change had produced an environment supportive of the idea of human rights that structured the Nikkei campaign for redress. Among a number of other official policies instituted to address individual and collective rights, the "elaboration" (Driedger 1989) of ethnic rights in the Multiculturalism Act (1988) had been redefined. Where once multicultural policy emphasized the retention of heritage, it now focused on equality rights (A. Kobayashi 1992).<sup>180</sup> For example, the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism had been struck "to find strategies to ensure the full participation of all Canadians in the cultural development of our society" (*Annual Report of the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism 1981/82*, 1). While this mission statement indicates willingness on the part of the federal government to change, the tenacity of the government's resistance throughout the campaign for redress suggests that it still wanted to determine the course of that change. Then, as now, a significant obstacle to applying multiculturalism was forging a meaning of multiculturalism that satisfied the majority of Canadians.

In a discussion of multiculturalism in Canada, the distinction must be made between the idea, the policy, and the practice of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism was first officially recognized in 1971 as an organizing national principle in Canada by then Prime Minister Trudeau's announcement of a national policy of "multiculturalism within a bilingual

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discussion of Japanese cultural norms regarding shame comes from Lebra (1976).

<sup>180</sup> The Multiculturalism Act has not yet been revised, but the government has redesigned the "Multiculturalism Program" to accommodate a tripartite goal: 1) identity, 2) civic participation,

framework.”<sup>181</sup> This announcement recognized Canada’s social reality as a nation of English and French charter groups to which had been added many other ethnic and cultural groups. It also asserted the idea of plurality, properly defined, as a positive contribution to national identity. By dispersing political recognition of ethnicity across the entire breadth of the country, Trudeau’s federal policy of multiculturalism forestalled political indebtedness to any one group.<sup>182</sup> The idea of plurality as a national identity had grown out of the *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, and was explored throughout the 1970s in a progression of government commissions and councils, at the federal and provincial level.<sup>183</sup> Most of this government activity occurred in response to increasingly vocal and politically active ethnic groups (Smith 1994; Resnick 1994). In 1988, official recognition of the parameters of multiculturalism was enshrined in Canada’s Multiculturalism Act.

Although official multiculturalism may have grown out of the demands by ethnic groups for equity, the policy has been carefully crafted to maintain a balance between benevolence and control in the management of ethnicity in Canada. The Act specifies that the Canadian government “recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society” (836).<sup>184</sup> In *Itsuka*, Kogawa comments on the soothing effect those words have, especially when they are used as an ideological alternative to the violence of a passionately mono-cultural state. Speaking at an “ethnocultural” breakfast sponsored by the Ministry of Multiculturalism, the minister has just prefaced his comments with the assurance that he, too, is an immigrant. The minister squirms as one of the guests berates him for assuming that “ethnic” is synonymous with “immigrant.” But as a guest with “a heavy European accent” begins speaking, the minister relaxes:

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and 3) social justice. These changes were designed to “keep pace with” the increasing diversity in Canada (*Multiculturalism: Respect, Equality, Diversity*, n.p.).

<sup>181</sup> Hansard, *House of Commons Debates* 8 October 1971, 8545).

<sup>182</sup> For discussion of Trudeau’s position on multiculturalism, see Smith (1994).

<sup>183</sup> These included, for example, establishment of a federal ministry of state for multiculturalism (1972) and appointment of the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism (1973).

<sup>184</sup> The perception of multiculturalism as a reflection of cultural diversity is still popularly held (Cardozo and Musto 1997).

The man thanks the minister effusively, declaring that in the country he fled, any criticism of the Government would have been severely punished, and that he's sure others in the room feel, as he does, a great sense of gratitude for the wonders of this wonderland, Canada. The minister signals appreciation with a genial wave. (197–98)

When Prime Minister Brian Mulroney apologized to Nikkei in the House of Commons, he described the wartime treatment of them as behaviour that “went against the very nature of our country.”<sup>185</sup> This description officially recognized diversity as a foundational Canadian characteristic in the present and, the apology implies, retroactively. How, then, do we understand why the redress campaign had to be initiated by those whom Canada had disenfranchised and dispossessed, and reached only through a tortuous series of negotiations that consistently met with resistance from the federal government at many significant levels (Omatsu 1992; Miki and Kobayashi 1992)? Governmental redress discourse often related official resistance to terminology or actions that might imply the government of the day had acted unjustly, or that appeared to favour the (ethnic) Nikkei at the expense of the majority of Canadians.<sup>186</sup> In other words, the official multiculturalism that defined the nation as a plurality of ethnic groups, was still committed to controlling ethnic participation.

Debates over multiculturalism have polarized over the issue of control. Those who criticize the government for having gone to extremes in ceding control to ethnic Canadians appear to favour what I call “mainstream” multiculturalism. Mainstream multiculturalism rests on an idea of the nation as a state with a clearly identifiable and unitary centre. It recognizes the

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<sup>185</sup> Hansard, *House of Commons Debates*, 22 September 1989, 19499).

<sup>186</sup> Jack Murta, the first Minister of State for Multiculturalism involved in the redress process initially refused to negotiate and rejected the term “compensation” in favour of “memorialization.” Murta’s replacement, Otto Jelinek, invoked the “majority” Canadian voice in his refusal to negotiate, and rejected the financial report commissioned by Nikkei (The National Association of Japanese Canadians, *Economic Losses of Japanese Canadians After 1941*) as “irrelevant.” The third minister involved in the process (David Crombie) offered \$12 million in compensation to be divided equally among the 14,000 remaining survivors, that is \$850. per individual. Crombie rejected individual compensation because wartime suffering was not limited to Nikkei who had, anyway, been uprooted as a community, not individually (Miki and Kobayashi 1992; Omatsu 1992).

Although the Multiculturalism Act was not passed until the same year the redress settlement was reached, each of these refusals is inconsistent with the idea of a nation officially committed to the rights of the individual (as outlined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms) and

ethnic component in society, but concerns itself with maintaining the national core by allowing only manageable levels of ethnic participation (Kanaganayakam 1983; K. Anderson 1991). As well, mainstream multiculturalism defines the culture of the ethnic "other" in terms of its difference, not from a named center, but from a set of normative behaviours and values that delimit that center (Frankenberg 1993).<sup>187</sup> For instance, the evidence of ethnicity may be described in terms of a certain body odour, volume of speech, driving habit, taste in architecture, or level of cleanliness that is "different." That these behaviours are "wrong" or "unacceptable" is understood, as is the equation of "different" with "not like us."<sup>188</sup>

The discourse of mainstream multiculturalism emphasizes the appreciation or tolerance of diversity (Frankenberg 1993) and the rejection of affirmative action policies (Omi and Winant 1994). It clearly prescribes laudable and allowable signs of ethnicity, usually in terms of folkloric cultural practice, such as dancing, food, "costumes," and festivals. Ethnics are expected to be fluent in the official language(s), and to assimilate behaviourally to the ways of their adopted country. (Bissoondath 1994; Zwicker 1993). By tying funding to an acceptable range of cultural practice for which ethnic groups must compete, the government creates ethnic rivalries and stalls the formation of powerful coalitions (like the ones that worked with Nikkei in the campaign for redress). Through the implementation of these practices and policies, ethnicity becomes "as much a product as a constituent of multiculturalism" (A. Kobayashi 1992, 10)—especially the conflict model of ethnicity:

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to eliminating "racial discrimination" (as a member of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination).

<sup>187</sup> In fact, one of the chief anxieties expressed by those against Canada having a policy of multiculturalism is that the centre has been so eroded by ethnic Canadians that it is no longer recognizable (Bissoondath 1994). See, also, the letters to the editor of the *Vancouver Sun* that have continued to cite this "erosion" of the Canadian centre throughout the years following the institution of official multiculturalism in Canada.

<sup>188</sup> An example from popular discourse of the different as disagreeable is the common expression that the jarring taste of an unfamiliar food is "different." Especially when it is used without the preposition "from" or "than," "different" suggests an evaluation made by the speaking subject rather than existing in the object itself (*OED* 638). To describe the concrete practice of another group as "different" marks that practice as a kind of ethnic residue, just as the difference between two numbers is what exceeds the common value of those numbers.

We don't need the kind of policies that promote rivalries. We don't need you to toss us crumbs so we can fight each other like dogs. Stop the divide and conquer. (*Itsuka* 196)

An alternative to mainstream multiculturalism is the model of "transformative" multiculturalism. As the name suggests, transformative multiculturalism recognizes in the breadth of the multicultural reality an idea of cultural transformation that is desirable for each of its country's citizens. Thus transformative multiculturalism is a project of defamiliarization (Krupat 1992) in which the normative values of each ethnic group, including the dominant one, are challenged. There is no "common sense." Within this national framework, cultural difference is not seen as division, but as that which binds the country together (Kulyk Keefer 1995). Furthermore, the national core of a transformative multicultural country is, itself, an ideological territory of difference. Thus the design and implementation of national policy happens through a democratic process of interaction among groups. Equal access to institutional structures is determined by merit, but only after institutional obstructions have been removed.<sup>189</sup> Transformative multiculturalism accepts that ethnic or "component groupings must be perceived in the same way they perceive themselves" (*Annual Report of the CCCM* 142).

This explanation is not intended as an argument for a certain type of multiculturalism, but as a brief summary of two theoretical models. Also, although I would describe official multiculturalism in Canada as most closely resembling the structure of mainstream multiculturalism, elements of the transformative model are evident in the practice of Canadian multiculturalism.<sup>190</sup> However, I would note the correlation between the growing acceptance of conceptual categories of identity (race, culture, ethnicity, class, culture) as constructed, and increasing criticism of mainstream multiculturalism. This correlation can be explained, in part, as the latter being a logical consequence of the former. Once we reject the "natural" status of received analytical concepts, and once social realities (such as intermarriage and the increased

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<sup>189</sup> "Once we recognize that the attack on affirmative action is not simply about 'fairness', but also about the maintenance of existing social positions and political stability, it becomes easier to explain its enormous appeal" (Omi and Winant 130).

numbers of wealthy immigrants, previously a categorical oxymoron) cause us to question material practices based on those concepts, any models of national identity shaped by ideas of natural difference become theoretically and socially inappropriate.

Recent scholarship on race and racism has resulted in one of the harshest criticisms of mainstream multiculturalism, namely that multiculturalism can be a racist tool of a racist state.

While its [Canadian multiculturalism's] more benign public face has supported cultural "diversity" and "pluralism," the company it keeps with hierarchically structured relations of "difference" exposes a subtext of racialization. (Miki 1998, 90)

This is a complex topic, and as my emphasis is on the response to dominant discourses, rather than the discourse itself, I will only treat it briefly.

In *Racist Culture*, Goldberg warns that the end of apartheid in South Africa does not signal the death of institutional racism:

The possibility of a new racism, a more subtle and silently sophisticated racism, is assumed away, as it orders social formations anew. It is denied just as it maps the contours internal to and bordering the postcolonial, postcommunist, postmodern, post*apartheid*, and increasingly transnational era. It is contradictorily celebrated as multicultural diversity just as it rationalizes hegemonic control of difference, access and prevailing power. In short, liberal meliorism – whether that of modernity or postmodernity—blinds itself to the transformations in racist expressions, in racist culture. (8; emphasis in original)

When we reflect on the vigorous incongruity in the history of ideas and their purportedly "corresponding" realities, it is quite easy to imagine multiculturalism as a theoretical wolf in sheep's clothing. Nikkei were interned at the height of a war that was said to be a grand struggle for democracy. History books quote 1918 as the year that women won the franchise, when it was 1949 before Nikkei women (and men) were allowed to vote.<sup>191</sup> These are examples of what Henry and Tator call the ideology of "democratic racism"—a racial project that involves making sense out of two conflicting sets of ideals (8). Knowing Canada's history of democratic

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<sup>190</sup> For example, despite the government's initial protracted resistance to Nikkei demands which were, in effect, an exercise in transformative multicultural rights, the redress settlement was material evidence of the centre's (unenthusiastic) willingness to change.

<sup>191</sup> In the same year that the Multiculturalism Act was passed, the *Canadian Encyclopedia* describes 24 May 1918 as the day that "all female citizens aged 21 and over became eligible to vote in federal election, regardless of whether they had yet attained the provincial franchise" (Jackel 2330). It cites 5 April 1917 as the date that British Columbia "approved women's

(and institutionalized) racism, it is relatively easy to conceptualize Canadian multiculturalism as a project of sophisticated racism.<sup>192</sup>

However, in emphasizing the response to multiculturalism, we are also able to examine the relevant significance of perception or point of view, and to identify moments of subversion in the history of multiculturalism in Canada. In some cases, subverting the discourse of multiculturalism is as unsophisticated a matter as noting inconsistencies in terminology (Yuzyk 1973; Cardozo and Musto 1997). Other, more complicated subversion has involved protracted discussions over exclusionary aspects of multiculturalism, which are subtle only to those who are the agents of exclusion. This means that, at times, those attempting to subvert multiculturalism must first educate the agent of multiculturalism on the sense of the normative that obscures the subtleties of sophisticated racism.

Concerning Vancouver's upcoming "ethnic festivals" Kim Bolan, "Multiculturalism Reporter" urges:

Travel to the four corners of the world this summer. And do it without leaving the Lower Mainland. The area's ethnic and multicultural groups are planning fairs and fiestas throughout the summer to show off their cultures and foods to anyone who wants to come. (The Vancouver *Sun* 3 July 1995, A3)

Implicit in Bolan's invitation is the notion of culture as a collection of heritable traits and practices handed down to ethnic immigrants for use in the present. Ethnic traditions originate elsewhere and are "shown off" as entertainment in Canada; the festival at the Italian Cultural Centre will actually "recreate the spirit of Italy." Readers are welcome to attend those festivals that appeal and can be accommodated by one's schedule. The abundance of festivals will make us feel as

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suffrage" (2330). In an entry headed "Japanese," the *Encyclopedia* says that not until 1949 "did Japanese Canadians regain their freedom and become enfranchised" (Sunahara 1105).

<sup>192</sup> As I suggested earlier, dominant Canadians relied on racialized discourse during the conflict surrounding increasing immigration from Japan, especially the notion that "racial" difference inevitably begets conflict. Although the discourse of multiculturalism now represents physical and ancestral markers in terms of ethnicity or culture, it applies the same logic of causality to difference. Hedy Fry, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism, has restated the logic in this way: "as we become a more diverse society, there will always be increased risk of racism occurring, and we have to be really watchful" (Vancouver *Sun* 20 March 1996, A1).

if the world had come to Vancouver, without ever disturbing our geographical and cultural perception of where we really are on the globe.

While Bolan's article does not have the tone of a racist "attack," it is, I think, recognizable as a racial project that defines "ethnic" difference as something discrete, containable, strange, and distant from the dominant reality. "Cultural Editor" Greg Felton echoes this description of other-worldly ethnicity:

Anyone who partakes of the sights, sounds, and smells of one of Vancouver's cultural enclaves, such as Chinatown, Little India, or Little Italy can feel as if he were in another country without having to leave home. (The Vancouver *Courier* 27 August 1995, 11)

Again, ethnicity is the interchangeably unfamiliar; Felton lists specific geographical areas, but only as examples meant to clarify "cultural enclave." The "anyone" who will feel transported to another country by visiting an ethnic commercial district is a cultural cipher, in that the normative value of his (dominant) culture means it is understood or given. We understand that this "anyone" is an ideological universal; were a Canadian of Chinese, Indian, or Italian ancestry to walk down the same streets, it is less likely that he would feel as if he were in another country. Both of these texts are exclusionary in that the multi-ethnic reality they construct is incongruous with the foundational multicultural nature of Canada named in the Multiculturalism Act. Whether either of these texts is racist ultimately depends on the complex interaction of intent, context, awareness, and perceived effect.

The two texts introduce similar complexities in subverting multiculturalism. Decades before multiculturalism became official policy,<sup>193</sup> Kitagawa offered a prescient criticism of the multicultural attitude of her contemporary society. She addresses white Canadians, urging them to consider how their freedom "takes up a lot of our freedom, the freedom of the coloured races" (227–28; emphasis hers), and then to act justly:

Toleration is a conceit based on one's superiority. When we are tolerant we are benevolent, and when we are benevolent we acknowledge ourselves to be slightly better than the object of our benevolence. [. . .] Let there be no benevolence in our consideration for our fellow men. Let us be kind, considerate, because we owe that to our fellow men. These are not our gifts to them, but the natural currency between brothers. (229–30)

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<sup>193</sup> Miki dates the manuscript of this address as "c.1945–46" (226).

Because benevolence is a wellspring of control that is expensive to maintain, it is invoked by both critics and apologists of both mainstream and transformative multiculturalism.

With its cloak of benevolence, and its commitment to ethnic "identity, civic participation and social justice,"<sup>194</sup> Canadian multiculturalism has officially codified numerous elements from all of these categories of being. Having written these concepts on the national heart, claiming multiculturalism as the very "nature" of Canada, the state has created a "mother of all races." At certain points in the course of explaining and defending multiculturalism various speakers contribute perspectives that elucidate the nature of the policy. Challenged by the media to defend the question regarding ethnic origin on the 1996 Census, Hedy Fry, Minister of State for Multiculturalism, replied that multicultural funding cannot be allotted, "if we don't know how many different skin colours there are."<sup>195</sup> Recognizing and resisting the assimilative allure that persists in Canada's multicultural model of diversity poses a particular challenge in the analysis of categories of being in the Canadian social reality, and in the material realities of its unmanageable ethnics.

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<sup>194</sup> *Multiculturalism: Respect, Equality, Diversity*, n.p.

<sup>195</sup> *CBC Radio News*. 17 February 1998.

## Chapter Two

### Becoming One of the Family?: Intermarriage and Multi-ethnic Identities

In Chapter One I discussed various ways in which the theoretical understanding of categories of being (race, class, culture, ethnicity, and gender) is no longer preoccupied with foundational notions of heredity and biology. Instead, such theories now also incorporate the idea that communal and individual identity involves multiple processes of construction dependent on, and productive of, material practice. In spite of this theoretical shift, writers maintain the image of Nikkei women as the caretakers of culture because they are naturally fitted to the roles of wife and mother (Ayukawa 1990a and 1992; Kitagawa 1985; Takata 1983; Ito 1994; Yoo 1993; Yanagisako 1977 and 1985; Imamura 1990; Nomura 1988). In this section, I discuss various ways in which Nikkei women have supported and subverted this role ascription. I trace the effects of intermarriage<sup>196</sup> on the transmission of culture by examining Nikkei discourses concerning exogamy. Finally, I examine the transmission of culture within

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<sup>196</sup> Early theorists of race and ethnicity relied on either "amalgamation" or "interracial marriage" to designate marriage across group lines (Park 1950; Adams 1937). At this time, official Canadian discourse defined "marrying out" as the marriage of members of "foreign ethnic groups" to British or French Canadians (Hurd 1941). Increasing use of "ethnicity" as a concept of difference (sometimes, but not necessarily, implying the familiar idea of "race") is one shift in social thought that invites use of the broader "intermarriage" to denote various types of out marriage. The term "intermarriage" may imply mutuality, or the union of individuals from two separate groups. With reference to Nikkei, some researchers use "exogamy" or "outmarriage" to signify marriage to someone of Asian ancestry other than Japanese, and "interracial marriage" to signify marriage to non-Asians (Kitano et al. 1984).

I use the terms "intermarriage" and "exogamy" interchangeably to specify any conjugal partnership that crosses accepted boundaries of culture, ethnicity, race, nation, religious faith, and class (in cases where class membership is considered a significant boundary of communal belonging). Both terms suggest marriage between individuals who identify as members of two distinct groups, or to whom such identity is imputed. Although I argue against the existence of pure categories, I retain the terms in order to examine their use. For the same reason, I also use the term "mixed." Like "hapa" (the term commonly used in Hawaii to signify "mixed" children), members of intercultural families are reclaiming these and other racial terms in the process of self-naming. To substitute these terms with what seems to be a less pejorative or more "accurate" term would, it seems, be discursively violent.

intercultural<sup>197</sup> Nikkei families, specifically those families in which women not of Japanese descent perform the roles of wife and mother.

### *The Japanese Mother*

In *Japanese Patterns of Behaviour*, Lebra identifies the mother/child relationship as the locus of four types of dependency: total dependence on the mother for security, protection, and survival; caretaking; indulgence; and ultimate sacrifice. It might seem that the three latter categories define the mother's realm of activity, while the first, "total dependence," pertains to the child. Presumably, the mother enjoys the love of her child and gains satisfaction (or even security) from the relationship, without being dependent on the child. However, the idea of dependence can be expanded here to include the mother's psychological dependence on meeting the expectations of her role. As I discussed earlier in regard to shame, what Lebra calls "status orientation" is sufficiently influential in Japan that simply complying with appropriate role behaviour may be a significant reward.<sup>198</sup>

Lebra also points out that the child's dependence on the mother does not fade with maturity. Fulfilling responsibilities that are attached to the role of adult does not require that either sons or daughters exchange the dependence of childhood for "adult" independence.

Masculinity [in Japanese society] is asserted more against the opposite sex than against one's mother or other males. The mother remains a lifelong object of attachment, not only because

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<sup>197</sup> I use "intercultural families" as an umbrella term inclusive of the variety of "out" relationships mentioned above. Because of the focus of this study, I specify those instances where "intercultural" refers to categories other than culture, ethnicity, race, or nation. For a sample of the questionnaire used in the survey I conducted regarding cultural transmission in intercultural families, and details regarding the parameters of the project, see Appendix Three, "Research Design of Intercultural Traditions Survey."

<sup>198</sup> That is, in a society that emphasizes status orientation, exhibiting inappropriate role behaviour might cause such psychological discomfort that the individual prefers compliance. I would also distinguish between status orientation and the more stereotypical notion of "Japanese" conformity or "groupism." Although the two ideas are related, conformity relates to the positive regard for homogeneity, where status orientation is concerned more with harmonizing differences, not erasing them.

Compounding these social motivations is the organization of experience into the spheres of *honne* and *tatema*e (Lebra 1976, 136). As with Kiyooka's shipboard romance (discussed in Chapter Four), a woman may see her compliance with acting *onna-rashii*, or womanly, as *tatema*e and disconnected from the intimate realm of personal desire.

she is the source of all kinds of gratification, but also because she symbolizes the weakness and inferiority of the female sex in a male-dominant society.<sup>199</sup> (59)

This stereotype of the Japanese mother provides another reason why scholars have de-emphasized the significance of women's achievements in the early years of settlement in Canada. As discussed above, male and female roles are spatially organized, especially among issei husbands and wives: wives care for things inside the home, and men care for those outside of it (Yanagisako 1985). Within this framework, it is conceptually impossible that issei women achieved, or are perceived as having achieved, anything of significance outside of the home. The spatial perception of women's roles enhances the stereotype of the sacrificing mother as weak and inferior. Wives and mothers are confined within the home because they are considered naturally unfit to deal with the outside; sheltered from the world, they remain dependent on the men who engage with the outside on their behalf.

At several points in this study I discuss various ways in which writing by and about "traditional" issei women contests this stereotype. Ayukawa (1988; 1990a; 1990b; 1992; 1994; 1995), especially, has dedicated her scholarship to unsettling the stereotypical view of issei women that dominates the historical record. Yet Ayukawa (1992) also supports this perception of women, agreeing that "the men-folk had contact with the white populace through their work, but the women were confined to their family and the Japanese community" (64). Gilman (1985) has shown that stereotypes connecting race and sexuality with ideas of pathology were among the most powerful in nineteenth-century Western Europe and North America. This connection may contribute to the strength of the stereotype that associates Nikkei women with images of weakness and inferiority. However, the stereotype of the sacrificing mother and unconditionally faithful wife is also common in Japanese mythology (Piggott 108). Whereas women like Mrs. Imada invoked the "strong women" myth as a way of overcoming the strain of immigration and

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<sup>199</sup> See also Doi (1973).

life in a relatively hostile environment, others relied on the familiar image of the Meiji woman as a means of rationalizing the position of Nikkei women in the Canadian context.<sup>200</sup>

Ayukawa stresses that issei women were not only cooking and cleaning in logging and shingle camps, but were often working alongside their husbands in the woods (1990b; 1992). Furthermore, at times the women were compelled to compromise their domestic duties because of their responsibilities outside of the home. Such compromises included leaving very young children alone in the house for long periods of time.

In time, the strawberries ripened so I picked them, put them in the basket and went to town. I walked three miles along the railway tracks with my three year old, sometimes carrying her and sometimes making her walk. I left my baby<sup>201</sup> at home, sleeping. It was necessary for me to go three times a week because if the strawberries were over-ripe they would not be any good. No matter how much I hurried, the return trip took two to three hours. I must have been stupid, I think, leaving my small son sleeping at home. (1988, 50)

It is possible to understand the apparent contradiction between accounts which support and those that contest the stereotypical image of the sacrificing Nikkei wife and mother without forcing them to be congruent. As I stressed above, in the early years of settlement, the social reality of issei women was one in which the range of individual choice was quite limited. Married women worked because discriminatory economic conditions demanded it. Steady employment was rare, and the habits of their husbands often meant that economic security was another of the issei picture brides' "shattered dreams" (Ayukawa 1992, 64). If they had remained in Japan, the young wives would have enjoyed the counsel of their mothers and mothers-in-law, and their husbands would have depended on the examples that had been set for men according to the standards of the culture they knew. In Canada, these supports were absent. At times, issei women were ideologically "confined" to the family by a society and historians who attempted to reconcile the stereotypical expectations of them with the incongruity of their material reality. At other times, the women may have been motivated by shame or a sense of propriety to keep their difficult lives private, especially from those outside of their

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<sup>200</sup> "Mythologies are often liable to be created or resorted to in a need to escape oppressive histories and present" (Bannerji 1995, 28).

<sup>201</sup> At this time, the baby was approximately one year old.

community. Despite this challenge by the earliest experiences of the picture brides and the multiple ways Nikkei would redefine marriage over the course of the century, writers continue to invoke the stereotypical idea of the Japanese mother.

### *Intermarriage and Assimilation*

Social scientists in North America have generally regarded intermarriage as a valuable index of assimilation (Richard 1991; Alba 1990; Kalbach 1983; Kitano et. al 1984; Lee and Yamanaka 1990; Nakano 1990; Fugita and O'Brien 1991; Hope 1995; Montero 1980). Some researchers identify intermarriage as both the cause and effect of what they describe as the "homogenization" of society (Kalbach 1983).<sup>202</sup> Included as a factor in this homogenization is growing erosion of British and French dominance due to increased rates of immigration, especially from Asia.<sup>203</sup> However, many researchers also see a correlation between the increasing racial homogenization of North America<sup>204</sup> and the dramatic increase in rates of intermarriage among Asian North Americans, especially Nikkei (Kitano et al. 1984; Fugita and O'Brien 1991). A concomitant factor noted is the tendency for children of intermarried couples to repeat exogamous behaviour (Aguirre et al. 1995; Alba 1990).

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<sup>202</sup> Richard (1991) found that the rate of ethnic and "ethno-religious" intermarriage in Canada doubled from 17.1 % in 1871 to 37.3% in 1971. Among Nikkei, the rate of intermarriage was negligible at the start of the Second World War; currently Nikkei are reported in popular discourse to be marrying outside of their ethnic group from 80% to 90% of the time (Sugoro 1991; McAllister 1991). Kitano et al. (1984) found that, among Asian Americans living in Los Angeles, Nikkei had the highest rate of intermarriage (Kitano uses the term "outmarriage")—63.1% in the year 1977. Kitano acknowledges that the procedures used in his study missed those Asians whose surnames were not identifiably "Asian," as well as those born to non-Asian fathers (180). The rate of intermarriage is already relatively high, and higher for Asian women than for Asian men (Nakano 1990). Because women are more likely to surrender their natal name than are Asian men who marry, it is likely that the actual rate of intermarriage for Nikkei is significantly higher than that quoted. Thus, the popularly quoted Canadian statistic is probably consistent with the real numbers of Canadian Nikkei intermarrying.

<sup>203</sup> The Canadian Census of 1996 was the first to allow respondents to include the category of "Canadian" as an ethnic identity, and the first to ask Canadians to identify themselves as "visible minorities." Based on the data gathered in this census, the *Vancouver Sun* interviewed the director of the Vancouver Centre of Immigration Studies regarding his interpretation of the number of visible minorities reported (18% of British Columbians identified as visible minorities, and "one in three Lower Mainland residents—or 564, 590 people—are visible minorities"): "We are, in fact, an Asian city" (18 February 1998 A2).

North American Nikkei communities have also accepted the causal connection between intermarriage and assimilation (Banno 1940; Omatsu 1992).<sup>205</sup>

By the time the Sanseis [sic] had reached adulthood, interracial marriages were becoming an apparent trend. The majority of these being to caucasians [sic]. By 1990 that trend had gone beyond 82%. We have assimilated. We have become part of the status quo, perhaps at the sacrifice of our first culture, language and spirituality. (Okano 1994, 113)

The rate of intermarriage has been viewed as dependable and direct a measure of ethnicity as membership in voluntary ethnic organizations or the ethnicity of one's best friend: "*Not surprisingly*, inmarried Japanese Americans showed a higher rate of affiliation with ethnic organizations (66.7%) than the outmarried (50%)" (Nishi 1995, 128; my emphasis). It is this common acceptance of intermarriage as a definable, measurable, and understandable cause of assimilation that I investigate in this section. By examining various expressions of intermarriage as an explanatory variable and as concrete practice I show that in intercultural families, many elements of Japanese and Nikkei culture are thriving.

Like Okano, Adachi discusses the increasing rate of intermarriage as evidence of generational behaviour:

Sansei are merging into the wider society through an increasing high rate of inter-marriage, the rate of which, based on a random survey, is about 59%, whereas in 1941 the Japanese had the highest rate of endogamy, 99%, of all groups in Canada. (362–63)

Here Adachi distinguishes the increase in intermarriage as a characteristic of the sansei, who it is implied, favour assimilation more than do their parents or grandparents. As Adachi describes it, intermarriage is part of a complex of behaviours. Sansei are the ambivalent Nikkei generation: desiring a deeper identification with their "Japanese" identity, they lack the direct cultural connection they believe their grandparents enjoy. Ridiculed by their own community for their ethnic "gropings" (Adachi 362), they resort to intermarriage as a sure passport to "Canadian" society.

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<sup>204</sup> Root (1995) calls this the "browning of America."

<sup>205</sup> For editorials and articles on intermarriage as the means to assimilation, see also issues of the *New Canadian* 1939–1950.

Nikkei who viewed intermarriage as a means of assimilating into pre-war Canadian society were following a pattern established by those in power. Those who authored the Royal Commission of 1902 viewed intermarriage as a complete and inevitable means to assimilation (382). In the early years of the Second World War, the federal government candidly discussed intermarriage as an efficient way of assimilating immigrants from non-charter groups:

From the preceding analysis [of the 1941 Census data], it would seem that very considerable progress has been made during the past decade in fusing the various ingredients in Canada's 'racial melting pot'—in so far as intermarriage, [sic] with the basic British origins is a criterion. (Hurd 101)

So certain were they that Anglo-conformity was a predictable outcome of intermarriage, that government officials exempted all Nikkei who had married white Canadians from internment during the Second World War.<sup>206</sup>

In the United States, the practice of exempting intermarried Nikkei from being interned highlighted the gendered aspect of attitudes toward intermarriage. Although all Nikkei were interned initially, members of intercultural families were assigned specific options for dispersal. Nikkei women married to white men could return to the West Coast, while white women married to Nikkei men could leave, but not return to the protected area. This decision suggests that the United States government was operating on a patriarchal assumption that fathers were responsible for creating the home culture.<sup>207</sup> In childless intercultural families or families with adult offspring, only the Caucasian spouse was free to leave the camps. Adults of "mixed" parentage could leave if they had less than 50% Japanese blood and were able to prove that

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<sup>206</sup> "An exception was made for Eurasians [sic], Japanese married to persons of other races, and Japanese in hospitals, prisons and asylums. These were, with their children, only a hundred or so in number, and were given permission by the Minister of Justice to stay" (*Report on the Administration of Japanese Affairs in Canada 1942 – 1945*, 5). Also, see Adachi, 235.

<sup>207</sup> By contrast, the extent to which mothers in Japan are still considered most connected to domestic culture is apparent in the treatment of families who have spent time in other countries because of the fathers' employment. On their return to Japan, these individuals are referred to as "*rikokushiyo*" or "returnees." This term is reserved for the children and sometimes the mothers of these families, the assumption being that the father is untouched by the foreign culture. "Of course, they [the men] are the reason the family goes abroad. But the main point is that it's about what the children go through, and maybe the mothers" (Macdonald and Kowatari 1995). Kowatari points out that the term, "*rikokushiyo*" is composed of the kanji, or characters, for "return," "country," "children," and "woman."

their pre-war environment was Caucasian" (Spickard 1989). In Canada, the intermarried Nikkei and their children, approximately 100 people, were simply excluded from the internment (*Report of the Administration of Japanese Affairs in Canada 1942–1944*, 5): "Intermarriage, then, was the magic elixir that converted security risks into bona fide Canadians" (Adachi 235).

### *Women and the Transmission of Culture*

The assumption that the race of the husband and father decides family culture is countered by what may be described as the equally patriarchal construction (both descriptive and prescriptive) of women as the bearers of culture. Not only have Nikkei women been portrayed as sacrificing mothers and wives, they have also been represented as the primary source of cultural transmission in the home (Ayukawa 1990a; 1992; Imamura 1990; Kitagawa 1985; Kogawa 1981; Yoo 1993; Montero 1980). Montero explains this description of Nikkei women as the agents of cultural transmission in terms of role and predisposition. In the realms of language, religion, and "culture"<sup>208</sup> women transmit the culture which they, as the more "traditional" sex, "bear" (56–57).<sup>209</sup> For Kitagawa (1985), it is women's intelligence that suits them for this role:

Who could best teach these precepts? The woman, the mother! Her instinctive intelligence is the measure of her influence, spiritual and moral, for the good of her children. Her intelligence . . . how important that is! (6)

The image of the mother as cultural teacher has been common to western discourse since at least the seventeenth century (Badinter 1980). The domestic monarch of the seventeenth-century middle class; the noble mother of eighteenth-century idealism; and the natural educator of nineteenth-century true womanhood were among the stereotypes of motherhood invoked by western society (Rousseau 1762; Willard 1843; Ronda 1984).<sup>210</sup> Throughout the same era, Japanese intellectuals were also prescribing the role of women as

<sup>208</sup> Montero distinguishes religion and language from culture (56–57).

<sup>209</sup> Montero's use of the verb "bear" blurs what might seem to be a distinction between the realms of "being" and "doing." Given the understanding of cultural transmission as a process of socialization, women may be said to bear culture much as they bear babies.

one centrally occupied with the task of socializing children according to the contemporary expectations of appropriate adult behaviour. As discussed in Chapter One, during the Meiji reformation (1868–1912), this image involved a domestication of the American Cult of True Womanhood. With the industrialization of the Taishō (1912–1926) era, women’s movement into the urban workplace caused policymakers to reconsider women’s roles. This fact, and the increasing militarism of the early Showa era (1926–1989)—especially the Manchurian crisis—led to modifications in the ideal of motherhood to include the mother’s role in the reformation of society as a whole (Wilson 1995). This expanded image of “spiritual” or “social” motherhood included single women, especially as brides who would “settle” the Japanese soldier population in Manchuria during the early 1930s.

Despite their cultural and historical specificities, each of these expressions of ideal motherhood reserved for women the role of transmitting society’s culture through the socialization of society’s children and (in the case of Manchuria) men. Given the high rate of intermarriage among Nikkei and the popular assumption that intermarriage is a reliable index of assimilation, or the loss of ethnic identity, ethnicity might appear to be more threatened by marriage to non-Nikkei women than to non-Nikkei men. Yet children of such marriages are suggesting this is not the case:

Ironically, it was my Caucasian mother who taught me how to cook nikkei style. She believed that it was important that her children not lose touch with their roots. (Arima 1991, 5)

I begin this examination of ideas surrounding intermarriage by reviewing scholarly and popular literature on the significance of intermarriage in the process of assimilation. In the next section, I turn to textual accounts of the idea and practice of cultural transmission in intercultural families generally. By expanding the available literature with responses to the questionnaire completed by non-Nikkei women who are partners with Nikkei men, I also trace patterns of cultural transmission in those intercultural families which might be expected to threaten most the transmission of culture.

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<sup>210</sup> For a discussion of the construction of the mother as cultural teacher, see Badinter 1980.

### *Research Design*

Research on intermarriage has been hampered by two tendencies: 1) an emphasis on structural indicators of assimilation, and 2) an unexamined acceptance of analytical categories such as “race” and “culture.” The structural design of most studies has led researchers to define as causal correlations between, for instance, persistence of ethnicity and membership in voluntary ethnic organizations (Fugita and O’Brien 1991; Driedger 1983), or between the size of ethnic community, and generations removed from the “home” culture, with rates of intermarriage (Kitano et al. 1984). Driedger’s (1983) survey of interethnic dating among university students assumes the university to be an “open social system, [that] will provide many opportunities for interethnic dating and intermarriage” (215). Driedger does not consider exclusions based on class or racism in either the operations of the university social system or in the students’ choice of partners.

I have already discussed the manner in which the acceptance of unexamined categories of analysis has hampered investigations into the social realities of Nikkei in Canada. With regard to intermarriage, a serious consequence of the acceptance of received categories has been a theoretical emphasis on intermarriage as either “diluting” or “polluting” (Alcoff 1995) pure races and cultures. Each of these problems has resulted in a body of research that, until recently, ignored or downplayed pre-existing critical ontological complexities in the lives of those who intermarry. To accommodate intermarriage between those already of mixed racial heritage, Barron’s (1946) study of intermarriage in New England assigned such individuals to the nationality of their father, and then assessed the intermarriage accordingly. The Canadian Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1967) assigned ethnicity in the same fashion, as did Statistics Canada before 1981. Such designs constrict the complex realities of interethnic dating and marriage to fit existing systems.

On closer examination, categories which social scientists use as independent variables in the study of the effects of intermarriage on the persistence of ethnicity and cultural

identification are, by the researchers' standards, already "impure," especially with regard to assimilation. Given the success of racial projects directed at Nikkei throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the population that is studied most, the sansei, are considered by many to be already a thoroughly assimilated group.<sup>211</sup> In fact, many Nikkei view the assimilationist behaviour of the sansei as their particular heritage.

In her poem "Sansei," Haruko Okano writes:

I am not like the Issei women,  
I am not part of their children's generation.  
I am Sansei, a third removed  
Perhaps lost to the community forever. (*Come Spring* 41)

Here culture is not simply a discrete collection of artefacts and authentic ways of being that are handed down through the generations. Neither is culture wholly a process of construction. Okano's distance from the culture of her foremothers is the result of immigration, and a measure of the incomplete success of the project of assimilation. Okano catalogues the evidence of her ambiguous ethnicity in a list of physical clues: her body's contented response to "rice and bancha";<sup>212</sup> limbs clad in denim, feet walking parallel, yet turned in "to kick aside kimono hem"; Japanese words awkward in her mouth. For Okano, assimilated identity is not the result of exogamy, but of the pressure of history:

My syntax is Japanese-Canadian,  
Formed by generations of hushed voices.  
Pressed white,

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<sup>211</sup> This may be the reason that recent workshops sponsored by the Human Rights Committee of Vancouver's Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association were mainly attended by shin-ijusha (new immigrants). At one workshop I attended, of approximately 50 people, I was the only non-Nikkei woman attending with a Nikkei husband. All of the other couples were comprised of a white man and a Nikkei or Japanese woman. The moderator/translator was the Japan-born mixed daughter of a shin-ijusha.

The demographics of this group suggest that sansei do not perceive the same degree of need that the shin-ijusha do to address the challenges of intermarriage, as they were presented in this series. This may reflect the level of comfort "assimilated" sansei have, as Canadians, with interracial marriages that do not cross significant cultural barriers. As well, given the already high rate of intermarriage among Nikkei, many sansei are dealing with the challenges of being mixed adult children and finding a place in Nikkei communities (*Bulletin* September 1992: 25). During a break in the workshop the moderator approached me and commented that she was relieved to have another "one of us" there. This suggests to me that mixed Nikkei offspring may identify more closely with other Canadians than with recent immigrants from Japan.

<sup>212</sup> green tea

Like manju.<sup>213</sup> Pulling away softly from lips barely parted.  
A sweetness of language lost.

Forcibly westernized is as good as silenced.  
I learnt to use the fork and knife.  
I sit in a tall straight-back chair without falling.  
My feet walk parallel in my stretchy blue jeans.  
My Asian-ness is a secret even to me.

Okano's poem invites researchers to respond to these conceptual and design challenges by theoretically incorporating the complexities of what scholars once accepted as unitary categories. One important distinction researchers of intermarriage are making is that many who marry outside of their group are already marginal, or "atypical" members of their community. While this adjustment may seem benign, we need to be aware that theories may be constructed so that those who intermarry can only be seen as idiosyncratic or maladjusted. By aiming theory at the philosophical center of the group, rather than its margins, we never succeed in explaining what is thereby deemed unexplainable (Muhsam 1990).

In her review of forty-one research investigations into various aspects of intermarriage, Cottrell (1990) found that intermarriage "represents a consolidation" (156) of an already culturally eccentric or marginalized lifestyle. Among studies of "colonial/war bride" marriages between American men and Asian women (1950–1989), Cottrell observed that the husbands were often alienated loners, threatened by the image of American women as strong. In their search for a marriage partner, these men chose what they perceived to be a subservient option. Many of the women had survived the tragedies of war by breaking cultural norms, and idealized American men as kind and financially secure. Thus both partners, although theoretically (and in the eyes of their spouses) representative of their respective cultures, might also be understood, at least initially, as representative of stereotypical images of each other's cultures.

In his study of Japanese war brides married to American Nikkei men, Spickard (1989) observed that the women found their Nikkei in-laws "old-fashioned, uncultured, and restrictive" (145). In turn, the parents viewed their daughters-in-law as "immature, lazy, extravagant, and

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<sup>213</sup> sweetened sticky rice filled with sweet beans

“too Westernized” (145). The brides’ characterizations of their in-laws is not, necessarily, inconsistent with the idea that those closest to the home culture are the “most traditional.” The women’s relative youth and position as daughters-in-law<sup>214</sup> may have caused them to disparage their in-laws as much as might any actual persistence of these traits as markers of ethnicity. Similar factors may have shaped the elders’ opinions of their daughters-in-law. However, the characterization of Japanese women as “too Westernized” does challenge the stereotype of issei being the most traditional Nikkei *because* they were most connected to Japan. Whatever the nature of the behaviours included in the realm of “Western” and “old-fashioned,” these subjects inverted the usual application of the behaviours. That is, a direct connection with Japan is being credited as the origin of two opposite types of cultural behaviour. “The women of the new Japan diverged from Issei expectations as much as did the Nisei” (Spickard 1989, 144).

The image of the issei as the most traditional is further complicated by the observation that issei women who came to Canada as picture brides or, for some other reason, arrived alone lacked the cultural “tutelage” that would normally be theirs if they had stayed in Japan (A. Kobayashi 1983). While this may have been a relief for some, it signified a break in the usual means of cultural transmission and sharing of tasks among women in the family. Therefore, material realities created by immigration demanded that issei women, with their husbands, determine which cultural practices would be passed on in the new “western” environment, and in what manner.

### *Intraethnic Intermarriage*

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<sup>214</sup> Significantly, these Japanese brides were expressing their opinions to the researcher, not to their parents-in-law. As others have noted (Ogawa 1980; Ayukawa 1990b, 1995; Adachi 1976), among Japanese who immigrated to North America during the Meiji era, many cultural values and beliefs remained grounded in Meiji philosophy, “fashioned in the rural villages of Meiji Japan” (Ogawa 80). Part of the “Westernization” the American issei were disappointed to observe in their daughters-in-law likely involved an apparent disrespect for parental authority over grown children (including daughters-in-law), an “old” cultural attitude that had persisted among the issei (Omatsu 24).

These new patterns of cultural transmission shaped the cultural “personalities” that have been attributed to each generation. According to this aspect of the generational discourse, the cultures of nisei and issei were so dissimilar that Nikkei described marriage between them in terms of intermarriage. This type of intermarriage was seen as a necessary cure for “the marriage problem” that had resulted from the uprooting and transfer of single issei men to road camps:

The elements of the problem were well known. They had to do with the clash in concepts of marriage as between the older and younger generation, and with the unfortunately unbalanced ratio of marriageable Nisei women to eligible Nisei men, with the differences in cultural background between the average Issei single man and the average Nisei girl, and the low earning power of the ordinary second generation worker. (*New Canadian* 30 January 1943, 2)

Issei men could choose between remaining in the road camps or marrying the culturally unfamiliar nisei women who were “coming into their own” in the internment camps, and moving east of the Rocky Mountains. As discussed above, interned nisei women were enjoying higher earning power than were their male cohorts, and at jobs that suited their qualifications. They were well-educated urbanites with a “polished ‘man-catching’ technique” (*New Canadian* 14 August 1943, 7). However, judging by the exchanges between the nisei and “niseiettes” in the *New Canadian* at this time, even their male cohorts found the nisei women uncomfortably independent.<sup>215</sup> The community managed this cultural and physical alienation by instituting a revised version of the picture bride system. However, it could not undo the effects of socialization:

The old-fashioned mothers wailed that the marriageable values of their daughters were lowered by their being too well educated, too independent in having professions and trades and skills that sometimes surpass the earning power of men. (Kitagawa 266)

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<sup>215</sup> Yanagisako (1985) found that generational differences over autonomy determined male and female domains in marriage. Issei couples have sociospatially defined domains: the wife’s domain is inside the home, the husband’s outside, and the husband has ultimate authority over both. Thus, children are a mother’s responsibility until they enter school (the public sphere), at which time the father’s responsibility for children increases. Nisei couples have separate and autonomous functions, although the rearing of children is generally the mother’s responsibility. Male leadership persists in nisei marriages, but by consent or because the husbands earn more than their wives.

These nisei were "half Japanese" (Okada 15) before any obvious intermarriage had occurred. Thus, in addition to the imbalance between men and women, Nikkei had already identified that their "marriage problem" was one of intercultural relationships:

Every provocative angle in the whole complex relationship is given a unique twist in the case of the second generation of an immigrant Oriental group, by reason of a conflict in culture, an imbalance of biology, and a restricted economic status. (*New Canadian* 21 May 1941, 3)

The community addressed the situation officially in meetings and debates.<sup>216</sup> Comparing marriages between nisei Canadian and "foreign" women with white American soldiers, the *New Canadian* suggested that the nisei women were "closer" to their American husbands because "[t]here is no language barrier nor major cultural difference" (20 May 1946, 2). These discussions, and the editorial position of the *New Canadian*, suggest that many Nikkei knew that the process of assimilation had created a realm of difference within their community as significant as that between Japanese and white Canadians. The extent of this assimilation to Canadian ways was apparent in the education that the nisei provided for interned children. After six years of studying under nisei teachers, most of the children found the transition to public school relatively easy (Sumiya 1992). The geographical dislocation of dispersal east of the Rocky Mountains further consolidated the cultural alienation of the nisei (*A Dream of Riches* 133).<sup>217</sup>

Because this cultural difference correlates with generation, it may seem reasonable to assume a causal connection: the nisei were resisting and transforming the cultural norms of their parents because they were rebellious youth. Certainly that is the way many nisei present their parents' viewpoint.

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<sup>216</sup> Steveston nisei held a debate on the issue: "Resolved that the present Japanese marriage system in British Columbia is unsatisfactory." The women won for the affirmative (1 July 1939, 5). In 1941 a committee was struck to study "various phases of the marriage problem among the Nisei" (*New Canadian* 21 May 1941).

<sup>217</sup> The effects of the physical dispersal were, of course, exacerbated by the racism that motivated it. For Nikkei, the drive to assimilate was always motivated by the need to avoid racism: "While the desire to maintain a low profile was understandable in light of the racism the Japanese had to face, it was to have far-reaching consequences for the future community. The offspring of the Nisei, the Sansei, would grow up without the rich cultural and linguistic experiences provided by the pre-war communities" (*A Dream of Riches* 133).

The Issei, however were far less concerned over the happiness of their children than over propriety and decorum. Even in an unusual "forum," sponsored by the Camp and Mill Workers Union, in which Issei and Nisei met to discuss their problems, the overriding theme was familiar: the suspect "morality" of the Nisei, ironical in a group in which delinquency was only noteworthy by its almost complete absence. (Adachi 169)<sup>218</sup>

However, there is support for the idea that those who intermarried at this time (1930s and 40s) were already emancipated, rebellious, adventurous, or somehow detached from their communities (Resnick 1933). Among contemporary intermarriages, Alba (1990) has observed that assimilative behaviour in the form of weak or absent ethnic traits is just as often a prior condition of the marriage as it is an outcome.<sup>219</sup> As Spickard describes it, intermarriage among sansei is "the natural outworking of their parents' assimilationist trend" (1989, 58). If we agree that assimilated individuals, or those with a "high motivation" (Kitano et al. 1984) to assimilate, are more likely to intermarry than others of their group who show strong ethnic ties (structural or behavioural), it need not mean that intermarriage accelerates or causes assimilation.

Furthermore, individuals marry outside of their group for a variety of reasons other than the desire to assimilate. Asian women may marry as an act of resistance against social systems they perceive as patriarchal (Kitano et al. 1984). Among American Nikkei men, the cessation of immigration from Japan between the years 1924 and 1952 limited the possible number of Nikkei wives.<sup>220</sup> Thus intermarriage became a necessity for "surplus" Nikkei men who were fixed on marrying. To this demographic factor, Barron (1946) adds the "propinquitous," that is the increased incidence of social contact between ethnic groups, and the "peremptory," or the decrease in effectiveness of familial, state, and religious restrictions against intermarriage. A group's perception of its social status, the images ethnic groups have of each other, and society's tolerance of inter-ethnic relationships also affect the likelihood of intermarriage occurring (Spickard 1989). Ironically, the conditions that predispose sansei to

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<sup>218</sup> Also see Kitagawa (1985).

<sup>219</sup> In this regard, Barbara (1989) describes intermarriage as "the consolidation of a distance which already existed between an individual and his or her group" (193).

<sup>220</sup> In Canada, the annual rate of immigration from Japan was less than 100 people between the years 1938 and 1954. Until new immigration regulations were passed in 1966, the annual rate of immigration from Japan averaged approximately 150 (Young and Reid 193)

marry out were often achieved by their ancestors' dedication to values that were deemed essentially Japanese (Hope 1995).

### *The "Problem" of Intermarriage*

The structuralist paradigm accepts intermarriage not only as a cause of assimilation but also as a cause of the increase in divorce or otherwise troubled marriages (Fugita and O'Brien 1991; Jeong 1990; Spickard 1990; Chan and Smith 1995; Barbara 1989). Jeong (1990) notes that, among American military couples, partners of Asian/American marriages expressed less satisfaction than did "normative white, noninterracial, American" couples (325). Fugita and O'Brien (1991) found that intermarried sansei report a lower level of involvement in ethnic organizations and kin networks than those married to Nikkei. They also state that intermarriage "creat[es] conditions leading to greater marital instability" (140).

One difficulty with studies that emphasize a correlation between ethnic persistence and evidence of structural ethnicity is that they rely on involvement in ethnic organizations (language schools, Buddhist church, committees, and other voluntary organizations) in which the non-Nikkei spouse and/or the mixed children may neither feel nor be welcomed.<sup>221</sup> Thus,

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<sup>221</sup> In 1970, the *New Canadian* printed an excerpt from a report by Joe Grant Masaoka, the administrator of the 'US Japanese Research Project,' a joint study of "interracial" marriage by the Japanese American Citizens' League and the University of California. Masaoka's report stated: "The ostracism which the older generations employed to show its disapproval of outmarriages is being dissipated. Consequently, just as the marriage customs have successfully given way so will the mores of rigidity of Japanese yield gradually to more Americanness" (4 August 1970, 8).

Although others have observed a type of ostracism of the non-Nikkei spouse active in Vancouver's Nikkei community even now (*Bulletin* Sept. 1993, 19), this exclusion may happen for reasons other than disapproval of intermarriage. A central concern among many community activists is the issue of who is representing the Nikkei community. This concern has assumed the form of a racial project which is designed to increase scholarship and representation by community members, that is those individuals with some measure of Japanese ancestry. As such, this exclusion resembles what is happening among those native Hawaiians who state that the only place haole (Caucasians) have in Hawaiian scholarship is the one that native Hawaiians assign them (Trask 1996, 914). For example, the Vancouver Nikkei community has addressed the concern over representation by holding closed sessions at Powell Street Festival designed to assist Nikkei researchers to investigate community issues. To encourage artistic representation of Nikkei culture by Nikkei, that community has also sponsored taiko (drumming)

involvement of intermarried community members may decrease because involvement as a family is not encouraged. In this case, it is the community's attitudes toward intermarriage and the definition of family,<sup>222</sup> rather than the marriage itself, that are more likely the cause of weakened ethnicity.

In fact, in the ethnically heterogeneous context of Hawaii, Lind (1964) found that divorce rates were lower among intermarried couples than among those who married within their ethnic group. Although Lind also found that among the intermarried, the group with the highest rate of intermarriage had the highest divorce rate, he suggests that a number of other factors are at least as significant in the failure of these marriages. These include: recent arrival of the ethnic group in Hawaii, transiency, disproportionate numbers of men and women, and either a very loose or very tight community structure.<sup>223</sup> Finally, Lind notes that in the period since Romanzo's (1937) study of intermarriage in Hawaii the frequency of intermarriage doubled while the divorce rate remained constant.

Rather than considering intermarriage a cause of increased marital instability, it may help to think of it as precipitating the inevitable crises of marriage—exogamous and endogamous. Intermarriage hurries along problems that “are by nature the same as those of an ‘ordinary’ marriage; they are experienced with a greater intensity, however and with more significant consequences” (Barbara 1989). Thus partners who are aware of their differences early in their marriage may divorce earlier than those who marry within their group.

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workshops for those of Asian ancestry only. Such sessions also provide a forum for those who have been silenced by exclusionist racial projects of the dominant society.

<sup>222</sup> Perceptions of the Japanese *ie* are possibly relevant here, especially regarding the absolute intimacy, or inside status of the family. As the ultimate stranger, the foreigner (in the case of intermarriage, the non-Nikkei spouse) is excluded from the family registry and is, thus, absolutely outside. “Intermarriage also has an indirect negative effect by creating conditions leading to greater marital instability. In an ethnic community, which is essentially a ‘network of families,’ this clearly disrupts many of the critical ties that bind community members” (Fugita and O’Brien 140).

<sup>223</sup> Kitano et al. (1984) found a correlation between tightly structured ethnic groups and a low incidence of intermarriage and, therefore, divorce. Lind's findings suggest that it is the intensity of the structure rather than its particular nature that contribute to the high divorce rate. One possible explanation is the disapproval of the tightly structured ethnic group toward marrying

### *Children of Intermarriage*

Anticipation of marital challenges is one reason the arrival of children in a mixed marriage generally changes the dynamics of the relationship even more than in an endogamous relationship. The question often posed of mixed couples—"What about the children?"—suggests that the nature and weight of concern surrounding intermarriage are really issues of racial purity and the consequences of breaking the cultural taboo against racial mixing (Ferber 1995).

Near my home is an eighty-acre tract of as fine land as there is in California. On that tract lives a Japanese. With that Japanese lives a white woman. In that white woman's arms is a baby. What is that baby? It isn't white. It isn't Japanese. It is a germ of the mightiest problem that ever faced this state; a problem that will make the Black problem of the South look white. (Daniels 15)

In these few sentences we learn that, in the early twentieth century, the act of intermarriage represented a nearly unthinkable transgression of several social boundaries. The "Japanese" man has risen above the appropriately humble economic status of the "immigrant" and lives on a large parcel of quality land.<sup>224</sup> The illegal nature of this "squatting" is echoed in the speaker's<sup>225</sup> reluctance to describe the union of a white woman and Japanese man as a marriage. Because the issue of such a union materializes its illegal and immoral nature (The situation is insensible even to one of the state's spiritual leaders.), the child can have neither race nor culture nor humanity. This new phase of the Japanese "problem" has even greater national consequences than did the arrival of the early immigrants. By polluting all pure existential categories, the idea of the mixed child—this germ—has the potential to invert the mythic image of the American state.

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outside of its ranks, and, in the case of the loosely structure community, the lack of support provided for any type of marriage.

<sup>224</sup> The Alien Land Law of 1913 prohibited Nikkei from owning land, although they could still lease it. Subverting the law, many Nikkei either transferred their holding to their American born children or hired lawyers who were willing to incorporate the land so that white owners held it officially. See Daniels (1972).

<sup>225</sup> Daniels identifies the speaker as "former Congregational clergyman, Ralph Newman" (15).

The discourse of miscegenation as a potential plague on the people of North America was equally common in popular rhetoric of the day in Canada. Here too intermarriage was referred to as an “unnatural” or “immoral” union; metaphors of pollution, sickness, and death were commonplace (Roy 1989; Ward 1990; Boggs 1926; Angus 1931). Even those who fought against the exclusionary practices of the early twentieth century viewed the children of these unions as lost souls, in every sense of that phrase.

Writing on the “problem of the Eurasian child,” Boggs tells of an adult barrister of British and Chinese ancestry who, it seems, urged that “the Eurasian child should be given the legal right, on his twenty-first birthday, to shoot his father, mother and himself, if he so wishes” (320). While liberal supporters such as Boggs and Angus chose to discourage intermarriage on the humanitarian grounds that the children would suffer, they nonetheless agreed with the more venomous attacks that saw race mixing as unwise at best, and perhaps even dangerous. There was still concern that mixed marriages would either be barren or result in children who were mentally and physically “deformed” (Gilman 1985).

Philip Holden observes that these “nineteenth-century” notions about Eurasian children persist in the twentieth-century Hong Kong romance novel. If the romance produces a child, [i]t is either stillborn, or sickly [ . . . ] and eventually dies either from its illness or by freak accident. Adult Eurasians [ . . . ] may be sympathetically portrayed: Eurasian children are always unhealthy. (153)

And as we read in Wayson Choy’s novel, *The Jade Peony*, in twentieth-century Vancouver the Eurasian child stands completely outside of any community:

Tammy Okada, of mixed parentage, had tightly braided brownish pigtailed and wore obvious hand-me-downs; her English was terrible. None of the girls wanted to play with her, not even those who were more or less her own kind, the Japanese girls. Tammy Okada was a stupid girl, thick-waisted from a poor diet, not much blessed with looks. She always had to borrow someone else’s pencils because she could never untie her own twine-knotted box. Yet she was too proud to let anyone help her undo the twine. (181)

Eurasian unions apparently offered little to a young country occupied with nation building.

*Intermarriage and the New Canadian*

Within Vancouver's Nikkei community, concerns over the adverse biological consequences of intermarriage were short-lived. The *New Canadian* printed articles that drew on the commonplace nature of intermarriage in Hawaii. Again, support for intermarriage was still presented in biological terms: mixed children were characterized as evidence of "renewed vigor as a result of mingling of divergent streams of human stock" (24 June 1944, 2). As early as 1940, Edward Banno, a local nisei dentist, wrote that the idea of race purity was "absurd" and that there was no biological basis for supposing that mixed children suffered in any physical or mental way because of their combined ancestry. Banno argued that if parents were from different "races" but shared a culture, their children would have few difficulties being accepted socially: "Such conclusions, however, must await for a more enlightened society for their acceptance" (*New Canadian* 22 March 1940, 2).

Now the argument for intermarriage advocated the modernist<sup>226</sup> triumph over feudalism. The modernist nisei held that intermarriage was not only "natural" and "reasonable," it was a matter of "faith in mankind's advancement to a higher state of civilization where the negative emotions of hate and prejudice will be things of the past" (*New Canadian* 29 January 1943, 7). Looking outside of the Nikkei community addressed the matter of inequities between young nisei men and women while assuring assimilation into dominant Canadian society and, the argument went, the end of exclusion. An article in the *New Canadian* described the scope of this discussion:

The relocation program has brought the question of assimilation again to the fore. [. . .] Hitherto the theoretical side of the question has been advanced with great fanfare during the years before the war [sic]. Intermarriage as a probable solution has been put forth by various ministers preaching from the pulpit, hack writers of *The New Canadian* [sic], and armchair pundits of the ivory tower. The relocation program has put into motion the ways and means of putting these theories into actual practice. (Naga 7)

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<sup>226</sup> This expression of intermarriage as a function of modernist social success echoed in the government's characterization of intermarriage as evidence of social "progress" (See Chapter One).

As one editorial put it, intermarriage was not the only means of assimilation, but “complete assimilation will not be achieved until intermarriage becomes socially acceptable” (8 June 1949, 2).

Although this phase in the debate over intermarriage broadened its focus to include culture, race was still central to the reporting of intermarriages.<sup>227</sup> The general term “intermarriage” was used, but was understood to mean the more common “inter-racial marriage.” Early anti-assimilationist rhetoric had linked the “impossibility” of cultural assimilation with the dangers of racial mixing. This discourse not only used categorical distinctions based on physical characteristics of “race” as descriptions of various physiognomies, but also ordered the distinctions hierarchically. Thus, the deterioration and barrenness believed to result from inter-racial marriage represented a real physical threat *and* a cultural improbability.

Throughout the 1940s the most obviously putative expressions of racial discourse began to wane, and were written over with a palimpsest of “culture.” By mixing the material representatives of pure races, intermarriage would eliminate the ideology of pure race, “the doctrines of racial tradition and pride that promotes [sic] cliquishness” (*New Canadian* 8 August 1949, 2). American Nikkei media presented intermarriage as a nationalist alternative to endogamy, another way for Nikkei to prove their loyalty. Not only were mixed children physically and mentally healthy, they were exceeding the standards set by mono-ethnic American children (*New Canadian* 24 June 1944). In May of 1950 the first wedding photograph of a mixed couple appeared in the *New Canadian*; a few months later the paper was already debating the necessity of referring to race when reporting on intermarriages.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Articles on intermarriage often ran on the front page on the *New Canadian*, and discussed various aspects of the new “marriage problem.” However, just as often the race of the partners was the focus of the story: “He’s Marrying a White Girl!” (25 December 1943); “E. H. Lewis, Proprietor of Robson Pet Shop in Vancouver is Planning to Leave for Japan with his Japanese Wife” (*New Canadian* 29 October 1949, 1).

<sup>228</sup> On 9 August 1950, one headline read, “No Reference to Race in Reporting Inter-Racial Marriages in Hawaii.” The article was prompted by the quandary at *Time* magazine over whether or not to distinguish race in the report of a marriage between a black male social worker and a white female heiress. See “Split Decision,” *Time* 24 July 1950, 62

In the continued resistance to intermarriage there was a sense that the probable difficulties in gaining social acceptance outweighed the need to follow one's heart. There was also a sense that the desire to marry out was a stage in the process of maturing, that young people who followed their desire were either rebelling against what continued to be characterized as old-fashioned values, or were simply too young to imagine the consequences of their actions.

These sentiments were expressed in issues of the *New Canadian* that followed the case of a mother from Ohio who sought official assistance in ending an interracial relationship. The mother requested that the Navy send her 18-year-old Caucasian son home from his appointment in Hawaii, so that he might forget his attraction to a local Nikkei woman. Her concern was that the young couple's love was not "deep" or "tough" enough to survive (2 June 1948, 1). The editors' sympathies lay with the young man, but they agreed with the mother that loving the "exotic" was often a maturational stage. They saw the man's choice of partner as illogical, given the greater resistance the couple would meet in Ohio than they had in Hawaii (9 June 1948, 1).<sup>229</sup>

Racial discourse remained a significant consideration in the social acceptance of intermarriage. Certain groups were seen as greater hindrances to acceptance than others:

Anti-Chinese prejudice among the Japanese is so high that when a Nisei [sic] marries a person of Chinese origin, the whole community used to ostracize the miscreant. Now, if you are contemplating inter-marriage, it's going to be hard enough to buck paternal and community opposition anyway, so pick an Occidental, friend, unless you want to do it the hard way. (*New Canadian* 15 March 1947, 2)

For this writer, Japanese "prejudice" towards Chinese had its roots in Japanese imperialism. Japanese and Chinese were "born enemies" (2), and the issei had passed this lesson on to the nisei, along with other "Meiji" cultural values and beliefs.

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<sup>229</sup> At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Nikkei constituted 40% of Hawaii's population. Had the entire population been removed from this sensitive military position, Hawaii's economy would have collapsed. This was one reason why only 500 Japanese nationals were interned in Hawaii (Ogawa 1978).

Resistance against intermarriage from the white community did not make such fine racial and cultural distinctions. In the dominant Canadian discourse, intermarriage was still considered to be a union between white and "coloured" races. Spaulding (1995) notes that in twentieth-century American writing,

[. . .] the term "mixed race" almost invariably refers to individuals who are part "white" and part "raced." [. . .] Racial mixes that do not include "white" simply have not figured equally in the literary imagination (99).

Significantly, anti-miscegenation laws in the United States were drafted to prevent marriage between "white people and people of colour" (Frankenberg 72). White Canadians may have perceived Chinese to be less objectionable than Japanese in some respects, but purity could not be maintained by degrees.

This did not mean that Nikkei held marrying "out" to be synonymous with marrying "up," or hypergamy. If some Nikkei saw intermarriage as a process of pollution, the impurity of marrying a hakujin (white person) was felt most acutely when the hakujin was a woman. We might trace this concern to what Yanagisako (1977) describes as "woman-centered" (as opposed to matrifocal) American Nikkei kinship networks. Whereas matrifocal societies emphasize the centrality and power of the mother within households, woman-centred Nikkei kinship emphasizes the influence of women on the networks among households. Within the extended family women rely heavily on each other for support because relationships among them are considered free of the *enryo* [restraint] that characterizes cross-sex relationships. Women, knowing the intimate details of the family, are the "kin keepers" (211). Therefore, in less assimilated or more cosmopolitan families, marriage to a non-Nikkei woman estranges an entire branch of the family.

As a means to assimilation, the idea of a Nikkei man marrying a white woman was believed to be fraught with certain difficulties that also mirrored the discourse against intermarriage in the dominant community. In 1943, when Nikkei were being dispersed east of the Rocky Mountains, the *New Canadian* published two lengthy articles on intermarriage. Both articles address the alienation Nikkei faced on being thrust out of the secure "Japanese"

environment of Vancouver's Powell Street into various largely Caucasian settings. In particular, the article by Hideo Shigei reiterates the perception that marriage to a white woman represented the greatest threat to morality and the persistence of Nikkei culture.

In "Oases in Toronto" Shigei uses the metaphor of the journey to describe the physical movement east during the war years. Toronto is a desert where one may find various oases, "quiet and restful havens where they [nisei] can rest, and renew their courage and inspiration" (25 December 1943, 7). These oases include churches, certain restaurants, and "Japanese" homes where the nisei find conversation, familiar food, and "tender motherly care." Maternal attention included sock mending, cooking, and the substitution of a "warm home" for a barren "rooming house." Shigei's oases are clearly places where young men find what they need to be secure and to preserve culture. "Girls" are a welcome feature of both Japanese homes and churches. In fact, according to Shigei, girls are the only reason why nisei in Toronto began attending church: "It is only since the Niseiettes began to pour into this city that boys became religious and started going to church."

Conversely, hakujin girls waited for Nisei, not at church, but loitering outside restaurant doors. Below the heading, "He was a Quiet Boy," Shigei relates the misadventures of one lonely but pious nisei who shuns the gambling and drinking of the prisoner-of-war camp at Schreiber, Ontario only to be trapped in the "snare" set for him by a "curly-haired "hakujin" [sic] girl with bright red lips." The quiet nisei and the hakujin girl "vanished into the darkness of the streets. Since then the boy has changed. . . ." (25 December 1943, 7).

Shigei's article makes several important distinctions around race, gender, and culture. Perhaps the most obvious is the gendered meaning attached to the generational signifier, "nisei." When nisei women are distinguished as "Niseiettes," we understand the normative experience of the second generation to be male. Articles and editorials published by the *New Canadian* at this time were not necessarily signed with the given name of their authors. However, in many cases, the gender of the writer—or the gender the writer hoped to portray—is

obvious.<sup>230</sup> The bulk of the discussion of intermarriage in the *New Canadian* appeared under pseudonyms or in unsigned editorials. Because the editorial board was largely male we can assume that men wrote the majority of the editorials. Thus, the normative ideas that emerge from this writing are representative of a male discourse of gender. Muriel Kitagawa's frequent contributions often speak of a "new" kind of nisei woman, and constitute a counter-discourse. These two positions were often articulated as lively printed debates between the young nisei men and women.<sup>231</sup>

In the normative discourse of gender and culture printed in the *New Canadian* a central theme is the connection of white women with immorality. As discussed above, Japanese and Nikkei cultures consider women the bearers and keepers of culture. They bear the responsibility for socializing children and maintaining kin networks, and they provide the "warm home" of Nikkei culture. From this standpoint, non-Nikkei women (especially those of the dominant society that was preoccupied with extinguishing Nikkei culture through assimilation) represent the ultimate threat to post-war Nikkei society. Where Nikkei women brought stability to the pioneering community, settling and civilizing the sojourning men, white women signified the end of Nikkei culture: the sterile rooming house, and "the darkness of the streets."

Significantly, then, Nikkei and dominant Canadian discourse considered women's experiences to be coherent with predetermined and naturally co-extensive parameters of their race and gender. It is a given that Nikkei and white women marry men, bear children, and transmit the cultural practices and beliefs of the generation before them. If a white woman marries a Nikkei, her children will, at the least, be culturally confused; they will certainly not inherit the Nikkei culture that ought to be rightfully theirs:

A dark bleak future is predicted for those who wander out of the fold to marry an outsider. Little Tommy's first grade teacher asked him,  
"Your last name sounds Japanese. Are your parents Japanese?"

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<sup>230</sup> Some writers signed their initials or used a known pseudonym; for instance, Tsukiye Muriel Kitagawa often signed her articles, "TMK" or "Sue Sada" (her maternal grandmother's name), and her poems, "Dana." She was also known as the author of certain unsigned columns, such as "Water 'Neath the Bridge," "For A' That," and "Hello There" (Kitagawa viii).

<sup>231</sup> See, for instance, the columns "Deborah and I" and "Femme Fare."

"No, teacher."  
 "Then what nationality are they?"  
 "I don't know." (Naga 7)

This excerpt from the same issue of the *New Canadian* is part of Joseph Naga's ironic comment on his community's resistance to intermarriage. While Naga agrees that intermarriage provides only a partial solution to the "assimilation problem," he shares the conviction that losing one's culture is a corollary to marrying out. That is, intermarriage does not substitute one complete culture for another, but dissipates ethnicity by creating an ambiguous and unrecognizable third culture.

The *New Canadian* continued to feature this more complicated picture of intermarriage throughout the following decades. As much space was dedicated to factors such as economics, age, and nationality as was granted race and conventional ideas of culture. Social resistance to intermarriage, and especially to the children of intermarriage, was still discussed as a necessary consideration in the decision of whether or not to intermarry. The newspaper included international coverage of the subject, reporting on a variety of marital combinations and the equally varied social reactions to them.

The paper also began publishing articles that emphasized the sometimes ludicrous realities of intermarriage in a culture of pure categories. One case involved a Japanese woman and her white South African husband who were refused permanent residency in South Africa because Japanese were considered non-white "for marriage purposes" (25 October 1967, 1). The couple was finding it impossible to accommodate a necessary stop in Johannesburg before leaving the country because the airport "did not have transit facilities for a white man with a Japanese wife."

However, the balance of the intermarriage coverage in the *New Canadian* during the 1960s and 70s concerned the ambiguous identity of the children of intermarriage who, as "neither fish nor fowl" (4 October 1967), did not have a place in either the Nikkei or the dominant Canadian community. Current discussions in the community over the cultural ambiguity of mixed individuals suggest that ideas of racial and cultural purity are still central in the discourse

against intermarriage.<sup>232</sup> Although there is still support for intermarriage as a means to assimilation (Suguro 1991)—and strong resistance against intermarriage because of that “inevitable” outcome (Wakayama 1992)—many sansei who are the adult children of the intermarriage pioneers are asserting their rights to a legitimate position within the Nikkei community. Thus the problem of intermarriage has now become an emotional discussion of philosophy *and* material realities.

Regardless of the varied levels of individual comfort with the realities of being mixed race, the insistence on authenticity locks mixed race individuals into an ambiguous position in community. In “The Changing Face of the Japanese Canadian Community: Children of Intermarriage—an Ambivalent Issue?” Kirsten McAllister reported that at one meeting of the National Association of Japanese Canadians it seemed the products of intermarriage, represented the dilution of the Japanese Canadian gene pool and the destruction of Japanese Canadian culture. At the same time, perhaps out of politeness, . . . we were recognized as the “future.” (*Bulletin* May 1991, 7)

For nisei who married outside of their community because they hoped to gain acceptance into the dominant society or because they had internalized the racist discourse against them, these sansei are “an unwanted reminder of something shameful” (Alcoff 260–261). As Alcoff emphasizes in her essay on mixed identity, offspring of the intermarried remind both the dominant and the subordinate society of the “shameful act” that produced them, and are alienated by each community to which they have a claim.

Although it may seem reasonable that the offspring of intermarriage are not responsible for their identity and, therefore, ought not to be ostracized because of it, in reality the symbolic value of the mixed individual outweighs society’s recognition of their material reality. Where Nikkei and white Canadians were constrained by racial categorizations of purity in the early twentieth century, now mixed race individuals are locked into the same conceptual model, but

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<sup>232</sup> Regarding intermarriage and the definition of community among Vancouver Nikkei, see the *Bulletin* especially from 1987 to the present. The *New Canadian* began publishing in Toronto in 1948 and continued reporting on intermarriage throughout the years.

as a symbol of corruption or lack, an ambiguity that threatens the identity of “pure” members of a race.<sup>233</sup>

Whether or not a structural paradigm is used in research on intermarriage, framing the discussion within the boundaries of the discourse for or against intermarriage cannot fully explain the ambiguous material realities of that experience.<sup>234</sup>

I look at the world from a funny place. I don't belong to any club. The Japanese-ness was very much a part of my childhood and a part of me. At the same time, I could not fail to notice that every time I walked into a room of Japanese people, there would be an inventory made of my body parts, [sic] was my nose Japanese, were my ears English. The Kuratas were one of the first families to marry out at a time when it was still very unusual to see people of mixed blood. [. . .] The other thing that's very odd to be me is that racially, I can be almost anything I want. I can fool people into thinking I'm Italian or French, Ukrainian, Indian, Inuit, you name it. I have a lot of fun with it. When police start arresting me for being Native, I just let them go ahead. (Kurata 1995, 1)

The belonging that Kurata discusses here is essentially racial. As a child, Kurata participated fully in Japanese culture; it was her physical appearance that disqualified her from racial purity (Kurata's reference to her family in the third person rather than with the intimate, “my family” or “we,” suggests a marginalized position even within the family). Because her parents were intermarriage “pioneers,” there was no background of mixed race to fade into. However, in the racial heterogeneity of her adult world outside of the Nikkei community, there is always an unfamiliar other group to which she might be seen to belong. “Visiting” a round of races, she belongs to whichever one she is assigned, or “named” to. By Kurata's account, the harmless fun of this play-acting is, nonetheless, a transgression of the acceptable, “lawful” limits of identity. “Fooling” with the multicultural idea of Canada, Kurata is actually fooling herself that her diversity might be the sign of the ultimate Canadian, and that she (like the native she is

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<sup>233</sup> “Thus, in many cultures today, mixed-race people are treated as the corporeal instantiation of a lack—the lack of an identity that can provide a public status” (Alcoff 260). In his survey of “the mulatto” in American literature, Giles (1995) describes the manner in which “The mulatto could be identified with and pitied as the victim of the miscegenation taboo while at the same time be feared as the despised other lurking within who had to be punished, either for trying to sneak into the white world as an impostor or for reminding the black world of the mark of the oppressor” (64). For further discussion of mixed race as a trope, see Spaulding (1995).

<sup>234</sup> Here I am expanding Frankenberg's (1993) caution about framing concern within the terms of the discourse against interracial relationships (127). Positive evaluations similarly limit

punished for impersonating) has a claim to self-determination. To appreciate the complexities of this kind of (not) belonging, we have to shift the focus of research from the indicators of structures of ethnicity, to the social realities of intermarriage: we need to examine intercultural and interracial unions from the inside out.

### *Intermarriage and Motivation*

Stepping back from the idea of intermarriage as a means to assimilation yields conceptual space in which to consider what gains individuals may have enjoyed, or hoped they might enjoy, by marrying outside of their group. In colonial societies, intermarriage was one way of securing a position in the colony. Usually this method of ensuring continuity served the aims of the colonial power. For the European colonizers of Indonesia, for instance, encouraging European men to take local wives was one way of keeping the men in Indonesia, protecting colonial interests (Hellwig 1993). In Canada, intermarriage between the charter colonizers and First Nations women similarly protected European interests. In some cases, intermarriage with a colonial power was also seen to benefit the local population. When the first foreigners began visiting Hawaii, King Kamehameha identified the potential benefit in European and American technologies, and encouraged marriages between haole (Caucasians) and Hawaiians. Children of these marriages were accordingly granted high status by the king (Haas 1992).

Intermarriage also may be seen as a concrete way of challenging racial and cultural stereotypes. This political form of intermarriage is a more pragmatic version of the nisei's utopian marital project of the 1940s and 50s that, many believed, would yield a world of racial tolerance.<sup>235</sup> Although there is no evidence that intermarriage as an act of political resistance is a dominant expression among Nikkei, couples may stumble on this aspect of intermarriage and

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research into marriage outside of one's group, whether group membership is defined by race, ethnicity, class, or sexuality.

<sup>235</sup> At the same time, Kitagawa (1985) was warning against tolerance: "Toleration is a conceit based on one's superiority. When we are tolerant we are benevolent, and when we are benevolent we acknowledge ourselves to be slightly better than the object of our benevolence" (229–30).

come to exploit it over time. One example of such incidental activism concerns the attitude of mainstream feminism towards marriage to a Nikkei man (what many consider an act of “feminist hypogamy”). Just as Nikkei women may resist “Asian patriarchy” by marrying a white man, only to find themselves squarely confronted with “white patriarchy,” so the white feminist who marries a Nikkei may find in her egalitarian mate a way of happily exploiting and subverting the stereotype of the Asian patriarch. By examining the contexts of such internal mechanics of intermarriage—distinct from their position in structural categories—we approach a clearer understanding of the patterns of culture and ethnicity within intercultural families.

### *Choosing Ethnicity*

From my discussion of community debates and research into intermarriage it should be clear that there has been general agreement over time that the children of intermarriage suffer. However, mixed children have rarely been included in the research on intermarriage (Cottrell 1990). Again, one reason for this is the trend to structuralist research; pure categories cannot accommodate racially mixed subjects. This bias towards pure categories has had major implications for placing mixed race in feminist theories. In conversation about the unlikely possibility of a feminist mixed race community Lisa Valenci-Svenson observes that

[. . .] in the white feminist community there is so much theory, that broad category “Women of Colour” has enough trouble fitting into their theory. But we fuck up their theory like nothing. If they were to know my life, all their theory would fly out the window. (Batacharya 41)

It is helpful to study the contrasting context provided by the dominance of mixed cultures in places such as Hawaii and Latin America. Yet, despite the gains to be had by studying a system in which intermarriage is a normative practice, methods for understanding Canadian particulars (such as the formative impact of the internment on Nikkei identity) must be developed.

Kurata’s account of forming an identity from her “funny place” in the world suggests that mixed individuals arrive at an identity by an infinite process of selection. This process has liberating aspects: if an individual’s race is not easily identifiable by her physical features, she is

“free” to be whatever race she can convince others of. This is the aspect of fluid identity that Ling (1992) emphasizes: “Not only are more choices open to them [mixed race people] than to people of mono-racial ancestry, but these choices are fluid and may change during one lifetime” (306). However, care is needed not to romanticize the racial ambiguity of mixed race. One’s freedom to choose ethnicity is constrained by the reality that choices must be made in order to accommodate ideas of authenticity that still inform concepts of race. Ling acknowledges that this ethnic freedom has historically been a response to an “embattled position” (311).

As well, when adults choose their own ethnicity they are also choosing on behalf of their children. For instance, if one parent is physically “exiled” from his or her home culture, that parent may emphasize aspects of the culture of exile with the intention of balancing the influence of the dominant one, thereby shaping the choice of ethnicity the child will make in adulthood (Barbara 1989). However, exile may influence choice in exactly the opposite fashion. If it is the mother who is exiled in a country with a patriarchal cultural system, she may have little or no control over which culture(s) the family adopts (Imamura 1990).

Gans identifies three possible choices for parents of mixed children: 1) the single identity most satisfactory to the parents; 2) pan-ethnicity; or 3) non-ethnicity. Gans distinguishes “pan-ethnicity” as joining with other ethnic groups in an expression of generalized situational ethnicity, often motivated by class interests (4). Alba (1990) agrees with Gans that parents who intermarry are less likely than the endogamous to desire a single ethnic identity for their children. Here again, intermarriage is cited as the reason for parents’ “lack of concern” for their children’s identities (206). Coherent with the historical regard for intermarriage as the evidence and cause of immorality, emphasizing the parents’ influence over the identities of their mixed children compromises the agency of the children and constructs for them an identity as “victims” of their parents’ sins (Frankenberg 1993).

Significantly, although the bulk of research names intermarriage as the cause of decreased ethnic identification, it seems that a more appropriate focus might be the complexities of identification that result from intermarriage. If we shift our conception of identity

(racial, ethnic, or cultural) from substantive paradigms of imposed identity to the idea of identity as a continuous process of formation that may involve self-conscious choices, the complexities produced by intermarriage then may be seen as contributing to, rather than detracting from, ethnicity.

Spaulding (1995) also suggests that identity may be chosen in three ways, but the choices or “types” Spaulding names are decided by the mixed race individual. The first type, “abjection” is based on Kristeva’s notion of the abject.<sup>236</sup> This is the “impossible” self: ambiguous, distorted and distorting, it occupies a land of oblivion that is edged with the sublime. The second type of identity, “secession,” is chosen by those individuals who find a way out of their cultures by forming a third culture, “a territory unto themselves” (104). Others choose “prescription,” an identity that is multifocal and dynamic,

not a consequence, but a process. Far from being diminishing or containing, *metissage* [sic] is fruitful. At the heart of constructive racial imbalance is a refusal of biologically and culturally based designations altogether—and an acceptance of the lived consequences of this deliberate practice. (107–108)

Spaulding compares *métissage* with Zack’s (1994) notion of the “racelessness” of mixed identity, a state necessitated by “the impossibility” of mixed race in the contemporary United States.<sup>237</sup>

Although Spaulding sees the third identity type as the healthiest of the three choices, the distinction between *métissage* and secession is not always clear. Like *métissage*, the individual’s third territory can be staked through process and resistance. Zack’s “race of writers” is a culture of sorts; *métissage* contains its own cultural orthodoxy of imbalance, refusal, and

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<sup>236</sup> I also relate the abject to the significance of food in the process of identity formation in Chapter Three.

<sup>237</sup> “The impossibility of being mixed race in American social reality, at this time, has dissolved my racial identity as I write about it. Race has dissolved into writing, for me. I belong to the ‘race’ of writers who write hard, dry prose, i.e. the race of philosophers who are a type of artist who create themselves in writing. I do this for its own sake so that I can have an existence that others can read” (Zack 1994, 27). Alcoff (1995) describes a similar approach to fixing on a satisfying mixed identity as relinquishing the search for “home” and settling on whatever it is that will “illuminate” the place where she is—to herself and others (278). Thus living out mixed ethnicity becomes a matter of unsettling the understanding of fixed, contained self with images of the “mestizo.”

self-consciousness. In fact, any identity that depends on resistance will bear, as any exclusionary practice does, the imprint of what has been rejected.

A more open process of identity formation that might be applied to both the intermarried couple and the mixed individual is Barbara's (1989) concept of "marital distinctiveness." For the intermarried couple, marital distinctiveness is a "relativisation, if not an appreciation of difference, [. . .] blending of the elements which go to make up the identity and personality of each partner" (190–191). As the basic element in a mixed marriage, marital distinctiveness is both a temporal and a spatial concept: it provides the long-range perspective that is demanded by complex social realities, and it is, like secession, a neutral territory in which to negotiate the third, intercultural marital identity.

For mixed individuals, marital distinctiveness can be conceptually expanded to include the relationships of children with parents and with each other. For members of intercultural families, the process of forming an identity around ideas of race, ethnicity, and culture involves negotiations within the family as well as outside of it. The presence of mixed children, who often appear racially different from each other and from one or both parents, dramatically increases the demand for a neutral territory.

Like secession, the success of marital distinctiveness depends on a certain amount of good will and trust among family members; during a period of conflict, the neutral zone can resemble a cultural "no-man's land." The need for a safe place is especially acute for mixed children who, unlike those accepted as racially pure, cannot count on home as a safe retreat from oppression (hooks 47). In Irene Robinson's short story, "On Being a Japanese Grandmother," Rea, the mixed race grandmother of the title, recalls her son's childhood:

Better that she concentrate on Paul. Oh? Back to rolling that boulder, huh? Had she been overly simplistic to take him at his word when, as an adult, he'd said that her being half-Japanese had never bothered him? She thought she was filling the kettle. Instead she ran hot water all over her hand. Be fair. When he grew up, Vancouver was flour-white and having her for a mother must have been a pain. By the time he was fifteen, he'd become disgusted with her—how she was nothing but an *ainoko*—a halfbreed. [. . .] So where had he learned that word? Rea didn't know a damn thing about being raised Japanese. (46; emphasis in original)

In this intercultural family both parent and child are mixed offspring. Both are implicated in a process of negotiating identities that exceed normal role expectations. From her son, the mother receives cultural instruction in the form of racial slurs and adult denial that seem driven by "Japanese" shame. And although the mother claims no knowledge of how to raise a Japanese child (the implication being that she was raised "white"), her adult son is "more" Japanese than his mother. As a grandmother, Rea is still negotiating her individual identity and her place in the family that, because her son has married a Japanese woman, is made even stranger to her.

There can be a strong utopian cast to the idea of identity formation as a process of negotiation. Protracted breaks from difficult phases in the process can resemble escape from, or denial of, the realities of a mixed race existence:

Here, in this spiritual land of mixed race, I feel at home. I have been able to drop the last vestiges of my urban lifestyle, freeing myself for total immersion in the magic and Aloha of the Island. My soul is replenished daily with the kind of love and acceptance that is uniquely Hawaiian. I give thanks for the ancient wisdom I have learned here. (de Sousa 14)

From de Sousa's description it seems that Hawaii has reached that state of enlightenment Banno and other nisei had imagined, in which racial exclusion was secure in the historical past. However, as is apparent in the Hawaiian debate over cultural construction and native nationalism (Appendix Two), race mixing has not proven a panacea for racism. In fact, race is still a reliable predictor of status in that state,<sup>238</sup> and is a central theme in Hawaiian satire.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Haas (1992) observes that institutional racism in Hawaii has decreased as a result of various strategies applied in that state from the nineteenth century to the present. Nonetheless, as Haas's figures show, there is still significant disparity between, for instance the low life expectancy and high infant mortality rates among native Hawaiians, and the corresponding rates for Hawaiian Nikkei. Also, a decrease in institutionalized racism in Hawaii does not mean that race is unimportant in Hawaiian society. For example, Hawaiian Nikkei constitute one-third of the Hawaiian electorate; approximately 40% of legislators, and 55% of civil service administrators (Haas 32-45).

<sup>239</sup> For Hawaiian racial satire in video, see Frank de Lima (1991).

In spite of the vigorous racialization in Hawaii, mixed race individuals and families enjoy a dominant status<sup>240</sup> that more racially differentiated societies cannot provide. Although still part of a racial discourse, mixed race in Hawaii is a marker of belonging and validation. The mixed race individual "blends in," becomes part of the ethnic backdrop, and appears "local," especially in urban centres.<sup>241</sup> In contrast with the discomfort of appearing racially ambiguous in a strictly differentiated or apparently homogeneous society, being accepted as "ordinary" involves a transformation that can have magical effects on the mixed race individual. As well as being a release from having to explain and defend one's appearance, de Sousa's exchange of the mainland urban for the local, "rural" Aloha welcome heightens the spiritual sense of her transformation.

Appreciating the ambiguous nature of identity for mixed individuals, then, means examining the situational context of (ethnic) identity as a process of choice, and accepting the validity of this voluntary ethnicity. In "A Champon State of Mind,"<sup>242</sup> Wegmüller acknowledges that, from a mono-ethnic or mono-racial standpoint, such accommodation may indicate the lack of a fully developed self. Recalling an analogy taught by her Japanese grandfather, Wegmüller likens the "fluid" multicultural self to water, which in its various forms accommodates itself to the environment (87). While this interrelational "harmony," as Wegmüller calls it, may be characterized as a Japanese model of identity, it is inconsistent with the western idea of the fully actualized self. However, instead of theoretically fixing Wegmüller's approach as either Japanese or Swiss,<sup>243</sup> it is possible to circumvent the national schematic altogether, and regard her position as one strand of a "fully" ethnic sensibility.

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<sup>240</sup> In 1990, individuals of "mixed ethnic stock" constituted the largest ethnic group in Hawaii, and accounted for approximately one-third of the state population (*The State of Hawaii Data Book, 1993–1994*, 38).

<sup>241</sup> There are still many rural areas that are more homogeneous than the cities. For instance, the island of Niihau is considered ethnically "Hawaiian," and all visitors to the island must secure permission to be on the island.

<sup>242</sup> For my discussion of champon or stir-fry as a metaphor for cultural mixing, see Chapter Three.

<sup>243</sup> Wegmüller describes her mother as Japanese and her father as Swiss.

Among members of dominant Canadian (that is, non-ethnic) society or groups to whom ethnicity is imputed, dismissive attitudes toward voluntary ethnicity may suggest mistrust of the motives of the ethnically disaffected who seem to "manage" their ethnicity in order to gain access to dominant society. This mistrust is especially acute toward affirmative action programs in the United States (Omi and Winant 1994) and multicultural funding in Canada (Bissoondath 1994; Kogawa 1992). Certainly, situational ethnicity cannot accommodate the absolutism of dualistic thinking on which the privileging of unitary identity depends. Without wishing to romanticize mixed identity, I would simply suggest that its flexibility opens avenues for forming and expressing the interconnected self in the multicultural environment that the insistence on unitary identity does not.

Choosing one's ethnicity is, of course, more complicated than simply deciding between one culture and another (or among several). Voluntary ethnicity happens at the micro level of daily choices: which food to eat when and where; what language to speak; what postures, habits or clothing to adopt as safe and appropriate in which context; and so on. The choices mixed individuals make as children are especially numerous and complex (Barbara 1989; Frankenberg 1993; Hernandez-Ramdwar 1994), and often a matter of forced voluntarism. Whereas parents of mixed children may perform a strongly protective role in the early years, school-age children must define and defend their identity independent of family support. For instance, the decision of whether or not to "pass" as mono-racial (if the individual's appearance makes passing an option) is made by the child the moment she first responds to a challenge of her ethnicity.<sup>244</sup>

For members of intercultural families, a variety of factors influence the decision of which race or culture to identify with. These factors include the degree of cultural pride expressed by each parent, and the knowledge parents have of their separate cultures or races; the absence of influence from one side of the family, especially if the isolation is the result of family

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<sup>244</sup> This decision need not be permanent, of course, as the identity of the mixed race individual is challenged throughout life.



pass on is their own, or more precisely that culture considered to be implied by their racial ancestries (often traced through the father). For instance, a woman who identifies her racial ancestry as "French Canadian" is assumed to pass on "French Canadian" culture.

This theoretical practice simplifies a complex practice to the point where the results of such studies do little to explain or reflect the experience of intermarriage, especially where "non-ethnic" women mother "ethnic" children.

Stefanie [Samuels]: I think my brother and I have always identified ourselves as Black and Mom as being white. And it's interesting. I've always felt that she's sort of been on the outside of things. I've always felt that I wanted to draw her in, because I feel she has abandoned much more her Ukrainian side and our family has adopted many more Jamaican values. . . . So it always bothers me when I hear the stereotype, that the person of colour in an inter-racial relationship is always the one that will somehow be oppressed. (Camper et al. 206–207)

According to Samuels's account, this racially white mother has become culturally other in an interracial and intercultural family where the normative race is "Black" and the normative culture "Jamaican." The mother has subordinated her culture to that of her husband, in effect skewing family culture and narrowing the range of choices available to her children. Although ethnicity is assumed here to be voluntary for the entire family, including the presumably Black Jamaican husband, racial identity is fixed for those who are not mixed. Thus, despite the mother's adoption of Jamaican values, Samuels and her brother continue to perceive her as white and, therefore, an outsider. Significantly, by marrying a Black Jamaican, mothering mixed children, and "abandoning" her Ukrainian culture, the mother has likely also become an outsider to the white Ukrainian heritage that is supposedly "hers."

In a lesbian relationship, the experience of adopting a spouse's culture also reinforces the image of women as the bearers of culture. Frankenberg (1993) discusses "Cathy's" adoption of Latin American culture as "a process of resocialization" (120) directed by her Chicana partner, "Miranda":

But pretty soon, that's all the music we were listening to. We ate a lot of Mexican food. We spoke a lot of Spanish. I was signed up, culturally. I was like I was at my mother's knee. (120)

This resocialization constructs a comprehensive matrilineal and matrifocal kinship network within the lesbian family, with a limited biological basis. That is, the transmission of culture

through women is total: from parent to child and from parent to parent. Where the culture of the biological father is incorporated in the exclusively lesbian family, control over that process is also held by women.

For mixed children in either lesbian or heterosexual families, the mother's adoption of her partner's culture can be the focus of racial exclusion. As Samuels's reflections suggest, this racialized behaviour is particularly acute when the mother is perceived as belonging to the dominant culture or race and the father or partner to a minority culture or race. Mixed children who identify with the minority culture<sup>246</sup> may feel oppressed by their mother's performance of voluntary ethnicity, especially if they see it as a false or superficial identification (Frankenberg 1993; Barbara 1989). Children may feel this oppression particularly acutely if their first language, their "mother tongue," is also that of the oppressor. In this case, the child's "native" language, that reserved for intimacy and the private, safe self (Barbara 1989) is also an intimate connection to the "annihilation" of self (Felman 1995). Thus the intercultural family is a microcosm of racial formation within the larger society, with family members confronting the "other" in their private midst.<sup>247</sup> While the outsider may evaluate this racial confusion negatively, what the multiplicity of intercultural families disrupts most are the categories of being that define these microsocieties as aberrations.

In the context of the dominant culture, the extended family network of the minority culture may cultivate in mixed children a strongly mono-ethnic identity. Sometimes this choice of ethnicity represents a conscious act of resistance or the sense that the minority culture is the "right" one for the child. However, given the movement of people within a large country such as

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<sup>246</sup> Citing a 1970 study of Eurasians in Washington state, Spickard (1989) notes that half of the subjects identified with the minority, that is, Nikkei group of their childhood, regardless of the dominant culture within their families. As Spickard suggests, this may be explained in part by "the tendency of Whites to label Eurasians Japanese, and of Japanese to label them Whites" (115). I agree with Spickard, but would suggest that other contributory factors (gender identification, socio-economic status, whether the children's environment was urban or rural, mono-racial or multi-racial, language spoken at home and so on) may have exerted as strong an influence on the children's decision. After all, fully half of the subjects did *not* identify with the minority group.

Canada, the family from the minority culture may simply happen to be the one that is physically nearby. In either case, the process can be a comprehensive one that grooms children to be enthusiastically mono-ethnic adults (Sprott 1994). In a workshop on intermarriage at the 1992 Nikkei "HomeComing [sic] Conference" Mari Jane Medenwalt reflected on her identity as a sansei:

For myself, I can say that it is the same as a sansei where both parents are from the JC [Japanese Canadian] community. My mother and her family have passed on that place to me—not in their genes, but in their experience, their memories and their love for me and for our family. (51)

The apparent denial in Medenwalt's description of her position as "the same" as that of the sansei with two Nikkei parents suggests she may be engaging strategically with essentialism (Grewal and Kaplan 1994). For many reasons her position is not at all ontologically similar to that of the "pure" sansei. Although Medenwalt may have equal rights to a position within the Nikkei community, she is at once white *and* Nikkei. Thus, she is also guaranteed a position (however qualified) in white culture that the mono-racial Nikkei could never enjoy. Although she rejects the biological model of culture, Medenwalt distances herself from the culture her mother has "passed on" by using the third person to describe events that remain not entirely hers. In this way, the transmission of her mother's family culture remains objectified and distant, especially in contrast with the intimacy of other reflections:

After a while, my family stepped closer, took me in completely, hugging, teasing, feeding me foods of my childhood: *saimin*, *mahi mahi*, *kimchi*, salty little silver-eyed fish. . . *poi*.<sup>248</sup>

What Medenwalt and Davenport describe is the ontological dilemma of mixed race individuals claiming even a temporary or qualified unitary ethnicity. As I suggested earlier, this impossibility is assigned a causative connection to the "problems" that come with intermarriage.

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<sup>247</sup> As Moraga (1983) points out, the appearance of one's self in those we have perceived as different is also one focal point of resistance to intermarriage from those outside the family.

<sup>248</sup> Davenport is describing the sloughing off of her mainland identity as a process of cultural immersion (Barbara's "cultural baths," 139) or the physical counterpart of brainwashing. Significantly, Davenport is being immersed in the corporate symbols of "local" rather than ethnic Hawaiian culture. *Saimin* is a Chinese-inspired noodle soup; *mahi mahi* is a domestic fish; *kimchi* is a Korean pickle; *poi* is the dish which native Hawaiians made from taro root long

Expanding my consideration from intermarriage as an "event," I have also suggested that the problems of intermarriage may be more correctly located in common problematic *ideas* about intermarriage. We assume that this most intimate version of "race relations" will yield marginal individuals, unalterably alienated from a satisfactory experience of self, because they are fractured, incomplete, multiple, "schizophrenic."<sup>249</sup> We expect that mothers will naturally transmit the culture that is seen as theirs, that the dominant culture will reign, and that intercultural families will be lost to the ethnic community. These popular ideas are what constructs the "impossibility of being mixed race" (Zack 1994, 27).

### *Intermarriage Inside Out*

I have discussed various ways in which the experiences of intercultural families offer an alternative view of mixed race. To these I add the possibility that a shared culture independent of the obvious or dominant cultures may be a unifying and significant channel of identity formation in intercultural families (Cottrell 1990). This shared experience may be another structural category, such as the "overseas" missionary and military cultures. However, we might also include shared events of such magnitude that an alternative culture is created, such as the hibakusha [survivors] of the nuclear holocaust in Japan, or those who were interned during the Second World War. Since the targets of each of these attacks, to a large extent, appeared racially homogeneous, the subsequent cultures each appear racially and ethnically distinct. However, others whose identities were not those of the target groups also experienced these attacks, for instance non-Japanese living or visiting in Japan (Nikkei and others) when the bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and non-Nikkei who were interned, or who were intimately connected to those who were. Japanese citizens who were alive but absent

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before settlement. The only food Davenport signifies as "other" (the un-italicized "salty little silver-eyed fish") is usually imported from Japan or China.

<sup>249</sup> I do not intend this word as a metaphor for the multiple self; to do so would be to misinterpret schizophrenia and trivialize the impact of that disease. By enclosing the word in quotation marks, I am commenting on its (mis)use in popular discourse. For discussion of

when the bombs fell on their country are also culturally excluded from the effects of this defining moment. Similarly, Nikkei who were not in North America during the war (many of whom were in Japan because of education or family responsibilities), or who immigrated after the war, do not share the influence of the internment on their identities and are excluded from community by those who do.

As with any inter-ethnic diversity,<sup>250</sup> the significant implications of these exclusions for the construction of ethnicity and the boundaries of intermarriage are most apparent to those closest to the communities involved. Recalling the translation of Imada Ito's journals, it was, in part, the boundaries created by inter-ethnic diversity that simultaneously blocked Shimpo Mitsuru's access to the text, while making translation of those same sections easier for

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postmodernism's "irresponsible" dependence on schizophrenia as metaphor see Harvey (1989) 351ff.

<sup>250</sup> Research on intermarriage classifies the racially Japanese as a unitary ethnic group, either identified as "Japanese" or "Asian." However marriage between various "ethnic" Japanese (Burakumin, Okinawan, or Ainu) is considered, by Japanese, just as significantly and officially a case of intermarriage. This distinction is apparent in many areas of community experience in Vancouver.

For instance, Okinawan community events are generally not advertised in the Japanese Canadian community newspaper (the *Bulletin*), and are attended by "Japanese Canadians" only by invitation or if the Japanese Canadian is married to an Okinawan. Where the rate of intermarriage among Nikkei is commonly quoted as between 80% and 90%, intermarriage between Okinawans and white Canadians (or Nikkei, although marriage to a Nikkei is more common than marriage to a Caucasian) occurs in less than half of all marriages (Canada Okinawa-ken Yuaikai [Okinawan Friendship Society], *Member's Directory* 1996). This figure is very approximate. Because I base the estimate on listings in the Directory, it does not include Okinawans who are not members of the yuaikai or Okinawans involved in gay and lesbian partnerships.

The 1998 Vancouver Okinawan Shinnenkai (New Years' celebration), was conducted entirely in Japanese and hogen (Okinawan dialect). By contrast, there is widespread concern in the Nikkei community that the Japanese language is being lost. Of the 200 that attended the Okinawan Shinnenkai, there was a total of four white Canadians: three women married to Okinawan men, and one invited guest.

Further evidence of the effects of inter-ethnic diversity on ideas of community is the practice of classifying marriages between "Vancouver" Japanese and "Steveston" Japanese as "intermarriage" (R. Higo, personal communication, 4 November 1994).

Ayukawa. Because Ayukawa and Imada were both from Hiroshima prefecture,<sup>251</sup> and had both lived in Canada, the dialect of the journal was familiar to Ayukawa.<sup>252</sup>

However, Ayukawa enjoyed a familiarity with Hiroshima women of a certain generation who had also lived in Canada. The body of citations and acknowledgements to these women which grows in Ayukawa's text constitutes a separate lineage, a community that makes the translation (not necessarily synonymous with "the understanding") of Imada's journal possible. In fact, Ayukawa relies on the intimacy between mother and daughter as a template for the knowledge of her subject. The final sentence of "Bearing the Unbearable" reads: "She [Mrs. Imada] would likely have done what my own mother has done—spent some of the Redress money to brighten her own life before giving the rest away to her grandchildren and to worthy causes" (94). Ayukawa indicates the significance of her mother's influence on her scholarship by repeatedly citing her as an authority in her translations of Imada's journal. At one point, Ayukawa (1990a) muses over "puzzling revisions" in the journal:

It is obvious that these were corrections made by Shimpo in his effort to understand the Japanese Canadian language that Mrs. Imada used. He apparently had great difficulty with this language, for Mrs. Imada had written the way elderly Japanese Canadians and older Nisei [. . .] speak today. [. . .] Perhaps such usage impeded Shimpo's comprehension of her writing. It was not a problem with me, however, because my mother, who also came from Hiroshima Prefecture but is a decade younger than Mrs. Imada, writes to me regularly in a similar script. (10)

All of these micro-cultures combined to exclude Shimpo from this matrilineal and matrifocal transmission of culture.

It is possible, then, that the strength and intimacy of non-racial shared cultures may influence the incidence and quality of intermarriage as well as enable mothers to transmit cultures that are not recognized as "theirs." Among the responses to my intermarriage questionnaire I was surprised to discover one in which the supposedly non-Nikkei spouse, Joan, identified her culture or racial heritage as "Canadian/Japanese/European (Irish)." Joan does not

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<sup>251</sup> Ayukawa is a nisei and therefore not literally "from" Hiroshima. I use the phrase colloquially to signify heritage, as in "we're (my people, my family, I'm) from the prairies."

<sup>252</sup> In her translations, Ayukawa (1990a) explains that Mrs. Imada writes "simply," "like my mother," in the language of "my childhood" (9 and 12).

explicitly describe herself as white, although she does identify “non-Japanese” members of her extended family. Rather, she emphasizes the childhood years she spent in Japan, her employment by Japanese companies in Vancouver, and the correctness of her Japanese language in contrast with that of her “Canadian/Japanese” husband:

My Japanese language is “Tokyo-ben” [dialect], my husband’s is 3<sup>rd</sup> generation removed, fishermen’s Wakayama-ben, although his vocab [sic] is greater, my structure is more correct.

The profile of the “non-Nikkei” spouse that builds in Joan’s account is actually that of a cosmopolitan but nonetheless culturally Japanese individual. Joan spends a great deal of time and space describing in detail those practices and experiences that contribute to this identity, explaining at what points the distinction between Nikkei and non-Nikkei breaks down:

I don’t consider our relationship as “his” culture vs. “my” culture. In some ways, he is more “traditional” Japanese, as the values, attitudes and mannerisms have been brought here 80+ years ago. (My Japan is more “modern” than his.)

Clearly, Joan does not feel an outsider either within her intercultural family or, it would seem, in Japan. In fact, she assumes the voice of the native initiating the foreigner to local culture: “The first time my husband went to Japan, I took him. (We stayed with my friends, in my old part of Tokyo).”

The distinctions Joan makes between “traditional” and “modern” Japanese resemble those made by Canadian Nikkei, both recent immigrants and those whose families arrived in Canada in the early years of immigration. Joan also expands the idea of Japanese culture beyond language and concrete practice to include cultural viewpoint, a kind of moral stance in relation to wider society, and the more subtle “mannerisms,” the small clues that belie culture. This cluster of ideas surrounding Japanese culture suggests that Joan does have an intimate understanding of that culture—as she explains her participation in it.

In this case, the contiguity of “Japanese” and “Canadian” cultures relates to Joan’s extended physical stay in Japan and connection with Japanese business cultures in Vancouver. This contiguity transformed Joan’s “Canadian/European (Irish)” cultural identity to include “Japanese.” While the voluntary aspect of Joan’s situational or behavioural ethnicity may appear obvious, the fact that Joan spent her formative childhood years in Japan suggests that

socialization also contributed to her ethnic identification. As the pre-war issei observed in their children, regardless of the culture practiced at home, the socialization that occurs in the public sphere can dramatically increase identification with the dominant culture, especially if such identification is considered desirable.

With intermarriage, the role expectations that others have of the non-Nikkei spouse also compromise the voluntary aspect of changing one's ethnic identification. That is, the spouse may internalize or otherwise comply with what she understands is "right" behaviour just as pre-war Nikkei did in Vancouver. This type of assimilative cultural practice is prevalent in intercultural Nikkei families that spend substantial amounts of time living in Japan, and is often tied to learning the Japanese language.

Allison has lived in Shizuoka, Japan with her family for approximately six years. In response to my question regarding language and culture she replied:

While living in Japan, our involvement in the mainstream culture changed dramatically as we acquired enough of the language to understand and be understood. Without the ability to speak Japanese we would have been on the outside, not included in the get-togethers of our friends, neighbors, colleagues. With the language came an understanding of them.

For both Allison and her Nikkei husband, Tony, learning Japanese was the primary means of inclusion by the "mainstream." Not only did speaking Japanese ensure that they would be understood, it also meant that Allison and Tony understood—the words, the people, and the culture.<sup>253</sup> Unlike other cultural practices, language proficiency gives the newcomer an air of familiarity that facilitates acceptance by the dominant culture. All of the respondents identified a strong link between language and gaining access to a culture, describing language as the "key" or "common thread," a "means for communicating and thinking."

However, Belinda describes language proficiency as the primary condition for her children's acceptance as Nikkei:

My "Welshness" does not depend upon my speaking the language. Like many, I am accepted without the ability to speak Welsh. I think it is different for the Japanese though. While one's

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<sup>253</sup> Allison's use of the pronoun "them" makes the object of "understanding" ambiguous; what is understood may be the "friends, neighbors, colleagues" and/or the "get-togethers," that is cultural practice.

own identity does not depend on speaking the language, acceptance within/by that culture may be decided by it. Japanese is not a dying language, as Welsh may be, and to be accepted and able to function in Japan, or Japanese cultural centers elsewhere, I believe the boys will have to be able to speak Japanese.

Unlike Joan, Belinda does not claim to identify in any way with Japanese or Nikkei culture. She identifies strongly with her Welsh/English heritage, and does not yet identify herself as Canadian. Belinda's distinction between Japanese and the "dying" Welsh language may appear to be the reason she equates her children's acceptance by the Japanese community with the ability to speak Japanese. However, Belinda does not identify a similar need for her husband, Paul.

Paul was born and spent part of his childhood in Israel, lived in Britain for several years before the six he and Belinda spent together there, and has lived in Canada for the past several years, yet Belinda describes his culture as "Japanese." By implying that Paul, but not his children, will be accepted without speaking or understanding Japanese, Belinda identifies the primary function of race in the formation of community identities. Regardless of cultural identification, Belinda's status as a white outsider is assumed, as is her husband's insider status as a Japanese. By learning Japanese, their mixed children may be able to earn acceptance.

Conversely, Allison's descriptions of her participation in culture while living in Japan suggest a level of involvement and acceptance that at least equal that of her husband. She identifies herself as the main transmitter of culture in their family, a role that she says both she and her husband agree on. Allison emphasizes that she is "particularly" responsible for teaching the rituals of festival celebrations of both "my tradition and of the Japanese culture." Although neither Allison nor Tony was familiar with many Japanese celebrations before moving to Japan, in her role there as a mother, Allison learned the performance of certain rituals that her husband did not.

In teaching culture in our home, in Japan a few celebrations really didn't involve my husband much at all—Tanabata, Dolls Day, Ohana-mi, even Children's Day—were celebrated by me and the children together, and often with neighbourhood mothers and their children, and through [sic] friends from the Kindergarten, once the children attended Kindergarten.

Here, again, is a “woman-centred” cultural community within the greater ethnic one.<sup>254</sup> Men are not actively excluded from this community. However, men are prevented by their absence from participating in and knowing the cultural practices that are transmitted from mothers to their children (and to “outsider” women) in the process of socialization. As the parent who knows how to conduct the rituals of these celebrations, Allison continues to be the one who directs the family’s Japanese cultural practice in Canada. In contrast, Tony is the parent who is most involved in orchestrating the “Canadian” celebrations of Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter. In order to exercise their choice of behavioural ethnicity, Allison and Tony negotiate a cultural territory within the tolerable limits of gender role expectations.

Where comfortable divisions between “white” and “non-white” become confused or indistinct as they seem to have for Joan or for Allison and Tony, it may seem reasonable to shift the focus in theories of culture away from the concepts of race and difference toward those processes that emphasize similarities. After all, if a few years of language education and living in a culture can make one relatively comfortable with cultural practice (or even, as in Joan’s case, cause one to rename her cultural identity), an insistence on the primary relevance of race and colour in the processes of identity formation seems unwarranted. However, such an adjustment in theoretical practice may effectively reproduce hierarchies of authority, as cultural construction has done in its treatment of native nationalism.

For example, despite Allison’s descriptions of her cultural transformation while in Japan, colour remains a significant organizing principle in her cultural discourse. Allison locates her family’s cultural experiences in two different geographic locations: Vancouver (Canada) and Shizuoka (Japan). When asked to classify or describe her family’s culture, Allison replies: “We have a mixture of Canadian—Japanese culture.” These statements suggest that Allison and Tony have simply “blended” elements from each of their separate cultures. Yet elsewhere Allison describes her culture as “white middle class,” and her husband’s as “Japanese

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<sup>254</sup> I use the word ethnic rather than “racial” because of the multi-ethnic nature of Japanese culture. See my discussion of the myth of Japanese “homogeneity” above.

Canadian, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation.” Thus, in the accounts of her family’s cultural practice, Allison accepts that “white middle class” culture is the normative Canadian reality. As well, she equates the culture of a Japanese Canadian nisei with an equally normative standard of Japanese experience. In both cases, race is generalized as culture.

While Allison’s description of her family’s cultural practice is coincident with racial categories of colour, neither race nor racism performs a causative role. The very fact that Allison describes her own identity in terms of race and class suggests that she has acknowledged and perhaps closely examined her own racial privilege.<sup>255</sup> It may appear that she has based her organization of culture on conventional racial organizations, but what Allison has also done is connect culture to her family’s experience with place. Cultural practices that appear most Japanese are those that Allison learned in Japan, not from her Japanese Canadian husband, nor from contact with a Nikkei community. In fact the celebrations that are familiar to Tony are the very ones which Allison learned in her “white middle class” Canadian childhood.<sup>256</sup>

Allison does indicate that certain spheres of cultural experience are less easily learned than are others. As I said above, Allison describes herself as the prime transmitter of culture in the family and reports that her husband accepts that as her role. However, she also indicates that there are other philosophical or spiritual expressions of culture which her husband “teaches less visibly by the way he approaches things, views life and death, and teaches values.” By not naming these intangibles, Allison implies a deep vein of cultural experience that is less susceptible to change, and less accessible to her as an outsider, than are concrete practices.

Nonetheless, the experience of living in Japan may so defamiliarize the non-Nikkei spouse with her primary culture that she becomes universally marginalized. In her study of non-

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<sup>255</sup> “Whiteness, as a set of normative cultural practices, is visible most clearly to those it definitely excludes and those to whom it does violence. Those who are securely housed within its borders usually do not examine it” (Frankenberg 1993, 228–229).

<sup>256</sup> Allison did not discuss Tony’s cultural identity in detail, but since he is also the adult child of a mixed marriage, more detail in that respect would contribute to a fuller understanding of the family’s culture.

Japanese wives of Japanese men, Imamura (1990) recounts the advice of an American woman to fellow “foreign” wives:

[. . .] don't cut yourself off from the people. Put your kids in the school system, make friends with the neighbours, get out of this *gaijin* [foreigner] concept. . . you simply have to become a part of where you are . . . do everything other people do. . . that's just what you have to do. . . be yourself. (187; translation in original)

The assimilative behaviour that this American woman proposes resembles the inclusion Allison enjoyed in Japan once she learned Japanese. Just as Allison's cultural familiarity with Japan did not result in her defining “her” culture differently, so too this writer seems convinced that assimilation to Japanese ways need not entail assuming a Japanese identity. The desire to remain oneself may be particularly strong in Japan where the highly assimilated foreigner is simply regarded as “more different”—“*hen na gaijin*” [weird foreigner]—rather than culturally Japanese.<sup>257</sup> While having a child in this environment may hold promise for an increased sense of belonging, the event may also further emphasize the mother's strangeness: the child represents both continuation of the family line and the family's marginality (Imamura 1990). Furthermore, the mother in an intercultural family may be blamed for what is perceived as the father's cultural failure (Imamura 1990).

Less forceful than blame, perhaps, but just as pessimistic an evaluation of intermarriage is the theoretical corollary to the assimilationist perception of intermarriage, namely that mothers of the dominant culture are simply incapable of transmitting minority cultures to mixed children. Although the international nature of her and her husband's residencies muddied the “purity” of their own cultural heritages, Belinda was well aware of the perception that she was not the right sort to mother her children:

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<sup>257</sup> One organization in Japan, the “Association of Foreign Wives of Japanese,” describes its objective as the provision of psychological support and assistance to its members (Kubo 1991). The AFWJ journal is published bi-monthly and covers a wide-range of topics of interest that provide support directly, and by providing the venue for construction of a micro-culture. One approach taken by the journal is to provide enough practical advice that members can feel comfortable living in Japan without losing what is seen as “their” identity. For example, one issue included “*obento*” [portable lunch] recipes for children's school lunches: “Afraid your child's *o-bento* doesn't measure up to the other mothers'? Can't think miniature enough? Can't

As a British woman married into a Japanese family, I felt there was greater pressure put upon me to prove myself capable of raising the children “properly,” than there would have been, had it not been a mixed marriage. This was especially as we have *sons!* [sic]

This perception is not always clearly a matter of race or ancestry. My mother-in-law has explained to me that my participation in the family (especially in the early years of my marriage) was an obstacle to family intimacy. As I discussed earlier, many daughters-in-law with the same ancestral heritage as their marital family encounter similar problems. However, it does seem that non-Nikkei daughters-in-law may be put to certain tests to prove their familiarity with their husbands’ cultures, and their ability to transmit those cultures to the children. The benchmarks in my cultural apprenticeship included the ability to cook Japanese and Okinawan food often and well; a familiarity with Japanese and Okinawan history and literature; and an understanding of the Okinawan “kokoro,” or heart.<sup>258</sup>

I introduced this section by discussing some of the attributes of the Japanese mother. Writing by and about Nikkei women has domesticated the idea of the Japanese mother to accommodate the realities of Nikkei experience in Canada. The cluster of attributes surrounding this stereotype includes sacrifice, submission, strength, and silence. The Nikkei mother does whatever is required of her to care for her children in the way she has been taught. She yields to the will of her husband and, when her children are grown, to her sons. She is strong and enduring. She neither complains nor protests. In spite of her struggles supporting the right of women to be employed, to vote, to express their opinions, to marry for love if they so desired, or just be frivolous, Kitagawa (1985) adopted the discourse of the sacrificing mother in praise of her own mother:

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seem to come up with enough ingredients to satisfy your child’s teacher? Try these recipes and give your child a varied, artistic o-bento every day” (Ono 105)

<sup>258</sup> My mother-in-law explains that all that is left for me is to become fluent in Japanese, and then I will “be” Japanese. One standard used to measure my cultural performance within the family is the evidence of Japanese or Okinawan cultural traits in my firstborn. (As “chonon,” or eldest son of the eldest son, this child continues the family line.) These various levels of cultural knowledge and ability encompass a range of behaviours symbolic of the successful transmission of culture, or at least the absence of obstacles to the transmission from elsewhere. The appearance of these traits and behaviours seems to reassure grandparents that their mixed grandchildren will not be culturally “lost” to them.

She was our mother, our sole support for food, clothes, shelter, and morale; hooligans that we may have been in those awful days, we recognized the innate breeding in her fine bones, felt in our own marrow some part of her indomitable spirit, and dreamed of the day we would clothe her in velvet, rest her on cushions while hired minions served her delicious foods. 275

Kogawa also praises the sacrificial—and omniscient mother:

Her eyes are the eyes of Japanese motherhood. They do not invade and betray. They are eyes that protect, shielding what is hidden most deeply in the heart of the child. She makes safe the small stirrings underfoot and in the shadows. Physically, the sensation is not in the region of the heart, but in the belly. This that is in the belly is honoured when it is allowed to be, without fanfare, without reproach, without words. What is there is there. (*Obasan* 59)

Children know this impossible mother at certain precious moments; some adults remember her as having been “always” there. In African American society, the sacrificing mother is worshipped:<sup>259</sup>

Unfortunately, though positively motivated, black mother worship extols the virtues of self-sacrifice while simultaneously implying that such a gesture is not reflective of choice and will, rather the perfect embodiment of a woman’s “natural” role. The assumption then is that the black woman who works hard to be a responsible caretaker is only doing what she should be doing. (hooks 1990, 45)

As I have stressed regarding such ideological constructions as “race” and “ethnicity,” when considering the stereotypical ideal of the sacrificing mother we have to continue looking “behind” the surface of the concept to the layers of meaning which constitute it. For instance, the idea of sacrifice is also an accumulation of behaviours and imputed meanings. It may seem an obvious point, but whether Nikkei are reflecting on memories of their mothers’ behaviour, or creating imaginary mothers, they are approaching “the Nikkei mother” from the outside in. Particularly in constructions of the sacrificing mother, we see a detailed outline and very little of the organic body—the child’s interpretation of the mother. As with any emphasis on form and structure, this interpretation is determined by its oversight; “the eyes of Japanese motherhood” do not *look*, but are *looked upon*.

Structurally, of course, even if actual Nikkei mothers did only half of all that they are said to have done, their actions would still support the stereotype. Even the mother whose

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<sup>259</sup> This is simply another example of a group that privileges the sacrificing mother; I suspect many cultural and ethnic groups value this stereotype.

demeanour seems inconsistent with the idea of sacrifice may be acting sacrificially.<sup>260</sup> It is possible that these idealized images of the sacrificing mother strengthen communal ties within minority cultures. However, the images place an impossible and unwarranted burden on the shoulders of actual women, especially those who are not mothers, or those who are unwilling or unable to comply with the stereotype. To add the ultimate responsibility for the transmission of culture to the role of sacrificing mother is strikingly at odds with a women-centred approach to chronicling and understanding women's experiences. It locks women into a gendered expectation of culture that measures their ethnicity along a spectrum of gender-specific behaviour (Ling 1990). Furthermore, this particular stereotype renders other family and community members, and the balance of communal activity, culturally superfluous.

In response to the general question of how one "gets" culture, and to the more specific question of how they and their spouses learned of each others' cultures, my respondents' replies covered a wide range of activities and environmental influences. Certain words were repeated, such as "stories," "living," "food," "friends," "family," "socializing," "osmosis." The women generally characterized extended family as playing an important role in the transmission of culture. Only one respondent said that the mother "should be the main transmitter of culture" in the family, and most reported that their husbands agreed that at least both parents should share the responsibility for cultural transmission. However, in the majority of the families, the women reported that they were the main transmitters of culture. Thus, regardless of the fathers' intentions (as reported by their wives), in these intercultural families the Nikkei men surrendered responsibility for the transmission of culture to their non-Nikkei wives.

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<sup>260</sup> For instance, the image of the assertive black woman on many American and British television programs (for example "The Cosby Show" or "Chef!") does not, necessarily challenge the stereotype by suggesting that the mothers are any less willing to sacrifice for family. Similarly, the modern Japanese "kyōiku [education] mama" is aggressive and determined on behalf of her children's schooling, but is not relieved of other domestic responsibilities in order to help her children negotiate the onerous system of examinations (Iwao 139). And as many women are finding, the late twentieth-century "working mother" is still actively responsible for the majority of housekeeping and childcare responsibilities in the home (Hochschild 1989).

Significantly, although the women did not always name the culture they thought was important to transmit, the particular practices, norms, and values that they specified were often identifiable aspects of "Japanese" or "Japanese Canadian" culture. These included Japanese heritage and language, "non-western" culture, Japanese bazaars, the internment, living in Japan, Japanese festivals, and so on. Another aspect of minority culture the women hoped to pass on to their children involved an understanding of the effects of prejudice. For Joan, this involved a rejection of national chauvinism:

If the only thing they learn is the understanding that Canada is not the center of the world, and that no one country/culture is superior to that of another, I will be happy.

Shannon was more concerned to prevent the marginalization she predicts her children will face because they are mixed:

I'd like to be able to help my children not feel marginalized because they come from two cultures but rather celebrate the specialness of this. I'd like my children to visit both Saskatchewan and Okinawa/Japan, and possibly live there—learn Japanese language—to learn the histories, about the people (family), food etc. etc.

Like Joan and Allison, Shannon has lived in Japan with her husband, Mark, who was born in Okinawa and lived there until age nine. Shannon has visited Okinawa with Mark, and shows a detailed appreciation for her husband's culture. Being familiar with the marginalization of Okinawans within Japan has possibly heightened her understanding of the experience of being a minority and of being mixed.<sup>261</sup> As well, my children and I have been frank with Shannon about their experiences with racism, and the ambiguities of mixed identity.

Shannon also connects culture with place, as do the other women who have lived outside of Canada. She describes living in Japan as "VERY" important (her emphasis):

I believe (from my own experience) that it is only through living (experiencing the day to day "things") in a new country, experiencing a (new) culture that one can gain the subtle things of the culture—feeling, impressions, the unspoken.

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<sup>261</sup> Both of Mark's parents are Nikkei. However, Mark's mother is of Okinawan descent; she spent the first fourteen years of her life in Taiwan, and approximately the next twenty-five in Okinawa. His father is a nisei of Japanese descent whose parents sent him to Japan for education, as was the case for many Nikkei families. After the Second World War, Mark's father also moved to Okinawa.

Shannon's emphasis on experiencing the difference of Japan—the “new country,” and “new culture”—is consistent with the assimilationist discourse of Allison's experience with Japanese language. Although Shannon plans on providing her children with plenty of stories, food, games, songs, and pictures, her emphasis on the cultural gains of living in Japan evokes that deep cultural experience Allison observed in her husband. However, for Shannon, living in Japan is not a quick route to cultural proficiency:

I would want my children to experience life in Japan or Okinawa not so that they would become more “Japanese” but to give them an understanding of one part of their roots.

Shannon does not yet have children. Thus, the detail of her responses and her integration of culture and struggle seem consistent with Barbara's (1989) observation mentioned earlier that intermarried couples meet the challenges of marriage earlier than endogamous couples. Not only is Shannon imagining mothering in detail, she is foreseeing and addressing the challenges surrounding identity that await her imagined children.

It is important to note that none of the women offered the opinion that she would be able to understand the racism and other problems of identity that she imagined or witnessed as confronting their children. What they did foresee, or plan, was that they would educate their children about culture specifically and about differences in general in order not to reproduce racism and other exclusionary practices. For Hong, educating her children about racism included teaching them about “the internment of Japanese Canadians and treatment of Orientals in early Canadian history.”<sup>262</sup> Joan planned to instill in her children an egalitarian approach to culture(s) by teaching them that Canada was not the centre of the universe. Belinda seemed equally “determined that they [her three sons] should *not* [sic] inherit a sense of greater importance as males from that part of their cultural heritage.”

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<sup>262</sup> Judging by the responses to certain questions, I think Hong's husband completed this questionnaire. For example, my introductory letter clearly states that the survey is intended for non-Nikkei spouses of Nikkei men. However, to the question, “How would you classify / describe your culture or “racial” heritage?” this respondent answered “Second Generation Japanese Canadian.”

The women also planned to protect their children from exclusions based on race—both within and outside of the family. Belinda's strategy was to facilitate acceptance of her children by the Japanese and Nikkei communities by equipping them with Japanese language. Laura was more concerned to forestall her children's encounters with racism. Although her current partner was a Nikkei man, the father of Laura's two children is Cree. She reflected on her cultural privilege, and was as concerned about selectively isolating her children from their multiple cultures as she was ensuring their access to these cultures:

I don't, wouldn't [sic] want my family to be an influence on my children in any great way. Subtle racism, sometimes not so subtle is more than I can bear. This is not something that I want my children to have to confront.

Laura specifically named racism only in relation to my question about the influence of extended family on the transmission of culture. However, the effects of racial privilege and exclusion were a strong and complex subtext throughout her discussion of her family's cultures. Laura is determined physically to isolate her sons from the racism of her extended family. Yet she is aware that this racism is part of her own cultural heritage:

I am only now getting a sense of what it is for me to be a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation "Flatlander" (prairie settler/peasant stock) now living at the coast. I recognize my role or rather position in the present dominant society. Issues of whiteness and non-whiteness are a part of my life. As a mother of children who are non-white I have to be sensitive about the "culture" (heritage) that they, in a way represent.

Of course, settling the prairie included displacing her children's Cree ancestors from their territory. Therefore, as much as Laura's children "represent" the Cree, Laura represents their colonizers. For Laura, learning the implications of these relative positions is a process, something she is "getting a sense of" only after mothering her children for several years. Thus being "sensitive" about her sons' identities as Cree means that Laura's desire to protect them from racism involves protecting them from herself.

Intermarriage dramatically changes the idea of home as a place of safety, a "private space where we do not directly encounter white racist aggression" (hooks 1990, 47). For many individuals of First Nations and European ancestry, "family" becomes "the greatest source of racism, hurt and shame" (Arnott 1994, 266). Laura is physically cultivating a safe place for her

sons by keeping extended family visits to a minimum and “picking and choosing” cultural “information.” Still, providing a safe cultural place for mixed children is not the same as giving them a culture that matches their colour.

My mother raised me, she loved me, but upon reaching adulthood, I’ve never realized [sic] that there was something very important my mother could never give me—a culture which matched my colour. If women are the bestowers and the keepers of culture, the ones who pass on language, nuance, myth, food, spiritual teaching and values to children, then I have been culturally malnourished. (Hernandez-Ramdwar 3)

Laura seems well aware that the institutionalized race privilege and racism that are a part of her and her children’s lives in society must also be a part of their home. Because white privilege is a part of Laura’s cultural heritage, she cannot pass on to her sons the values and beliefs that are formed by experiencing the absence of that privilege.

As I discussed earlier, in an attempt to counter the effects of dominant culture within intercultural families, some women of mixed children fade into their partners’ minority culture. Place and intention are two of the many factors that determine the effect this choice has on cultural influences in the home. Cultural fading is one way to balance the influence of the dominant culture in the intercultural Nikkei family in Canada—what Mary called the “overwhelming sense of western culture they they’ll be deluged with.” Mary seems to think that if she emphasizes the transmission of Japanese or Nikkei culture in the home, her children will receive a balanced exposure to western and Japanese culture. With respect to the definition of culture and which family members “ought to be” the agents of cultural transmission in the home, the women’s responses generally support this metaphorical notion of cultural balance.

Generally, each woman describes her heritage in terms of multiple cultures. Nonetheless, their collective reliance on words like “both,” “two,” “your own,” and the phrase, “Japanese and western”/“Canadian”/“North American”/“American” constructs the image of intermarriage as a blending of two representative cultures. In part, this representation happens because all of the multiple cultures (national, regional, economic, and religious) named by the women can be considered as “white.” Thus, the women may have been conceptualizing their marriages to be interracial unions between representatives of the dominant white and

marginalized Japanese groups in need of cultural balancing—most obviously for the sake of their children.<sup>263</sup> These women chose to relinquish or de-emphasize their culture, acting less “white” and more “Japanese,” in response to an unjust social system. This expression of behavioural or situational ethnicity cannot be dismissed as less significant than evidence of structural ethnicity.

The fact that this cultural adjustment leaves racial categories intact does not mean that intermarriage has failed as a resistance to racial exclusion. As is apparent from the persistence of racial categorization in Hawaii, race may be signified descriptively without intending or effecting the exclusions that have historically been intended by racial discourse in Canada. Also, for mixed children, the processes of identity formation sometimes involve playing with essential racial categories and labels, as Kurata does. While to an outsider this may sound like racist discourse, it may be an essential step in working out a comfortable or tolerable identity.<sup>264</sup> Where the connotations of “Japanese” in early twentieth-century discourse signified a cluster of “non-Canadian” traits and practices, in the late twentieth-century discourse of mixed race, “Japanese” may both modify and be synonymous with the idea of “Canadian.” In other words, with precise definitions of race strained by intermarriage, race may come to signify what various groups and individuals are and want, rather than what they are not and cannot have. Intermarriage provides mixed children with a choice of positions from which to critique the notions of pure race.

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<sup>263</sup> Restricting the exercise of their racial and cultural privilege within the family might also be seen as a more general redress of injustice on a large scale or atoning for their heritage of racism.

<sup>264</sup> This practice of racial “play” is more obvious when the child’s friends are also mixed. At one point in his adolescence my eldest son’s social group was comprised completely of mixed teenagers. These boys gave each other racially descriptive names (such as “sushi-head,” “jap,” and “chink”) that only members of the group were allowed to use. By describing this activity as “play,” I am not implying that it was, necessarily or always, “fun.” Trying out racial labels may approach fun in a more proportionately ethnic society such as Hawaii (However, even there, the enjoyment of the activity depends on the actor’s relative position within the hierarchy of ethnicities.). Given the relative dominance of whiteness in Vancouver, and the turbulence of adolescence, I think that my son and his friends played with racial labels that others used as verbal attacks against them, as a safe way of defusing the anxieties and discomfort of being mixed while creating a community of mixed friends.

Of all the respondents in my survey, Laura was the one woman who did not speak in terms of cultural balance or exchange, and whose “multicultural” family poses the greatest challenge to unitary categories. While Laura stresses her children’s Cree identity, they do have greater access to white society than their Cree father has—because their mother is white. However, Laura also has a complex heritage from her prairie settler and mixed European ancestors. At the time of my survey, the children’s “father figure” was shin ijusha (new immigrant). The children also lived in close contact with their Cree extended family, and were in full-time daycare at a “West Coast First Nations” facility:

I believe it is very important for my children to learn about all the cultures that they live with and are surrounded by. “Their” culture is a very sticky term as they really have more influence of West Coast First Nations than Cree—and more Japanese than that. Primary is a blend of cultures.

As I have discussed, in any discourse that privileges the purity of mono-racial or mono-ethnic identities, the inability to “buttonhole” one’s culture can only be seen as representative of a cultural vacuum. Laura’s description of her children’s cultural multiplicity may perhaps be overwhelming (even for their mother), but it does portray a sense of abundance. The contiguity of all their cultures of familiarity transforms each category represented while transforming the nature of categorization itself. Distinctions appear necessary only as a descriptive means of communicating and understanding, of placing oneself in community rather than being excluded from it.

The one woman who identified her culture as “non-white” racially modified this identity as “Chinese.”<sup>265</sup> Ping’s response supports the notion of cultural balance, without reinforcing the white/Japanese binary established by the other women’s responses. It also suggests that factors other than place may considerably influence mothers’ choices of which culture to emphasize. Within Canada, the cultural heritage of both Ping and her husband may be

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<sup>265</sup> I describe Ping’s use of the term “Chinese” as “racial” because, like “Japanese” it erases the ethnic and cultural diversity of China as a nation. “Chinese” can be a national term, but because Ping has lived in Canada for at least fifteen years, and describes her family’s (Ping, her husband and children) culture as “Japanese / Canadian” she is likely not a Chinese citizen.

described as minority influences. Again, in this family the mother is the main transmitter of culture, in spite of her wish that both parents share the responsibility. And, once again, the culture that Ping is passing on to her children is the "Japanese/Canadian" culture of her husband.<sup>266</sup>

To the question, "How do your children learn about their culture?" Ping replies:

From Japanese language school, daily home life, observing rituals from our church where the congregation is all Japanese, influence of their [Japanese] grandmother.

As well, Ping states that her family keeps only Japanese celebrations (Japanese New Year, Girls' Day, and Boys' Day). This strong influence of Japanese traditions is particularly interesting since what Ping identifies as "most important" for her children to learn about their culture is: "To know your own background." Without more information, I can only speculate as to why Ping has subordinated her cultural heritage to that of her husband. Although Ping is not happy about having the primary responsibility for cultural transmission in the family, there is also nothing in her responses to suggest that the family would become any more "Chinese" (or Chinese Canadian) if her Nikkei husband were to assume more responsibility for directing at

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I do not include "Hong's" description of her identity here, since that questionnaire was completed by her Nikkei husband.

<sup>266</sup> Several of the survey's structural elements established the project as an investigation into Nikkei ethnicity, thereby likely influencing these responses. Perhaps the most obvious among these factors was the wording of the recruitment notices requesting participation by women of "non-Nikkei descent" who were partners with someone who was of Nikkei descent. One question ("How important is it that your children visit or live in Japan?") made overt reference to specific ancestry, as did the title of the questionnaire, "Transforming Intercultural Traditions in Japanese Canadian Families." While my central concern was with the transmission of Nikkei culture, the project involved a written questionnaire (delivered by mail or otherwise second-hand), rather than personal interviews. This anonymity and physical distance likely ameliorated any direct influence I may have had on the outcome of the survey.

As was apparent from their responses, women who were members of a dominant social group expressed a strong desire to nurture the minority culture in their families and to oppose racism. These women likely privilege Nikkei culture in daily life, and would have responded similarly if the questionnaire had appeared less overtly concerned with Nikkei culture. As my earlier discussion of intermarriage and the *New Canadian* showed, Ping and Hong are both members of an ethnic group (Chinese Canadians) that Nikkei have disparaged in the past. In these two cases, the couple's ideas of gender and race may have contributed to their recorded ethnic preference. This influence may have been most relevant to the man who completed the questionnaire on his wife's behalf.

least the rituals of culture. However, like Tony, Ping's husband is likely passing on cultural values and beliefs informally.

Among those expressions of culture that Nikkei fathers may transmit inadvertently, the culture of internment may be one that non-Nikkei mothers cannot be socialized into. This is not only a complex topic that exceeds the bounds of this study; it is also a subject that requires a level of familiarity and belonging I do not have. It is my opinion that to form an identity based on the internment must be impossible without having "been there."<sup>267</sup> Because she was not interned, Traise Yamamoto acknowledges that she only knows the "direct consequences" (Fowler 28) of the internment. Learning about the consequences of the internment is one way of understanding how certain historical events transformed Nikkei culture, such as the way "our [Nikkei] passivity was fashioned by our history in this country, that, like some invisible undertow, pulls us down on bended knees" (Omatsu 69). However, the experience of knowing intimately the consequences of injustice is not the same as constructing an identity based on that event:

Japanese Canadians, and Japanese Americans for that matter, all share a common bond. Our parents, grandparents and great grandparents struggled through and survived the war experience. Unlike any heritage in the history of the country, we were unwanted and ostracized. It is on this dark chapter in our history that we have built our identity today. (Koyanagi 3)

Non-Nikkei mothers can ensure that their children know the "facts" of the internment, but only those who share Koyanagi's position concerning these facts can pass on a sense of this kind of community identity.<sup>268</sup>

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In order to compensate for these and other tendencies among intercultural families to privilege one culture, it would be helpful to delete any obvious references to a specific ethnicity, and then circulate the survey among a much larger and more heterogeneous pool of subjects.

<sup>267</sup> In this regard, I reflect on Ken Adachi's statement regarding the success of the redress campaign: "Of course I feel better today, as a Canadian, than I did last week. But it doesn't assuage my anger. No, not quite. I cannot summon up tears. Our individual and collective experience lies too deep for a facile display of emotion and easy rhetoric. It is too little and too late, for some of us" (451).

<sup>268</sup> Yamamoto challenges "(a simplistic) identity politics" (28) that depend on universalizing assumptions about race, ethnicity, and so on: "Time and time again, non-Asian American students have blamed their inability to understand the material or class discussion [about the internment] on the fact that no one in their family was in an internment camp or an immigrant on Angel Island. I always point out to such students that I have never been in an internment camp either. [. . .] there needs [sic] to be clear distinctions made between experience, identity,

This supplementary investigation into intercultural families has introduced issues that require further and more extensive attention. A first step in this direction would be to conduct detailed interviews with all members of intercultural families, or at least with both partners. This investigation would increase our understanding of the concrete effects of ideas of race and culture. Why, for instance, do mothers perceive that the transmission of a culture that is not "theirs" is nonetheless their responsibility, regardless of their wishes or their understanding of their partner's wishes? What perceptions do mixed children have of their parents' relation to, for instance, the racism the children encounter because of their (un)ambiguous racial appearance? What sites of community belonging are imputed to the intercultural family, by whom, and what belonging does the intercultural family perceive as theirs? How does the experience of intermarriage differ with generation and time of immigration? The frequency of Nikkei intermarriage and the increasing attention, within Nikkei communities, to its implications for cultural practice and community identities increase the relevancy of these questions.

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subjectivity, and ontology. There may be overlap to some extent, but no one should forget that these terms are not synonymous" (Fowler 28).

There is a difference between grasping the events and certain implications of the internment, and building an identity based on those events.

## Chapter Three

### Feeding the Body

In Nikkei women's writing, food is a powerful symbol<sup>269</sup> in the processes of identity formation. This chapter discusses various ways in which these writers incorporate food in the construction of permeable and interrelated identities. I address the pervasiveness of food as a symbol: in language, mythology, and in the formation and reclamation of individual and communal selves. I also discuss ways in which, in writing about ethnicity and in textual criticisms of official multiculturalism in Canada, food operates as a metaphor for assimilation and a "trivial" ethnicity. By insisting on the central place of food in the formation of their (ethnic) identities, Nikkei women writers reinvest food with the significance that such criticism often denies. By emphasizing a wide range of both its concrete and imaginative aspects, the writers also reclaim food from a scholarly preoccupation—common in literary criticism especially—with only its metaphorical possibilities. The chapter then demonstrates how, within the Nikkei and the larger Canadian community, food has been used to order the social environment and discipline the unruly behaviour of Nikkei, especially women. I conclude with an overview of various ways in which the transformation that is inscribed in the writing of Nikkei women occurs:

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<sup>269</sup> When I use the term "symbol" I am referring to a process of multiple constructions and significations of invested meanings. Because I attempt to understand the multiple ways in which Nikkei writers assign and recognize meaning, my discussion of that process selects from the range of symbolic processes the ones each writer invokes. At times, then, I discuss transcendent symbolism by which a writer (for instance, Omatsu) relies on a symbol as a way of articulating an essential meaning. In my discussion of other writers (Oikawa, T. Kobayashi, and Oka), I concentrate on the historicity of symbols and their particular meaning within an immediate context—or on the writer's reconstruction of archetypes and transcendent symbols (Oka, for instance, refigures the bath—conventionally a symbol of purity, cleansing, and order—as a symbol of transgressive "impure" sexuality.). Historical context is critical in my examination of symbolic systems underlying practices such as the transmission of culture within families that writers have connected with women's roles. In this case, my use of symbol relates to the system of normative and interpretive statements individuals make about the meaning of culture and its transmission within families (Yanagisako 1985). I am not concerned with "discovering" and explicating a fundamental "Nikkei" idea of symbolism, but instead examine ways in which Nikkei women writers express and form the multiple, interrelated self in and by their writing about the symbol of food and the activities surrounding its gathering, preparation, consumption and excretion.

by the literal processes of eating; by giving voice to unnamed and forbidden desires; and by creating selves outside of the conventionally acceptable.

### *Language*

To say that Nikkei women incorporate food “as language” in their writing is to acknowledge the writers’ use of food as metaphor. Thus in a text by a Nikkei writer, such as Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, we can expect to find words associated with food standing in for some other idea, linking objects and concepts:

*Obasan* shuffles to the trunk and stoops to lift the lid. The thick dust slides off like chocolate icing sugar—antique pollen. Black fly corpses fall to the floor. She pushes aside the piles of old clothes—a 1920s nightgown, a peach-coloured woollen bathing suit. A whiff of mothballs wafts up. The odour of preservation. (25)

*Obasan* has climbed up to the attic looking for something that was, she says, “lost” (24). To Naomi’s offer of help *Obasan* obliquely replies: “Everyone someday dies” (25). The lost thing is from the past, as elusive as dust, or an odour. But Kogawa’s food metaphors also grant substance to this ephemeral past: the sweetness of sugar, the colour and fuzziness of a peach. The “cake” hidden by its chocolate icing evokes intimate details of the past: nightclothes worn in wedding beds; skimpy swimming clothes the colour of the tree which marks the boundary between her paradisaic home and hell;<sup>270</sup> the desiccated and preserved dead who refuse to die. In a genealogy of food, Kogawa records family stories of a present relentlessly determined by each past event, food as metaphor for a past that filters into the present. The featherweight dust of the sugar fills the nostrils; the odours escape as the memories “seep and mingle through cracks” in our houses (25).

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<sup>270</sup> Throughout *Obasan*, the peach is generally a juicy, sweet fruit and the inclusive sign of cultural sustenance. The metaphor is enlivened in a general way by the connection of the peach with the myth of Momotaro, the story that Naomi remembers as a mnemonic for her happy childhood. Because this myth concerns a baby born from a peach (momo), the fruit suggests an innocent sexuality. In the story, Momotaro visits the island of the devils who plundered his parents’ village, and returns to the community all that was taken. However, the peach is also a metonym of the sexual transgression that excludes Naomi from commensality. Naomi describes the peach tree between her Edenic home and the hell of Mr. Gower’s as “the

How apt these images of food are for the intimacy of pasts that refuse to stay put. Food and self join and part on those flimsiest of boundaries between in and out, now and then. In her analysis of textualized starvation, Maud Ellman writes:

Digestion is a kind of fleshly poetry, for metaphor begins in the body's transubstantiations of itself, while food is the thesaurus of all moods and all sensations. (112)

Ellman explores the lexicon of food, arguing for its prototypical nature as a communicative exchange between individuals and between groups. Her text is theoretical in that it is a psychoanalytic study, but it is poetic as well, and at its conclusion Ellman's rigorous investigation luxuriates in sensibilities. Here, at the intersection of the scholarly and the poetic, lies the analytic potential in considering food, this concrete, practical, humble, domestic, and feminine<sup>271</sup> "epitome of all creative and destructive labor," as an element in processes of identity formation (112).

Food regularly appears as language in the systemic metaphors that structure human concepts of the everyday.<sup>272</sup> The vain are said to gobble up praise; the university grinds out graduates (or chews them up and spits them out); writers embody food metaphors in their texts. Lakoff and Johnson list a series of metaphors commonly used by speakers of English which, they say, reflect the metaphorical concept that "ideas are food:" we speak of raw facts, half-baked ideas, warmed-over theories, food for thought and so on (46).<sup>273</sup> Given this abundance

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giant octopus trying to break in" her window during a storm, thus the marker of Mr. Gower's sexual abuse of Naomi as a child (80).

<sup>271</sup> Historically, both men and women have been involved in much of the initial production of farming food, as well as in the economic management of food in the marketplace. In this chapter I am concerned to challenge the weighty theoretical tradition of ideologically connecting women with the body and its pleasures in order to keep the soul uncontaminated. The latter is the right occupation of the "true" philosopher (Plato, *Phaedo* 47-50). See also *Republic* and *Laws*.

<sup>272</sup> In *Metaphors we Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue for the systematic use of metaphor in thought processes. That is, linguistic metaphors are possible because metaphors already exist in the thought processes of individual "conceptual systems" (6).

<sup>273</sup> Lakoff and Johnson are useful because they appreciate the extent to which metaphor shapes cognitive processes, and because they offer a comprehensive dictionary of metaphors that are no longer recognized as such because they are so familiar. The text is, however, limited by its tendency to universalize specific language usage. For example, the metaphor "raw facts" has very different meanings in a culture which considers raw fish a threat to health and in another which relishes it.

of food metaphors in everyday speech, it is surprising that the growing critical interest in the discourse of food is only a recent phenomenon. It is surprising, until one recalls that the dualistic thought informing a great deal of western foundational philosophy relegates ideas of “woman” and “the body” (two integral components in metaphorical food) to the dark side of life.

Yet the abundance of such metaphors is provocative since this same philosophy often feeds on ideas about the body even as the discourse rejects it—digesting, excreting.<sup>274</sup> This irony is a place where one might begin to try and understand what it means for a text or writer to incorporate—embody—food. However, when reading the texts of Nikkei women, I consider it important to leave that starting place quickly. As any irony does, the necessity of rejecting a concept even as one conceives a philosophy based on that concept demands separation, an idea of “this” which is not “that.” Such ideological separation is rare in the writing of Nikkei women, and rests on traditions only recently added to the ancestral philosophies of these writers. As Naoe (Obāchan) warns Muriel (Murasaki)<sup>275</sup> in Hiromi Goto’s novel *Chorus of Mushrooms*:

Forget the Greeks! And don’t quote Bible verses to me, child. There were stories long before Eve tasted fruit fit for women. (18)

As I have read the fiction, poetry, journals, letters, and theory written by Nikkei women, it has become clear to me that the writers treat food literally as often as they explore its metaphoricity. This is especially true in the writing of Hiromi Goto and Mona Oikawa in the 1990s, but also in that of Imada Ito and Kaoru Ikeda, who wrote in the 1940s. These writers imagine the substance of food as a way to understanding something conceptual.<sup>276</sup> However, in

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<sup>274</sup> In *Phaedo*, Socrates and Simmias go on at some length discussing their need, as true philosophers, to escape the contaminated prisonhouse of bodily appetite and to dwell on matters of the soul instead.

<sup>275</sup> Naoe calls her granddaughter Muriel or Murasaki depending on context. Murasaki means “purple.” It is also the name (Murasaki Shikibu) of the presumed writer of *Genji Monogatari*, or *The Tale of Genji*, written sometime in the eleventh century.

<sup>276</sup> I agree with Kittay that the “conceptual oddity” of metaphor alters or “reorganizes” meaning generally (86-88). That is, when a metaphor renders incongruous familiar meanings of words or the world to which the words refer, the reader must alter the meaning of the words or the world, or both, in order to interpret the metaphor. For instance, one outcome of the conceptual oddity in Goto’s metaphorical “chorus of mushrooms” (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 86), might be that we

their writing, food is also a place where the lines isolating the material from the ideal (food from word, food from self) are so indistinct, and the realms so symbiotic that food becomes a way of elucidating being, and a textual entry into realms where food is being.

Recollections of her childhood form much of the story that Murasaki tells her lover:

Obāchan's bed of tales was a good place to dream in. Her words sometimes notes of music instead of symbols to decipher. Lay my head in her bony lap and swallow sound. (29)

Muriel's mother, Keiko, has taught her daughter to speak only English, in lessons reinforced by a diet reft of Japanese food. Obāchan, equally determined that the family remember Japanese, refuses to speak English. Like many other grandchildren, Muriel cannot comprehend her Obāchan's language. Instead, she meets Obāchan in her grandmotherly bed, over forbidden snacks sent from Naoe's brother in Japan, or as she lays her head in Obāchan's "bony" lap.

I turned my head slowly in Obāchan's lap, the fabric scratch and sniff. Inhaled dust and poetry. She stroked my forehead with her palm, and her words, they flowed fluid. I snuggled close and curled my legs and stopped pretending to understand. Only listened. And listened. And then my mouth opened on its own accord and words fell from my tongue like treasure. (52)

In her Obāchan's lap, Murasaki leaves the howling wind and dust of Nanton and enters Naoe's synaesthetic<sup>277</sup> world where words are things to be swallowed and poetry is breathed in with the prairie dust. And it is in this place where Muriel, the malnourished musume,<sup>278</sup> "reads" the lines

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either expand the human element of "the chorus" to include elements of the botanical, or the botanical nature of mushrooms to include the human, or both.

<sup>277</sup> Baron-Cohen and Harrison (1996) define synaesthesia (literally "joined sensation") as a sensory phenomenon that occurs "when stimulation of one sensory modality automatically triggers a perception in a second modality, in the absence of any direct stimulation to this second modality" (3). For instance, the sight of a particular colour may be sensed as a sound. Phonism is the specific term used when the stimulation of any sense produces an auditory sensation. In this case an individual may be said to "hear" a touch (*Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*, S-111). The synaesthetic individual is "born to a world where one sensation conjures up other, sometimes all five clashing together" (Cytowic 1996).

Although the mode of inheritance for synaesthesia is not certain, it is most likely x-linked dominant, with lethality in males (Bailey and Johnson 1996). That is, women carry the gene for synaesthesia on one of their X chromosomes, and the gene is lethal in hemizygous (XY) male fetuses. Thus, males who carry the gene can only pass it on to their female children.

Goto materializes this biomedical model of feminine inheritance by having Naoe pass a type of synaesthesia on to her daughter and granddaughter by touch, rather than by blood.

<sup>278</sup> daughter

on her Obāchan's face, and becomes able to speak the mother tongue forbidden by her mother (29).

Goto's exhaustive and imaginative use of food in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, and the particular ways in which other writing by Nikkei women incorporates food, can be only partially explained with the help of current critical approaches. The attraction of food in contemporary literature is its imaginative potential. Regarding the intertextuality of "literary eating symbolism," Lillian Furst calls "[t]he power poetics of food [. . .] an entry to one of the most neglected areas of literary study—what might be called the logic of visualization, the way images and image-usage patterns constitute not merely texts but literary traditions and even the cultures that generate texts" (44). But Furst's insistence on the imaginative aspect of the food metaphor, in opposition to its physicality, does not account for the particular ways in which Nikkei writers figure food as tangible elements in the processes of identity-making.<sup>279</sup> When Obāchan and Murasaki huddle together under the bedclothes, gleefully rude,<sup>280</sup> smacking, crunching, and draining sake bottles, the rebels' engagement with food is thwarting Keiko's desperate dietary strategies to transform and mold her mother<sup>281</sup> and daughter.

There're two ways of eating squid. To chew and chew and chomp and chew and wring out the juices from the leather flesh, or to hold the squid in your cheek and let it soak up the saliva until it swells and softens. Obāchan always chewed like mad, words falling out with each snap of her jaw. (18)

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<sup>279</sup> Furst's claim is that "[f]ood is not a physiological object in literature, but a unit of imagination that is in turn generated less individually than socially, within a framework of power relations" (54).

<sup>280</sup> As well as eating in a generally "unladylike" manner that the fastidious Keiko despises, Obāchan and Murasaki enjoy breaking Keiko's specific rule about not "smacking" your lips while drinking, both actions which challenge traditional Japanese and western food mores. This image of the "unfeminine" Asian woman is becoming familiar in subversive texts by Asian North American women. Yau Ching (1997) describes the companions in the film *Fast Life on a Lazy Susan* by Tien as "eating in a typically unfeminine, and therefore unoriental [sic], manner" (30). This image appears regularly in Mona Oikawa's writing. For instance, in her poem, "Eating Ramen," two women boldly kiss and hold hands in a restaurant, "this disrupted space / we are creating" (*Outrage*, 53). However, Murasaki also emphasizes the arbitrariness of food ritual by redefining this transgression as "a symbolic gesture of respect to what you've consumed" (17).

<sup>281</sup> I would say Keiko has given up on making over her mother into a good Canadian, and would be content if Naoe would just be quiet.

These “words” are audible speech, for Obāchan never stops talking, willing audience or not. But Goto also gives speech materiality with her image of words tumbling out together with spit, senbei<sup>282</sup> crumbs, and wayward drops of sake. Once satisfied, Murasaki, “covered in sheets of cracker,” snuggles comprehendingly in Obāchan’s lap. “I couldn’t understand the words she spoke,” recalls Muriel in the midst of her own storytelling, “but this is what I heard” (18). And once again, Murasaki relates one of her Obāchan’s tales to her lover, in the Japanese language she claims not to understand, and in her absent Obāchan’s voice.

When Goto writes of stories with the power to “feed” (201), she is not imprisoning language inside a metaphoricity that assigns food only a figurative status. Goto’s text depends heavily on food metaphors, but it exceeds<sup>283</sup> a rhetoric of food which only “objectifies the ineffable qualities of life.”<sup>284</sup> In stressing the permeability of the line dividing food and language, Goto writes from a tradition popular among psychoanalytic criticism, especially that following Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject.<sup>285</sup> We might even ask of Goto: “Is this surreptitious food orgy text or event?”<sup>286</sup> It is both, because the text does make metonymic connections between food and language as a reference for the interrelated self. The power of the symbolic structures in Goto’s texts, and in other writing by Nikkei women, derives from the general importance of food to communal life and the significance of food in Japanese Canadian communities. But by emphasizing the actual process of eating, Goto and other Nikkei writers are challenging the referentiality of metonymy as they use it. Words are lost to the untrustworthy materiality of food; identities are created by and through the food which people eat.

In its dependence on an inconstant materiality, writing by Nikkei women, and *Chorus of Mushrooms* in particular, challenges processes of signification which rely on categorical

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<sup>282</sup> rice crackers, sometimes covered in seaweed

<sup>283</sup> When I speak throughout this chapter of food as a vocabulary for excess, this is one meaning of “excess” which I intend, that is, excess as the language beyond the conventional.

<sup>284</sup> Schofield 1989, 2.

<sup>285</sup> Kristeva 1982; Ellman 1993; Gunew unpub.; Deleuze and Guattari 1986.

distinctions to establish meaning. Both structuralism and psychoanalytic criticism offer paradigms for considering food as language.<sup>287</sup> As Sneja Gunew stresses in her essay, "The Melting Pot of Assimilation: Cannibalizing the Multicultural Body," one can use a psychoanalytic framework, and still rigorously explicate the way that food "contends with" language (4). I agree with Gunew that elements of psychoanalytic theories are applicable to the interpretation of food and language. However, this approach is bound to ideologies of the western cultures which produced psychoanalysis, and is inadequate to address fully writing by individuals with Japanese and Canadian heritages.<sup>288</sup>

Anthropologist Stephen Mennell is particularly harsh with what he terms the "static" nature of structuralist theorizing (6-7). In *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Mennell criticizes the structuralist need for constants, something he defines as a "tendency in Western thought" (13). There are in western intellectual traditions tendencies inimical to the interpretation of a great deal of Canadian writing, but Mennell may be confusing stasis with order, or perhaps even with a desire for atemporality. For instance, Mary Douglas (1969)—one of the "structuralists" Mennel criticizes—identifies as spurious any distinction that one might make between structural categories such as the sacred and profane. These categories implicate each other and are, Douglas emphasizes, ontologically related. Also, in the 1920s and 30s Park had already recognized the potential which structuralism holds for transformative interaction between private desire and public structure:

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<sup>286</sup> Stressing the ontological indeterminacy of "here" and "banquet," Michel Jeanneret asks a similar question of Beroalde's statement (in *Le Moyen*), "if you were to take these words out of here, this banquet would be imperfect" (244).

<sup>287</sup> For example, see Douglas 1969; Lévi-Strauss, translation by John and Doreen Weightman 1969; Geertz 1973; Saussure 1983, translation by Roy Harris; Lacan 1977, translation by Alan Sheridan; Kristeva 1982, translation by Leon S. Roudiez.

<sup>288</sup> Although negotiation of the "old" and "new" cultures is a familiar refrain in writing by and about "ethnic" Canadians, in only the strictest sense can we say that Nikkei negotiate just two heritages. As I discuss throughout this study, cultures are constructed by an infinite number of physical and spiritual (that is, non-material) relations. Also, with intermarriage many writers inherit multiple cultures.

We are constantly remaking the world in accordance with our desires, but that world, once created, inevitably reacts back upon our desires to reshape them and define them in conformity with itself. (*Race and Culture* 31)<sup>289</sup>

Nikkei women's writing about the importance of food in their lives—the planning, planting, harvesting, preparing, serving, desiring, eating, and cleaning up after of food—also challenges the unravelling effects of a poststructuralist deferral of meaning or a postmodern insistence on the impossibility of transcendence.

In criticism, the cult of the body has arisen in defense against poststructuralism, and especially against the fear that “history” and “real life” have been overlooked in favour of a dangerous Gallic fascination with the signifier. (3)

Ellman's description of current critical interest in the body as a “cult” overstates the case. Certainly, in feminist theories in Europe and North America there has been a major shift away from issues of equality to an exhilarating preoccupation with the body following Hélène Cixous's (1976) exhortation to write the body, and Luce Irigaray's (1977) explication of female sexuality. Concurrently, Michel Foucault's (1979 and 1981) explorations of sexuality and power focused critical attention on the body generally, while specifically influencing discussions of, for example, the internment of Nikkei during the second World War.<sup>290</sup>

Ellman's distinction between the “cult of the body” and poststructuralism may be a distinction just as forced as that between the sacred and the profane. While Foucault, Cixous, and Irigaray are all renaming or substituting old signifiers with new, investigations such as Gordon Nakagawa's, which consider the body as signifier need not—necessarily—diminish the history and reality of material bodies. If anything, real, suffering Nikkei bodies become just as unavoidably present when, for instance, Nakagawa aligns interned bodies of American Nikkei with the quarantined “plague victims” or “lepers” described by Foucault:

The scarred flesh, the disfiguring burns, the miscarried child, the turberculin elder: All bear more than memories of bodily violation, more than signifiers of their original pain and infliction. (160)

Thus the narrated body exceeds its signification.

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<sup>289</sup> Ohnuki-Tierney also cites Lévi-Strauss's attention to “transformation and counter-transformation between metonymy and metaphor” (130).

I do agree with critics who identify a shortfall when “minority” texts are submitted to poststructuralist, and other, analyses that challenge the existence of the authentic subject (Miyoshi 1991; Smith 1987). This is especially the case for texts that introduce a subjectivity newly named or constructed. Yet the reading of “minority” texts benefits from a strategic critical engagement with elements of poststructuralist theory, such as its concern with power relations and historicization. In naming the general critical popularity of the body a “cult,” Ellman risks repeating an unavoidable historical practice much older than structuralism, that of presenting the history and real life of women as lying outside the central projects of criticism. Nikkei women have been writing since their arrival in Canada, but have been widely read only since the 1980s.<sup>291</sup> To come to the interrelated themes of food and the body in their texts expecting a cultish speaking back to poststructuralism is to diminish the importance of the events of history in even the most deconstructive of these texts, and to misunderstand the complex and often contradictory ways in which the texts engage with the entire process of signification.

### *Mythology*

When one is identified with the food one eats one is identified with the whole universe; when we are one with the whole universe we are one with the food we eat.

*Vimalakirti Scripture* (cited in Dōgen, 153)

This passage from Buddhist scripture introduces the mythical aspect of food as an element in the making of identities. It also reminds us that the fullest reading of texts by Nikkei writers depends on the reader’s awareness and knowledge of the complex spiritual heritage informing the writing.

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<sup>290</sup> For evidence of a shift in emphasis from the recording of internment stories as historical event to a discursive analysis of the internment as disciplinary practice see Nakagawa (1992).

<sup>291</sup> The immediate and widespread popularity of Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* (1981) awakened the general public to writing by Nikkei writers (Kitagawa’s work also became known initially because Kogawa integrated a significant amount of her unpublished writing in *Obasan*). This date was also a significant moment for many younger Nikkei women writers who either name Kogawa as their inspiration or, like Hiromi Goto, invoke *Obasan* in their own texts:

“[Muriel Kitagawa’s] papers testify to her outspoken determination to challenge the Canadian government and the citizens of this country. And reading Joy Kogawa’s book, *Obasan*, was like

Issei who write have spent the majority of their formative childhood years in Japan; others, like the growing group of sansei and yonsei writers, generally experience Japan indirectly, either as visitors or through family stories. Among the latter group of writers are those who suffer the legacy of racism which was directed at their parents and grandparents in the years leading up to and during the Second World War. Other contemporaries of the sansei and yonsei came to Canada as immigrants. Moreover, individual responses to racism are as diverse as are the histories of Nikkei immigration. Some Nikkei have either persisted with familiar religious practices since their arrival in Canada, or have resuscitated them as part of a cultural rediscovery after the war. Others have abandoned the religions to which they may have adhered in Japan and adopted Christianity—or not. Still others have managed to blend a variety of religions into one harmonious whole. Whatever their current religious practice may be, it is still vital to acknowledge that all Nikkei writers are at least informed, however variously, by the central religious or moral teachings of Japan *and* the west. In continuing to read food as a component of identity formation in Nikkei writing, I investigate the interrelations of food with these various mythologies.<sup>292</sup>

In her discussion of rice as a metaphor of self, Ohnuki-Tierney examines the imperative weight of food in relation to Japanese mythology, specifically the symbolic equation of rice with the gods of creation and the Japanese imperial system. Rice is the one grain believed to possess a soul.<sup>293</sup> In one creation story in *Kojiki, The Record of Ancient Matters*, rice and fish are “born” through the mouth of Ukemochi-no Kami, the food deity; when the deity dies, rice emerges from his abdomen and millet from his eyes. In the version of creation found in

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restoring memory of my past, giving me threads of connection to a community shattered through imprisonment and dispersal” (Oikawa 1992, 106–107).

<sup>292</sup> I am using mythology here as an umbrella term which covers the entire body of story by which people explain, order, or understand the universe they name as theirs. As such, mythology includes religious teachings, fairy tales, legends, and myths. I contrast this mythology with those ideas and practices which national and social groups (like “Canadians” or “Japanese Canadians” or “Christians”) consider to be either scientifically verifiable or common sense. My use of mythology emphasizes what individual or groups of actors claim with regard to truth, fact, and belief; I am not asserting the objectivity of scientific “fact” over religious “belief.”

<sup>293</sup> Yanagita (1982d, cited in Ohnuki-Tierney 44).

*Nihonshiki*, the rice deity is born right after the brother and sister creation gods, Izanami and Izanagi, die of starvation once they have created what is now Japan.<sup>294</sup> In other chapters of Japan's mythology, gods are named after foods; spheres of responsibility are defined by food; and the symbolic supremacy of the imperial line is signalled by, and contained in, the supremacy of rice.<sup>295</sup> Thus Japanese mythology acknowledges a foundational symbolic connection between food, language, and identities of the individual and nation.

Food is equally central to Christian stories of creation, and of man's—or more precisely woman's—fallen state within the great scheme. In the familiar biblical story, food is a symbol of spiritual supremacy and benevolence: God creates “all the plants that have grain for seeds and all the trees whose fruits have seed,” and then gives them as food to the man he has also created. Unable to resist Eve's entreaties, Adam yields to the woman (who has already been swayed by Satan), and the pair eats the one fruit God has forbidden them, the food that promises knowledge and discernment. As God casts them from the garden, food becomes the ultimate sign of separation, human appetite, and evil.<sup>296</sup>

However, food, the vehicle of the Fall, is also the eucharistic sign of reconciliation and unity, moderated by the transgressive residue of the Edenic forbidden.

In Aunt Emily's package, the papers are piled as neatly as the thin white wafers in Sensei's silver box—symbols of communion, the materials of communication, white paper bread for the mind's meal. (*Obasan* 182)

Here vehicle and tenor have switched places and we see plainly the reflexive nature of metaphor.<sup>297</sup> Earlier in the novel, food was a metaphor for language, and for a past that intruded on the present. Now the language of Naomi's mother's letters—letters of separation—is the symbolic metaphor for the food which is, in turn, the symbol of oneness with God, the

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<sup>294</sup> Also cited in Ohnuki-Tierney (51-52). *Kojiki* (A.D. 712) and *Nihonshoki* (A.D. 672-686) are generally considered the earliest written records in Japan.

<sup>295</sup> *Kojiki; Nihonshiki*; Ohnuki-Tierney 1993; Piggot 1983; Dorson 1962.

<sup>296</sup> Genesis 1-2.

<sup>297</sup> Richards (1936) coined the words “vehicle” and “tenor” as names for the two components of metaphor. Vehicle is the literal meaning of the words in the metaphor; tenor is the figurative meaning or “idea conveyed by the vehicle” (Kittay 16).

ultimate communion. Of course a concrete reality of “separation” depends on the ideological separation of the pure and the impure, the Creator and the created.

In Buddhist and Shinto teaching on the interdependence of spirit and matter this type of separation is philosophically impossible. Positing a Western philosopher who wonders what the Japanese do about “the mind-body problem,” Thomas P. Kasulis (1993) stresses that “the Japanese do not recognize the mind-body problem at all” (301). His point is that Westerners often ask the wrong questions of Japanese, and that the Japanese lack of recognition arises from their conviction that mind and body exist as a “complex” (302-03). Thus there can be no separation. And thus, says Kasulis, the words of Kukai,<sup>298</sup> “sokushin jōbutsu,” can be translated as “one becomes a buddha in and through this very body” (307).<sup>299</sup>

Kasulis notes the similarity between the integration of the human mind-body complex with that of the Buddha and Motōri Norinaga’s Shinto-influenced teachings on aesthetics.

Motōri, says Kasulis, developed the idea of kokoro:

The poetic impulse, we might say, is expressed in our being so in touch with things that we become touched by them. At that moment, the total kokoro expresses itself through the poet as language. (309).

Kasulis notes that Motōri’s notion of kokoro expands the common definitions of “heart” and “mind” to include all sensations, emotions, and verbalizations (309). Finally, since the complex of kokoro is a continuous, reflexive path between the individual and the world, it is related, “[i]n the most profound sense” to Kukai’s doctrine that “all of being is buddha-nature” (309).

The concept of unity has informed philosophy in Japan with the same intensity that dualism<sup>300</sup> has shaped western philosophy. Yuasa Yasuo (1993) explains:

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<sup>298</sup> founder of Shingon Buddhism

<sup>299</sup> “It has been explained that Buddha is not a physical body but is Enlightenment. A body may be thought of as a receptacle; then, if this receptacle is filled with Enlightenment, it may be called Buddha” (*The Teaching of Buddha* 60).

<sup>300</sup> “Buddha’s teaching leads us to non-duality, from the discriminating concept of two conflicting points of view. It is a mistake for people to seek a thing supposed to be good and right, and to flee from another supposed to be bad and evil.[. . .] Buddha teaches the Middle Way transcending these prejudiced concepts, where duality merges into oneness” (*The Teaching of Buddha* 125–126).

The East has never experienced in its history a conflict between science and religion. I feel that I cannot straightforwardly follow the either-or alternative between science and religion or between rationality and nonrationality. (347)

With this teaching in mind, I read Dōgen's<sup>301</sup> explication of the Vimalakirti Scripture, understanding that food as metaphor is a logical impossibility within Buddhist philosophy:

"The whole universe and a meal are identical in quality." ("Fushuku-Hampō," or "Meal-time Regulations," 153)

Before proceeding with his instructions on eating, Dōgen inserts a passage from the *Lankavatara Scripture*: "Both concept and reality are equal as they are in the eye of the Buddha, there being no difference between them whatsoever" (153). This equality is absolute, Dōgen explains; there is no difference. And so it follows that our "personification" of the Buddha, of Truth, is not metaphorical. Being equal with the Buddha is not transcendence—in the western sense of rising above matter—but an absolute materialization of spirit.

This is not the Christian Eucharist. A practising Buddhist does not simply commemorate or remember Buddha by eating,<sup>302</sup> nor is the material state of the "sacraments" elevated to the spiritual by being blessed. Rather, the truth that already exists is made apparent or "realized" by eating. The transcendence of eating is thus revelatory, a confirmation that the spiritual and the material "inter"-exist.<sup>303</sup> "When we eat, the universe is the whole Truth in its appearance, nature, substance, force, activity, cause, effect, relatedness, consequence and individuality" (153). Transformation occurs on a horizontal plane as the "correct mind" is transmitted "from one Buddha to another." (153). Eating, then, becomes an enabling act, the praxis that will "allow us to manifest the enlightenment we already have" (Kasulis 312).

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<sup>301</sup> Dōgen (1200-1253 AD) was the founder of Japanese Sōtō Zen Buddhism

<sup>302</sup> I am referring here to the Last Supper and Christ's command that his disciples "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22: 19).

<sup>303</sup> I distinguish inter-existence from co-existence, although even this distinction probably does not sustain the possible extreme interdependence of spirit and matter. Yuasa Yasuo identifies the contemporary search in philosophy and science for a new understanding of the relations between the inner and outer cosmos as an attempt to revise what he calls Cartesian "disjunctive dualism." My suggestion that spirit and matter "inter-exist" is probably closer to the "correlative dualism" that Yuasa observes as a principle of holistic medicine, an idea that Yuasa is convinced still does not interrogate the "principal relationship" between the two domains (356).

The opposition that I draw between Christian and Buddhist praxis may also be as spurious as that between the sacred and the profane. As translated in the Gospels, Christ's assertion that "this is my body"<sup>304</sup> more closely resembles Buddhist ideas concerning the interrelations of spirit and matter than it does church doctrine or exegesis. Perhaps insisting that the bread and wine metaphorically signify or represent the body of Christ satisfies both structural linguistics and Cartesian dualism more faithfully than it does Christ's words.<sup>305</sup>

Miyoshi (1989) explains that the concept of separateness is almost irrelevant to the ways in which the subjectivities of writer and reader occur in the majority of fictional, poetic and dramatic forms of Japanese literature. Japanese literature, says Miyoshi, perceives subjectivity as interrelation. Authorship is "public and communal:"

Less emphasis is placed on the acute sense of separation between the inside and outside, subjectivity and objectivity, artistic space and life space, than on the intense experience of fusion and collapse of such isolations. (165)

Keeping in mind the diversity of historical experience among Nikkei writers, we can expect influences from both Buddhist and Christian teaching to be evident in their texts. Some writers, like Kogawa, are concerned with food as metaphor, as a concrete bridge to community, and with the dissolving of boundaries as figured in the process of eating. But the texts of others are occupied with food that already is wholeness, thus challenging the idea of boundaries, or at least pointing to the fragility of the borders we imagine are there.

In her poem "Returning," Haruko Okano suggests the comfort of being welcomed back into community:

Grain by grain  
held close,  
I am gathered  
into wholeness. (*Come Spring* 50).

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<sup>304</sup> Matthew 26: 26-28; Mark 14: 22-24; Luke 22: 19-20.

<sup>305</sup> "While we look at the outward signs of Christ's body broken and his blood shed for the remission of our sins, let us recollect that the feast cost him as much as though he had literally given his flesh to be eaten and his blood for us to drink" (Henry n.d. 716). See also pages 736 and 767.

Okano invokes food as a symbol for individual identity and the individual in community. However, her stress on the connections of identity with a particular type of food, namely rice, echoes ancient stories in which the soul of the rice grain dwells in the various rice deities and, by inheritance, in each individual soul. Okano's emphasis on the particular helps us understand that, for Japanese (and to some extent, Japanese Canadians) rice is both a dietary and mythological staple. It also underscores the fact that the appellation, "the Bread of Life," could never, except in the most ironic way, be affixed to a Japanese god. I discuss below the relation of certain other foods to community identity. At this point, I am concerned specifically with the mythological significance of rice.

American Nikkei writer Lonny Kaneko describes an inevitable connection between "American" Christianity and a bread-based diet in his short story, "Of Bread and Rice." Adolescent tribal boundaries in his Nikkei community are therefore drawn along religious lines. Recalling the immorality of "young Buddhist hoodlums," Kaneko muses:

In short, our Buddhist nemeses were more rice eaters than bread eaters. As rice eaters, they had remained in the houses of their grandparents—figuratively, if not literally—and were taught to embrace their heritage, which flourished with more than the usual accoutrements of rice and incense and golden figures. (178)

Unlike their converted Christian cousins, the "indecent" others remaining in the ancestral home "as rice eaters," maintain their heritage because they eat rice, in the material form of rice eaters, and involved in the exchange of rice with their ancestors (from the grandmothers who cook, and to the dead who receive rice offered at the family altar). That is, the rice of the altar distinguishes the condemned hoodlums, "as foreign as those ["long-grain"<sup>306</sup>] immigrant

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<sup>306</sup> Ohnuki-Tierney stresses that it is short-grain rice that symbolizes the "Japanese" self, versus the "Chinese" (128). I would say that even now, among the Nikkei in my community of family and friends, the idea of eating Japanese (Canadian) food with Chinese rice is quite odd. This resistance is partially practical: it's much easier to pick up dry, long-grain rice with substantial bamboo chopsticks than with slippery tapered "Japanese" lacquer chopsticks. However, as I discuss below, maintaining such distinctions (one could, after all, have both "Chinese" and "Japanese" chopsticks in the kitchen drawer) is at least as vital when individuals perceive culture as slipping away, or being lost, as when one's culture is believed to be impervious to change.

teenagers from China,” from those redeemed who swallow the host’s American way of life with the host of the communion table. (177)

As Nikkei transformed their cultural practices to accommodate what they and others perceived as a Canadian or American way of life, the power of food as a distinguishing metaphor of culture began to ebb. Stereotypical marks of the “traditional” issei and the “westernized” nisei generations were perceived as so different that marital unions between the two groups were characterized using the same terms as those applied to marriage between Nikkei and other racial groups. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the “marriage problem” reported in the *New Canadian* was a label Nikkei used to signify nisei resistance to parental involvement in the choice of marriage partners as well as marriage between Nikkei and non-Nikkei. But the term also encompassed the scarcity of brides for marriageable men incarcerated in road camps during the Second World War, and the “differences in cultural background between the average Issei single man and the average Nisei girl” (*New Canadian* 30 Jan. 1943, 2).

Once distinguishing barriers blur in this way, the power of a particular food to distinguish one culture from among others weakens. Kaneko suggests that attempts at maintaining such categories are futile in the face of the current multicultural American reality wrought by immigration and intermarriage. Of his own children he says: “[B]ecause they have been raised almost solely on McDonald’s and Sesame Street, their cultural search would make them just another set of ethnic tourists” (184). Yet suggesting that intermarriage dissipates the power of food as a marker of bounded cultures does not mean that intermarriage lessens the salience of food as a marker of cultures generally. As I mentioned earlier, prejudicial ideas about the resultant cultural ambiguity of intermarriage cause her schoolmates to exile the Eurasian Tammy Okada, in *The Jade Peony*, from any homogeneous community. The “victim” of miscegenation, Tammy is not only deformed mentally, but physically as well—“thick-waisted from a poor diet” (Choy 181).

Apart from intermarriage, Ohnuki-Tierney agrees that the meaning of the self as rice has changed over time, as has its materiality (128). Then what do we make of Okano’s insistence

on rice as a metaphor of the self, more specifically her self, in community? From the age of nine, non-Nikkei foster parents raised Okano. She describes *Come Spring* as the story of her "journey to the present," an "approach" to her Japanese Canadian identity "from the outside in. [. . . Y]et it has been like coming home" (9). Okano's poem, "Returning," tells the story of finding oneself in and through the rituals of the rice harvest. As in *Obasan*, we read of "lost" things:

Head tilts,  
listening.  
mind straining  
to recall.

The rhythm  
of the Harvest Dance  
sways my body.

My hands seek  
the rightness of the place.

My feet carry me  
along a near  
forgotten  
path. (30)

One might describe the exercise of Okano's dance as "ethnic tourism."<sup>307</sup> But this harsh position is difficult to maintain in light of Buddhist precepts: concept and reality are equal; one becomes a Buddha through this very body; pre-existent Truth is made apparent in praxis. In light of such precepts Okano's harvest dance resembles a kata.<sup>308</sup> As her hands repeat the ancient ritual, the learner transcends her own clumsy body; in the performance of the dance, kokoro is expressed.

Significantly, this is a harvest dance. As mentioned above, rice is the one grain believed to possess a soul, and may be described as the prototypical metaphor of the Japanese individual and communal self. Thus harvest rituals are particularly important in Japanese

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<sup>307</sup> By imagining his children as ethnic tourists in search of "a stronger identification with their Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino heritages" (184), Kaneko refers to situational or behaviour ethnicity. The dismissive connotations of "tourism" suggest that Kaneko also identifies voluntary, behavioural ethnicity as inauthentic.

cosmology; harvest is a time, explains Ohnuki-Tierney, when associated rituals symbolize “a generalized exchange of souls and bodies between deities and humans” (57-58). The soul of an ancient culture can still visit the bodies of its estranged children.

### *Alimentary Symbols of Identity*

I have suggested ways in which food is central to the language of every day, and to the language of Japanese and Western mythology. Similarities between certain of these concepts and the material reality of food—or shared ideas surrounding food—confirm and enhance our perceptions of the world. To declare that the succulent ripe peach is as “soft as a baby’s bum” corroborates notions of youth and purity that are suggested by a “peaches and cream” complexion. But the seemingly incongruous pairing of the delectable peach with the part of the baby that is often soiled and smelly, the juxtaposing of the edible with the excretal, also challenges any conviction about the uncontaminated nature of either youth or purity—or the sweet peach, for that matter.<sup>309</sup> Thus similarities of concept and reality in food metaphors confirm perceptions of the world even as their incongruities change the meanings of those perceptions.<sup>310</sup>

Moreover, as I have shown above, in the language of everyday, speakers often elide food with language to a point where the two become indistinguishable components of one idea. Commenting on a presentation, a teacher may report that her students “lapped (or “ate”) it up.” The metaphoricity of this statement derives from an identity or equation of food and speech that

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<sup>308</sup> Kata is a pattern or form of movement. As in martial arts, meditation, tea ceremony and so on, kata are usually highly standardized movements associated with the activity.

<sup>309</sup> In fact, the apparent perfection of the peach found in the supermarket today, or even picked from the tree, is less suggestive of the rare “perfect” gift from nature than it is the common presence of toxic pesticidal residue. Organically produced fruit, with its off-putting physical imperfections, ruins a storehouse of food metaphors.

<sup>310</sup> In this example similarity and incongruity exist within the one metaphor, a peach as soft as a baby’s bum. Of course we use metaphors that may not seem at all incongruous, such as a “peaches and cream” complexion. I would argue that even these Aristotelian examples may contain incongruous associations. If the complexion is that of a sexually active twelve year-old girl, the strength of the metaphor’s connotations of conventional notions of purity is seriously undercut by the irony.

has some of its roots in the mythologies of the west and Japan. One of the foundational precepts of Christianity is a logocentrism based on food: the pairing of John's assertion that Christ is the "word of God" (John 1:1) and the "the bread of life" (John 6: 33-35) with Christ's own teaching that the bread and wine are his body and blood. Buddhism also makes little distinction between food and deities in granting rice a soul, and distinguishing gods by their dietary significance.

In the writings of Nikkei women it is impossible to try and measure the degrees of influence which these mythologies exert on individual texts and/or writers. The power of John's gospel on a Christian sansei writer may be easily overwhelmed by her Obāchan's strict adherence to Buddhism's scripture of *Three Thousand Manners*. Therefore, I have tried to avoid ordering degrees of influence, while still showing that the roots of Nikkei writers' textual dependence on food may lie deep and undisturbed by changes at the surface of life.

Having discussed the pervasiveness of food as a trope in the language of everyday, in the poetics of Nikkei writing, and in the writers' ancestral mythologies, I now want to consider more specifically how food operates in Nikkei writing as a defining symbol of identity. I approach the subject from three perspectives: 1) the appropriateness of food as a material component of, and metaphor for, identity; 2) the usefulness of food in circumscribing the boundaries of belonging (and, therefore, not belonging) to a group; and 3) the efficacy of food in recovering lost and/or imaginary homelands.

#### *The matter and metaphor of identity*

While the pervasiveness of textualized food is not at issue here, it is important to address the historical reluctance of western philosophy to consider food as a contributing component in theories of identity. In her discussion of this reluctance, Curtin (1992) names as culprit the foundational structures of dualist thought. The "ontological separateness" and differential value attributed to each of the familiar dualistic pairs (light/dark, man/woman, good/evil) means that food, material and deeply relational as it is, does not merit the intellectual

attention demanded by the incorporeal, atemporal and extraordinary left side of the binaries: “Back in the cave, the artisan class must ‘get the meal on the table’ somehow; just how is not a matter of interest to the philosopher” (5).

As Plato has Socrates say in *Phaedo*, once he has established the futility of seeking “pure knowledge” while still burdened with the body:

And therefore, while we live, it would seem that we shall be closest to knowledge in this way—if we consort with the body as little as possible, and do not commune with it, except in so far as we must, and do not infect ourselves with its nature, but remain pure from it, until God himself shall release us [. . .] (12 - 13).<sup>311</sup>

Of course food has long been a familiar theme in literature, just as recording and interpreting food practices have always been central projects in anthropology.<sup>312</sup> The recent contamination of theory with the production and consumption and even the excretion of food suggests a provocative moment in the history of thought. Psychoanalytic theory (whether Freudian, Jungian, Lacanian or Kristevan) with its emphasis on the infant’s biological relationship with the mother; Foucault’s historicization of the body and sexuality; the politics of identity; postcolonial critical attention to the colonized body; cultural criticism in capitalist cultures where infinite representations of the body are as crucial to national production and consumption as are the products they sell; feminism, with its insistence on acknowledging the centrality of the body to any theoretical project—each of these theories has recently begun forming its versions of why and how the body has always been “absolutely necessary” in the soul’s journey.

Whether one describes this awakening as a reactionary “cult of the body” or as simply fortuitous, the risk presented by the biological flavour of this theoretical development is familiar to feminist and ethnic studies scholars. However, the risk is a necessary one, if the historical centrality of food in texts by women and “minorities” is to be appreciated. In future, late twentieth-century theories of food may in retrospect be interpreted as a period of theoretical

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<sup>311</sup> In fact, Curtin points out that Plato seemed to think the body only “confuses the mind in its pursuit of the absolutely true” (“Food/Body/Person” 5)

<sup>312</sup> Here I am less concerned to trace the historical insistent presence of food in certain genres or disciplines than I am to address its more recent textual explosion, especially in “purely” theoretical reserves.

adjustment or transition, in much the same way that Omi and Winant (1994) perceive what they call pre-1930s “insurgent” ethnicity theory (14). These early theories of ethnicity viewed race as a social rather than a biological construction, and introduced the idea that assimilation of ethnic groups was a desirable goal as inevitable as the conflict inherent in contact between ethnic groups. Because current theorists of food have inherited the strictures of dualistic thought, part of the theoretical task at hand is to interrogate the allure of this reasoning, just as early theorists of ethnicity interrogated (or did not) their inherited white supremacist views.

This inheritance renders the topic of food in Nikkei texts particularly susceptible to a kind of reductive exoticism familiar to Asian North American writing, a reduction to “ancient commonplaces which constitute images presented as conventionally foreign” (“Twelve Asian American Writers” 58). In this essay, Lim is characterizing the authorial intention of those writers who are unselfconsciously concerned with social documentation, writers we might describe as complicit by default with racial stereotypes. Such writers sacrifice “literary construction” for the presentation of an ethnicity that they are convinced is historically or sociologically true (58).<sup>313</sup> Concerning food, we might imagine the complicit writer designing the set of her text to cohere with a “Nikkei” sensibility, for instance writing about sushi on the table instead of, say, pasta without questioning why the sushi appears on the table in the first place—or not, as the case may be.

The reduction of food to a stereotype of the exotic is also a common theoretical exercise that I examine further in the writing about ethnicity. At this point, I simply acknowledge that in the expression and formulation of identity through food, “ethnic” writers reproduce exoticism because they are seduced by the biological, and they escape exoticism because they are released by the biological:

There are people who say that eating is only a superficial means of understanding a different culture. That eating at exotic restaurants and oohing and aahing over the food is not even worth the bill paid. You haven't learned anything at all. I say that's a lie. What can be more basic than food itself? Food to begin to grow. Without it, you'd starve to death, even academics. But don't stop there, my friend, don't stop there, because food is the point of departure. A place

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<sup>313</sup> Lim restricts her discussion to fiction, including autobiography.

where growth begins. You eat, you drink and you laugh out loud. You wipe the sweat off your forehead and take a sip of water. You tell a story, maybe two, with words of pain and desire. Your companion listens and listens, then offers a different telling. The waiter comes back with the main course and stays to tell his version. Your companion offers three more stories and the people seated at the next table lean over to listen. You push all the tables together and the room resounds with voices. You get dizzy and the ceiling tips, the chair melts beneath your body. You lie back on the ground and the world tilts, the words heaving in the air above you. You are drunk and it is oh so pleasurable. (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 201)

This is a passage I will revisit several times. Here I consider Goto's assertion that the food you eat, or embody, is the place where growth begins.

The excerpts that Keibo Oiwa has translated from Kaoru Ikeda's journal were written while Ikeda was interned in Slocan. Ikeda's journal is a prime example of the materiality of food and its significance in the processes of identity formation in the individual and group. Understandably, Ikeda appears less preoccupied with the metaphorical nature of food as an explanatory concept than with the importance of food in the physiological, emotional, and cultural survival of the uprooting of the Second World War. For Ikeda, survival includes finding replacements for Japanese ingredients from what is on hand in the unfamiliar interior of British Columbia, especially for the critical food of ritual at Christmas, Oshōgatsu, and the time of death.

The third anniversary of her husband's death falls on 21 June 1942, barely three weeks after their forced removal from Vancouver. Because the family cannot visit his grave and do not have a butsudān, or family altar, in Slocan, they hang an enlarged photograph of Mr. Ikeda on the kitchen wall, and place some field lilies on the "makeshift" (127) altar. Ikeda records,

I consulted with Chisato [Ikeda's daughter] about some favourite dish of her father's we could offer him, but what could we get our hands on in such a remote place? (125)

Ikeda and Chisato manage to make "dumplings" with "leftover" flour and prepare fiddleheads foraged from the mountain. Although she imagines her husband's surprise at the service and "such unfamiliar, poor surroundings," Ikeda recalls how much he loved fiddleheads, and how they made their yearly trek into the "the woods near Burnaby to pick them" (127).

In this case, it is the place where Ikeda's husband, Arichika,<sup>314</sup> finds himself that causes the greatest surprise. Slocan still provides dumplings and fiddleheads, favourites that were also familiar in Vancouver; the significant dislocation is from one place in British Columbia to another. Ikeda locates the originary site of this traditional food in Vancouver and Burnaby, rather than Japan. Thus the food custom being substituted might be described as already a Japanese Canadian, rather than a Japanese, one. Similarly, the Christmas food that must be replaced because of the uprooting centres on a western, Christian ritual; it is the procuring of the Christmas turkey and trimmings which worries the women in Slocan. Kaoru reports how the women's arm of the hakko-kai<sup>315</sup> even "made a resolution [to the British Columbia Security Commission] to demand turkey and Christmas presents for each family" (133). For the same Christmas, Chisato manages to bake Christmas cake and cookies, makes "everyone's favourite" spaghetti, and replaces the traditional turkey with chicken.

In order to appreciate the nature of tradition, to describe what qualifies as a definitive food custom, we have to understand the movement of people from one place to another. How

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<sup>314</sup> Oiwa describes Arichika Ikeda as "one of the Japanese pioneers of North America" ("Slocan Diary" 117). Ikeda enjoyed success in business as the owner/operator of Ikeda mines in Haida Gwaii. Ikeda's name appeared in a list of outstanding issei published in the *New Canadian* on 1 March 1950; the list is reprinted in Roy Ito's *Stories of my People*, 131-132. Ito designates the individuals as koseki sha, which he translates as "people of merit." The list is an eclectic one, including publishers, church leaders, union organizers, business and professional people, farmers, those who "encouraged" others in the community, and Mohei Sato, who "assisted everyone, a good man." The fact that all but one of these issei is a man is reflective of attitudes of the day that would perceive as "outstanding" those individuals active in the public sphere.

The one woman on the list is novelist Toshiko Tamura, who "worked for the betterment of Issei women." Tamura "followed Etsu Suzuki [labour organizer and editor of the Vancouver newspaper *Tairiku Nippo*, separated from his wife] to become his lover" (Ito 121). It is apparent from the ambivalence of Ito's portrayal of Tamura that the questionable morality of this nonetheless "outstanding" woman confounded the popular image of issei wives as submissive Meiji women who devoted their lives to raising moral and successful children.

Within the same paragraph Ito juxtaposes the lot of "Mrs. Yoshida" [Ito does not name this wife of Ryuichi Yoshida, editor of the labour union periodical, *Minshu*] with that of Tamura, now married to Suzuki. The four lived together from approximately 1923-25, sharing expenses and trying to make a go of publishing the *Minshu*. Ito portrays Mrs. Yoshida as a long-suffering woman in poor health who remained home during her husband's frequent bouts of drinking. On the other hand, Tamura, writes Ito, favoured the race track and dining out; she "taunted" and "goaded" her husband, with whom she would often "quarrel violently" (127).

do such transitions influence what might be called food practices? When she relates the changes in food practices her family must make in Slocan, Ikeda uses the word “substitution.” However, she also relies on words that connote a kind of making-do, words like “manage” or “serve.” The fact of war had already made several of these changes necessary back in Vancouver, as it had in other countries. Ikeda describes how rationing has resulted in shortages in steel, glass, leather, cotton and food (132–133). In other words, Nikkei arrived in internment camps already in a state of lack, familiar with having to make do. Nonetheless, Ikeda describes the constraints that their new environment places on ritual food practices especially as “substitution.”

To appreciate fully the extent to which this change might be classed as a substitution it is important to remember that Oiwa has given the reader a translation of Ikeda's diary. Without the Japanese original, the reader must depend on Oiwa's own replacement of English. More than one Japanese verb may be translated as “to substitute.” Ikeda may have, for instance, used either the intransitive “kawaru” or transitive “daiyou suru.” Both rely on the same root kanji, or Chinese character, “ka,” meaning substitution. But this root is also the root of the verb “kaeru,” meaning “to alter.” This linguistic parallel complicates the discussion once we consider the connotations of the concrete or material that inhere in the word substitution, that is, the replacement of one thing for another.

Oiwa translates:

In this wandering life of ours, there isn't much we can do to prepare for the New Year. Knowing that the children long for *kuri-kinton*<sup>316</sup> I substituted peas for chestnuts and managed to make *mame-kinton*. . . . This was the whole list of our New Year's feast.<sup>317</sup> (134)

The immigration phase in the “wandering life” of this Japanese Canadian community had already changed the face of their festival celebrations. Arichika's and Kaoru's move to Canada introduced them to Christmas as part of their year-end celebrations. The extracts Oiwa has

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<sup>315</sup> Oiwa translates “hakko” as “whole world,” and describes the word as a key term in Japan's propaganda of imperialism during the Second World War (n.154). “Kai” means club, or association.

<sup>316</sup> a sweet made with chestnuts and mashed sweet potatoes

given us from Ikeda's journal indicate that the desire to maintain these "new" Christmas traditions in the "temporary world" of Slocan<sup>318</sup> (135) was great enough to cause the Nikkei women interned in New Denver to make "brazen" demands that the Security Committee facilitate the maintenance of these traditions (130–33). Oiwa's account of Ikeda's substitution of peas for chestnuts, and her naming of the new dish from the family of "Japanese" New Year's dishes, is not just an exchange necessitated by hardship, although it is that. Rather, it is a transformation, an alteration, of the high holiday itself. Just as the definition of Slocan peas must now be expanded to embrace their role as a delicious Oshōgatsu sweet, so the eating of the mame-kinton redefines the identity of the group of celebrants.<sup>319</sup>

The question of whether or not food is "appropriate" as a material component of and metaphor for identity becomes ideologically fraught once the label "ethnic" is appended to "identity." As Yau Ching asks: "Is the excess of cooking and eating a stereotype of Asian North Americans, or is it an 'essential' part of our identity?" (28). The appropriate question for me is: am I presenting food as a more essential part of identity for Nikkei women than for, say, white women? Am I creating the illusion of an excessive dependence on cooking and eating in the writing and lives of Nikkei women? If a text by a Nikkei writer does not appear concerned with food, am I interpreting that absence as a significant "lack" or as evidence that the text is engaged with food by what I name as its very resistance against food? Am I, in short, making food an essential marker of Nikkei identity as I explore the idea of it in Nikkei writing?<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> "Mame" means either "bean" or "pea."

<sup>318</sup> However "temporary" life (and changes in celebrations) may have seemed in Slocan, similar cultural transformations were happening in Japan. For instance, the use of green plums for umeboshi, or pickled plums, another practice Ikeda calls a "substitution," is common in Japan today.

<sup>319</sup> After reading this section, Ayukawa explained to me that Oikawa introduces the verb "substitution" in his translation. Ikeda simply reported that she used kidney beans because there were no chestnuts: "Marikotachi wa mainen tsukutte ita kuri kinton hoshi garu node, kure mo nai keredo ingenmame to satsumaimo o nite mame kinton o tsukure [. . .]" (personal communication; 1 August 1998).

<sup>320</sup> The insistence on having "authentic" Asian food may also contain a desire to have the core Asian self served up along with the real thing. Reporting on her sampling of mediocre food in reputedly excellent Chinese restaurants, food critic Joanne Kates writes:

*Of belonging*

Whether one classifies eating the food of one's cultural group as a pragmatic necessity (Creese 1988) or an easy nostalgia (Gans 1979), we have transformed eating into what Visser (1991) calls "a carefully cultured phenomenon" that creates community (ix). At table, the community of eaters shares an intimacy rooted in stories of creation and reflected in language; we recognize each other. Written about, the community is recognizable in text:

I saw rooms in which I could see myself walking, heard conversations in whose accents and timbres I could hear my family's voices. Instead of Virginia Woolf's Boeuf en Daube and Proust's madeleine, there were tofu and takuan,<sup>321</sup> sashimi<sup>322</sup> and sake. (Yamamoto 143)

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"I don't believe any of this mediocrity is about [the restaurant] Magnolia Garden, but rather about us and them. The gulf between Chinese and westerners is a long-standing collection of hurts and dangers. Anyone who reads the newly burgeoning literature of Chinese immigrants to Gold Mountain (the New World) knows about their suffering. From head taxes to the law of exclusion, we have not greeted our Chinese newcomers with open arms (except perhaps those recent ones who come bearing Hong Kong fortunes for investment here). A visible minority cannot be treated with such contempt for so long and respond by being warm and cuddly with westerners. They serve us dinner, but the taste of bitter experience has shown them that our interest in their culture goes skin deep. [. . .] We have not managed to convince them that we want to eat real Chinese food; most of us seem so happy with Sinoschlock. So why would they bother doing their best for "white devils" who won't even know the difference between fresh and frozen?" (*Globe and Mail* 2 November 1996, D7)

The urgency of Kates's desire for authenticity reinforces the barrier between "us" and "them" that the reviewer blames for her "tasteless" food. Regardless of citizenship, length of residency in Canada, self-definition, or even heritage, "[t]hey" who serve the "white devil" Kates her dinner are "Chinese" and a "visible minority." Having recapitulated the early twentieth-century immigration history of Chinese Canadians (and its exclusive vocabulary), Kates's review places her fellow Torontonians firmly in the past. She resuscitates the stereotype of the deceitful, servile Oriental, whose words are not to be believed, but whose actions are infinitely explainable by white Canadians.

Anthropologist Imogene L. Lim responds to the explanatory hypothesis of Kates's review by explaining how "fake" Chinese food was created to meet the parochial palates of early twentieth-century westerners. Lim continues that these creations (fortune cookies, for instance) are now part of "'real' Chinese cuisine" in Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China, stressing the heterogeneity of "both Chinese and non-Chinese populations" and their mutually "incorrect cultural assumptions" (*Globe and Mail* 9 November 1996, D9).

This exchange is provocative for several reasons, especially Lim's apparent choice not to engage more explicitly with the racialized discourse in Kates's article. The relevance of the exchange for this chapter centres on the profound way in which both writers engage food as a powerful symbol that describes the impermeable limits of group identity, essentially as cultural shorthand for "us" and "them."

<sup>321</sup> pickled radish

<sup>322</sup> sliced raw fish

We sit facing each other; drawn inward barriers crumble,<sup>323</sup> “[. . .] we rediscover, in the imagination, elements of original happiness and unity” (Jeanneret 2). The community is “intimate to the point of stickiness, like mochi” (*Obasan* 20).

Mochi is made with rice even stickier than the short grain rice of everyday that *Obasan* squishes on the flaps of envelopes to seal her letters (115). At *Oshōgatsu*, neighbours gather to cook mochi and then pound it with wooden mallets into an even stickier, homogenous mass that is formed into various shapes, and coated with or dipped into, different powders and sauces. Mochi may be wrapped in nori,<sup>324</sup> nuts may be added to it, and the mochi toasted. Each region or family has its mochi preferences. But every year children are taught to eat mochi carefully; “chew it well,” they are reminded. Mochi is sticky enough to glue *Obasan*’s dentures together “so tight she had to soak them in hot water for hours,” and every year someone tells a story of an old person dying by choking on mochi.<sup>325</sup> In mochi we see an exaggeration of the symbolic importance of the staple rice: if rice draws us together in community, then mochi will keep us there.

Mochi also brings the death of community. For the Nakasone and Kato families, the stubborn silence suggested by the clamping shut of *Obasan*’s dentures and the sealing shut of letters suggests the “sealed vault” (n.p.) of family secrets that threatens their community. The

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<sup>323</sup> Gunew (unpub.) treats eating as a metaphor for the dissolution of individual bounded subjectivities by relying on Kristevan notions of the abject. I find Gunew’s analysis helpful in my reading of writing by Nikkei women. However, Japanese sociological models generally posit individual subjectivity as inherently relational, and often in contrast to a North American model that is perceived as presenting the individual subject as discrete. Thus the Kristevan emphasis on the threat of dissolution is of limited usefulness in this context.

<sup>324</sup> toasted sheets of paper-thin seaweed

<sup>325</sup> I am not aware of statistics on “mochi deaths,” but stories circulate widely that such deaths occur. On 3 January 1998 the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* reported that, since New Year in Tokyo, fourteen Japanese had been in danger of choking to death on mochi: “Immer wieder kommt es vor, dass die aus gestampftem Reis bestehenden flachen ‘O-Mochi’ in den Kehlen meist älterer Menschen steckenbleiben und zum qualvollen Erstickungstod führen” [It happens over and over again that the flat ‘O-Mochi’ that consist of pounded rice get stuck in the throats of especially the elderly and lead to a painful death by suffocation. (Trans. E-M. Kröllner)]. That writers are treating such deaths satirically is evidence that they have acquired a commonsensical or even mythological status. In the film *Tanpopo*, *Tanpopo* rescues one elderly customer from death by mochi by inserting a vacuum hose into the man’s mouth and sucking the mochi out. Regardless

soft balls of mochi, the pure food of ritual, also reappear as a threat to innocence and ultimate togetherness in the image of the pedophilic Mr. Gower's "belly [. . .] large and soft" (91).

This bifurcated meaning of food's symbolic importance is more complex than the perhaps more obvious structure by which one term, of necessity, entails its opposite: the universal the general, and so on. It has become a commonplace in theories of food and community, as in theories of tourism, to point to the common root of the English words, "host" and "guest."<sup>326</sup> A similar situation exists in Japanese, where the one term, "shukaku," (or "shukyaku") means host and guest, as well as primary and subordinate. The term, and the roles it designates, signifies the one action of hospitality, overcast with differential power relations. The host welcomes the guest, but the guest is subject to the rules of the house, and to the host's beneficence.<sup>327</sup>

Also relevant to identity formation are the more general antonymic functions of food as symbol. Just as fruit is the vehicle of the Edenic fall and the sign of eucharistic reconciliation, and the peach a sign of sexual purity and violation, mochi symbolizes both the life and death of the community. Mona Oikawa's poem, "Coming out at the Sushi Bar" refigures the bifurcation yet again.

The maguro is the colour of dawn  
this day as I tell you  
"I am a lesbian."

The poem opens as optimistic as a new day, but it is clouded with ambivalence: the maguro<sup>328</sup> is raw, but not untouched; the sisters are the "new," outspoken generation, but not yet free of inherited prejudices:

And you in a tone  
masking emotion,

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of actual mortalities, my children and those of my friends and family always receive stern warnings with each helping.

<sup>326</sup> As the root, Visser (1991) cites the French *hoste*, meaning guest and host, and the Indo-European *ghostis*, meaning stranger (91). See also Pitt-Rivers (1968) on the transformation from hostile stranger to guest.

<sup>327</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, this element of hierarchy in hospitality operates in the policies and practices of multiculturalism in Canada.

<sup>328</sup> tuna

inherited from generations  
of women whispering  
with sisters about lovers,  
reply, "Yeah. So what?"

Sushi has as its figurative and literal base the staple rice. The sisters' "regular table" in the intimate domesticity of a screened tatami room is "far from the men," deep within as, historically, were the most private of rooms in Japanese homes (Esenbel 163), such as the women's quarters. But the sisters' whisperings are about intimacies that draw the lovers together even as they magnify the sisters' estrangement, their lack of community. And the very tool used to embody the pure rice of community is also the instrument of annihilation, ready to wipe out impurities.<sup>329</sup>

And you with your hashi<sup>330</sup>  
poised to attack the  
last California maki,  
smile nervously.

The antonymic functions of food are particularly concentrated in its function as an epithet of inclusion and exclusion, and as a sign of boundary violation. In *White Women, Race Matters*, Frankenberg (1993) remarks on the tendency of the white women she interviewed to equate whiteness with white objects, such as "wonder bread," or mayonnaise. Frankenberg observes the interconnections of these pale objects with capitalism (the objects are, most often, brand name products), and the concomitant association of other cultures as untainted by modernity.<sup>331</sup> What Frankenberg does not discuss is the nature of these white objects as food and its attributes, such as "blandness."

In *The Rituals of Dinner* Visser rhymes off the list of familiar food epithets: Germans are "Krauts," the French "Frogs," and the Inuit "Eskimo." Imada writes journal entries characterizing Chinese as "pig raisers." The "whites" come only to study the fish in her store, then leave

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<sup>329</sup> As its name suggests, "California maki" is maki sushi that was designed in the United States. It consists of avocado, crab, and mayonnaise, usually wrapped inside out, that is, with the nori or seaweed lining the rice rather than vice versa. Thus, the ingredients, the method, and the source of this sushi all suggest inauthenticity, or impurity.

<sup>330</sup> chopsticks

without buying. Italians will always come when squid is on display, sampling a whole tentacle: "If it was free they ate it. That's Italians for you!" (Ayukawa 1988, 38). The commonsensical nature of these labels lends them particular power; they are not intended nor do they function as explanatory tools. They are made necessary by their existence, as if the food itself possessed a nationality.

Imada writes about what she calls one of her many culinary "failures" in her early years in Canada:

For the first time in my life I saw this country's black tea. I also saw *hijiki* [a type of sea-weed, a brown algae] for the first time. This *hijiki* and black tea look so alike that I could not tell them apart. Once, I mistook the *hijiki* and used it for everyone's black tea and everyone laughed at me. (Ayukawa 1988, 35)

If black tea wore any national label at this time it would be "English" or "Indian" or "Chinese," but apparently because she sees it for the first time in Canada rather than in a country where it is cultivated, the tea is "this country's," "Canadian." Significantly, Imada also records that she sees *hijiki* "for the first time." Whether she means she has never seen *hijiki* before or, which is more likely, never before in Canada, she does not describe it as being a "Canadian" food.

Neither does historian Midge Ayukawa treat it as such. Tea is tea, whether black or green, and it is drunk in both Canada and Japan. Tea belongs in the category of "food," and the taxonomy is not disrupted by Ayukawa's translation of the Japanese word (possibly "kocha") into the English "black tea." But seaweed? Historically, seaweed in Canada is something that grows—and stays—in the sea; even its designation as a "weed" indicates that it is not food that appears on the dinner table.<sup>332</sup> Ayukawa has no choice but to retain the italicized Japanese word for the "Japanese" food (*hijiki*), and then bracket an English description of the food in its unprocessed state. The Canadian inedible cannot be substituted for the Japanese edible.

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<sup>331</sup> The idea that the culture of the other remains pre-modern resonates in the authenticity of timeless tradition Kates craves in her restaurant review.

<sup>332</sup> Recognizing that seaweed is eaten by some First Nations, and in Newfoundland as "dulse," I would maintain that this is a regional specialty enjoyed by relatively few Canadians. Only recently have more (non-Asian) Canadians begun consuming other versions of seaweed because of an increased interest in herbal medicine and dietary education about the health benefits of foods such as soy and seaweed.

A familiar inedible in *Obasan* is Uncle's "stone" bread. Connections in the novel between the bread and the theme of silence have been discussed elsewhere.<sup>333</sup> But Uncle's bread is also a metaphorical focus for cultural belonging. While Uncle tries to conquer the challenges of baking bread with flour raised on the Canadian prairie where the family now lives, its eternal inedibility is evidence of Uncle's firm position outside of "white" Canada. The bread is also a symbol of the transformative nature of white- and Japanese-Canadian culture. Uncle's bread may not resemble that of his neighbours, but by his participation in the same exercise, and his use of the same ingredients, the attributes of the "Canadian" activity and product, as well as those of Uncle's "Japaneseness" are changing.

As Stephen and Naomi's punning about Uncle's bread and other "Canadian" and "Japanese" foods draws a linguistic circle around them, it also fixes their positions inside and outside of both cultures:

[Stephen] called margarine "Alberta," since Uncle pronounced Alberta "aru bata," which in our Japanese English means "the butter that there is." "Try some Alberta on it." (13)<sup>334</sup>

Similarly, Stephen's demand for peanut butter sandwiches rather than rice positions him further outside a stereotypical idea of Japanese culture, just as Naomi's preference for onigiri<sup>335</sup> situates her inside (115).

Canadian dependence on the term "visible minority" to describe those who belong outside the invisible majority suggests that the firmest categories of difference are those confirmed by our senses. So it is with sense impressions of food: the most pungently novel is deemed the most foreign:

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<sup>333</sup> See, for example, P. Merivale 1988; Fujita 1985.

<sup>334</sup> Butter is one of those English words that is written using katakana, the syllabary used to write and pronounce non-Japanese words and sounds. Thus "butter" is pronounced "bata." The verb "aru" may also be used in the sense of the "thing that is," as in "aru ga mama," meaning to accept things as they are (M. Creighton, personal communication 18 Feb. 1998). As it is used in Morita therapy, "aru ga mama" implies a fatalism or resignation akin to shikata ga nai (another of Uncle's favourite sayings). Morita therapy is a kind of psychological therapy which teaches patients to accept oneself as "aru ga mama," and "learn to work around one's weaknesses" (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984, 82).

<sup>335</sup> rice balls

Mrs. Barker shifts uncomfortably. She puts her fists on her knees and her eyes dart from the cup to Mr. Barker sitting beside her. She is breathing unevenly.

What is it she smells? What foreign odour sends its message down into her body alerting her limbs? If only I could banish all that offends her delicate sensibilities. Especially the strong smell of miso and daicon [sic] and shoyu. (*Obasan* 224)

The smells that worry Naomi are perceived in the body, but conditioned, directed, and defined by ideas about race and what is appropriate food. Whatever the origin of Mrs. Barker's uneven breathing, Naomi is sure that Japanese food smells are the cause. As categories, the exotic and the indigenous are mutually exclusive and hierarchically ordered. Naturally, the external evidence of the exotic will jar; naturally, it is the indigene that will be put off, and the exotic repentant.<sup>336</sup>

Kogawa's relation to this subservience is ambiguous. Naomi describes as most offensively foreign the smells of miso,<sup>337</sup> daikon,<sup>338</sup> and shoyu,<sup>339</sup> all foods that obtain their identity through fermentation, a kind of spoiling or death of the original whole or pure food.<sup>340</sup> Uncle has just died; some might describe *Obasan* as the living dead, and it is unlikely that either Emily or Naomi is going to produce children to carry on the "pure" line.<sup>341</sup> This passage may be an encouragement to Nikkei concerned with the death of community through intermarriage that what appears as death may actually just be a sea change in the faces around the table. But it also may be read as exposing the fragility in hearty assurances about Canadian multiculturalism, pointing to the line still drawn between "us" and "them."<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> During the early days of immigration from Japan, non-Nikkei Canadians identified food as an obvious and dependable marker of belonging: "They like to have their dried fish and salted fish that come from Japan, and with their own fish they like to have their own rice and their own preserves" (*Royal Commission* 1902, 336).

<sup>337</sup> fermented soy bean paste

<sup>338</sup> horseradish

<sup>339</sup> soya sauce

<sup>340</sup> Fresh daikon has little odour, but with each preparation that takes daikon away from its fresh state—cooking, then pickling into takuan—daikon, too, becomes more pungent.

<sup>341</sup> The dialectic between purity and impurity is a central organizing principle in Japanese culture (Lebra 1976; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Nakamura 1978). Also see the discussion on the pollution of intermarriage, Chapter Two,

<sup>342</sup> In Canada, such assurances are common in government rhetoric concerning the absolute equality that official multiculturalism accords all Canadians. As discussed in Chapter One, since the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988) defines diversity as an inherent Canadian characteristic, the act may be invoked as evidence that equality exists in reality. Concomitantly,

As a sign of not belonging, food is also powerful by its absence:

Freedom lies not in three square meals a day, not in a pay envelope. Freedom lies in the integrity of one's most innermost self. Even if the leash on our privacy is long and loose, still the collar around our necks halts our free step, and our eyes are clouded with the awareness of restriction. (Kitagawa 1985, 215)

Here food is survival, material struggle, and a symbol of (limited) freedom. As Masters shows in her critique of the film *Fires on the Plain*, food lends itself well as a "signifier for struggle" (5). For Nikkei, the first step to freedom was very much concerned with winning an adequate diet. Food was made more important in the early days by its absence or by the disproportionate amount of time that was spent earning it.<sup>343</sup> For issei women like Imada Ito, the struggle to make ends meet defined her day, and food on the table signalled passable marital functioning and material survival in a foreign place.

But if food epithets are powerful markers of those who are inexorably outside of the group, they are also striking images of the culturally ambiguous. The North American of African descent who "acts white" is an "oreo." The First Nations person who does the same is an "apple"; the Indian a "potato"; the Asian North American, a "banana." Those individuals whose heritage is indistinguishable according to stereotypical norms are caricatured as food mixtures such as "Heinz 57," "champon,"<sup>344</sup> or "champuru."<sup>345</sup> In each utterance food retains its symbolic

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by pledging government aid to "ethno-cultural minority communities" for the purposes of "overcoming any discriminatory barrier" (5f), the Multiculturalism Act affirms that inequality also has real existence.

<sup>343</sup> In his report on "Oriental Standards of Living," W. A. Carrothers (1939) relates the difficulty in determining earnings for Nikkei since companies did not keep records for individual workers at this time. Considering what was known about "Orientals in industry," Carrothers felt it "reasonably safe to assume that the majority of the Orientals would be found in the low wage groups" (*The Japanese Canadians* 229). He also assumed that Nikkei would at least be earning the minimum wage of that time. Adachi cites wages paid to Nikkei mill workers during approximately 1890-1900 of, for instance, three to five cents less than the 20 cents per hour paid white workers (48). Ward (1990) reports that in 1902 Nikkei sawmill employees were paid \$0.90 to \$1.00 per day while whites were paid \$1.50 per day, and that Nikkei generally "earned one-half to two-thirds of what whites were paid for equivalent work" (112). During its tenure, the Turner government in British Columbia (1895-1898), also legislated against the employment of Asians by the majority of industries by charging the employer a five-dollar fine for each "Oriental" employed (Roy 1989, 126).

<sup>344</sup> In her essay, "A Champon State of Mind," freelance translator Susanne Akemi Wegmüller defines this term as "hodgepodge," and uses it to describe her Swiss, American and Japanese heritages. "Nagasaki champon" is a noodle soup that contains a variable mixture of vegetables,

force as a marker of identity, but describes a border that has been infiltrated, violated, and the pure defiled.<sup>346</sup>

The power of food as a marker of cultural ambiguity is a common theme when Nikkei write of trips “back” to Japan. If they are visibly non-white, those writers born and raised in Canada are still overwhelmingly described by non-Nikkei as having a “Japanese” appearance, and are expected at least to know, if not eat, “Japanese” food. Thus, on the first visit to Japan, a place where Nikkei might expect to blend in with the crowds, these writers are often shocked and disoriented to find themselves still outside the cultural fold.

Kogawa writes of such cultural dislocation in her poem “On Meeting the Clergy of the Holy Catholic Church in Osaka.” Here it is the ritualized propriety surrounding the feast that is the focus of the visitor’s angst, and evidence that she no longer “belongs” to the country of her ancestors. The speaker suffers cultural indigestion from what she sees as excesses of propriety at the “belly swelling bladder bloating banquet.” She laughs at the sight of men lined up like penguins at the urinals while “ladies in kimonos mince by,” only to realize that her laughter at the apparent incongruity of her hosts’ behaviour, and their apparently unselfconscious practice of it, is actually a strong indicator of what probably appears to her hosts as the equally peculiar misfit of someone who looks “Japanese” but is so obviously foreign.<sup>347</sup>

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seafood, and meat. Similar soups are served as regional specialties from Hokkaido to Okinawa, but they are not called *champon*.

<sup>345</sup> *Champon* is a category of stir-fry made in Okinawa; there are different versions containing various combinations of tofu, bitter melon, pork, and other vegetables.

<sup>346</sup> Tsang also cites food epithets that individuals use to characterize cross-race homosexual relationships: “rice queens” are whites attracted to Asians while “potato queens” are, predictably, those attracted to whites. I agree with Tsang that these terms are symptomatic of the stigma attached to cross-race relationships in a racist society, and would state further that in societies like Canada which are systemically or foundationally racist such terms are never value-free. However, I think that these terms, like food epithets my son and his friends exchanged (Chapter Two, f.n. 260), may also be used descriptively and even affectionately with neither the intent nor the result of subordinating a particular individual.

<sup>347</sup> Reaction to social decorum is often a primary indicator of individual distance from a culture. Because group members learn etiquette when very young, among adults social norms assume the status of common knowledge. Not only do community members know the rules, they are familiar with which cultural practices qualify as the focus of etiquette. In Kogawa’s poem, the

In addition to commenting on the ironic cultural condition of the Japanese Canadian in Japan, the poem exposes the fragile relativity of “Canadian” forthrightness:

And I follow snuffling to hide a guffaw though  
 Why I should laugh—which reminds me  
 At the Osaka zoo my friend kept pointing out  
 The peeing fox and the baboon’s purple bum and such  
 Asking how to say these things in English  
 And I tried to explain about the odd Canadians  
 Who have no bread and butter words  
 To describe these ordinary things. (*Choice of Dreams* 19)

For cultural border dwellers like this visitor to Japan, the horizontal exchange of “ethnic” foods sometimes creates a third community of those who visit each other’s territory. In a letter to *The Vancouver Sun*, Annie Liao envisions the possibility of such a third culture within Canadian multiculturalism. In this Canada, the exchange of cultures, through the exchange of food, will work to bring harmony and the full participation of each member. Liao recalls the Thanksgiving supper a friend invited her to share:

I enjoyed the abundant supper and friendship. In that moment, I recognized that Thanksgiving in the West is as significant as the Mid-Autumn festival in China [. . .]. Before this festival, I’ll try to make moon cakes for the first time. I hope it will be successful. I want to share the sweet moon cakes with all my friends and neighbors, both Chinese and Western. May all of us enjoy the bright full moon tonight and have good luck! (9 September 1995, A3).

This exchange resembles the practice of giving gifts of *meibutsu*, or the specialty food produced in one’s community. As individuals consume the emblematic food of another place, they are, metonymically, consuming that place.

Liao’s vision of a harmonious multicultural community also resembles that of a micro community Mrs. Imada recalls forming at the birth of one of her babies. During her week of postpartum rest the neighbours come calling,

the white ladies<sup>348</sup> in the neighbourhood came to visit every day. They came in the afternoon [sic] to see the baby, bringing a cake or a pie or salad and other delicious food that I had never seen

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speaker is unsettled by her ignorance of specific rules and by the surprising knowledge that natural functions are less “private” than in Canada. As many startled visitors and hosts at the 1998 Winter Olympic Games in Nagano, Japan learned, familiarity with what qualifies as public behaviour (for instance male nudity in front of a female bathhouse proprietor) sharply demarcates one boundary of belonging (Kristof 27).

<sup>348</sup> Mrs. Imada lists their nationalities as Belgian, English, and German.

before. The white neighbours had until then never seen Japanese people so I was quite strange to them. [. . .] We visited back and forth and had a good time. (Ayukawa 1988, 43–44)

Chances are that the neighbours had indeed seen “Japanese” people before. The Imadas had been in Ladysmith for almost two years by the time her son was born, and Mrs. Imada ran a fish store that was visited by customers of wide-ranging ethnic heritages. In a province with approximately 9,000 residents of Japanese descent, the majority of them involved in primary industries on the mainland and Vancouver Island, the neighbours were bound to have seen Nikkei at an earlier time or place.<sup>349</sup>

What Mrs. Imada seems to be emphasizing is that, as strange as the neighbours’ food was in the intimacy of her “Japanese” home, the women also appeared strange to each other—as if never having seen each other—when drawn together over these two activities of ultimate communion within their own larger communities: giving food and giving birth. Regarding her previous delivery, Mrs. Imada records that at that birth, with only her husband attending and “[w]ith no female beside me [. . .] I gave birth like a cat or a dog” (Ayukawa 1988, 33). This time the communal sharing of food at a birth recreates a community lost in another diaspora—that of women and children, “far from the men / at the sushi bar” (“Coming out at the Sushi Bar” 59).

### *Recovering home*

Food may be described, then, as a foundational element in communities of common experience. For the women gathered at the birth of Mrs. Imada’s child, the sharing of food momentarily redefined the criteria for those who may partake to include those strangers and their strange food normally excluded from the table. The women were drawn together in a community within, and yet separate from, their respective larger ones. In this new territory, where individuals visit each other’s cultures by eating each other’s food, the presence of the unrecognizable food, that they had “never seen before,” suggests another interaction of food

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<sup>349</sup> Extrapolating from the figures reported in the Census for the year 1911, we can assume that there were at least 9,000 British Columbians of Japanese descent residing in a province with a total population of approximately 390,000.

and place. In recreating the food of their “old” communities, Mrs. Imada and her friends have actually recovered homelands considered lost at the point of emigration. That imaginary place thus materializes, or is made manifest, as the symbolic and material attributes of the food of that place interact to reclaim the irretrievably lost land.

This interaction resembles that of the material and symbolic components of food that I have discussed as a component in the processes of identity formation. Food as communion and communication; eating as a manifestation of enlightenment; food as separation and reunion; food as substitution or transformation; food as a line between “us” and “them,” these expressions of food are as much a part of the recovery of homelands as they are part of the formation of identity. That is, it is the interdependence of food—in each of its expressions—and place which directs this process of recovery.

To a great degree, place determined the designation of food as “Japanese” or “Canadian” in the early Nikkei community. Most Japanese food basics came from Japan. After settling in Canada, Nikkei soon began growing familiar vegetables that also thrived in the Canadian climate, but items such as short-grain rice, miso, shoyu, and green tea had to be imported. We can understand Mrs. Imada’s happy surprise then, when, on arriving in Canada in 1911, she is served food that appears to be “the same as in Japan” (Ayukawa 1988, 23). We might also appreciate her hesitancy when greeted with long tables groaning with what she calls “Western” food at the “white man’s [logging] camp” (26) where she is to cook and do laundry for forty men.

When faced with the task of recreating their Japanese Canadian community east of the Rocky Mountains, Nikkei who were uprooted during the Second World War were concerned to maintain the familiar diet that had become readily available on Powell Street. As she is about to leave Vancouver for Toronto,<sup>350</sup> Muriel Kitagawa writes to her brother Wes about all she is taking with her:

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<sup>350</sup> Nikkei were allowed to settle in other cities outside of the “protected area” as long as they were able to be financially independent of government aid (Sunahara 65 and 78; Ayukawa

I'm bringing shoyu, rice, canned mirinzuke [pickles cured in rice wine], green tea, and every Japanese dish I have, and trays, and bowls. Can't get any more miso now. So long as we have shoyu we can have chazuke [rice with green tea and flavourings poured over it] anytime. You can't get much Japanese food now as the stocks are almost gone.

Gosh my stomach has been upset since Friday so I have to rest awhile. [. . .] Love, Mur. (*This is My Own* 147)

The family was leaving British Columbia and its 22,000 Nikkei for Ontario, where only 200 Nikkei lived.<sup>351</sup> Approximately one half of those 22,000 British Columbian Nikkei lived in the city of Vancouver. For them, Powell Street was the focal point of community life, a comfortable nest of business, recreation, religion, and education that Nikkei need never leave. Here any kind of Japanese foodstuff might be bought. The isolated nature of the Powell Street community (at various historical junctures also called "Little Tokyo," "Japan Town," or the more pejorative "Japtown") was formed by its residents accommodation of and resistance to the exclusionary practices of the majority.<sup>352</sup> Recalls Kitagawa, "We congregated more closely together than we desired for the sake of mutual protection and the human need of companionship" (*This is My Own* 218).

Whichever forces shaped the Powell Street community, Nikkei movement away from the comfort of this place also meant a move away from physical sustenance. No other location in Canada could be counted on as a source of Japanese food, and, judging by her list of essential baggage, Kitagawa could not imagine relocating her community without the basics of Japanese food and Japanese dishes to eat it from. In fact, by following her report of dwindling Japanese

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1990a, 12). Families such as the Kitagawas who were sponsored by friends or families in eastern Canada were allowed to move there. Although the B.C. Security Commission designated certain towns in the interior as "self-supporting sites" (Christina Lake, Bridge River, Minto City, Lillooet, and McGillivray Falls), it must be noted that those interned were also required to pay for their support. Also, although the 1,400 who chose to move to one of these sites had the means to relocate, they were not, necessarily, wealthy, nor did they escape hardship (Miki and Kobayashi 37-41). Official government discourse described the process this way: "A number of the more enterprising Japanese started moving out early in 1942 on their own initiative" (*Report on the Administration of Japanese Affairs in Canada 1942-1944*, 6).

<sup>351</sup> Miki and Kobayashi 32.

<sup>352</sup> Adachi describes "nihonjinmachi," as he calls it (literally "Japanese peoples' town"), as "a wall against prejudice and rejection" (131). Historian Kay Anderson describes these processes of accommodation and resistance among Chinese Canadian merchants in her text, *Vancouver's Chinatown*. See *The Jade Peony* for a poignant evocation of these exclusionary practices.

food stocks with an abrupt comment on her own ill health, Kitagawa suggests that an adequate intake of Japanese food is not only desirable, but essential for Nikkei physical well-being.<sup>353</sup>

It may seem ironic for Kitagawa to assert this dependence on what she calls "Japanese food." Muriel Kitagawa was a Canadian citizen by birth, and wrote at length and with passion about her Canadian identity.<sup>354</sup> She saw her parents' generation, the issei, as committed to "the old [Japanese] ways," accommodating themselves to a Canadian way of life only superficially (*This is My Own* 220). The simplest explanation for Kitagawa's dependence on Japanese food, in spite of her passionate convictions regarding Canadian citizenship, is that this food was an essential component of the Powell Street community she was leaving behind. Kitagawa was about to make a new home for her family in a place where no Nikkei community existed, and at a time when her homeland was at war with that of her parents. If their resettlement was to succeed, she must take the elements of Powell Street with her.

In writings by Nikkei and non-Nikkei, nisei are usually presented as a generation forced to choose between those "old Japanese" ways, and the Canadian ways that are theirs by birth.<sup>355</sup> Nisei must "maintain the heritage of their parents or break with it and become 'westernized'" (*A Dream of Riches* 65). This ideological division dramatically strained the ritual events and festivals in the years leading up to the war, and was vividly expressed by the foods

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<sup>353</sup> The lack of miso is significant for several reasons. If, as Kitagawa's letters suggest, her family is eating a predominantly "Japanese" diet, they would have eaten miso shiru (soup), at most meals. Kitagawa uses miso elsewhere in her writing as a central metaphor of the Japanese diet: "Slowly and inevitably, toast, jam and coffee became the standard breakfast instead of rice with miso soup and pickles" (*This is my Own* 203). Miso is made from soy beans, an easily digestible plant food high in protein, iron, and calcium, all essential nutrients in the diet of a postpartum woman, as Kitagawa was at this point. For instance, compared with the 0.9 mg of iron in the serving of Christmas turkey Kitagawa also recalls enjoying (77), a 100 gram serving of soybeans contains 9.7 mg. of iron (Holland 1991, 158).

<sup>354</sup> Kitagawa writes of the nisei maturing "in a world more Canadian than Japanese; for in spite of all that parents could do to keep their Japanese identity, the encroaching environment made their children more Canadian than Japanese [. . .]" (*This is My Own* 219). In their several official requests that the government not separate families during their removal from the protected zone, the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group also stressed their right to due process and "British fair play and justice," because they were Canadian citizens and, therefore, British subjects. (UBC Library Special Collections, Japanese Canadian Collection: Box 4, Folder 6b and c; also cited in Kitagawa 39)

individuals chose to eat, and in the words they used to talk about food. In fact, at this time, when assimilation was held by the majority to be the inevitable and desired end of ethnic mixing, many Nikkei perceived the food one ate to be a clear reflection of one's ethnic identification and patriotism. To eat Canadian was to be Canadian. Moreover, to eat Japanese food was to resist assimilation and invite "discrimination," as this excerpt from one essay contest demonstrates:

We Japanese are now facing discrimination. How can we avoid it? We should not do what white people do not like. Before going to school we should wash our hands and faces well. And we should make sure that our necks and ears are always clean. If we eat tsukemono [pickles] too much we will be disliked for our bad breaths. (cited in *A Dream of Riches* 64)<sup>356</sup>

As discussed in Chapter One, popular sentiment in the 1920s and 30s stressed the inevitability in the connection between assimilation and national belonging. In the matter of food and patriotism, the relevance of behavioural assimilation, of acting in such a way as to win admission to the majority culture, lay in the convictions surrounding choice, as expressed by Kitagawa and this young orator. Both essays suggest that, by their actions, the marginalized can ensure acceptance by the dominant society. As the winning contestant promises: "[t]hen white children and teachers will like us" (64).

Significantly for Nikkei, the choice of acting "Canadian" was only possible because in Nikkei discourses of the day two clear options existed. Individual actions determined and reflected the individual's choice to be either Canadian or Japanese. Because they were seen as indelibly connected to a Japanese past, issei could enjoy the luxury of adopting Canadian ways without risking the loss of their essential Japanese core. Kitagawa allows that many issei women "learned the arts of western cooking, western housekeeping, western clothes and styles" (*This is My Own* 219). However, she insists that the practice of these skills represented a superficial adoption of Canadian ways, and that the issei, "in their most intimate moments reverted back to the old ways" (220). Adachi (1991) agrees that issei adaptation to a perceived

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<sup>355</sup> Since children learn the material practices of culture, "Japanese" ways may be said to belong to the nisei "by birth" as much as do Canadian ways.

<sup>356</sup> This passage is from a prize-winning essay in the Nikkei annual public speaking contest of 1921.

Canadian style of life was superficial, and stresses that, "although more and more [issei] parents learned to compromise, it did not mean that their attitudes had in any way changed" (123).

Kitagawa and Adachi both couch their arguments in generational terms, as though attitudes and eventual behaviour were determined by traits that one might describe as inherently particular to either the issei or nisei.<sup>357</sup> Immigration restrictions and contemporary assimilationist policies and practices of the Canadian government and general public bolstered this tendency to ascribe generation with explanatory value. However, Kitagawa recognizes that, along with the influence of these generational traits, place also determines the nature and degree of one's identification with perceived Japanese or Canadian ways. For example, she cites "the encroaching environment" as that which made the nisei "more Canadian than Japanese" (*This is My Own* 219). That is, those characteristics that appear essential are made so by their occurrence in a certain place. However, by emphasizing the role of issei mothers in the transmission of these "Canadian" characteristics, Kitagawa also emphasizes the notion that cultural traits must be inherited to be natural. That is, regardless of where or how mothers acquire cultural traits, the traits are naturalized by the process of their transmission within the family:

As young Japanese women learned from their mistresses, they learned the arts of western cooking, western housekeeping, western clothes and styles. Of necessity they adopted these things until they became the natural heritage of the Nisei growing up in a world more Canadian than Japanese. (*This is My Own* 219)

In contrast to this inescapable primacy of one's genetic history, *Chorus of Mushrooms* presents an image of homeland that seduces the issei by its inextricable connection with the primacy of food. Perhaps, the text suggests, the issei fall back into the "old ways" because their minds hold memories of having lived amid the smells and tastes of a different homeland, sensory perceptions which Naoe Obāchan calls the "substance of memory":

[. . .] my tongue quivers for food of substance. The substance of memory. [. . .] Mattaku! [really] Wait! I scent [sic], a wonderful scent. Where is it coming from? I know! It must be Chinatown. [. . .] Of course, I know the food is not the same, but there is compatibility of flavour, a simple nose

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<sup>357</sup> This generational discourse was widely apparent in editorials, letters, and articles published in the *New Canadian*. See also Kogawa (1984) and McFarlane (1994).

tongue connection. Now if I can only make my way there. Well, I don't need a map. I'll just roll down my window and let the flavours of Chinatown beckon me. (141-42)

Naoe is searching out tonkatsu,<sup>358</sup> or a similar release from her "Canadian" culinary prison, among the shopping malls and late night cafes that line Calgary's MacLeod Trail. The site of her release is the Chinatown she imagines she smells, as yet no more an actual place than is the road she is travelling, no more her homeland than Alberta. In fact, this issei seems to travel back in her culinary memory to the years she spent in China, when eating and her name became the only tangible signs of a threadbare identity:

Breath shattering, trying to light the stove, to cook rice, urine retreating far up the bladder, too cold to come out. [. . .] We had a boy who lived with us. Fetched winter-wrinkled daikon, limp hakusai and eggs from the market. [. . .] I did not go to the market. I did not tend the garden. I did not change my kimono. I did not wash my hair. I wandered around the house with a brush in one hand and a pot of black sumi in the other. Went from paper screen to papered walls to skin-thin window and wrote my name in tiny characters. (48-49)

Japan is no more or no less Naoe's homeland than is China. Thus the inevitability of Chinatown as a site of rescue resides no more in its location or genetic fit than does the inevitability of Japan as the origin of Naoe's culture. Significantly, the food that Naoe smells is substantive enough to "beckon" her, and to map her escape route out of the "obscenely sprawling" Canadian highway (141-42). Substantive food recovers lost homelands and creates new ones.

### *Intersections of the Symbolic and the Literal*

#### *The material reality and imaginative potential of food*

There exists a causal connection between Nikkei food and Nikkei health that depends on both the sustaining material reality of food and the ability of food to engage the imagination. Health depends on the material food taken into the body. Fullness of health, or health in all of its physical, mental, and emotional aspects, depends on taking into the body that food deemed necessary and appropriate. Where the former definition of health is empirical and, to some degree, verifiable, the latter is decided by the individual eater or by a community of eaters. Rather than existing independently, these two conceptions of health inform and define each

other. For instance, in *Itsuka*, Naomi's advice that Japanese food befits Japanese bodies is both physiologically sound and socially constructed: "Mrs. Makino says we should eat Japanese food when we're not feeling well because our bodies are Japanese" (247).<sup>359</sup> Whether "Japanese bodies" are inherently fit for Japanese food matters less than that the familiarity of Japanese food represents the least assault on the ailing body.

For Nikkei writers, ideas about "the hairshirt of ethnicity," as Kogawa (1992) describes it, figure centrally in this process of identity formation (264). Kogawa's sense of tortured and tortuous ethnicity is obvious in her metaphor. However, although they exert tangible effects on the making of identity, ethnicity and its parent concept "race" lack the essential materiality that gives food its particular power as a component in that process. Recalling my discussion in Chapter One, I emphasize the nature of race as

a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies. (Omi and Winant 55)

Again, this is not to say that race has no impact on the material reality of lives lived. Another of the many effects that demonstrate the power of race as a concept is the conviction that the food of one's ethnicity fits one's (ethnic) body.

This truth about Nikkei health must be taught to be appreciated. At this point in *Itsuka*, Naomi and her fellow community members are weary from campaigning for redress. Aunt Emily, the crusading Nisei warrior, is suffering with bowel cancer. Like Emily, the NJCL (National Japanese Canadian League) has also been attacked from within, in this case, by its members' disagreement over what is suitable reparation.<sup>360</sup> Mrs. Makino delivers the same

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<sup>358</sup> breaded deep-fried pork cutlet

<sup>359</sup> The appropriateness of Japanese food as a healing substance also appears in work by the Japanese American writer Hisaye Yamamoto. In Yamamoto's short story, "The High-heeled Shoes: a Memoir," the narrator finds solace in Japanese food after being sexually assaulted. The story criticizes a need that Yamamoto seems to be describing as disproportionate with the expressed or structural ethnicity of her nisei protagonist. For instance, after reciting a detailed list of the food Obasan has prepared for her, the narrator reflects: "All these things she and Uncle are bringing over this evening. Is about five o'clock too early? It is possible she wonders at my enthusiastic appreciation, which is all right, but all out of proportion" (6-7).

<sup>360</sup> "NJCL" refers to the National Japanese Canadian League. In the novel, Naomi describes a system whereby provincial Japanese Canadian "Leagues" are organized under the umbrella of

diagnosis for both illnesses: "Fighting fighting, too much fight fight, no good redress." Naomi realizes that Emily depends on a healthy community for her own health, and "[w]hen it's wounded, she's wounded" (247).

The soothing of Aunt Emily's body begins with the offering and receiving of substantive, suitable, Japanese food. However, her complete healing, and that of the Nikkei community, depends on a reconciliation of the "old" Japanese ways with the "new" Japanese Canadian ones. As the generational representatives gather above the strife on Aunt Emily's "sky-high" balcony, Mrs. Makino, the issei mother, massages the still blustering Aunt Emily with her "perfect mind-body hand" (247).

Kogawa's novels always show evidence of the interconnections of mind and body, reflecting what I earlier described as traditional Japanese philosophy. Yet, as I sift through the productive influences in Kogawa's writing I recognize that Christianity and other western forms appear alongside Japanese mythology.<sup>361</sup> Even in her earliest writing, these western influences and the dominance of western Canada's Anglo-European culture contributed to the shaping of Kogawa's particular Japanese Canadian voice, with its reverence and respect for the issei.

[. . .] I had virtually no consciousness, except in a negative sense, of Japaneseness. I would see myself as white. I wrote as a white person. I wrote, in fact, in a male voice initially. In that sense I was a mimic, I read and I wrote what I read. (Kogawa and Koh 20)

In this interview with Karlyn Koh, Kogawa goes on to describe a sample of her earliest fiction ("Are There Any Shoes in Heaven") as a "completely white, male story." Yet the story's plot may be said to mimic Kogawa's experience of being uprooted and exiled to a sugar-beet farm in Alberta. Kogawa describes it as more than mimicry: "That was," she adds, "a Japanese-Canadian story" (Kogawa and Koh 21).

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the fictionally named "NJCL." The NJCL has its historic counterpart in the National Japanese Canadian Citizen's Association or NJCCA, also formed in 1947, and renamed in 1980 as the National Association of Japanese Canadians, or NAJC, the name the association carries today. See Miki and Kobayashi 1991.

<sup>361</sup> Discussing her literary models with Karlyn Koh, Kogawa recalls: "[t]hen I was lucky in one sense that there was the King James Bible, which was a very rich source of language. I had a lot of that in my childhood, plus the encyclopedia—the Book of Knowledge—there was good

Whether or not one classifies it as “Japanese,” Kogawa’s tendency to fuse categories that appear mutually exclusive—in this case the experiences of white and Japanese Canadians—also determines the place of honour Mrs. Makino holds in this passage. Resisting the popular conviction expressed by Kitagawa and Adachi that the issei are separated from successive generations by a chasm of age and experience, Kogawa closes the perceived intergenerational gaps within a circle of food ritual. Before the food is given, Naomi pays respect to the issei, characterizing them as oriented toward the future by the spiritual legacy they leave their offspring:

They endured for a future that only the children will know. Their endurance is their act of faith and of love. What they offer to the future are their keys to the safekeeping of the soul. (250)

In effect, the food is already blessed.

At the centre of the gustatory circle<sup>362</sup> is Mrs. Makino, dispensing wisdom with rice:

Mrs. Makino is filling our empty rice bowls, scooping the cold rice from the pot with the flat rice paddle. There’s a big thermos on the floor. The round lid acts as a pump and hot water steams out of the spout as she presses it with the palm of her hand. (*Itsuka* 250)<sup>363</sup>

Again, Kogawa conflates a metaphor of the Christian Eucharist with the traditionally Japanese image of the mother dishing out rice to her children.

At this point in the story, the struggle for redress has been going on for years; the actors are tired and dispirited; even the unflagging Aunt Emily is ill and “brooding,” reflecting that it is as if “[t]ime has gone backwards” to the struggling 1940s (247). By having Mrs. Makino locate

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writing in there. So it was that, plus my mother was a good storyteller and she told me a lot of Japanese folk stories” (“The Heart-of-the-matter Questions,” 19-20).

<sup>362</sup> The term is from Sidonie Smith’s text, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*. Smith uses the term in her discussion of Maxine Hong Kingston’s novel, *Woman Warrior*, to describe a parallel action by the mother in that story: “Through the conventions of speaking (Chinese), eating, greeting, chanting, storytelling, she keeps China drawn around her family in a linguistic and gustatory circle” (166).

<sup>363</sup> Ohnuki-Tierney (1993) describes the association of rice with the mother as being “expressed” in the symbolism of the shamoji, or rice paddle, which is used for serving up rice at the table. According to Ohnuki-Tierney, the shamoji was historically considered as a symbol of the shufu, or female head of the household and thus (citing Tayoko Noda 1943), the “central pillar of the household” (94). At the time of marriage, especially to a first-born son, the shamoji was ritually passed on from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, thus signifying a transfer of power to the new ie, or household. Unlike the equally customary practice of all family members

the source of Emily's cancer in the campaign for justice, the text is reprising a position suggested in *Obasan*, namely that the issei's resigned response to racism was morally right and necessary for the survival and health of the Nikkei community. Certainly Emily's reflections suggest that the nisei are still political and moral fledglings in relation to the first generation of immigrants.

Kogawa is also acknowledging the power and the right of the issei mother to fill the figurative empty rice bowl, a sign of nisei and sansei cultural impoverishment. She is emphasizing the power of the issei mother as healer: it is that mother who dispenses the hot water, thus transforming the inedible cold rice into the more appealing ochazuke, a tasty snack which is also reminiscent of okayu, the "mushy" rice fed to babies and the sick (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 74).

Nikkei health had already suffered from the tangible effects of Canada's assimilation project of the 1920s and 30s, and from the uprooting and internment.<sup>364</sup> Several writers emphasize the detrimental effects of the inadequate, but also unfamiliar food which the Nikkei were forced to eat in Hastings Park as they awaited their transfer to the interior of British Columbia. In her autobiographical prose poem, *A Child in Prison Camp*, Shizuye Takashima recalls a visit she and her mother make to their friend, Mrs. Abe, who is housed with her children in the Livestock Building at Vancouver's Exhibition grounds in Hastings Park:

As we draw close to the concrete buildings, the stench  
becomes so powerful in the hot, humid heat,  
I want to turn and run. I gaze at my mother.

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helping themselves to plates of food set on the table, commensality is further symbolized or reinforced as one person, the mother, dishes up each person's rice from the rice cooker (93-94).

<sup>364</sup> See Nakagawa (1992) for a discussion of physical and mental illnesses resulting from the internment of American Nikkei. For various reasons, the experiences of Canadian Nikkei and American Nikkei during the war were quite different. Certain of these peculiarities had the greatest implications for health. Most obvious among those factors which influenced the health of Canadian Nikkei were the greater length of internment for Canadians (on average seven years, compared with three years or fewer for Americans); the impact of inadequate housing in harsh winters to which Canadian Nikkei were unaccustomed; and the dissolution of the family structure when Canadian Nikkei men were initially sent to either road camps or prisoner of war camps in eastern Canada. For discussion of the particular effects of the internment on the health of Canadian Nikkei see Adachi (1991); Kitagawa (1985); and Takashima (1971).

Continuing, Takashima describes how she and her mother find Mrs. Abe nursing her baby on the edge of her steel bunk bed, "clothes hanging all over the place / to dry in the hot sour air."

She relates Mrs. Abe's description of the Hastings Park diet:

[ . . . ] The food is much better now.  
 We complained every day, refused to eat one day.  
 They take all our belongings, even our husbands,  
 and house us like pigs, even try to feed us pigs' food! (9)

The damage caused by inadequate diet and cramped, unsanitary conditions is reflected in the shocking image of the nursing mother, traditionally a figure placid and abundant, swearing angrily at her curious neighbour, "Nosy bitch!" (9).

This image of community contrasts conspicuously with the tiny community formed by the voluntary sharing of strange food at the birth of Mrs. Imada's baby. There, common experience and the luxury of friendliness amid relative abundance meant that the strange food that passed through Mrs. Imada's body to become milk for her baby was nourishing and safe. In the inhuman conditions of the Livestock building, the strange diet forced on the confined Nikkei women strains rather than strengthens their common bonds, and releases in the nursing mothers animal instincts for survival.

Less directly connected with physical healing is a nonetheless soothing meal Ikeda recounts on the eve of her exile to Slocan.

Soon my daughter's family came to join us for a farewell dinner that Mr. and Mrs. T. kindly prepared for us. They made *mame* and rice and wished us good health. Although Mrs. T.'s homecooking was always delicious, that day the miso soup and the boiled food was especially tasty. As the excellence of the food touched me, I wondered if the day would come when we could again share a meal. My heart was heavy. (123-24)

At this point of community fracture, it is difficult to imagine food healing the people gathered around this table. If anything, the implications of their final dinner together intensify the pain of the friends' leave-taking. They are sharing food that will soon be unavailable, and in a manner

that is about to change irrevocably. Food meant to ensure long life<sup>365</sup> now symbolizes the dissolution of the material community.

Ikeda heightens the apparent paradox by emphasizing through her choice of words the physical aspect of eating together. Evoking Naoe's description of food that is the "substance of memory," Ikeda relies on the concrete verb "touch" in its transitive form to describe the impact of the meal, and the concrete adjective "heavy" to describe her sadness. The irony of this meal, that at the height of the disintegration of their community these friends are enjoying together foods symbolic of long life and commensality, suggests that community exists independent of physical proximity. Thus each step in this process of leave-taking is consolidating an idea of community as *belonging* rather than *being* physically together. Yet the sharing of these symbolic foods leaves Ikeda's heart heavy with a sad wisdom: the probable absence of community food in the community's future means the disappearance of one tangible component essential to such belonging.

#### *Intimate food*

Whether Nikkei writers are suggesting that food contributes to individual healing or to the solidifying of communal ties, they agree that food is a substance that nurtures because it feeds literally and as a sign of belonging. What community members define as "our" food describes the perimeter of the group: non-Nikkei who eat Japanese food may be described as cosmopolitan, or even daring, but rarely as belonging within the defining limits of the category "Japanese."

Mrs. Makino teaches the younger women in *Itsuka* that they must eat Japanese food because their bodies are Japanese. This imperative wisdom concerns a process that involves

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<sup>365</sup> Oiwa glosses two meanings of "mame:" "good health" and "beans" (154). As discussed above, mame are also a necessary part of Oshogatsu. Thanks to Ikeda's imaginative and pragmatic resourcefulness, the absence of mame during the first Oshogatsu in Slocan spelled the transformation rather than the end of the celebration. Similarly, although individual Nikkei and their community suffered ill health because of the uprooting, sharing in a symbol of good

both mind and body. Members of a group may resemble one another physically inasmuch as sharing a consistently similar diet attenuates physiological and anatomical differences among group members. Such physical distinctions between ethnic groups are most obviously manifested in a variable resistance to disease. For example, scientists are hypothesizing that a diet high in soy products at least partly explains the low incidence of breast cancer in Japanese women (Willet 1997).<sup>366</sup> Women of Japanese ancestry living in Hawaii exhibit an incidence of breast cancer four times that of Japanese women living in Japan, yet still lower than Hawaiians of non-Japanese ancestry (Parkin et al. 1992). Current studies are also showing a correlation between the high levels of serum isoflavonoids obtained from a diet high in soy products and the lower incidence of other types of cancer and troubling menopausal symptoms (Ojeda 1992; Griffiths et al. 1996).<sup>367</sup> What makes these physical similarities a sign of cultural belonging in the novel is Mrs. Makino's insistence that the younger women identify their bodies as "Japanese."

Earlier I discussed the tendency to name or ascribe ethnic belonging by linking a group with the food which it eats, or is perceived to eat; the French are "Frogs," the Germans "Krauts" and so on. The power of such derogatory epithets to establish belonging derives from the intimacy of the connections they imply. From conception, each individual absorbs involuntarily the nutrients of a culturally inflected diet. Once born, the infant who is breast-fed quickly becomes familiar with the tastes of those strong foods that offend, or are perceived to offend,

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health at this time of suffering is only apparently paradoxical. Obviously, Ikeda's friends are wishing, not acknowledging, good health.

<sup>366</sup> This hypothesis is compromised by evidence that women in under-developed countries who do not have a soy-based diet also have a lower incidence of breast cancer than those in industrialized countries (Willet 426). Nevertheless, this evidence does not eliminate the role of diet in determining a correlation between ethnicity and disease. As Kida et al. (1997) conclude, a complex of factors involved in the "westernization" of Japan, including a significant increase in the consumption of western food with a high fat content, has resulted in what can be described as a "westernization" (or weakening) of resistance to certain diseases among Japanese.

<sup>367</sup> Along with beta-carotene and polyunsaturated fats, Lee et al. (1991) found soy protein, in the form of isoflavonoids, to be a significant component in diets that protect against breast cancer. Although this study was conducted on Singaporean women, a diet of "classic" Japanese food is also high in soy products, as Griffiths et al. (1996) observe.

the outsider. Hot peppers, garlic, kim chee,<sup>368</sup> tsukemono<sup>369</sup>--even if the infant is bottle-fed, or rejects milk which tastes of these foods, her environment is saturated with their smells. Thus, by their close physical connection with a community of eaters, children become intimate with the food of their group, their bodies culturally defined, long before they verbalize dietary preferences.

However, if a group occupies a socially marginal position, its children are also intimate with the negative implications of their "smelly" food. As discussed above, this intimate knowledge was evident in the child's advice that her community eat only those foods that "white people" liked and did not mark Nikkei as different. I have shown that Nikkei acquiescence to the Canadian project of assimilation was overwhelming in the decades enveloping the war. This submission placed the Nikkei in the position of having to defend their cultural practices. That is, from among the intimacies which Nikkei enjoyed and the dominant society did not, the only ones to be practiced were those that had no offensive public manifestation.

Nikkei children who learned this lesson grew into adults who carefully guarded the intimate from public scorn. Such separation meant that public prejudices were also protected, as we saw in Naomi's anxiety when Obasan's landlord and his new wife come to visit at Uncle's death. From being a child who happily carried Japanese lunches to school in spite of being ridiculed by her brother and classmates (*Obasan* 153-54), Naomi has matured into a careful guardian of the intimate. Furthermore, eating, once the earliest and easiest intimacy, has become a contested zone, and food a forbidden territory.

To understand this transformation of pleasure into pain, it helps to consider the experience of the individual's first enjoyment of food and how this enjoyment becomes submerged in conformity to the range of tastes considered acceptable within the community of eaters. While the sexual component of infant feeding is commonly accepted, criticism in the

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<sup>368</sup> Kim chee is generally hakusai, or "Chinese cabbage," combined with various other vegetables and sometimes shrimp, then pickled in salt, hot peppers and garlic.

<sup>369</sup> This Japanese word literally means "pickled things" and refers to any of a wide variety of pickles.

west has focused more on the pleasures of the suckling infant, than on those of the nurturing mother.<sup>370</sup> This privilege is understandable when the acquisition of speech is presented as a substitution for the primal oral satisfaction of feeding, a process by which “we sacrifice the pleasures of ingestion for the thrill of sculpting vocables within the mouth. [. . .]” (Ellman 47). The notion of substitution is also necessary if we posit sexual expression as a metaphor for non-verbal exchange within a community. Citing Lévi-Strauss, Ohnuki-Tierney (1993) supports the metaphorical relationship between eating and sexual union as a “near universal symbolic equation” (118). In contemporary literature and film, food frequently accompanies, or is the origin of, sexual desire and pleasure.<sup>371</sup> As the sexual stimulation of erotica and pornography may encourage or at least accompany sexual practice (James and Guloien 1989; Kelley, Dawson, and Musialowski 1989; Senn 1993), so writing and talking about food stimulates on many levels, and encourages the practices of eating and sex. In fact, the pleasures of eating are so evident in language about food (critical or otherwise) that the sensual and sexual infuse both realms.

The degree to which sensual imagery has permeated popular discourse about food reflects the primacy of the connection between sexuality and food. One vivid example occurred in a recent radio program of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The program featured host Shelagh Rogers’s interview with two chefs on the topic of bread making. The interview began sedately enough, with Rogers posing questions of both guests, and each giving her replies in turn. However, as the conversation turned to specifics of the bread making process, decorum faded, and the three became increasingly rhapsodic, apparently oblivious to audience. The speakers likened risen dough to “a baby’s bottom,” or the skin of a woman’s “inner thigh”; foccacia was said to have the appearance of cellulite. “The dough talks to you,” said one. The speakers expressed their preference for kneading by hand rather than with mechanical dough

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<sup>370</sup> See, especially, Freud, “Infantile Sexuality,” Trans. A. A. Brill, 1938.

<sup>371</sup> For instance, *Tanpopo* (1988); *Como Agua Para Chocolate* [Like Water for Chocolate] (1994); *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* (1994); *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo* (1982); *The Famished*

hooks, because hands are the “most personal,” and able to “respond” to the dough. The speakers were no longer distinguished by name, and Rogers yielded control of the interview to what sounded like the compulsion of the sensual.<sup>372</sup>

Such descriptions indicate a strong metaphorical relationship between food preparation and sex. The three women discussed bread dough as if it were the other participant in lovemaking, the dough and its maker responding to each other. By identifying the emotion of the baker as both raw ingredient and finished product, the discussion also approached the fragility of distinctions drawn between object and person: “you put all your energy and emotions into [the dough],” sighed one woman; “what you’re feeling comes out in it.”

Similar pleasures underscore Obāchan’s enjoyment of food in *Chorus of Mushrooms*:

Simple pleasure of crack crack lobster shell between my molars, pry sweet meat with my *hashi* and suck out the juice still inside, licking the garlic ginger cream sauce, pungent with green onion, and chew chew of lobster flesh, fresh and sweet as the sea. (148)

When writing conjures up the visual feast with the power of its sensual images, as this account of Naoe’s feast of Chinese food does, the desire for food matches that which is unleashed by filmic food:

Every time I watch *The Trained Chinese Tongue* [ . . . ], I feel an intense hunger rising within me, even if I’ve eaten right before. Whatever I’ve had, Chinese or not, suddenly falls short compared to the close-ups of food that streamline the optical experience, and the sensual, communal atmosphere this visual pleasure gives rise to. (Ching 28)

But whether we speak of food as metaphor, or as substitution, or even as an accompaniment to pleasure, we are demanding a separation between food and the exchange it represents; we are, in fact demanding representation. Food must function as something else.

The obvious weakness in this argument is, of course, the mysterious and sometimes disturbing physiology of the mother as food. Both the fetus and the infant feed not only through, but also on the mother: the mother *is* food. Most western models of individual development have treated this state, in which no line may be drawn between the child and mother, as a

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Road (1991); *The Cure for Death by Lightning* (1996); *Aphrodite: A Memoir of the Senses* (1998). This is a highly selective list; there are scores of others.

<sup>372</sup> *Morningside*, August 1997.

necessary stage on the way to full identity as an individual. In *The Psychology of the Child*, Jean Piaget describes the earliest months of infancy as a time in which the child has no consciousness of self and is unaware of the boundary between the internal self (what Piaget calls the “experienced world”) and the external realities (22). It is a time when “representation does not exist” (52).<sup>373</sup> The individual at its most dependent is incomplete.

In Lacanian terms, the child begins life in seamless dependence on its mother, unable to distinguish her existence as separate from its own. This union is interrupted in early childhood by the paternal phallus, the ultimate signifier. The infant travels through a time of insufficiency and anticipation towards this moment or plane of separation, after which the symbolic order reigns, and the child is armed with a rigid subjectivity. This individual is one who has learned that his separation from those around him, especially the mother, makes possible his entry into the realm of the symbolic. While Lacan’s emphasis on the relationship between language and subjectivity might seem to temper his insistence on the maleness of the symbolic order, it is incompatible with a positive valuation of the literal and with an idea of identity based on complete identification with another.

“No Freudian shit for me,” declares Muriel in *Chorus of Mushrooms* (36). Whether one chooses to read Muriel’s comment ironically or not,<sup>374</sup> it does invite a fresh critical approach, especially as the novel addresses the processes of identity formation. The three women in the story, Naoe, Keiko and Muriel/Murasaki, are never completely separate individuals. Although Naoe seems to have the most insight and knowledge of the three, even she is periodically flummoxed by the sense that she is being ventriloquist to the speech of another. Understandably, for the reader to identify the relevant speaker in this text is sometimes impossible. At one point, Naoe Obāchan tells Muriel she is about to relate a story, yet at the story’s end we read Murasaki protesting in Naoe’s familiar diction:

Good gracious me and my tits! Where in mackerel did that story come from? I can’t tell where Obāchan ends and I begin or if I made the whole thing up or if it was all Obāchan (68).

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<sup>373</sup> See also, Freud, “Infantile Sexuality.”

<sup>374</sup> I discuss below the irony of eating the father, rather than his totemic substitute.

One person or three, and a “voiceless man” (59), the characters in the novel invite an interpretation that might embrace as desirable, or at least imaginable, the idea of multiple, “fragmented” identities.

Within Japanese scholarship, models of the self easily accommodate multiple identities and the flimsiness of boundaries that might be constructed around the self in relation to sexual practice and eating. For instance, Hamaguchi (1966) bases his model of selfhood on an analysis of linguistic symbols by analyzing the kanji, or Chinese character, for “person.” The phonetic reading of the character “ningen” means “person in society.” Inverted, the character reads “kanjin” or “contextual self,” signifying a core self in relationship to others. With either of these readings, the kanji suggests that individual identities are interdependent.

This is not to say that the interdependent (or “situational” or “relational”) Japanese self (Lebra 1976; Bachnik and Quinn 1994; Smith 1983b; Kondo 1990) stands in direct contrast to the North American “individual.” To suggest that pioneer Nikkei privileged the more “concrete” group over the individual (Adachi 1976) is to overlook the complexities in both national ideologies.<sup>375</sup> As Lebra summarizes it, relational selfhood does not preclude autonomy:

The autonomy of the self is assured only in social isolation and in self-reflection. The emotionally and morally pure self is associated with selflessness, which in turn is thought to bring self-contentment and to eliminate the boundary between self and environment. (168)

Moreover, as the image of the Meiji woman overlaps with the Cult of True Womanhood, modern intellectuals in Japan pondered the interdependent “Japanese” by engaging with “western” Heideggerian and Kantian thought.<sup>376</sup> Nonetheless, *Chorus of Mushrooms* is a different text in light of these models. Three indistinguishable characters or one multifaceted, it makes little difference if selfhood is already accepted as relational.

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<sup>375</sup> By “national” I mean the two geopolitical (“Canadian” and “Japanese”) perspectives of the self, specifically the perception that the essence of nation is microcosmically reproduced in each individual (national) self.

<sup>376</sup> While most Japanese intellectuals in the 1920s and 30s who invoked western thinkers engaged with them only philosophically, others (for example Miki Kiyoshi) actually studied with Heidegger. On the alignment of Heideggerian philosophy and Japanese ultranationalism, see Sakai (1997).

Of course, these are selected highlights of intellectual models. Japanese models of selfhood are also, in varying degrees, influenced by the popular tendency of defining that country as the antithesis of the west. Thus Japanese scholars may exaggerate the contrast of “east” and “west” (as western scholars do), so as to distinguish what they feel is essentially “Japanese.”

This emphasis on Japanese uniqueness began as early as the Tokugawa era (1600-1868). As Najita (1989) explains, Tokugawa scholars understood that translating Chinese sentences into Japanese was a way of bringing something of the “home culture” or the Other, into Japan (10). Nonetheless, when forced to confront post-Second World War cosmopolitanism via the occupying forces, and international curiosity concerning the nature of that country, Japan responded with images of an interrelational, group-oriented national family of loyal subjects that was essentially Japanese. Over time, Japanese politicians and educators reinforced these images with the complementary myth of homogenization to the point where serious self-reflection on the political and cultural activities of the nation—including Japan’s heterogeneity—have only recently flourished.<sup>377</sup> (Miyoshi and Harutoonian 1989)

Nikkei texts engage with these theories of the western and Japanese self in varying degrees. Certainly the multiplicity or interrelatedness of identities in *Chorus of Mushrooms* seems less novel or surprising when read against ideologies of self as the individual in context. In fact, an understanding of these models of selfhood might even be said to highlight the aspects of this novel that may be described as particularly Canadian. Had the text been written with a Japanese audience in mind, many details concerning the formation and expression of individual identity could have been assumed and expressed implicitly. As it is, Canadian immigration patterns and official multiculturalism have rendered the Canadian audience so

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<sup>377</sup> One of the harshest critics from within the nation, Kenzaburo Ōe, maintains that such self-critique has yet to emerge. In his essay, “Japan’s Dual Identity: A Writer’s Dilemma,” Ōe discusses the tendency for Japanese to welcome and circulate translations of American and European cultural theories, specifically poststructuralism and postmodernism, without interpreting such theories in relation to the particular ambiguities of Japanese social realities, both within the country, and in its relation to the rest of the world.

diverse that only those texts which reflect dominant Canadian ideologies can luxuriate in making art free of didacticism. In her role as narrator or storyteller, Muriel repeatedly takes pains to identify and explain those times when the trope of interrelated self-identity (as well as the story's circuitous time line) is operating:

Two women take up two different roads, two different journeys at different times. They are not travelling with a specific destination in mind but the women are walking toward the same place. Whether they meet or not is not relevant. (200)

Here and elsewhere in the novel, we also see Goto challenging human attempts to contain and order time, place, and object. As with many other versions of the story of the yamanba or mountain woman,<sup>378</sup> Goto's telling makes the lines that have been drawn between such categories as women and food, good and evil, the demonic and the human, appear quite faint. In Goto's version of this myth, the earth is sickly and unable to sustain any life. At the invitation of the yamanba, dying maggots enter her body.<sup>379</sup> Once they are all safely in, the yamanba stands tall and expresses the maggots through her breasts. "Fingers, hands, calves and feet. Some were tall and slender while others stayed plump and soft. They grew and clamoured around her. In wonder, they called her mother." Despite her fatigue at the task, the yamanba cares for her maggot children, made human by their rebirth. She swallows the foul water of the polluted earth, and then squats over the streambed: "The water flowed, sweet and pure between her legs. From her body rains clean water, and the earth is alive and pure once more" (115-119).

The story is a cautionary tale about the earth's ecology. It is a feminist revision of both western and Japanese stories of creation, and it is a story of transformation. I discuss below

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<sup>378</sup> The literal rendering of the characters used to write "yamanba" is "old woman of the mountains." However, "because of the frequency with which demons in folklore become old women and vice versa (Mabuchi et al., 60) the notion of a crone living in the mountains immediately conjures up the notion of a female demon" (Viswanathan 241). I follow Goto's use of "mountain woman."

<sup>379</sup> As well as subverting the idea of polarities, Goto's story contains several elements of historical yamamba mono (tales or stories), including bold expressions of sexuality, the cyclical transformation of the young and beautiful into the old and ugly, and the shifting boundary between the eater and the eaten. In her novel, *The Floating World*, Kadohata's "Obasan" (see

the ways in which this story is also a comment on how Nikkei overcame some of the more degrading aspects of their uprooting during the Second World War. Here, the story is relevant because it portrays the absolute and necessary interdependence of all living things, as well as the continuity of the eater and the eaten. In the polluted world visited by the yamanba, the unwelcome and disgusting may also people the earth: "When the yamanba squeezed the last maggots from her breast, there were millions of soft-skinned people around her" (118).<sup>380</sup> The maggots feed on death, and they are food for the mountain woman. They are expressed externally as language, as food, and in the image of their maker. Moreover, the maggots are companionable children whose definition and existence derive from their interdependence.

The story makes metaphor redundant. If becoming is a multiple, directionless process in which identity cannot be fixed, the separation on which categorization and representation rest is chimerical. Building on ideas of individuals as interdependent parts of a whole, and the organic mind-body complex, we see that at any moment "I" and "you" stand in dependent relation to each other and exist as potential food for each other.<sup>381</sup> Thus, the copula is necessary for meaning but resists substitution: to say "woman *is* food" is to acknowledge existence as the eater and the eaten. The simultaneity in this kind of being returns maturity to dependence, respect to the literal, and pleasure to the nursing mother.

Homans has suggested that we recast the (female) presymbolic in a more positive light than we find in Lacanian psycholinguistics. For girls, the phallic fracturing of the mother/child dyad is, she claims, less traumatic, even less necessary. The adult male sexual object does not compete with the daughter for the mother's attention as it does with the son (13). Moreover, adult women may continue in close relation with their mothers without sacrificing maturity.

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Chapter Four) also evokes yamanba mono, especially the ukiyo-zōshi ("prose fiction of the 'floating' world"; translation Viswanathan's (248)) of the Edo (Tokugawa) period.

<sup>380</sup> Goto's telling of the yamanba story has parallels in the creation myths from the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshiki*, which also blur the distinctions between excretion and birth, filth and creative beauty, and food and the body.

<sup>381</sup> The potentiality in this edible state also refers, of course, to the cyclical nature of life and death by which the decomposition of all organisms, including the human body, replenishes the earth which grows our food.

Homan's argument does not necessarily rest on normative heterosexuality. Tamai Kobayashi's poem "As yet untitled [sic]" suggests that the continuity of the mother/child dyad also complements, rather than detracts from, adult lesbian sexuality:

I see your hand  
 curled  
 as an autumn leaf  
 life lines  
 carved out of years  
 memories of summers green  
 and you, young  
 heart racing across a field of light  
 a shy nod  
 and gentle smile  
 and how you have grown in years  
 in silences  
 winters of childhood  
 . . .  
 softly  
 tell me your name  
 whisper in your mothertongue  
 grow  
 run wild  
 and come back to me (29–30)

Within the poem metaphor is possible, even desirable: the hand "curled as an autumn leaf, the heart racing." But the speaker also acknowledges communication that precedes the symbol. These presymbolic gestures of speechless infancy co-exist with the words of old age in "winters of childhood," and can be recalled and repeated in the uncivilized "mothertongue."

This "mothertongue" resonates in writing by Nikkei women writers as a name for the often lost native language of their forebears, and, as I have been claiming, as an attempt to reclaim or construct a way of speaking that exceeds the dominant language usually labelled as "patriarchal" (Uyeda 1994). I address language usage throughout this thesis, but its relevance in this discussion of food and identity centres on the way in which the literal operates in Nikkei women's articulation of desire.

To recapitulate, I am suggesting that the notion of substitution as a prerequisite for meaning is a necessary component in theories that insist that the acquisition of speech is dependent on the sacrifice of the oral pleasures of eating. Furthermore, the emphasis on the infant's pleasure diminishes the significance of the mother's pleasure. In this section, I have

developed the idea that separation between the object and the individual is not given, but ideologically constructed, and that mature individuals may define and experience self in relation to others.

It follows that the enjoyment of feeding need not be limited to the child, but may exist as part of a whole pleasurable experience in which mother and child participate together. The mother's sexual excitement and other pleasures of breast-feeding co-exist, as does the infant's enjoyment of sucking and babbling. The pleasure of one need not supplant the other, for either the mother or the child. Where the nature of pleasure and the one who enjoys it are already part of another, neither substitution nor metaphoricity is required, or even imaginable.

Mona Oikawa continues this challenge to representation by playing with the literalness of lesbian sexuality and "mothertongue" in her short story, "Stork Cools Wings." Lisa and the anonymous narrator meet at a Tai Chi class: "two Asian women in a room full of tall white men" (93). Driven to sleepless nights full of yearning at the sight of Lisa executing the Tai Chi movement, "stork cools wings," the Nikkei narrator suppresses her desire, convinced that Lisa is heterosexual. As her luck has it, the narrator is proven wrong and, after six months of restless, desiring nights finds herself in bed with Lisa. At the brink of realizing her fantasy, the narrator is interrupted by Lisa's distaste of the dental dam covering the vulva of her lover.<sup>382</sup> The narrator urges Lisa to look in the refrigerator for a bottle "with a drawing of a Japanese woman on it" (98). In the bottle is umeboshi paste. Lisa smears it on the dam:

"It looks like dried blood," she says.

"That's why I like it," I answer, adding, "It's actually dried plums, very macrobiotic." She laughs and I feel a cold sensation as she spoons out the thick red paste while the dam is still on me. (98)

Here sex is food, and neither is a substitute for the other. The woman Lisa eats from the body of a Japanese woman food that is identified by the image of a Japanese woman. The umeboshi paste she eats resembles menstrual blood, the material sign of mature womanhood that might

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<sup>382</sup> Use of the dental dam reduces the risk of transmitting HIV/AIDS during oral sex.

have been food had fertilization occurred during heterosexual intercourse.<sup>383</sup> Yet Lisa cannot eat her way through the multiple representations to the “real” Japanese woman under the sign. The dental dam does not obstruct some thing hidden beneath the layers of signification for which another meaning can be substituted. The covering at the vaginal entrance simply veils another passage, a space that renders literal the image of oral sex as “eating” one’s partner.

Oikawa’s story follows an established critical tradition that views lesbian sexuality as a way of subverting or rejecting essential patriarchal components to so-called heterosexual models of subjectivity, such as we find in the Lacanian insistence on the phallus (Homans 1986; Wittig 1973).<sup>384</sup> Remarkable in “Stork Cools Wings,” though, is the manner in which the story’s literal rendering of eating returns to the mother the oral pleasures of what has, at least since Freud, been termed “infantile” sexuality, without threatening the identifying boundaries of the self. In fact, as the lovers’ oral explorations test temporal boundaries, the mother emerges as one who finds that she is, already, part of a host of others: “I move her beneath me and begin to travel the paths of our foremothers, through crevice and moss, uncovering treasures with mouth and hand” (98-99).

This is probably not what Mrs. Makino has in mind when she urges the younger women to identify their bodies as Japanese. Nonetheless, by reaching “back” in time and place through the processes of eating and being eaten, the anonymous Nikkei woman in “Stork Cools Wings” makes an identity for herself. The woman on the bottle of umeboshi paste is no more or less “Japanese” than the fictional Nikkei woman on the bed, but the images commingle and are eaten into being, as they are both licked into the mouth by the “mothertongue.”

This is not to say that the potential of eating one’s way into being exists only for lesbian women. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, one phase in the process of identity formation for the entire Tonkatsu family happens through autoingestion. Having immigrated to Canada, Keiko and her

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<sup>383</sup> My thanks to Millie Creighton for the characterization of menstrual blood as “food that might have been.”

<sup>384</sup> I am referring to textual representations of lesbian sexuality, not suggesting that women necessarily make a political “choice” to be lesbians.

husband Shinji decide that assimilation is “best” for their children. As Shinji explains to his daughter Muriel: “Sure, we couldn’t change the colour of their hair, or the shape of their face, but we could make sure they didn’t stand out. That they could be as Canadian as everyone around them” (206-07). To Keiko, “being Canadian” means eating “Canadian,” so, in the Tonkatsu household, Japanese food is forbidden. Naoe Obāchan regards her daughter’s decision as an unwelcome “conversion” (13) to western ways, and is reduced to smuggling in Japanese treats through her private mailbox, to be eaten surreptitiously under the bedclothes after her daughter and son-in-law are asleep.

Although Naoe and Muriel regard it as a component of the parents’ attempt to “put Japan behind [them] and fit more smoothly with the crowd” (207), the absence of Japanese language in the home is also an unbidden consequence of the parents’ decision. Recalls Shinji: “And from that day, when we decided, neither of us could speak a word in Japanese. Not a word would pass our lips. We couldn’t even think it” (207). When asked for the family’s surname, Shinji offers the immigration authorities “tonkatsu,” the one Japanese word he does remember. Thereafter, the family that refuses to eat Japanese food carries the name of a popular Japanese entrée, loosely translated as “deep-fried breaded pork cutlet” (209, 150).

On the night of their transformative feast, Muriel struggles to prepare tonkatsu. Naoe has left on a private journey of self-discovery, causing Keiko to fall into a catatonic stupor, apparently unable to function without the physical presence of the mother she has variously berated and nurtured. Although Goto’s text does not explain the way she does it, over the months of her absence, Naoe manages to keep in touch with Murasaki. In Naoe’s estimation, Keiko is not recovering because she is not eating Japanese food. At Naoe’s urging, Muriel goes off, armed with a shopping list from her Obāchan, to find the Japanese grocery store in Calgary, and returns home to cook the tonkatsu. After several failures, Muriel succeeds with three “golden pork cutlets [. . .]. Funny, I thought, we’re going to eat our name” (150).

One reason for Muriel’s lighthearted approach to the irony of this particular incidence of autoingestion is that Goto presents the meal as a subversion of the “Freudian shit” of ritual

totemism. Freud observes that the justified substitution of the literal father for the primal one of the ritual totem nonetheless results in a taboo against killing the father ("Totem and Taboo").<sup>385</sup> The evening's entrée for the Tonkatsu family is, of course, a multiple substitution. Because tonkatsu is neither the "real" name of the father, nor treated with veneration by the Tonkatsu clan, neither the primal father nor his literal substitution is being eaten. Furthermore, tonkatsu is probably best regarded as a contemporary Japanese dietary tradition that, in contrast to rice or even the miso that is central to Kitagawa's perception of what is Japanese, has yet to be invested with the attributes of myth.<sup>386</sup> Thus, Goto relies on what is already inauthentic as another threshold in the continuing process of transformation.

Eating the literal manifestation of their name does not trigger an immediate transformation in any of the family members. But in this household where Naoe has been hurling Japanese words at her daughter, persistently speaking Japanese to her granddaughter, hiding pupae in the folds of her clothes, hoping for butterflies, and imagining that succulent daikon and eggplants might grow from the piles of prairie dust in the house,<sup>387</sup> the days after the meal are "a chrysalis time" for Keiko and Muriel (155). As Muriel prepares more Japanese meals and the family continues to dine on the forbidden food, literal and metaphorical food emerges as "a point of departure. A place where growth begins" (201).

### *Eating Her Way to the Table*

#### *Food as a marker of assimilation*

If, as I have discussed, eating "our" food is a way of eating our selves, it seems imperative to acknowledge the next step, namely that "eating each other's food is often a barely sublimated way of simply eating each other" (Gunew unpub. 3). Certainly, autoingestion entails

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<sup>385</sup> All citations from Freud are from Brill's translation, *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*.

<sup>386</sup> We might say that the only thing separating "tonkatsu" from, for instance, "wiener schnitzel" is the name of the father.

<sup>387</sup> Silently, Naoe chides: "Don't bother dusting, I say. It'll come back, surely. Let the piles of dust grow and mound and I'll plant *daikon* and eggplant seeds. Let something grow from this daily curse" (3).

at least the possibility of cannibalism.<sup>388</sup> In many ways cannibalism is an easy metaphor for the general imposition of power over another person or group. For example, critical writing concerning the imperialist and colonizing components of anthropology has contributed to that discipline's increasing self-reflection regarding its culpability as an instrument of imperial powers (Trask 1991; Trinh 1989). Yet however rigorous these analyses, they lack the rhetorical impact of Stanislas Adotevi's metaphorical description of imperialist anthropology as an "anthropophagous" endeavour (trans. in Trinh, 73). Similarly, the connotations of extremity and disgust that western literature has collected around the practice of cannibalism render it a singularly powerful metaphor for any assimilationist project.<sup>389</sup> As anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday (1987)<sup>390</sup> has observed, more positive connotations of cannibalism do free the metaphor from being cast in purely negative terms:

As a life-giving symbol or a symbol of order, ritual cannibalism physically regenerates social categories by transmitting vital essence between the dead and the living or between the human and the divine. Society is reproduced in the social power that these rites confer and in the reaffirmation of the social hierarchy. (214)

Nonetheless, these meanings of cannibalism detract little from its sway as "the prototype of . . . identification" ("Infantile Sexuality" 597).

A factor that modulates the implications of cannibalism as a metaphor for assimilation is the model of identity that Nikkei women writers are developing. As I have been discussing, the model of the self that emerges from texts by Nikkei women is that of the interdependent individual, already assumed in the identity of another. For a self so perceived, the possibility of being eaten poses less of a threat to personal boundaries. In fact, in *Itsuka*, Kogawa imagines a feast in which the identity of the sacrificial victim is preserved to the degree that she is able to

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<sup>388</sup> The necessity of this connection is apparent in many texts, but especially relevant to my insistence on the literal aspects of food in writing is Simone Weil's writing on eating and desire. As Mervyn Nicholson observes, in Weil's writing, "eating—and being eaten—are psychologically the same act" (53).

<sup>389</sup> Of course, there is a substantial difference between cannibalism as social practice and cannibalism as metaphor. Thus, in societies with no apparent history of cannibalism, the metaphor owes its potency to that very incongruity, as well as to the significant intensity of the practice.

<sup>390</sup> Also cited in Gunew (unpub.).

serve herself up: "Last night I dreamt of being poor and needing to feed people and carving a huge roast out of my abdomen" (194). If community service<sup>391</sup> can be figured as participatory cannibalism, it is possible that cannibalism contributes to, as much as threatens, individual and group identity. One way in which literary critics have freed themselves to explore these safer imaginative aspects of anthropophagy, is to leave discussions of literal cannibalism to such disciplines as history and anthropology. After all, stresses Lillian Furst, "food is not a physiological object in literature, but a unit of imagination [. . .] (54). So situated, critics and readers have engaged enthusiastically with the abundant selection of contemporary "food books."<sup>392</sup>

However, the distinction between the imaginative and the literal is difficult to maintain in any discussion of food in writing. As argued above, writing about food may stimulate its readers to eat just as pornography is said to stimulate its consumers to have sex. The exact nature of the connection between literature and practice is not critical here. Whether the relation is associative or causal, the imaginative use of food, and food as material reality, are at least mutually implicated.

The flimsiness of this distinction between the imaginative and the literal becomes apparent once the conversation turns to "ethnic writing." In Chapter One I argued that, allowing for minor regional variations, cultural practice in Canada reflects an understanding that "ethnic" Canadians are the "non-white" and those who cannot trace their heritage to either of Canada's two "founding nations." Thus, for ethnic Canadians, processes of identity formation involve engaging with a hierarchical system. This system demands that individuals and groups articulate their identities against a dominant norm. For writers from the dominant group, a

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<sup>391</sup> This is another of Naomi's dreams that reflect her anxiety over her responsibilities and position within the Nikkei community.

<sup>392</sup> As one example, food in literature has achieved status as one of the "Great Issues" at Unity College, Maine. As part of the so-named seminar series at this college, the 1996 session bore the title, "Food for Thought: The Ecology, Ethics, and Economics of Eating." (Allison Wallace, personal electronic mail to Laurie Ricou, 6 February 1996). The seduction of the literal that tends to appear in discussions of food was also apparent in the proposal for this seminar;

component of identity such as food—their food—is a given, a dependable and powerful shortcut to meaning that relies on a common understanding of metaphors. But to write about an “apple pie” issue, for instance, is also to ensure that a great number of (ethnic) Canadians will be excluded from the meaning of that metaphor.

For ethnic writers, such metaphorical shortcuts are an option only if they are writing solely for their group.<sup>393</sup> Incorporating their (ethnic) food when writing for a wider audience demands the cumbersome process of glossing: the food must be named and its correct pronunciation noted; the name of the food must be translated or transliterated; and the food’s qualities, taste, appearance, preparation and significance described. While the need to explain food to their audience might limit certain kinds of metaphorical exploration by Nikkei writers, these same constraints, in concert with Nikkei models of interrelated identities, also expand the range of possible textual interpretations. Exercising their own “outrageous breaking of Western moral codes,”<sup>394</sup> Nikkei writers thus engage vigorously with the metaphor of cannibalism, refiguring anthropophagy as another way to being.

Some texts, such as *Chorus of Mushrooms*, mine these extreme constraints in writing about ethnic food for their potential in challenging stereotypes. In the following exchange Muriel is confronted by another shopper, apparently not of Asian ancestry, while choosing eggplants in the “ethnicChinesericenoodleTofupattiesexotic [sic] vegetable section” of the grocery store, Safeway:

“What is that, exactly? I’ve always wondered.”

I looked up from my reverie and a face peered down on me. A kindly face. An interested face.

“It’s an eggplant.”

“Oh really!” Surprisewonderjoy [sic]. “How wonderful! This is what *our* eggplants look like. They’re so different!” (90; emphasis in original)

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Professor Wallace planned on preparing and eating a meal with her students “at least once” during the term.

<sup>393</sup> With increasing rates of intermarriage, the heterogeneity of some ethnic groups, such as the Nikkei, has decreased the supply of common knowledge required to support these metaphorical shortcuts even within ethnic groups.

<sup>394</sup> MacClancy uses this phrase to characterize cannibalism, asserting that the extremity of Western reaction to the practice determines cannibalism as “a further means of scoring the racial divide” (176).

The passage challenges the constraints of naming and translation as much as it does “vegetable politics” (91). By collapsing the physical separation between the names of the items in the “exotic” section and in her fellow shopper’s reaction to Muriel’s explanation, Goto emphasizes the arbitrariness of representation generally. As with the shopping list Muriel takes to the Japanese grocery store, Goto reproduces the hand-printed signs advertising the names and prices of the ethnic foods in the Safeway produce section: anglicized versions of “Chinese” produce, their Japanese translations, and English translations of the *nasu*<sup>395</sup> she is choosing. Food has a literal, tactile place in this story. By having Muriel later strike the phallic “Japanese” eggplant against the sign above it Goto also suggests a complex strategy of resistance against dominant systems of representation. Muriel’s action introduces race as an essential component in discussions of language, and it suggests that there is a violence in male counter-discourse that compromises its own heterodoxy.

Of course, despite the degree to which *Chorus of Mushrooms* involves the literal, and challenges the ideology underlying representation, its complicity as yet another representation fuels the complexity in its treatment of metaphor generally. In much the same way, Nikkei writers’ use of cannibalism as a metaphor for assimilation is complicated by the apparent complicity of Nikkei with attempts by the British Columbia government to assimilate Japanese Canadians in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>396</sup> It must be remembered, however, that the apparent voluntariness of Nikkei engagement with the assimilation project was itself a sign of the project’s success. Recalling Kogawa’s image of Naomi’s abdomen as a roast of beef, simply naming the identity of the server does not negate the fact that the server is being eaten.

Kogawa addresses the autonomy of the assimilated in one of her early poems, “Nutcracker.”

'O what a nut you are,  
You said as you broke my shell  
To devour me.  
I waited

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<sup>395</sup> eggplant

<sup>396</sup> The historical aspects of assimilation are addressed in Chapter One.

To course through your blood stream  
 Swish up through you heart  
 Trickle into your brain.  
 Your teeth crunched through me.  
 Expectantly, I entered a cavity  
 And then you spat me out. (*Splintered Moon* 5)

Here both the eater and the eaten act autonomously. The Nutcracker breaks the shell, expecting a tasty morsel, and the nut refuses the digestive tract, moving instead through the vital organs and passageways of the one who would eat it. Realizing its ultimate fate, the nut nonetheless decides the cavity in which it will wait to be born through the mouth or, perhaps, "that other mouth" (Ames 23).

"The Nutcracker" (1967) may be the summary of a love gone wrong. As Kogawa describes her poetry of that time:

I wrote poetry, but in poetry I didn't have to have a subject as such, I didn't have to have a name—it was just raw emotion and it just came out of me. And the struggles that I had were struggles with questions of love and evil and death, and those are universal questions, so I didn't have any particular consciousness, again then, of race. ("The Heart-of-the-Matter Questions" 21)

In the same interview, Kogawa identifies the late 1970s as the time when she began consciously to write about her identity as Japanese Canadian. Without suggesting that this poem contains "preconscious" elements of an ethnic identity struggle, I would offer that the metaphorical structure of the poem supports the possibility that this short piece may also be about ethnic assimilation and rejection, as much as it is rejection by a lover. Significantly, Kogawa states "I didn't have to have a subject/name," not "I didn't have." As well, given the historical experience of Asian women in North America, for Nikkei women writers race always entails gender (Wong 112). By presenting apparent inaction as the crucible for future action (the speaker waits for a time between being eaten and acting), the poem challenges stereotypes of Nikkei women's passivity, and broader generalizations concerning Nikkei complicity with assimilation.

In part, cannibalism appears frequently as a metaphor for assimilation in Kogawa's writing because of her dependence on the physical body as a metaphor for culture. Throughout *Obasan* and *Itsuka*, Naomi refers to her family and her community in organic terms, often

suggesting that the two possess a kind of entropy. In a metonymy suggesting the interrelatedness of individual and communal identities, Kogawa often elides Naomi's body with that of her community. Placed, as it is, in the context of an "ethnocultural breakfast" sponsored by the Ministry of Multiculturalism, even Naomi's dream of feeding the hungry from her abdomen suggests that she is also one of the "ethnics" about to be consumed by the dominant Canadian centre—"homogenized," as one angry breakfast guest observes (*Itsuka* 192-198).

Criticism concerning the metaphor of culture as a body that lives and dies often claims that the metaphor is inconsistent with the transformative, inventive aspects of tradition and culture (Clifford 1988; Handler 1985):

The invention of tradition is not restricted to nationalists and intellectuals, who characteristically manipulate symbols of collective identity (Eisenstadt 1972: 18), but is an intrinsic part of social differentiation. (Linnekin 1983, 250)

I address this topic more extensively in Appendix Two, but a few points must be made here regarding the discussion of cultural construction and its relation to Nikkei writers' use of food.

First, when making assertions concerning a culture's use of metaphors of identity, outsiders must take caution proportionate to their distance from that culture, and commensurate with the group's' heterogeneity. Cultural practice is as much discursive as it is tangible (Yanagisako 1985; Frankenberg 1993). For researchers or critics to evaluate members' statements about culture as somehow ontologically separate from, or less reliable than, cultural practice (and researchers' interpretations of it) is to impose on the practitioners of that culture an externally-defined notion of what culture in general and that culture in particular comprises. Kogawa's metaphors of Nikkei culture as a body are not faulty; they are simply hers. The ideology that informs those metaphors also informs her practice of Nikkei culture. Furthermore, for social scientists to assert the proper inevitability of culture as "constructed," just as marginalized peoples are valuing authentic, organic culture, "serves to undermine the authority of those groups and individuals who have been oppressed by, and now are actively engaged in defying, European and North American hegemony "(Tobin 162).

Second, Nikkei women writers who are shaping their identities through food risk being seen, and (mis)interpreted, by the very symbols they are attempting to reclaim. As Ching (1997) observes in her study of Asian American media, the repetition of food rituals may be understood to maintain racial labels of what it means to be “authentically” Asian. The tension of this predicament happens in all texts that involve a representation of transformative identities through the use of stereotype.

Of course, when the range of Nikkei women’s subjectivities is still relatively new to public discourse, these writers are also in danger of being chastened for too radical a challenge. Each of these positions determines the way readers come to representations of food as a transformative element in the processes of identity formation. Each invites the reader to fetishize food and the “real” ethnic to the point of exaggeration and invisibility. Watching the sensual food preparation scenes in the film *Eat Drink Man Woman*, Ching recalls,

I felt like I was stripteasing, selling something I didn’t have. I felt incredibly fixed. Because I felt fixed, I felt false. I felt as if I were an imitation, pretending that I too could live up to the glamorized image of these foods. Then I realized that the only way I could feel more comfortable looking at these images was to imagine I wasn’t Chinese. That way, I could take full pleasure in enjoying the intricacies of the acts, those strange, very very strange ways of cooking and eating. As if this was completely foreign, and I was not. (31)

Her materiality therefore, frustrates the assimilation of the ethnic other. Constituted as an alimentary symbol,<sup>397</sup> she would be consumed as ethnic food if she could be made to fit properly an imaginary existence.

#### *Dismissing the “ethnic” by dismissing “ethnic” food*

I have argued that material and metaphorical food is omnipresent in everyday language, in western and Japanese mythology, in representations of culture, in the processes of identity formation, and in the assimilation of one culture by another. Why, then, is food so easily dismissed as trivial (Kanaganayakam 1995; Okamura 1995; Goto 1992; Bissoondath 1994; Lim 1986; Visser 1991; Gans 1979)? Why, when the redress of racial injustice is celebrated by

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<sup>397</sup>The term is Ching’s.

feasting (Omatsu 30), do critics portray food, especially the food of “ethnic” festivals as evidence of a superficial and/or confused understanding of multiculturalism? “To attend an ethnic cultural festival, then, is to expose yourself not to culture, but to theatre, not to history but to fantasy” (Bissoondath 83–84). How does one reconcile, or attempt to interpret, the dissonance between Bissoondath’s view of the ethnic festival and Tamio Wakayama’s description of the Nikkei community’s Powell Street Festival as “a serious and passionate attempt to affirm our cultural legacy and to lay the groundwork for our future” (*Kikyō* [“Coming Home”]13)?

Part of the answer lies in whether, and in what respect, individuals consider food worthy as a cultural symbol. Wakayama continues:

For many, the Festival has and will continue to serve as a joyous starting point in the long journey to self-discovery. For those who have yet to cross the borders of their alienation, we leave the vision of the Powell Street Festival and the myth and metaphor of *Kikyō*—in coming home to Powell Street we have found a heritage that is worthy of respect and public celebration. (13)<sup>398</sup>

The alienation to which Wakayama refers is the forceful separation of Nikkei from their culture of heritage through the assimilationist projects popular in early twentieth-century Canada and the uprooting of the community during the Second World War. Earlier Wakayama describes this alienation as a “denial of self [that] had led to a rejection of each other” (12). From its inception in 1977, Powell Street Festival has been one metaphorical and tangible way for Nikkei to reclaim what once was the physical and spiritual centre of their pre-war Vancouver community. In the tradition of community Christmas parties and school assemblies, Powell Street Festival has also been a place where community members entertain each other with the skills they have been honing throughout the year, a way of transmitting culture through the performance of its symbols.<sup>399</sup> A critical element in that process of becoming through coming together has been the communal preparation and consumption of food.

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<sup>398</sup> *Kikyō: Coming Home to Powell Street*, is the title of Wakayama’s photojournalistic history of Powell Street Festival, an annual celebration of Vancouver’s Nikkei community.

<sup>399</sup> Located in what might be described as a larger, roughly concentric circle are other, less rambunctious activities outside the festival’s culinary ring: ikebana, bonsai, archival photos, a data base through which community members trace family and friends dispersed during the war, literary readings, seminars where community members learn how to do research on Nikkei,

Powell Street Festival happens in Vancouver's Oppenheimer Park. Food booths surround the park. Festivalgoers must pass through the fragrant circle of barbecued salmon, sizzling yakitori,<sup>400</sup> takoyaki,<sup>401</sup> and mugicha<sup>402</sup> to reach the various other booths and stages on the green. The location of the food booths determines a steady movement of participants back and forth between the centre of the park and its culinary edge, one starting point within another; it is as if the enjoyment of other festival activities depended on the consumption of festival food. Replenished, one moves from the culinary ring to observe and perform: drumming, dance, singing, sand painting, sumo, karate, pottery.

The note of worthiness that sounds in Wakayama's description of Powell Street Festival as a "joyous starting point in the long journey to self-discovery," echoes in Hiromi Goto's description of food as "the point of departure. A place where growth begins" (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 201). Both writers stress the critical importance of the feast in the process of cultural and individual self-discovery. However, Wakayama seems to regard the physical components of Powell Street Festival as manifestations of a deeper, more important truth or reality:

Beneath the colourful *kimonos*, the visceral beat of *taiko* and the tantalizing aroma of *teriyaki* salmon, is a serious and passionate attempt to affirm our cultural legacy and to lay the groundwork for our future. (13)

Physical cultural symbols such as clothing, entertainment and food are playful, exotic seductions away from the "serious" work of finding one's cultural self underneath one's cultural trappings. Unlike Bissoondath, Wakayama insists on the importance of festival: it is only its distracting, superficial elements that one must guard against.

The passage declares Wakayama's distance from what might be described as pure Japanese symbols. Writers who refuse to translate or italicize foreign words may be resisting

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among others. These activities may lack the wider public appeal of the entertainment and vendors in the park, but are no less concerned with transmitting culture. Again, festival participants must pass through the culinary circle to reach what might be described as a more intimate cultural zone.

<sup>400</sup> small pieces of grilled chicken on a bamboo skewer

<sup>401</sup> octopus fritters

assimilation by a dominant discourse. Here, however, Wakayama's anglicized plural of a Japanese noun ("kimonos"), and his use elsewhere of the intimate "obāchan" (12) to refer to an unfamiliar older woman suggests that the italics in his introduction highlight more the nature of his engagement with symbols of Japanese culture than a statement of resistance.<sup>403</sup> By stressing the superficiality of clothing, performing arts, and food, Wakayama creates an image of the real Powell Street Festival that is much more than a collection of convenient and easy symbols of theatre and fantasy, more than the performance of a "symbolic ethnicity," which Gans (1979) describes as

characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior. (9)

Yet in both Wakayama's efforts to defend the serious nature of Powell Street Festival and in Gans's description of the ease of symbolic ethnicity, lies the assumption that cultural symbols, such as food, are inherently trivial. Continues Gans:

All of the cultural patterns which are transformed into symbols are themselves guided by a common pragmatic imperative: they must be visible and clear in meaning to large numbers of third generation ethnics, and they must be easily expressed and felt, without requiring undue interference in other aspects of life. (9)

Gans argues that food is a ready cultural symbol because it is easy to consume, understand, and incorporate into one's way of life. It is possible that many sansei relieve a diet of non-Japanese food with visits to Japanese restaurants and an annual binge at the Powell Street Festival.<sup>404</sup> But to suggest that food is trivial because it is trivialized ignores the actual complex relation between individuals and food.

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<sup>402</sup> iced barley tea

<sup>403</sup> In Japanese, the plural is indicated by context rather than by a change in the word itself. "Obāchan" is the term one uses to address one's own grandmother, or to refer to one's grandmother in the company of friends or family. One refers to and addresses an older woman who appears grandmotherly as "Obāsan." I am not criticizing Wakayama's use of Japanese as "wrong," but suggesting that it reflects his roots as a Canadian Nikkei, rather than Japanese. Wakayama may be using "Obāchan" as a way of referring to a type of woman, but this use, while affectionate, is also condescending and trivializing.

<sup>404</sup> "I have little but my name, pedigree, and diet of an occasional Japanese Canadian meal to recognize myself as a nikkei[. . .]" (Arima 5).

In the passage from *Chorus of Mushrooms* regarding food as a place of departure, Muriel agrees with Wakayama that food is a point from which one sets out on voyages of self-discovery (201). However, rather than apologetically subordinating food to a serious underlying meaning, as Wakayama does, this speaker fuses material food democratically with language, story, those who eat it, and other physical objects. There is no separation, suggests Goto's text quoted earlier, by means of which food represents some deeper meaning.

You eat, you drink and you laugh out loud. You wipe the sweat off your forehead and take a sip of water. You tell a story, maybe two, with words of pain and desire. Your companion listens and listens, then offers a different telling. The waiter comes back with the main course and stays to tell his version. Your companion offers three more stories and the people seated at the next table lean over to listen. You push all the tables together and the room resounds with voices. You get dizzy and the ceiling tips, the chair melts beneath your body. You lie back on the ground and the world tilts, the words heaving in the air above you. You are drunk and it is oh so pleasurable. (201)

One eats; actions follow which are causally unrelated, but spatially connected. For no apparent reason, many become one in the face of a shared meal: chairs, tables, stories, bodies. Each defining barrier merges with the next to suggest that, when eating together, the proximity of one thing or person with another may be all that transcendence requires. Goto's bacchic vision far exceeds Wakayama's moderate description of sizzling salmon. Rather than introducing food as an adjunct to culture, as a symbol easily integrated into one's way of life, Goto argues that food is culture's foundation.<sup>405</sup> To say that food is a superficial way of understanding a culture is, she says, "a lie" (201).

There are several reasons why discussions of culture, ethnicity, and multiculturalism may characterize food as trivial. First, the tangibility of food means that it is as easily clichéd as it is represented. A fascination with the visual as "real" underlies this tendency. As Chow (1993) notes, individuals are convinced that the meaning of the image which they see is as clear and irrefutable as they suppose the image itself to be: "The obsession with visuality means also the

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<sup>405</sup> It must be noted that food functions as a central theme and literary device in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. *Kikyō* is a photojournalistic representation of the wide range of activities at Powell Street Festival. Nonetheless, Wakayama grants a disproportionately small space to food: out of one hundred and seventy-five photographs, Wakayama includes only four in which the preparation or consumption of festival food is central.

obsession with a certain understanding of visibility, namely, that visibility exposes the truth" (166). It follows that we can understand what Japanese food is, in part, because we see, and therefore experience, that it is simply there. One may more or less appreciate food described as "Japanese" or "Japanese Canadian," but there is as little reason, given its physical presence, to discuss its ambiguity as there is its existence.

Second, as I suggested in my discussion of food as a metaphor of cultural assimilation, food may be declared trivial as part of a defence against assimilation. Once members of marginalized cultures categorize food as a superficial symbol, they may protest that their steady diet of food from the dominant culture is not a sign that they have been assimilated. Similarly, members of the dominant culture need not worry that either their identity or position is threatened by eating the other's food.

Based on what Nikkei women write, it seems that a third reason for the trivialization of food involves the ways in which their experiences have been represented. Specifically, those who interpret Nikkei history classify food as trivial because the experience of Nikkei women has been unexplored and undervalued. Ayukawa (1990a) insists that women have largely been excluded from written Nikkei history, and that when historians do acknowledge Nikkei women their treatment is dismissive in both scope and language (7–9). As we have seen already, one example of this practice is Takata's brief discussion of women in *Nikkei Legacy*. Takata is prepared to admire the dedication to family of the first Japanese women who came to Canada, but notes that "[u]nlike the men, the Issei women cannot be singled out for unique or outstanding achievement" (18).

It was with these words in mind that I came to the unpublished journals and letters of issei women, and read accounts like that of Imada Ito. In the passage below, Mrs. Imada writes of her time in North Bay where her husband washed trains, and she cooked and did laundry for her family and thirteen other workers:

I had to cross ten railway tracks to go to the station for our water, to wash the rice and to go to the bathroom. A strong wind blew from morning until night. It was miserable walking along the railway tracks carrying the baby and holding my daughter's hand. I wept silently every day. (Ayukawa 1989, 52)

Given contemporary divisions of labour by gender, it is likely that most men, and certainly most historians, would not have participated in, witnessed, or discussed the details of achievements like Mrs. Imada's. Male scholars would have lacked the necessary knowledge gained from such experiences to even translate accounts like that of Mrs. Imada.<sup>406</sup>

Accounts of life in Canada written by issei women are powerful documents. As discussed in Chapter One, the women who became known as picture brides found strange lives with strange men awaiting them in Canada. They were usually isolated from their peers, and offered few opportunities to learn English. The women toiled at tasks both physically demanding and, usually, completely foreign to them. Their tales of perseverance are moving and humbling to read. But the stories are also invaluable for their anthropological and historical detail. Once again, Mrs. Imada explains what it means to be cook in a camp:

In the morning I was to cook fifty pounds of rice. In order to wash this rice, I divided it into two parts and washed it in a soy sauce barrel. To cook it, two large flat pots were set up. The fifty pounds of rice were for the breakfasts of twenty-seven people and the lunches of twenty people. Breakfast was only beanpaste soup and boiled beans. I rose in the morning at 4:30, then awakened everyone at 6:00 AM for breakfast. (28)

Mrs. Imada continues to specify what types of food were eaten; which were fresh and which dried; how often meat was delivered to the camp; what she was paid, and what it cost "to feed all these men" (29-30). She adds that by noon each day she would also have cleaned sixteen houses. Such details were passed on from experienced women such as Mrs. Imada to newly arrived picture brides, and created informal networks of information and instruction exclusive to communities of issei women, as well as constituting a body of oral history.

What these particular authoritative voices also contribute to anthropological and historical interpretations is an accounting of the personal cost of pioneering for issei women.

Mrs. Imada recalls:

In the morning the men would go to work in pure white shirts but when they returned they were all black from outside to inside. The twenty-seven men would therefore change every day. I worked every day in tears. (30)

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<sup>406</sup> See my "Introduction" for details regarding the difficulties one male Japanese scholar (Shimpo Mitsuru) faced in translating Imada's journal.

The practical and affective components of such significant domestic achievements have rarely been considered in the histories of marginalized Canadians. Had they been, the triviality of food in relation to ethnicity and multiculturalism would be a much more difficult argument to make.

Yet we disqualify the experiences of certain historical actors not only for their gender or ethnicity, but because of a deeper distrust of what appears as unmediated or unselfconscious experience. In her discussion of Asian American writer Virginia Lee's *The House That Tai Ming Built*, Shirley Lim (1986) criticizes the wisdom of including such non-ironic anecdotes in ethnic fiction because they "would appeal to a white audience looking for an introduction to an exotic culture" (61). Since the "real" ethnic has been exoticized out of existence through misrepresentations of cultural symbols, it often seems that any engagement with the food of one's ancestors is viewed with suspicion unless it is ironic. Lim's concern over the exploitable literality of food in fiction is perhaps more understandable when one recalls the interaction between Muriel and her fellow shopper in the exotic vegetable section at Safeway, and Arun Mukherjee's observation that for any of Canada's "visible minorities" experience is always ironic.<sup>407</sup>

A further peculiarity in the desire for the exotic in late twentieth-century North America is the manner in which it has exceeded the situational constraints of nineteenth century Orientalism. Whereas that Orientalism was concerned with creating an idea of "the west" in opposition to the idea of an exotic "east," (Said 1979), contemporary desire for the exotic seems related more to the desire for an intrinsic, definable difference. This desire often masquerades as what Visser (1991) calls a "pull [. . .] towards neophilia [sic]" (42–43).

In Canada, the desire for containable difference is further inflected regionally. Recent patterns of immigration have meant that, for Canadians in areas such as southern Ontario and

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<sup>407</sup> "While the official cultural and political discourse claims that the visible minorities and the invisible majority lead a harmonious life, the ironic speech created by the non-white Canadians belies that" (*Oppositional Aesthetics*, 70). As Linda Hutcheon stresses, for marginalized women in multicultural Canada, the alienation and double vision of "minority" experience is particularly fruitful ground for irony, "the basic trope underlying their subversion and resistance" (50).

coastal British Columbia, the "oriental" east is now here, rather than somewhere "over there."<sup>408</sup>

Thus certain Canadians may perceive the "new" as having been thrust upon them. For individuals and groups whose sense of identity has depended (as Orientalism did) on a clear separation of east and west, this means that being compelled by the new is no longer a positive attraction or "pull" towards a geographical east. Rather, the new Orientalism is an exercise in asserting the boundaries of identity by maintaining the novelty of the exotic who is now my neighbour. Exclusion may be a common end, but rendering an ethnic group marginal in multicultural Canada involves rather more sophistication than did the earlier Orientalism.<sup>409</sup> For instance, contemporary ethnic exclusion requires that one choose and name certain symbols—such as food—as unmistakably and irrevocably ethnic, regardless of their complex and ambiguous significance, or even their identifiable "Canadianness." Thus ethnic writers are always in jeopardy: whether they incorporate descriptions of food in a journal, as an element in a fictional setting, or as ironic comment on identity and position, they engage a symbol heavy with a predetermined significance.

I have suggested that, for several reasons, food is often viewed restrictively or as trivial in spite of its tangible and metaphorical importance. The materiality of food renders it easily representable and clichéd. A symbol considered trivial resists interpretation as a sign of assimilation or "real" ethnicity. Finally, the ideological connection of food with poorly understood "female" domesticity has meant that the complex importance of food has also been misunderstood and under-represented. By no means do all Nikkei writers who incorporate literal or metaphorical food in their texts address these limiting factors. Some treat food only peripherally, or have left journals that fill in historical gaps. Other writers engage directly with these factors, and with the shame attached to the preparing and eating of Japanese food. A body of writing is emerging in which food also acts as a vocabulary of excess, giving voice to

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<sup>408</sup> See Chapter Two regarding the uneven population distribution of immigrants from Asia.

<sup>409</sup> I am asserting two synchronous occurrences of Orientalism. What I distinguish as nineteenth-century Orientalism operates quite vigorously today in relation to cultures that are physically separate from its practitioners. See, for instance, Chow (1993).

ways of being that lie outside the predictable and ordinary. This writing is shaping a system of communicating and being whereby the literal and the symbolic merge. The final section of this chapter addresses the various ways in which food, and its vocabulary of excess, is used to control and transform individual and group identities and the worlds that contain them.

### *Sustaining Vocabularies of Excess*

#### *Ordering the environment*

Perhaps one of the more obvious ways in which individuals engage food as they order the environment is by invoking and participating in the rituals surrounding food. Something as simple as what we say (or do not say) while eating contributes to the orderliness of the meal.

Table talk returns to the diner ownership and awareness of his pleasure; it gives form to desire, it functions as a regulating force, and just when the appetite was in danger of taking over, it re-establishes man's unique role as a thinking animal. (Jeanneret 93)

In her poem, "Tea Party," Kogawa uses the image of polite restraint at table to comment on the way individuals depend on the rituals of food to order human interaction and, thus, control desire.

When birds dance for instance  
 Heads cocked, wings spread  
 Leaping back and forth, tearing turf  
 Instead of feathers

And we are polite and elegant  
 Sipping tea with steady hands  
 The wings beating beneath  
 Our ribs behind our eyes (*A Choice of Dreams* 66)

The birds' dance is a competition for supremacy, by which the right to copulate and ensure the survival of the flock is the prize for the male most able to destroy the others. The dance thinly disguises the bird's ability and desire, if provoked, to kill. As the boundaries of the flock and the mating pair are defined by the dance, so too are the codified rituals of the tea party (who pours, who sits where, who says what and when) and their violations (who arrives fashionably—or simply—late, who slurps from the saucer, who overeats, who neglects to stifle a belch and who is dismayed—or not). Thus, as they order the taking of tea, the rituals also order space and

time. As well, the poem criticizes decorum for stifling true feelings of the heart, “[t]he wings beating beneath / Our ribs behind our eyes.” Yet the tea drinkers’ submission to decorum transforms the savagery of desire into a pleasant afternoon’s gathering by postponing individual need, and making it appear secondary to social intercourse.

At another meal, Mona Oikawa treats the tangible qualities of food, in this case steam rising from a bowl of noodles, as a metaphor for the way in which decorum obscures reality:

The steam from the udon<sup>410</sup>  
fogs my glasses  
as I tell you  
I feel closest to you  
and need someone to know  
who I really am  
in case . . .

The stanza is from Oikawa’s poem “Coming out at the Sushi Bar,” a poem discussed earlier for its relation to food as a marker of community identity. Within the same poem food establishes the sisters’ intimacy in relation to “the men at the bar,” while simultaneously suggesting the ideological and experiential chasm which separates the two women:

“The wasabi is hotter today,” you say.  
And feeling the pressure  
to analyze and rationalize  
(as so many straight people do)  
you add,

“I knew after you had been away—  
Was it in 1977?—  
that you came back different.  
I figured something horrible  
had happened to you.  
You had changed so much.”

The sensuous intensity of the wasabi,<sup>411</sup> in excess of the fundamental tastes of bitter, sweet, sour, or salty, suggests the uncontainable nature of lesbian desire within a heterosexual reality. The futility of the attempt by the (presumably) heterosexual speaker to categorize the wasabi mirrors her equally futile efforts to make sense of her lesbian sister’s “horrible” difference.

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<sup>410</sup> thick wheat noodles

<sup>411</sup> a kind of horseradish

Throughout the poem, Oikawa uses food, the emblematic symbol of commensality, to highlight the disparity of inter-group ideologies. The sisters are members of several of the same groups (ethnicity, family, gender, and generation), a criterion that, in the tradition of Nikkei written history, has usually been invoked as the basis for analysis. Theoretical analyses of race and ethnicity, especially, have so depended on a causal connection between shared group membership and shared ideologies that disparity within the group has been interpreted as a sign of "division," or evidence that the group is malfunctioning (Park 1930; Creese 1988). Nikkei popular discourse invokes similar criteria in the shaping of generalizations about identity.<sup>412</sup> In "Coming out at the Sushi Bar," Oikawa invites the reader to consider that sharing group membership is no more a guarantee of shared ideology than is shared wasabi, or udon, or the fact that we "each take a pastel-coloured mint / for the road" (62). The world of the poem is neither a lesbian utopia, in which the straight sister is converted, nor a gustatory hiatus in which the two shelve their sexual differences so that food may be purely enjoyed. However, the poem does suggest that food may accommodate and signify difference without threatening community. The sisters retreat to their separate worlds, never having seen through the foggy steam, but with promise: "Maybe next time / I will tell you / how loving women / did change my life" (62).

On a larger scale, food became a sign of discipline and resistance for both the Canadian government and Canadian Nikkei in ordering the environment of Nikkei during the Second World War. As discussed above, Muriel Kitagawa wrote of the effects of wartime food shortages on Nikkei diet and, concomitantly, spirit. It is unlikely that the government considered the disciplinary benefits of changing diet when removing Japanese Canadians from the business centre that provided them with Japanese foodstuffs. In fact, given Nikkei compliance with the assimilationist projects of the day, British Columbia business and government

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<sup>412</sup> For discussion of generalizations based on group membership, see Chapters Two and Four.

administrators probably had little idea that the Nikkei diet varied substantially from their own.<sup>413</sup> Regardless of the government's intentions, the uprooting substantially altered Nikkei diet, food gathering and preparation. Nikkei efforts to clear land and plant gardens once they were interned represented an act of resistance. Arriving in Slocan well past the usual time of sowing,<sup>414</sup> Ikeda and her family plant nonetheless. Together, the entire family conquers the forbidding wall of bushes, dead trees, and bracken roots that they find in Slocan, even "transplant[ing] chrysanthemums, trefoil, and coltsfoot that we had uprooted in such a hurry the morning we left Vancouver [ . . . ] (127). The action of taming the landscape by planting gardens is an example of one way in which the Nikkei did not remain passive victims but resisted the damaging effects of the internment. But this journal entry is equally important because it introduces not only the "common ideology" (A. Kobayashi 1989, 181) in the opposition of organizing social activity against a disciplining body, but what might be termed the more positive, transformative nature of that resistance.

For others who, like the Imadas, had stockpiled food for their "independent migration"<sup>415</sup> to Taylor Lake during the Second World War, obtaining food was no problem:

We had no worry about food since we had bought enough food in Vancouver to do us for six months to a year. However, there was not much enjoyment in staring at the same thing day after day. It was very difficult also to loaf every day and not work at all. (Ayukawa 1990a, 40)

Working in the logging camps and train yard may have been miserably difficult for Mrs. Imada, but it defined the shape of her day. With her increasing expertise, the work of preparing food under harsh conditions provided her with a measure of control and ordered her suffering existence. The forced move to Taylor Lake took away even that measure of control.

As I mentioned in relation to *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Nikkei writers also engage food as a way of challenging the idea of linear time. The same technique is apparent in *Obasan*. When

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<sup>413</sup> Part of the "inhumane" treatment those held in Hastings Park protested was the imposition of an inadequate and western diet (Kitagawa 1985). By 3 August 1942, those in "Sick Bay" (the Hastings Park infirmary) were receiving a Japanese meal twice weekly (Ono 1942).

<sup>414</sup> Ikeda and her family were sent to Slocan on 3 June 1942. She made her journal entry describing the garden planting sometime between then and 21 June of the same year.

<sup>415</sup> This is another term used to describe the move to self-supporting sites.

Naomi returns home after Uncle's death, she finds Obasan investigating leftovers in the refrigerator:

"Everyone someday dies," she is saying with a sigh as she clears the table. She takes half a piece of left-over toast and puts it away in a square plastic container. The refrigerator is packed with boxes of food bits, a slice of celery, a square of spinach, half a hard-boiled egg. She orchestrates each reminder of a previous dinner into the dinner to come, making every meal like every meal, an unfinished symphony. Our Lady of the Left-Overs.

There are some indescribable items in the dark recesses of the fridge that never see the light of day. But you realize when you open the door that they're there, lurking, too old for mould and past putrefaction. (44–45)

Obasan has just been adding to her endless ball of twine, the novel's image of an unbroken line of generations extending from the past through to the future. Uncle dies; the ball drops from her lap, unrolls a bit; she rewinds it, reshaping her world, her "hemisphere of the globe" (44). It is, perhaps, too obvious a metaphor, overwritten. But Kogawa complicates the image with this history of dinners past that Obasan ritually reincorporates into the present. Scraps of the past will not stay put; reappearing to transform the present, they redefine conventional ideas of temporality.

Goto recuperates the theme of temporal fusion in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. The novel refuses a cluster of received notions, most particularly linear time, discrete individual identities, and distinctions between speaking and hearing. As discussed above, one technique Goto uses to challenge these notions is to retell stories from Japanese mythology. One such story is Uba-Sute Yama. As Goto's story goes, ages ago in a small village there was such poverty that at the age of sixty, elders were carried up the mountain and left to die. As her sixtieth year approaches, one old woman convinces her younger sister to climb the mountain with her because "it's time to have fun again" (66). The two cavort on the mountain, giving each other home permanents, smoking Mild Seven cigarettes, and eating Meiji chocolate bars.

Goto's choice of food is doubly significant. The chocolate may be a modern snack processed by Meiji, a large dairy company in Japan. However, the name of the company carries both connotations of a past, Meiji, era and of the transition that defined that historical period of reformation. By thus conflating the mythic past with the "real" present, Goto

challenges the notion of “tradition” as that which is past. Tradition is not limited to those practices and beliefs of the past, but is continually transformed in the present.

### *Disciplining excess*

Inside the car a warm homely scene greeted me. [. . .] The excellent fare of that first morning did much to soothe the irritability of the newly interned. Indeed, the good food with which we were provided throughout our stay at road camp did much psychologically to alleviate the emotional hardship of the time. (T. Nakano 15–16)

I introduce this section on food as discipline with Nakano’s warm recollection for several reasons. The gratitude and contentment that resonate throughout Nakano’s memoir, *Within the Barbed Wire Fence*, highlight certain ways in which the internment experience differed for the Canadian-born and those who, like Nakano, identified stronger ties with Japan.<sup>416</sup> Nakano’s story also sharply emphasizes the extent to which gender determined the particulars of internment, and shaped individual perceptions of the experience. His recollection of the road camp hearth prompts us to consider various manners of engaging with and writing about food and discipline generally, but most particularly with regard to the uprooting and internment. By so doing, we gain a broader understanding of the potential food has as a disciplinary tool.

Ayukawa (1992) suggests that being interned in the ghost towns of the interior was more difficult for men than for women (65–66). Denied the familiar employment that largely defined their identity, the men languished. Women, on the other hand, either enjoyed new employment opportunities as teachers, social workers, nurses, and office workers for the Security Commission, or used the increased leisure time some of them enjoyed to pursue artistic and cultural activities.<sup>417</sup> Such was not the case for men who, like Nakano, were sent to either work camps or the prisoner of war camps at Angler and Petawawa in Ontario.

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<sup>416</sup> Nakano recalls that his early faith in Japan’s eventual victory was a result of “blind faith:” We Japanese, largely working-class immigrants, were, generally speaking, not given to sophisticated political thinking” (8). It was difficult to relinquish this faith, Nakano says, because “it was not a rational belief, but rather born of the love I, as a Japanese national, still felt for my fatherland” (93).

<sup>417</sup> Kitagawa disagrees with Ayukawa: “But the men are luckier than the women. They are fed, they work, they have no children to look after. Of course the fathers are awfully worried about

By immigrating to Canada, Nakano had traded life on a farm in Japan for what he calls monotonous employment in the pulp and paper mill at Woodfibre, British Columbia (5). Three months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor Nakano found himself confined in the livestock building on the grounds of the Pacific National Exhibition Park in Vancouver. He describes days spent out of doors, avoiding the stench of stale cigarette smoke and manure by pacing in the fenced yard, and nights when he "tunnelled into the bedclothes for some escape" (13). After five days Nakano was, he says, "liberated" to the Yellowhead work camp in the Rocky Mountains (15). As Nakano strolls about breathing the clear mountain air on his first morning at Yellowhead, he spies within the cookhouse:

platters piled high with hot cakes. These gave off a delicious aroma, which filled the car and gave me an appetite. There was lots of butter and syrup. Large dishes full of boiled eggs also stood ready. And there was plenty of milk and tea. Everyone might eat as much as he liked. (15-16)

Little wonder it was that Nakano found the scene "homely" and soothing. Nakano's pleasure only increases when he finds that his labour is to be clearing land in the bracing air at whatever pace he and his fellows decide, a task made more pleasant with bonfires that the inmates build from the felled trees. Not only is this work reminiscent of work on the family farm in Japan, the bonfire reminds him of his boyhood delight in roasting potatoes on just such fires. Nakano indulges himself in this nostalgia as he enjoys more delicious food during his lunch break by the fire.

I read Nakano's account with the benefit of hindsight, after having read very different accounts by many other Nikkei, and without having personally exchanged the stench and

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their families. But it's the women who are burdened with all the responsibility of keeping what's left of the family together" (*This is My Own* 117). Kitagawa is obviously considering the responsibilities of the women who were mothers. Ayukawa is more concerned with the range of experiences among women. For instance, she notes that many of the young women enjoyed employment that was denied them in Vancouver, and which paid a better salary than the manual work that most of their male cohorts had to settle for.

"Kitagawa is talking about Spring 1942 when the men were sent to road camps, and the women were left behind 'to hold the fort' and had no idea what the government intended to do with them. Many had no saving, and the major bread-winners were gone. I'm talking about the interior camps where most of the women had their husbands back with them" (personal communication from Ayukawa; 1 August 1998).

confinement of Hastings Park for the release of fresh mountain air, moderate physical activity, and delicious food. I hesitate to describe Nakano as duped, but there is a situational irony in his musings. His host is, after all, the government who imprisoned him. At the very least, Nakano's account is an extreme example of what Visser (1991) describes as the "ritually subordinate role of guests" (123):

Eating together is a sign of friendship and equality . . . and yet people have always used the positioning of the "companions" as an expression of the power of each in relationship to the others. (121)

In this case, the government bears the literal inscription of hospitable power by exercising "considerate" treatment that subdues and seduces the prisoners into regarding their jailers kindly.

Nakano did spend time reflecting on the grimmer realities of his idyllic prison, and felt the strain of being separated from Yukie and Toshimi, his wife and daughter. The beauty and peace of his environment sustained Nakano in these times, and inspired his poetry, as we read in this translation of one of Nakano's tanka:

Watershed's  
Whispering waters  
Part and flow.  
Separation anxiety  
Revives. (24)

Each time he was moved to another camp, Nakano found solace in natural beauty and, eventually, in Christianity. Even when punished for refusing any longer to be separated from his family, Nakano's writing displays a resignation that has most often been described as typical of the issei. Adachi describes the early issei immigrants:

Disruptive behaviour was censured, discipline and obedience were mandatory so that self-control, resignation and gratitude were highly desirable. Issei felt that suffering and hard work were necessary ingredients of character-building. (225)<sup>418</sup>

Yet read against the journals of two issei women, Imada Ito and Kaoru Ikeda, Nakano's actions seem more indicative of gender and religious beliefs than of generation.

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<sup>418</sup> See also Omatsu 1992; Kogawa 1981 and 1984; and Ito 1994.

Despite their difference in gender, age, home province, and, consequently, dialect, Ikeda's account resembles that of Nakano in tone and diction. Since the two were serious students of tanka and haiku, poetic forms inspired by the natural beauty of their separate confinements, a shared regard for their physical environment colours both accounts. As the mountains calm Nakano, the apparent purity of Slocan Lake placates Ikeda:

Surrounded by dark green hills and a mirror-like lake, Slocan presents some fine scenery. It's just like a summer resort and the water is so clean that it runs through pipes that go directly into the kitchens. We must think it lucky to move to a place like this, since there are said to be camps where water is not in such abundant supply. (124)

Initially, Ikeda emphasizes the pastoral quality of her surroundings:

There seems to be good pasture in the mountains, because morning and evening there are boys leading herds of cattle along the trail, bells around their necks ringing *karan, karan*. When we see something like that, we know we've arrived in the country! Watching these cows is one of our pleasures, giving us a mellow feeling, somehow. We have asked the herdsmen to deliver us a bottle of fresh milk everyday. (126)

There is a risk of oversimplifying and mistaking the poetic complexities of tanka and haiku that have been translated. Nonetheless, it is still apparent that the poetry by these two issei differs substantially in the nature and extent of their self-reflections. Nakano does write about the affective aspect of his various confinements and is aware of the danger in a beauty that mellows:

Summer breeze  
Blows soothingly;  
In it,  
Gradually,  
I grow more submissive. (86)

However, Nakano's poetry—at least that which Nakano and his Canadian-born daughter Leatrice have chosen to include in this text—is generally more concerned with a positive appreciation of nature and nostalgia for his past homes in Japan and Canada. The poems conclude in a denouement emblematic of the submissive gratitude Adachi characterizes as “Meiji” deference (225):

As final resting place,  
Canada is chosen.  
On citizenship paper,  
Signing  
Hand trembles. (105)

Ikeda's journal enjoys no such resolution. When her account ends on the third anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Ikeda is still interned in Slocan, constantly anxious over conflicting reports about the war's progress, and uncertain about her future. Ikeda's prose is consistently more critical of Canadian authorities, and even her light-hearted poems bear an undercurrent of irony:

Caught up in play  
Left behind by the herd  
Surprised young calves  
Run to catch up—  
How lovely!

Looking back  
As their children straggle  
In wayside grass-  
Cow mothers mooing  
Sorrowfully (126–27)

Ikeda usually balances her descriptions of the natural beauty and abundance of Slocan with comment on its dark aspect. The peace and quiet of the surrounding hills and their sloping pastures are guarded by "a high cliff on top of which sits a gloomy forest" (126). Ikeda and her family are able to clear land for gardens but:

There were so many tough thickets, dead trees and a network of bracken roots that a spade wouldn't even break through, so that even with Chisato and the kids helping, it was dreadful back-breaking labour for Tokunaga. (127)

And mountains that provide the "unique pleasures" and "fun" of hunting for their abundant matsutake, or pine mushrooms, also claim the life of one of the hunters. Ikeda's entry for this day, 18 October 1943, is filled with images of dormancy, lifelessness, and death, and ends with this poem:

Morning frost  
Chrysanthemum flowers  
Drooping slightly

Mountain gift  
For my hair  
Fallen red leaf (140)

We might say, then, that Ikeda's poetry suggests a greater insight into the implications of internment. Nonetheless, Ikeda's emphasis on the pastoral quality of Slocan and the

abundance of food, and Nakano's warm recollections of the hospitality of internment, each highlights the manner in which the deceptively beautiful subdued the Nikkei and thus facilitated the process of internment in Canada.<sup>419</sup>

Takashima's description of the actual impurity of Slocan Lake shows how the natural beauty of British Columbia's interior served as a foil for the physical dangers of internment. *In A Child in Prison Camp*, Takashima also writes of the "quietening" effect of the natural beauty surrounding her (18), but tells how those Nikkei who were sent to the town of New Denver were warned not to drink the water from the lake:

There is an old mine up in the mountains not far from New Denver. It is closed now, but during the time it was open, the miners threw all their waste into the stream which gushes down the mountains into Lake Slocan. It's the same small river we cross going into the village. So even if this lake looks lovely and pure, the water is not to be drunk. (31)

From the beginning of her stay in New Denver, Takashima experiences things that leave her "confused and mad. I want to shout and protest [. . .]" (18). Takashima's long poem about her internment experiences recollects what that experience was like for a child born in Canada. Thus we see little of the decorum and restraint that underscore the accounts by Nakano and Ikeda.

Although she went directly from her home in Vancouver to the internment camp in New Denver, Takashima visited Hastings Park with her mother. From her account of that visit, mentioned above, we begin to see the manner in which the control of food was used to discipline the Nikkei who were confined there. Takashima is convinced the livestock building is as bad as the "hell-hole" she learned about in Sunday School (9). The child is shocked with the change this confinement has wrought in the children she sees, and in her mother's friend. There is no decorum in Mrs. Abe's voice as she complains about being treated like animals and fed "pigs' food" (9).

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<sup>419</sup> The American government did not enjoy this benefit, since most of the American internment camps were located in the desert, a place with a particular, but less obvious beauty. The desert camps also lacked the soothing geographical similarities between Japan and the Canadian internment camps, work camps, and even the prisoner of war camps in Angler and Petawawa.

Kitagawa describes the efficacy of this treatment in breaking down civility and commensality among those held at Hastings Park:

They are undernourished; they are unwashed. One of the men who came out to buy food told Ed it was pitiful the way kids scrambled for food and the late ones went empty. I'm not going in there, no matter what happens. God damn those dirty politicians that brought this tragedy on us. (*This is My Own* 103)

Gordon Nakagawa (1992) has shown how certain disciplinary practices of the American government transformed interned American Nikkei into "docile and deformed subjects" (144). Unlike Adachi, Nakagawa resists naming inherent characteristics among the Nikkei that predisposed the interned to docility. Nakagawa's discursive analysis considers ways in which internment narratives "situate" the teller in relation to the experiences so narrated. Crudely put, the story of internment makes sense of the lived experience of internment by representing it in a selective (re)construction (145). Nakagawa's analysis contributes to the growing body of critical writing about Nikkei history that resists the simpler structural approach that has prevailed. By refusing to order Nikkei behaviour in degrees of structural relation to static foundational categories (for example, "ethnic," "issei," "Japanese," and so on), Nakagawa addresses some of the complexities that structuralist analyses simply homogenize. To the degree that the internment experience of Canadian and American Nikkei may be described as similar, Nakagawa's analysis helps us understand the way in which the physical wounding of the internment limited "human agency" among the Nikkei.<sup>420</sup>

Evidence of the ill health that resulted from the insufficiency and poor quality of the food in Hastings Park is well documented.<sup>421</sup> In addition to narrative accounts, Reverend Yoshio Ono, who supervised young adult males in the Park, kept detailed records concerning sanitation

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<sup>420</sup> I disagree only with the extent of Nakagawa's hypothesis. As I observe throughout this study, Canadian Nikkei protested the uprooting and engaged in positive action on behalf of their community in many different ways, both individually and in groups. The fact of such oppositional activity limits the usefulness of Nakagawa's argument that human agency is "disqualified" by the physical suffering of the internment. This is not to deny the gravity of the disciplinary actions taken by the government, police, and fellow citizens against Nikkei, but to caution against further disqualifying agency by overlooking that which persisted.

<sup>421</sup> In addition to the accounts by Takeo Nakano, Muriel Kitagawa, and Shizue Takashima see Adachi 1976; Kogawa 1981; and Ito 1994.

and health. At one point, Reverend Ono recorded a total of two hundred and thirty-six patients in the infirmary known as "Sick Bay," one hundred and seventy-seven of them ill with communicable diseases, including sixty suffering from tuberculosis (3 August 1942). His entry for that day recommends that requests be made for adequate medical supplies and a floor to be laid in the infirmary. Not surprisingly, the combination of poor diet and inadequate sanitation also resulted in a high incidence of dysentery and other gastro-intestinal disorders.

There were strange sounds. Near the women's washrooms, there were women and girls lined up, not in an orderly line, but ragged, some on their knees, clutching their stomachs, others crying, some even lying on the floor. [. . .] I saw more women and girls lined up, to use the male facilities. An old lady was crawling on all fours, towards the boy's [sic] washrooms. Her face was twisted in pain. (Sato 9)

For a man to recall witnessing this public scene of women suffering what would ordinarily be a private indignity reflects the extent to which the ordering of their environment through dietary control attacked fundamental norms of Nikkei life. The event may be seen to represent metonymically the disintegration of the larger community. Gender and age categories are confused in this unusual and extreme display of emotion in public; humanity has been so degraded that fellow community members appear as animals. "Like dung drops. Maggot bait," fumes Emily, punning on their euphemistic "evacuation" from Vancouver (*Obasan* 118).

In their recollections, Nikkei women relate how their roles as women, once strictly defined within community, are challenged and redefined by the disciplinary practices surrounding food. Imada Ito recalls Hastings Park:

I felt like a beggar each day at mealtime when we took a plate and lined up for food. At the beginning I hated it but later I got used to it although I never grew to like it. (Ayukawa 1990a, 33)

Kaoru Ikeda recalls her departure for Slocan:

A six-thirty we boarded the train. The Mounted Police examined each of us and checked our names off against a registry. Every passenger was handed a dollar to pay for a meal on the train. I again tried hard to control my tears and be silent while experiencing such humiliation. (124)

After many lean and hungry years, Mrs. Imada was finally enjoying a comfortable life on her farm in Haney, British Columbia, when she was sent to Hastings Park. The day before this entry, Ikeda had enjoyed a delicious farewell dinner "kindly prepared" by their friends (124).

Now both women suffer the niggardly doling out of food by their keepers. The passages relate Imada's and Ikeda's affective reactions to this indignity, but they also illustrate the way in which disciplinary control of food has redefined each woman's role as either beggar or criminal.

In several ways, government control over food challenged the range of acceptable roles for Nikkei women and undermined any status or control those roles may have afforded them within the traditional family structure. The inmates of Hastings Park were served Japanese food only occasionally; women were unable to choose or prepare food for their families; and meals were served cafeteria-style at long tables, rather than in family groups.<sup>422</sup> According to Kitagawa:

It was reported that a dietitian was assigned to the Pool, but from the accounts of the people who were in there, the menu scarcely varied from day to day or even from meal to meal, and it was first come, first served. At first there was no preparation for babies and young children at all, and they got along on what they could eat from the adult fare. It was cold meat or bologna, bread and butter, and tea, which was later changed to stew for lunch and dinner. And the inmates were charged for their board. (*This is My Own* 195)

There is a striking contrast between these last three accounts of Canadian hospitality and Mrs. Imada's happy memory of being served Japanese food for her first meal as a picture bride in Canada (Ayukawa 1988, 22–23). Bearing in mind the practical challenges of serving thousands rather than a handful, it is nonetheless significant that the laws of hospitality are different for potential traitors than they are for welcome guests.

In the 1920s, Canada eagerly received the picture brides for their potential to civilize the population of Japanese men who had become restive since their immigration to Canada. The

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<sup>422</sup> Maykovich identifies the communal dining in the internment camps as a factor that contributed to what she calls "the weakening" of Canadian issei culture:

"For instance, prior to camp life, the family dinner served as a time and place of socialization in which parents inculcated traditional values in their children. In the camp mess hall, however, seating arrangements by age group rather than by family group developed, wherein children occupied tables away from parents and their supervision" ("Acculturation Versus Familism in Three Generations of Japanese Canadians" 68).

While such dining practices were common in American internment camps (M. Nakano 1990), Canadian Nikkei generally were housed in family groups and, therefore, took their meals together. Exceptions to this practice included those men who were confined in prisoner of war camps, or in work camps in the Rocky Mountains. Of course, parental authority among Canadian Nikkei was otherwise strained since so many fathers were confined elsewhere.

hospitality accorded these strangers agreed with the general laws described by Visser (1991), laws designed to

deal firstly with strangers—how to manage their entry into our inner sanctum—how to protect them from our own automatic reaction, which is to fear and exclude the unknown, how to prevent them from attacking and desecrating what we hold dear, or from otherwise behaving in a strange and unpredictably dangerous manner. (93)

Thus, while Canadians welcomed the first Japanese women to arrive in Canada, they had also to win the compliance of the new guests. One way to do this was to impress the women with the power of the country's role as host: comforting as the Japanese dinner was, it was also a delicious manipulation.

Attempts at ordering the environment of Nikkei women by controlling the preparation and presentation of food included controlling the production of food. Literally, this meant that once interned, the only foods which Nikkei could use were those which could be purchased or grown in the area, or which were allowed as imports. In her journal, Kaoru Ikeda provides detailed records of food foraged in the mountains or cultivated once the land was cleared, a history of food which is also recorded in Ikeda's poetry:

Picking berries  
I happened on a bearprint  
In the Slokan mountains (129)

Ikeda also describes various creative improvisations with which Nikkei in Slokan met the culinary constraints of internment.<sup>423</sup> While feeding a family within these constraints was a challenge, the sharing and cooperation demanded by the struggle strengthened community ties.

Community spirit was taxed, however, when the government distributed a large supply of food from Japan to all the internment camps. This incident became, in the eyes of many Nikkei, a touchstone for patriotism. Ikeda recalls her own feelings at the sight of the gift, "[o]ne bottle of soya sauce per person, one pound of tea per family and half a pound of miso per family" (145):

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Hastings Park was the main location where communal dining affected the family life of Canadian Nikkei.

<sup>423</sup> For example, by experimenting, the women soon learned to make tofu with the help of epsom salts (138), and umeboshi with green plums (139). Recall also Ikeda's culinary substitutions at Oshō gatsu.

Sitting looking at this gift which has travelled across the world, sent by my compatriots, I can barely restrain my tears, as the memories well-up. (145)

The incident merited a poem:

Reaching out  
With compassion  
Precious gift  
From my native land.

Old country memories  
Carried back  
With scent of tea (145)

Recalling the earlier discussion of food as metaphor and metonymy, it is apparent that to accept and consume this food from Japan represented a highly symbolic act for all Nikkei, whether born in Canada or Japan. For Ikeda and other issei, to eat this food was to embody the home ("my native land") and community metonymically, both of which they had physically abandoned by immigrating to Canada. This embodiment was doubly significant: since those who gave the food were also suffering severe food shortages; their giving entailed sacrifice as well as generosity. Also, immigration had not dissolved the bonds of *on* and *giri*; if anything, the sacrificial nature of the gift of food multiplied the obligation that came with it. As Ikeda describes it, the act also emphasized the persistence of community over time and space. Although they were physically separated, the issei and the Japanese were still "compatriots" whose imagined<sup>424</sup> communal bonds transcended abandonment and the conceptual dissonance in the reality that the native land of the issei was now at war with their adopted one.

Nikkei born in Canada were aware of the gift's significance, but interpreted the offering as an act of aggression, not generosity:

Such an act on the part of the Japanese government [. . .] to send such goods to us can only be construed as an attempt on their part to convert our sympathies to its fascist philosophy. (*New Canadian* 29 January 1944, 1)

Nisei anger over the "shoyu insult from Tokyo"<sup>425</sup> baffled many issei:

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<sup>424</sup> I am thinking here of Benedict Anderson's explication of the nation as imagined, specifically the expression of nation as "a deep, horizontal comradeship" (*Imagined Communities* 7)

<sup>425</sup> *New Canadian* 29 January 1944, 1.

A group of young Nisei in Eastern Canada insisted that they were Canadians with no relationship whatsoever to Japan. To distribute care packages to them, they argued, was an insult to them as Canadians. [. . .] For an old person like myself this behaviour was far beyond my comprehension. (Ikeda 146)

Significantly, both groups believed that racism motivated the government to distribute food to all interned Nikkei rather than just to Japanese nationals. Ikeda understood that, by assuming that these "true Canadians" (146) would value the gift, the government was once again refusing to acknowledge nisei nationality and loyalty. The nisei agreed that the universal distribution of food in the camps "was a clear indication of the government's failure to distinguish between Japanese nationals and natural-born Canadian citizens" (*New Canadian* 29 January 1944).

While they might be viewed as mainly indicative of self-interest, both reactions to this gift of food can also be seen as protest. At the very least, for those who had, by being interned, lost control in other areas of their lives, food and control over it became increasingly important (M. Nakano 1990). Furst (1992) further suggests that

[d]isorderly eating can thus represent the last protest left to the socially disempowered, and at the same time, paradoxically, a means for them to attain a kind of domination (6).

By accepting food from Japan at a time when they were aware that loyalties were being measured by those in control, and by their fellow community members, the issei were effectively flaunting their affection for "the enemy," asserting their agency and their positions as community elders and parents. Conversely, for the nisei to refuse the food as evidence of their loyalties did not preclude the possibility that by the same action they were also challenging the old order within the Nikkei community.

Because Japanese Canadians were interned on the basis of their racial ancestry, race and ethnicity have always occupied a central role in discussions of control over the production and distribution of food to Nikkei during their years of confinement. Reading the writing of Nikkei women, one begins to understand the specific ways in which gender also determined the experience of women in relation to food. Ideas of "womanliness" were integral to life in the Alberta sugar beet fields.

The girls were outstanding. They said the girls couldn't harvest the beets. But they did. They worked with the stiff south-west blow stinging dust in their eyes, they toiled while their backs

cried out in protest, while their fingers froze in the cold morning frost, until their arms were swollen so that sleep came hard at night with aching arms in the way. When they to town, they are different these girls. They [are très<sup>426</sup>] chic and pretty [. . .]. (*New Canadian* 26 December 1942, 3)

The “girls” are certainly not women like Imada and other picture brides who were already too familiar with hard physical labour. In the 1930s and 40s, articles in the *New Canadian* commonly referred to young nisei men and women as “boys” and “girls.” Such appellations were common for the time in the wider community also, but their use in a publication which called itself “The Voice of the Nisei” distinguished the nisei in relation to their elders.<sup>427</sup> While some of the “girls” who were sent to the beet fields were from farming families, most of them were from the city and were unfamiliar with this type of labour. As Kitagawa describes, they were “young women who knew manicures and permanents” (3), women whom the issei still considered most worthy as wives and mothers.

There were many enlightened Issei who agreed that the young must lead their own life, uncomplicated by the old ways that were out of tune with the western ways, but by and large they all succumbed to the well-oiled wheels of custom. (*This is My Own* 225-226)

Thus, the women’s performance was considered outstanding because it exceeded perceived limits of womanliness. Once their bodies had been doubly the site of production: seeds were sown (at conception) and harvested (at birth) from women’s bodies, and food produced (during lactation). Now those bodies were also doing the harvesting. By prettying up for trips into town, the women relieved the ambiguity of such role disordering.

As it appears in Kogawa’s writing, resolution of this ambiguity restored the relative submission of women: “Sachiko was sent to the beet fields, worked as a domestic and was raped. Her child died” (*Itsuka* 168). The sexual assaults that Naomi endures in Vancouver are repeated in Lethbridge (*Obasan* 190) and in the beet fields of Granton (*Itsuka* 28). Wartime injustices against the Nikkei have been expressed elsewhere as a metaphorical rape that

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<sup>426</sup> author’s silent emendation

<sup>427</sup> Many Nikkei perceived differences between “Japanese” and “Canadian” ways as irremediable, and were usually discussed in terms of an intergenerational debate. “The Nisei used to dream of the day when the Issei would be the minority opinion, when we could pattern

induced shame in its victims (Sunahara 1981; Shahani and Shahani 1997). The accumulated reporting of such attacks in Nikkei women's writing reminds us that they were also real incidents, sometimes diminished by other writing that secures women within a passive domestic role.<sup>428</sup>

### *Transformation*

I began this chapter suggesting that, for Nikkei women writers, food is a powerful symbol in the formation and transformation of identities. I have discussed ways in which Nikkei women make individual and communal identities by incorporating literal and metaphorical renderings of food in language, mythology and the writing of ethnicity. Before discussing the transformation of these identities, two questions of meaning must be addressed.

These questions concern the object and limits of transformation, and are interrelated. First, what or who is being transformed? To argue that certain Nikkei women represent a changing identity through the writing of symbolic food may imply that either experience or a representation of it has altered. Given the constraining perceptions of what were considered appropriate roles for Nikkei women, another likely object of transformation is the cluster of perceptions about womanliness. Yet if we consider the historical realities of Nikkei women's experiences in relation to stereotypical representations of them—or the absence of representation in written history—inscribing Nikkei women's actual experiences in relation to food also transforms the Nikkei historical record and methods of writing history. I suggest that each of these ways of being is transformed through the writing of Nikkei women's identities. In fact, in a discussion of transformative identities it is unwise to rely on a concrete term such as "object." As the title of this study suggests, the nature of identity formation as a process invites one to consider transformation as an infinite dynamic, "being" in both its nominal and verbal

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our lives our way without risking our family relationships, affections and livelihood" (Kitagawa 1985, 226).

<sup>428</sup> See also Kitagawa (1985).

forms. Using the metaphor of bushwhacking, Mona Oikawa acknowledges this dynamic in her tribute to writers who are lesbian and women of colour:

Their powerful words have carved out deep paths in the forest of feminist literature, providing lesbians of Colour with safer routes by which to travel and move forward. ("My life is not Imagined: Notes on Writing as a Sansei Lesbian Feminist" 106)

The second question requiring clarification is just what is meant by "transformation." As I use it, the term "transformation" denotes multiple meanings, the most obvious being the idea of change. Put simply, when and as Nikkei women write about food, identities and ideas about those identities change.

In her short story, "The Caves of Okinawa," Hawaiian Nikkei writer Sylvia Watanabe tells of one Nikkei woman's belief in the power of food and the written word to change identities. In an attempt to ensure the safety of her son who is about to go to war in Viet Nam, Haru Hanabasu augments her Buddhist practice with "a hundred extra namuamidás every day and weekly offerings of sweet rice cakes and oranges at the temple down the road" (*Talking to the Dead* 25). Because her faithless husband Harry refuses to join her in prayer, Haru writes "Diamond Sutras" on rice paper which she then tears into tiny bits and smuggles into the tofu loaf she feeds him. Haru admits concern that Harry's apostasy will undo her efforts, and performs her subterfuge as insurance against religious sabotage; in effect, she is attempting to change her husband. Yet both husband and wife eat the tofu loaf, and both are called by nicknames for Harold, "Haru" being one possible japanized version of the English name. This shared name may imply the union of husband and wife or an interconnected identity based on notions of interrelated subjectivity. In either case, it suggests that by eating the consecrated tofu with her husband, Haru may also be expressing doubts about her own piety, and hoping to be transformed from a skeptical believer into a true one.

In Haru's case, the nature of individual being is transformed as the word is "made flesh," or manifest in the food that is eaten; food is a conduit for some other agent that transforms. As I have shown, as Nikkei women incorporate food into their writing literally and metaphorically, they create a world in which food is not just a metaphor for language, or being (although it is

that), but a world in which identities and ideas about identities, are altered by a tangible engagement with food. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the grocery clerk at the Japanese food store notices Muriel puzzling over the identity of satoimo, or taro: "Don't worry," reassures Sushi, "once you eat what they are, you won't forget them . . . . Eating's a part of being after all" (138). Sushi's words (and the pun of her name) testify to the Shinto conviction that all matter has a soul, and evoke Buddhist philosophies concerning eating as a manifestation of enlightenment. These religious precepts and Sushi's advice about the unforgettable nature of food explain why Keiko Tonkatsu perceives in Japanese food a permanent threat to the "Canadian" identity that she has decided is best for her family. When she spies Muriel's skin, yellowed with stains from overindulging in "Jap"<sup>429</sup> oranges, Keiko believes the threat has been realized:

"Oh God," an invocation as opposed to a curse. "Oh my God." She grabbed my wrists and dragged me to the sink.

"Ouch!" I said, tugging back. "Ouch, don't! It's only the oranges. I ate the whole box, that's all."

She turned the hot water on full blast. Dumped Sunlight on my hands and started scrubbing with an SOS pad.

"Ow!" I screamed. "Don't Mom! It's only the oranges! It's only the oranges!"

"Yellow," she was muttering, not even hearing me. "Yellow, she's turning yellow she's turning yellow [sic] she's—" (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 92).

In these incidents, the actions taken by Haru and Keiko betray a conviction that identity is static and unitary at any given moment. Keiko, especially, believes she has discarded a Japanese identity for a Canadian one, and is frantic at the possibility that her choice may be undone by a careless error. This model excludes any simultaneity of multiple or interconnected identities. As discussed above, most Japanese models of identity accept as a given the interrelated or interconnected nature of human subjectivity. Thus, identity may be the area in which Keiko has most successfully rejected her Japanese ancestry.

Nikkei women's writing suggests that for food to have transformative power in relation to identities one need not perceive of identity as either static or unitary. In her "Femme Fare"

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<sup>429</sup> Recalls Muriel, "But there was one thing Mom could forgive and that was a box of Jap oranges for Christmas. [. . .] She thought if the church could buy Christmas oranges, then she might make this one allowance and I wouldn't be contaminated" (91).

column of 9 May 1941 Kitagawa describes issei women—"our Japanese Mother"—as a collection of inconsistencies:

[. . .] new as the land which now harbours her, as strong as the rugged mountains on which she casts her eyes each morning, as rough as the soil in which she works, and as gentle as the land from where she came. [. . . She has] acquired the characteristics of that vast sisterhood of immigrant wives, ready at repartee, equal to give and take with the best of the men, practical, materialistic, and loudly jovial. But the fundamental teachings, her special code of ethics, at times incongruous in so boisterous an environment, persisted. And she was capable of anything, and if the lord and master left on some journey from where there was no returning, armed with intense courage, an unconquerable will and a mere smattering of English, she took his place[. . .]" (3)

The identities of these Nikkei women are determined as much by the geography of their adopted Canada as they are by that of Japan. They remain "Meiji women," thrifty, enduring, diligent, compliant, modest, and reticent, in spite of their acquisition of immigrant rowdiness. They are, in fact, as capable of living up to the ideals of Meiji womanhood as they are the responsibilities of Canadian patriarchy. By enumerating this description of issei women's omnipotence in both past and present tenses, and by introducing the notion of "persistence," Kitagawa challenges popular ideas concerning the temporal "pastness" of tradition.<sup>430</sup> Her eulogy invites the reader of Nikkei women's writing to consider less the actual nature of identity as the recipient of transformation than those widely circulated notions concerning the limits of appropriate or imaginable behaviour.

From this standpoint, identity is multiple, interrelated, and synchronic—continually transformed because it is always in the process of being made. Burdened with ideas of what is appropriate and decorous for women and, therefore, rich with possibilities for subversion, food is one of the major means and ways in which formation and transformation occur in writing the lives of Nikkei women—transformations of identities, and of their stereotypical representations. Food participates in this transformation as it is incorporated into material bodies, as it gives voice to unspoken or forbidden desires, and as it creates lives outside of the conventionally possible.

*Incorporating food*

To suggest that eating may direct and transform the making of identities is not, in itself, a novel gesture. As discussed above, Christianity, Buddhism, and Japanese mythology all rely on food imagery in stories of creation, and to explain the position of individuals in relation to each other and to the divine. Within academia, psychiatry and the social sciences have also displayed a long tradition of interest in the significance of food and identity (Freud 1938; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Douglas 1969; Lacan 1977; Kristeva 1982). I have discussed the interactive relationship of eating and Nikkei women's identities. I now complement this discussion by addressing the interaction of that relationship with the writing of culture. In so doing, we bear witness to a fault line in the narrative surface of Nikkei historiography and folk knowledge.

Nikkei women have always been involved in processes of identity formation and transformation in which food and the material body are central. Yet representations of Nikkei women by others have been marked by an absence of the physical body, and a reliance on stereotypical representations of Nikkei women's roles. This dependence on stereotype has, curiously, focused on their positions as good wives and wise mothers while ignoring the integral position of the body in fulfilling the expectations of those roles, as experienced and narrated by the women concerned. Concerning the marital arrangements made by their families and *nakodo*, or go-betweens, two women write:

The young rural women of that era usually left marriage matters to their parents and decisions were made on the word of the marriage broker. It was handled as if we were material commodities. (Imada, in Ayukawa 1988, 19-20)

Since my family didn't have any money, my older brothers wanted to send me to Canada. Because if they married me off in Japan, I'd need a lot of things, and that meant a great deal of expense. So if I were to get married and go to America, all they had to do was send me over here. That's why these marriage talks came off. It's because my brothers and sisters were stingy. (Miyo Hayashi, in Makabe 160)

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<sup>430</sup> For example, see Adachi 1976; Omatsu 1992; *A Dream of Riches* 1977; Okano 1992.

Furthermore, the lives of Nikkei women that exceed the boundaries of those roles have been under-represented, disparaged, or omitted.<sup>431</sup> Thus for Nikkei women to write about the many ways in which interactions between material food and tangible bodies define their identities transgresses the comfortable limits of a history that measures perceived experiences of Nikkei women against idealized notions of the “Meiji woman.” By transgressing, such writing transforms Nikkei women from objects of study into voices of authority, representing their own agency and identities as well as being represented.

It may be tempting, when considering the transformative aspect of bodily interactions with food, to enumerate subjective representations of Nikkei women’s identities and experiences. This exercise may balance (or unbalance) the historical record but, as noted above, by simply adding women’s experiences to the list of categories, such contributory or “compensatory”<sup>432</sup> history still does not address the various ways in which women functioned within the constraints of a system that privileged the experiences of men, and the voices of men in the process of representing all experience. Because Canadians have only recently begun listening to the voices of Nikkei women, it is critical that these testimonies be heard. Concurrent with such listening is the need to include an analysis of Nikkei women’s methodology in the critical adjustment of theoretical approaches to these stories.

The power of material food to transform selves is one of the main themes in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Naoe Obāchan certainly blames her daughter’s “Canadian” diet for her cultural abdication:

This Western food has changed you and you’ve grown more opaque even as your heart has brittle[d] [. . .]. Keiko rolls her eyes backward so she is staring up inside her ketchup brain. (13)

Unlike the other members of her family, Keiko’s determined effort to eliminate from her life all symbols of her heritage has been completely successful: with the transformation of external habit and ritual has come a transformation of Keiko’s heart and mind. Meanwhile, each of the

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<sup>431</sup> In Chapter Four, I discuss in greater detail representations of women who lived, or are living, lives considered by many to be immoral, abnormal, or at least unconventional.

<sup>432</sup> Lerner 1979, 66.

others has been secretly indulging in Japanese food: Naoe and Muriel in the dark comfort of Obāchan's bed, and Shinji out in his book-lined office in the mushroom barn. There remain other traces of Japanese culture in their lives as well. Although unable to speak Japanese, Shinji is still able to read the language and does so frequently, under cover of his occupation as a mushroom farmer. Under her covers, Naoe continues to speak and teach her granddaughter Japanese.

In each of these positions Goto has situated food so as to emphasize its liminality.<sup>433</sup> Although theories of situational ethnicity suggest otherwise, Keiko's commitment to a Canadian diet does not camouflage her inner Japanese core. The transformation of the heart of her identity has kept pace with her integration of the "ready" symbol of food. The one Japanese food item that Shinji cannot forego, seaweed paste, is a processed food that requires no preparation and can be easily integrated into his Canadian diet as a between-meal snack. Yet to indulge his love of this one snack he must drive secretly to the Japanese food store in Calgary where he enjoys a friendship with Sushi, the grocery clerk, and is able to purchase Japanese books, only to hide in the barn in order to enjoy the food. Even this small indulgence, evidence of what Gans calls "residual" ethnicity, decides the pattern of Shinji's day, and helps him maintain a connection with language, a symbol commonly cited as essential to the maintenance of culture (Ohama 1997; Okano 1992).<sup>434</sup> Finally, Goto seems to suggest a causal connection between food and language in the relationship experienced by Muriel and Naoe as

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<sup>433</sup> I am referring here to Goto's description of food as "the point of departure . . . . A place where growth begins" (*Chorus of Mushrooms*, 201). Food exists, is imagined, and experienced on the limen, or threshold of another realm—of existence, imagination, and experience.

<sup>434</sup> My eyes no longer know  
 how your mouth shaped that secret language.  
 I watched your mouth move, but my ears  
 cannot hear the meanings.  
 They are plugged with the wax of repression.  
 My tongue feels out the ghosts of our first language, silenced in my body.

I wonder among my people  
 like a Gaijin  
 only the shell of what could have been. (Okano 29)

they combine their enjoyment of other Japanese prepared foods with storytelling and language lessons.

In none of these circumstances is food an easy way to ethnicity or, as Wakayama stresses in *Kikyō*, a superficial symbol of the more serious aspects of culture. Rather, each of these expressions of food and culture directs the reader to Goto's conviction that "food is the point of departure. A place where growth begins" (201). Again, this connection of food and culture is not strictly causal. It is not the inherent "Japaneseness" of the Tonkatsu family's bodies that makes Japanese food appropriate for growth. After all, Keiko may be said to have acquired Canadian culture quite adequately along with her Canadian diet. Neither does the solitary enjoyment of token snacks ensure real growth. It is only Muriel and Naoe who, by their communal enjoyment of the sensuous aspects of food, are able to listen to, understand, and speak Japanese.

In fact, it becomes quite apparent, from Keiko's reaction to her mother's departure, that cultural maintenance depends on interpersonal connections. Keiko is perpetually irritated and angered by Naoe's "mutterings" in Japanese and is convinced that her mother persists simply to "taunt" her (21). Yet when Naoe leaves, Keiko is unable to function. Now Muriel must nurture her mother through this second infancy, especially by feeding her Japanese food. The Tonkatsu family's first communion over a Japanese meal evokes Aunt Emily's words in *Obasan*: "You are your history" (50).

Eating Tonkatsu in the heavy silence between night and dawn, a strange configuration. (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 153)

As discussed above, autoingestion as a metaphorical representation of assimilation is a familiar idea. However, in this passage Goto is also stressing the indeterminacy of the setting and the representational nature of the event as a "configuration." The contiguity of the two words, "eating tonkatsu," provides multiple meanings: the Tonkatsus are an eating family; the family is eating; and the family is being eaten. So signified, these individuals belong to a familial and cultural gestalt in which the parts alone are no more than that; at table, through the literal

act of eating,<sup>435</sup> their identity as individuals is made complete by depending on each one's contiguity with the next. This is not identity through separation as explained by Lacanian psycholinguistics. The configuration which Muriel describes is "strange" because it is new to the family, and because it continually rearranges the comfortable limits of what is external and internal, individual and communal, and establishes the body as incomplete on its own. After eating, Muriel is even less sure of where her personal boundary lies: "this was a chrysalis time for Mom or me. Maybe for both of us, I don't know" (153).

### *Voicing desire*

The potential of food to rearrange categories of being means that among groups who have enjoyed a limited range of publicly accepted identities, writing about food is likely to test those limits quickly and forcefully. In this respect, it is important to stress that the release Nikkei women experienced in simply having their writing published and read in the 1970s and 80s was modulated by the particular dominance of men in their writing communities. As Elaine Kim has observed in the American context: "[t]he sacred Asian American texts [. . .] were by "dead yellow men" instead of "dead white men" (*Charlie Chan is Dead* x). Although the historical specifics of Canadian Nikkei experiences produced a different literary community than that of American Nikkei,<sup>436</sup> there existed certain similarities between the two national situations. Both Canadian

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<sup>435</sup> Here I am contrasting the literal act of eating with the broadest interpretation of representation as a metaphorical process.

<sup>436</sup> For instance, the American government forced Nikkei to proclaim their national loyalties in response to and, therefore, within the definitional constraints of two questions. "Are you willing to serve in the Armed forces of the United States on combat duty wherever ordered?" and "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor or to any other foreign government, power or organization?" (cited in M. Nakano, 162).

American Nikkei were also called for service in much greater numbers (relative to population) than were Canadians. The 442<sup>nd</sup> regiment, composed entirely of Nikkei, was the most highly decorated unit in the American military during the Second World War. Ayukawa stresses that "the difference between JAs [Japanese Americans] and JCs [Japanese Canadians] re military service is a bit more—JAs were drafted. After Pearl Harbour JCs were no longer accepted in the armed forces—until early 1945 when Cdn. Government agreed to

and American Nikkei suffer from generalized racism against individuals of Asian heritage that rely on images of emasculated men<sup>437</sup> and exotically sexualized women. Therefore, in the writing that began circulating in the 1970s and 80s, both Nikkei men and women were tentatively shaping their subjectivities in opposition to the stereotypes that had permeated all artistic expression by non-Asians.

In their concern to speak in the voice of "yellow manhood,"<sup>438</sup> Asian American writers Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Inada, and Shawn Wong treat the writing of Asian American women dismissively and with a thudding insistence on resistance against white dominance that displays ignorance of the subtleties their sisters were engaging in their subversive writing.<sup>439</sup> In Canada, Nikkei men who were eager to correct the historical record were less vehement and blustering than the editors of *Aiiieeeee!*. Whether unknowingly, or unwillingly, they ignored those historical experiences of women that exceeded the stereotypes of domesticity and submission circulating in the Nikkei community.<sup>440</sup>

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allow <150 nisei to be accepted as volunteers in Army Intelligence for service in the Pacific" (personal communication; 1 August 1998).

The central theme in John Okada's novel *No-no Boy* (1957) is the American particulars of the debate over loyalty, including the dark irony in the government's test of American-born Nisei patriotism. This novel inspired the Asian American writers of the 1970s who revived Okada's work. In his introduction to the 1976 edition of the novel, writer Lawson Fusao Inada has described it as "a living force among us" (vi).

Other peculiarities of internment that produced a particularly "Canadian" body of Nikkei writing include those mentioned above, namely housing in family groups rather than dormitories, the geography and climate of internment and work camps, and Canada's refusal to allow Nikkei back to the west coast until 1949.

<sup>437</sup> However, Nikkei men were perceived to be more aggressive than Chinese Canadian men, and more like the "manly" white man. This generalization was relative to existing perceptions of Chinese Canadian men as asexual, as typified by the Charlie Chan character of American movie fame. The perception of the aggressive Nikkei man was fueled by Canadian fears of Japanese invasion during the second World War, and betrayed an underlying tendency to believe ancestry determined loyalties. See, for example, the *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration* (1902), and *Report and Recommendations, the Special Committee on Orientals in British Columbia, 1940*.

<sup>438</sup> Frank Chin et al., *Aiiieeeee!* (preface).

<sup>439</sup> For example, Chin et al. claim that both the surfeit of Chinese American women writers in the 1970s and the reluctance of these women to write in the first person "reinforce the stereotypical unmanly nature of Chinese Americans" (15).

<sup>440</sup> See, for example, Adachi (1976); Takata (1983).

For instance, Ken Adachi sympathizes with the plight of Canadian-born Nikkei women because of what he describes as “parental anxieties” surrounding sexuality and Nikkei ideas about “male superiority” (168). He also shows sympathy for the “harder lot” of unmarried Nisei women—because their disproportionate numbers fated them to remain single (168). Both statements disregard the range of actual experience among Nikkei women by repeating common stereotypes about Nikkei women as being only and enthusiastically heterosexual.<sup>441</sup> This disregard for women’s experiences was common to the “cultural nationalism” Asian North Americans described that proved unable to resist the challenges to its own exclusionist projects:

Inevitably, the Asian American identity offered by cultural nationalism could not but produce conflicts that portended its own undoing: what was excluded and rendered invisible—the unruly, the transgressive, and the disruptive—began to seep out from under the grids and appear from between the cracks. Eventually the seams burst and were exposed. In the case of Asian America, this unruliness has come from women who never stop being both Asian and female, as well as from others rendered marginal by the essentializing aspects of Asian American cultural nationalism. (*Charlie Chan is Dead* xiii)

Because food is intimately connected with experiential realms that have been ignored or undervalued in the writing of Nikkei and non-Nikkei men, writing about food by Nikkei women is unruly simply because it is done. But it is the indivisibility of food and desire, in all of its indecorous expression, which has contributed most to the formation and transformation of Nikkei women’s identities.

As I have discussed, Mona Oikawa is one Nikkei writer who incorporates food to express transgressive desires. In her poem “Eating Ramen,” Oikawa offers a cheekily disruptive telling of the dailiness of lesbian sexuality. Situated in a North American “Japantown,” in a cafe selling ramen (a noodle soup already “impure” with Chinese elements), on Oshogatsu (a celebration that centres on home and the heterosexual family), Oikawa’s North American narrator and her partner strain against multiple physical and symbolic borders: even the ramen that starts out so properly stiff and straight is softened with cooking and then slurped round<sup>442</sup> as the two women

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<sup>441</sup> For further discussion of Nikkei women and lesbian sexuality, see Chapter Four.

<sup>442</sup> This phrase refers to the technique of noisily slurping one’s noodles; if the diner is unskilled or in a particular hurry, the noodles may not be sucked up straight but whipped around to slap against the cheek, hence “slurped round.” As with any cultural practice that is acceptable in one

“sit close, / hand in hand, / talking about Malcolm X, / the film we just saw.” Confounding the other customers who are “trying to figure out / whether we’re two men or two women or . . .” the lovers’ passionate public embrace is definable only within the ellipses of Japanese gender binaries. Yet Oikawa blesses this unruliness with an almost nostalgic infusion of two “Japanese” cultural symbols” “I smell the warmth of miso, / feel o-shogatsu [sic] breathing / kindness upon me.”

Much of Oikawa’s writing seems to express what Ching identifies as “the desire of young Asians to queer up the hetero-patriarchal ideologies embedded in their food culture” (33). As with the sisterly disclosure in “Coming out at the Sushi Bar,” by situating lesbian sexuality in a Japanese North American restaurant, traditionally a meeting place for friends, families, and (heterosexual) lovers, this poem reconfigures food and sexuality to accommodate the textually strange or novel.<sup>443</sup> However, Oikawa is not concerned to substitute one representation for another: the narrator of this unruly sexuality suspects her own stereotypical assumptions:

[. . .] I still notice their eyes,  
 people slurping ramen—  
 straight people—  
 men with women.  
 (Of course *I’m* sure of this.) (“Eating Ramen” 54; emphasis hers)

The indeterminacy of the narrator’s position is characteristic of this most recent stage of Asian North American literature in which writers explore the multiplicity of identities, and of the tensions in the contradictions inherent in multiplicity.

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society and taboo in another, slurping has become evidence of ethnicity. An amusing scene in the film *Tanpopo* involves a group of young Japanese women being taught (in Japan) how not to slurp when they eat noodles prepared in a western fashion. The humor in this scene is augmented by the Caucasian man at the next table who is noisily slurping up his spaghetti.

Slurping is one of those cultural practices that become a site of ambivalence in intercultural families. For example, does one slurp only when eating “Japanese” noodles, or is it appropriate to slurp regardless of the ethnicity of the meal, as long as the family is eating at home? Ought the ethnicity of guests and visiting family members determine eating technique? These situations may sometimes be humorous, but they are not facetious.

<sup>443</sup> I emphasize the nature of this act as a re-inscription. Lesbian lovers have, of course, been meeting over food for generations; the novelty of the poem lies in the public nature of the lovers’ actions.

In her poem "Origins," Oikawa examines the selves she discovers within as she relates to the woman who is her lover:

When I think of you  
I become a geisha  
waiting to serve you  
o-cha and nori—  
wrapped morsels  
on a cold winter day. (*All Names Spoken* 76)

Her lover's beauty prompts "ancient memory" to rise. Their shared histories as "the colonized daughters / of daughters of / Japanese mothers" excite the samurai within. And with the lovers' admission that they are also "Japanese women," the speaker loosens her lover's obi, a familiar preparatory act in love scenes within Japanese literature. These several identities co-exist, not quite randomly (the invocation of each imagined identity depends on separate and different material contexts), but without the imposition of hierarchical ordering that privileges samurai over geisha or mother over daughter. Moreover, by "queering up" the cliched image of the subservient geisha feeding male guests on demand, the poem re-animates the metaphor by linking forbidden desire with food.

Oikawa's treatment of food is not limited to the metaphorical. In "Stork Cools Wings," Oikawa incorporates material food with sexual expression as a metaphor for transgressive, transformative sexuality. Honouring the familiar association of sex and food, Oikawa has the two characters come to know each other over tea and dinners together, but twists the metaphor of sex as eating by introducing the tangible umeboshi paste. To rid the dental dam they are using of its bubble gum taste, the narrator instructs Lisa:

"We can rinse the dam, it helps. . . And there's a little bottle in my fridge door with a drawing of a Japanese woman on it. Get it," I urge frantically.[. . .] "it's ume paste. Smear it on your side of the dental dam." (98)

Replacing the modern, stereotypically western, bubble gum taste of the dam with the Japanese flavour of umeboshi is simply an exchange of metaphors: the substance only camouflages the barrier that obstructs the "real" woman behind it. But by parodying the identification of women with food and the domestic, and Nikkei women with the diminutive, exotic, Japanese lover, as well as their role as consumable commodities intended for men's use, Oikawa releases the

narrator from the cold storage of Nikkei women's stereotypes. Elsewhere, Ching has pointed out how stereotypes may be reproduced in the process of parodying "a world in which we Asians become the food we (are expected to) eat" (33). Oikawa avoids the stereotypical by changing the traditionally accepted gender of the diner/lover, and by emphasizing the nature of the woman eaten as a representation. Lisa must be satisfied with eating food that resembles the menstrual blood, in itself also only a sign of the womanhood behind the barrier; her tongue never finds a core of that being.

This story so celebrates the bond created by the lovers' identities as Asian women that it would seem Oikawa is following the tradition of early Asian cultural nationalism that exchanged the image of the assimilated Asian with polarized images of "yellow power" (*Aiiiiieee!*, preface). The characters' "bond of sisterhood" forms the instant they recognize they are the only Asian women in a class of "tall white men" ("Stork Cools Wings" 93). The lovers' ethnicities merge as the women do: "Incense wisps of jasmine and cherry blossom rise in clouds above our bed. 'Til the light of dawn, we carry each other to the peaks of Tian Shan and Fuji-san. . ." (99).

However, this is just one story, and in the same collection Oikawa displays her resistance to simplistic exchanges of unified identities. She interrogates her own actions in "[c]hoosing a lover who is white," examining the implications that action might have on the extent of her belonging—or not—within the feminist, lesbian/gay, Nikkei, and white communities ("Some Thoughts on Being a Sansei Lesbian Feminist" 100–03).

This proclivity for enduring, perhaps even welcoming, the contingencies of being is a common thread in most writing by Nikkei women. Since they are already at least doubly marginalized, writing outside the strictures of both Nikkei and white convention, women who express previously unnamed or forbidden desires seem more willing to risk exposing the equally contingent nature of community memory in the construction of community truths.<sup>444</sup> For instance, in their attempts to revisit "white" versions of their history, Nikkei writers (and some

others)<sup>445</sup> generally emphasize the extent to which the racism of the larger Canadian community caused severe injustices within the Nikkei community.

While Nikkei women who write participate in this project of anti-racism, they also challenge the injustices they have suffered as women within the community, and offer different memories of experiences that have historically been recorded by men. Recalling the hiatus between the time Nikkei men were sent to road camps and the women and children to the interior, Ayukawa (1990b) writes:

The female supportive network helped. I recall that on my street, three families lived together and shared not only their letters from the men-folk but also their mutual concerns, while they prepared for their own evacuation. I visited them often, for I found it a very cheerful place. (5)

This “cheerful place” existed, not because of, but alongside and in spite of the injustice of the uprooting. The qualitatively similar daring in inscribing such happy memories, and in the writing of the forbidden generally, further distinguishes Nikkei women’s writing about food by its engagement with the unspoken and the traditionally disgusting.

The Nikkei woman’s text most thoroughly engaged with the disgusting is *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Early in the novel, Naoe Obachan reflects on the replies she gives to her son-in-law’s daily inquiry about her day: “Once, I said I spent the day masturbating with my toes. Another time I said Keiko scrubbed the walls with shit and wiped the floor with piss” (48). Although she suspects Shinji has forgotten all of the Japanese he once knew, the absence of a comprehending audience only increases the significance of Naoe’s responses. A central theme in the novel is the dependence of comprehension on true listening, and the necessity of redefining the ways in which individuals communicate. Thus Naoe’s words both cause the reader to reflect on the limits of verbal speech and on stereotypical representations of grandmotherly Nikkei women.

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<sup>444</sup> Regarding the similarly marginalized status of Latina lesbian writers, López (Fowler et al. 1996) describes how the writers “redefine community so that it includes sexuality as productive to the culture’s conceptualization of community building” (28–29).

<sup>445</sup> See, for example, Ward (1990).

Goto's novel abounds with libidinal and scatological images and talk, usually articulated by Naoe Obāchan. As well, her retelling of Japanese myths features arresting images of coprophilia, also performed by women. In *A Feast of Words*, Michel Jeanneret identifies the participation of such imagery in the "table talk" of the Renaissance feast: "[t]he carnivalesque [sic] concentration on the organs which are normally taboo is therefore part of a regenerative and dynamic impulse" (239). By focusing on what Ames (1988) calls "[t]he hidden other mouth that all share, the last defenceless border between the self and the Other" (23), the scatological and coprophilic imagery in *Chorus of Mushrooms* provides the writer and reader with language and ideas transgressive enough to transform identities. As it disrupts and disorders stereotypical constraints on behaviour, such writing creates an imaginative space in which new selves emerge. As well as altering the processes of individual identity formation, this type of regeneration includes an aspect of renewal that also may involve the transformation of community.

In writing about the period of detention in Hastings Park, Nikkei writers present the dehumanizing effect of this confinement of the Nikkei community with imagery of filth and waste in which maggots are the ultimate symbol of decay (Takashima 1971; Kitagawa 1985; Kogawa 1981).

The whole place is impregnated with the smell of ancient manure and maggots. Every other day it is swept with dichloride of lime or something, but you can't disguise horse smell, cow smell, sheeps and pigs, rabbits and goats. (*This is My Own* 114)

Adachi describes the Livestock Building in which many of the Nikkei were held as "the perfect metaphor for the Japanese experience" (248). The crowding, poor sanitation, and inadequate diet of Hastings Park also contributed tangibly to the ill health and broken spirits of the Nikkei confined there. Not only were the Nikkei "herded" into this "incipient abattoir" (Adachi 248), they became the decaying matter on which maggots could literally and metaphorically feed.

Returning to Goto's retelling of the yamanba myth, we see that Goto reconfigures the metaphor of the maggots in Hastings Park as a central theme in creation. In Goto's story, the mountain woman finds herself away from home, in a part of the world where "there was only the

silence of dead and dying things" (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 116). There she drinks the water of the putrid stream and ingests maggots that "churn in the bones of the dead" (117). Later,

[h]er feet planted like stone, she swung her great breasts out of her samui and clenched two fists around them. She milked her breasts with great white spurts and a steady stream of maggots squirted from her nipples.[. . .] They grew and clamoured around her. In wonder, they called her mother. When the yamanba squeezed the last maggots from her breasts, there were millions of soft-skinned people around her. (117–18; italics hers)

The dirty water, now clear and sweet, leaves her body and falls in rain that makes the earth "fresh again" (119). As discussed earlier, seeing good in the wartime uprooting of Nikkei is also a common theme in writing about that time. Goto's tale is less concerned with such justification and revising of memories than with reclaiming the injustice as one phase in a cycle of perpetual transformation. Hold the injustice gently, the story says, not to be resigned to, or to repeat, but as the part of life it is:

"Are you not one of the living as well?" the *yamanba* asked [the maggots] softly.

"Yes," the maggot said, after some thought. "I guess we are."

"If you eat of the dead, the conclusion of the cycle is your death. That is all that remains." (117)

By accepting that the fecund and tenacious maggots contribute to the cycle of life the community will recognize when it is time for change: "[t]here are ages of silence and ages of roaring, but these too must come to a close" (76). Then individuals can shrug off the dehumanizing burden of saintly martyrdom and allow transformation to occur.

Goto insists on the transformative potential of "waste" in all of its forms. Naoe decides to leave her daughter's house: "Keiko and Murasaki need to grow without my noisy presence and I need to live outside the habit of my words" (76). Before she begins her journey, she follows the "fungus hum of mushrooms growing" (84) to the womb-like barn where she sheds her clothes and lies down in the moist compost. In the warmth of this moist generative waste, Naoe's wrinkled parchment skin is transformed until it is "taut, glowing coolly like newborn silkworms" (85). There she indulges herself in the masturbatory bliss that so repulses her daughter.

Unlike Naoe, for whom waste is a means of leaving the present, for the cowboy who joins Naoe on her journey, waste belongs with warm old memories of childhood breakfasts, "and Dad still smelling hay sweet of cow shit and the sound of cream separating from milk

downstairs" (194). After breakfast, the boy leaves for his first day at school, his first day away from the people who only call him "Son," and is shamed into admitting that he does not know his name. In the strange and apparently hostile environment of the schoolroom that has been forced upon him, the delicious food of the boy's breakfast also becomes waste as it is vomited onto his teacher's shoes. As they travel, both the cowboy and Naoe continue changing, unsure that the transformations are actual, and equally unsure whether they are witnessing or causing each other's transformations.

Kogawa also engages the scatological and coprophilic as she examines identities and decorum. While Goto relies on stereotypically disgusting images to reconstruct identities, Kogawa applies a milder scatology as a critique of Japanese social decorum in the poem "On Meeting the Clergy of the Holy Catholic Church in Osaka" discussed above (*Choice of Dreams* 19). Kogawa selects the way Japanese choose, eat, and then rid the body of food and drink as a broad, inclusive metaphor for what the speaker sees as the incomprehensibility of Japanese propriety. As mentioned, the poem is preoccupied with the inelegant aspects of digestion: bloating, belching, and urinating. Kogawa contrasts what are, to her "Canadian" way of thinking, embarrassing and laughable indelicacies with the more digestible sight of observing the same processes in animals. The poem observes a double irony, the first being that of the speaker's position as a forthright Canadian Nikkei who, unlike her supposedly decorous Japanese host, has no words to describe the ordinariness of elimination and the sight of an animal's sexual organs. The second concerns the manner in which the civilized have inverted "natural," animal elimination into a spectacle, a form of entertainment to be consumed.

Of course both the scene in the poem and the poem itself are coprophagous spectacles, since the poet feeds on the spectacle of Japanese elimination only to regurgitate it on paper. The two incidents are framed as a religious experience—a physical "meeting" with God's representatives—and a revelation. Yet the speaker observes as an awkward adolescent would, stifling laughter at the sight of priests urinating; choosing childhood words to describe "[t]he peeing fox and the baboon's purple bum. . . ." This bathetic treatment of the natural and the

supernatural; the conflation of the contrived and the ingenuous, the pure and the defiled, disparages those who would so naively, the poet seems to say, sacralize common human beings, or put their faith in those who have. The juxtaposition also exposes propriety, whether Japanese or Canadian, as superficial and laughable.

Moreover, in aligning an implied desire for another kind of purity with the excessive filth of excretion, the poet suggests that the extremes of such desire are realizable only outside, or at the limits of, the conventional or proper. Kogawa is challenging the ultimate frontier mentioned above, “the last defenceless border between the self and the Other.” Stymied by her confusion over her own identity, too Canadian to participate unselfconsciously in Japanese ritual, yet conscious of having been placed outside the real (white) Canadian fold, the poem’s intolerance of cultural definitions of decorum implies the possibility of some kind of other identity that would transcend the strictures of both societies.

Of course the high contrast in juxtaposing the sacred with the profane or the lewd with the proper is more consonant with Christian imagery than with that of Buddhism or Shintoism. Jesus may have existed “in every respect” as human, but nowhere in the Bible do we ever witness him urinating or defecating. By contrast, Japanese gods have often expressed their power through their digestive tracts: Susano urinates under the chair of Amaterasu (the goddess of light) to humiliate her (Piggott 40); Kōbō Daishi spits at dragons and sea monsters that disturb his monkly meditations. Kihachi is downed by “farting” arrows of the shinto god Takeiwatatsu-no-Mikoto (Dorson 156–7), and saliva is light from the evening star (Piggott 41).

Dependent as her writing is on Japanese myths, especially in the novels *Obasan* and *The Rain Ascends*,<sup>446</sup> “On Meeting the Clergy of the Holy Catholic Church in Osaka” could be a milder critique of what Kogawa perceives as the Japanese sacred than it might appear. From such a standpoint, the poem is more harshly critical of the Canadian visitor and her or his

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<sup>446</sup> In this novel, Kogawa incorporates an aggregate notion of mercy taken from her understanding of Christianity and Buddhism (Sally Ito and Joy Kogawa, “Divine Abandonment,” 3-9).

western attempts at pretending that a division exists between the sacred and profane, than it is of any sense of a compromised Japanese Christianity.

In texts by Nikkei women, the writing of desire—whether for the “pure” or the transgressive—achieves a tone of liberation and release; certainly, the scene of Obāchan relishing her body in the fungal steam of the mushroom barn or the knowledge of the significant achievements of “issei women” may exhilarate the reader. Yet however exciting the writing and reading of desire may be, they also may remind the reader of “the little shadow under the intensity of appetite,” as Richard Wirwick describes it (90).

The “shadow” is what the mystic Simone Weil hoped to avoid by fasting, namely, the death that results from the realization of desire.<sup>447</sup> This death may be the terminal extremity of desire that ends the adult state of separation from the mother, and the distinction between need and demand (Lacan 1977). It may also be the eventual uselessness of representation; once an individual realizes the transgressive pleasure (*jouissance*) that exceeds the boundaries of pleasure, as Naoe Obāchan does in the mushroom barn, her need for language dissolves. Once I live “outside the habit of my words” (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 76) where is the text?

### *Indigestion*

Pragmatically, in the lives and writing of Nikkei women, this death is that of the old self that was created by and for those who needed her to be as they desired. As Imada Ito observes:

In the past, the men never listened to what women said. They said women can never be superior, so the women were always very timid. The men did exactly as they wished. The women could only cry and be sad. They all suffered. (Ayukawa 1988, 51)

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<sup>447</sup> “It may be that vice, depravity and crime are nearly always, or even perhaps always, in their essence, attempts to eat beauty, to eat what we should only look at. Eve began it. If she caused humanity to be lost by eating the fruit, the opposite attitude, looking at the fruit without eating it, should be what is required to save it” (*Waiting on God*, 104). Regarding the spiritual necessity of looking without eating (what Weil calls “attention”), see Van Herik’s essay, “Simone Weil’s Religious Imagery: How Looking Becomes Eating.”

However, many incidents in Imada Ito's life suggest that this affective response to her husband's misadventures veiled rather than precluded a lifetime of achievements and small rebellions.

The Imadas worked together cutting cedar logs in the woods at Stave Lake, Mrs. Imada wearing a pair of her husband's boots with rice bags tied around them so she wouldn't slip on the ice and snow. They did well, and in November of 1920 pledge to make one thousand dollars by New Year's day, which they do. Shortly after Oshōgatsu, Mr. Imada goes off to Vancouver, ostensibly to buy a rooming house. During his absence, the firewood runs out:

Since there was nothing else I could do, I chopped up the usu [a wooden mortar in which glutinous rice is pounded and made into cakes, usually for New Year celebrations] and burned it. (Ayukawa 1988, 66-67)

Mrs. Imada goes on to burn the shed roof and the bathhouse, until two neighbours who have arrived to check on her save the Imadas' property from further destruction by chopping down some dead trees for firewood.

Mrs. Imada often explains her actions with variations of the phrase "there was nothing else I could do." The words seem meant to justify certain actions she takes within the narrow range of choices permitted by her husband, by custom, or by opportunity. Ayukawa's English translation invokes the phrase, "shikata ga nai," or "it can't be helped," a phrase that many issei used in response to their uprooting, and that came to symbolize what many Nikkei characterize as issei submission, or a "rationalization" for not resisting (Adachi 226). Because Mrs. Imada always associates the phrase with significant achievement or drastic action, with each utterance of resignation, she acknowledges the superficial structure of her world and the significant (and sometimes highly symbolic) choices she makes within the confinements of that structure.

For instance, Mrs. Imada chooses to save her life and that of her children by destroying the object necessary to prepare the ritual rice of each New Year's feast, the very day she and her husband had set to materialize a goal that signified the harmony of their working, married relationship. She could have chosen any other wood to burn, or chopped some herself; the youngest of her children was well accustomed to being left alone in the house as his mother

went off to work in the woods with her husband. Instead, she destroys the tool used in the communal preparation of rice, the symbol of commensality. This act of defiance is one component in the process of identity formation Mrs. Imada pursues within the limits of her "timid" submission to the proscribed role of obedient wife and mother.

Before she settles on the blatant obstinacy of her old age, Naoe Obachan also relies on this type of subtle subversion as a way of asserting her individual identity within a traditional marriage. As a young woman, Naoe finds herself married to a "weak and foolish" man (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 38). Angered by the legislated domination of such a weak man over her "proud" self, Naoe, like Mrs. Imada, expresses her identity by subverting her role as servant:

"Naoe," he called. "Sake."

I heated the sake until it boiled over and the alcohol evaporated. Until it turned as sour as vinegar.

"Naoe, this *sake* is overheated. Be careful next time."

Next time I barely heated it at all, as tepid as cooling urine.

"Naoe, it's too cool this time. You must have more care."

I overboiled it again. Bottle after bottle, I never said a word, served vinegar and urine until he lay on the *tatami* seeping *sake* tears, begging me to get it right, while Keiko watched with round black eyes. (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 38–39)

The several transformations in this scene occur in relation to the agency that Naoe possesses within the structural confinements of marriage. Naoe responds submissively, correctly, and silently to each of her husband's commands. As he instructs her to take care, she takes the care she needs to assert and express her own desires: while maintaining the appearance of the sake she changes its nature to vinegar and then urine. In the process of altering the drink, she also transforms her husband's salty tears to "sake" ones. Simultaneously, as Naoe's silent efforts invert the power relations apparent in the stereotypical scene of a husband being served sake by his wife, she transmits to her daughter a revolutionary brand of marriage instruction.

A particular challenge in the writing of Nikkei women is the repetition of such inconsistencies or seeming contradictions between the stereotypes and material realities of their lives. The writers acknowledge the stereotypes and the inevitability of their operation in their lives. They are compliant and, occasionally, sympathetic with the position of their men in relation to the same stereotypes. As Maki Fukushima writes:

My husband had quite a good nature. He did have a bent for playing cards and gambling, but after he married me, it was just once in a while, and as for drinking, it was just social. So there was nothing wrong with my husband, but he hadn't saved any money.

[. . .]

When I wrote a letter telling them [Fukushima's parents] that I got up every morning at four o'clock and cooked for dozens of people, my husband said I mustn't write anything like that. He said that he wouldn't look good if my parents thought we couldn't manage unless I did anything like that, so he didn't let me write. (Makabe 51 & 53)

Yet while inscribing their resignation and compliance, the same writers tell stories of anger, opposition, and, as I have shown in their participation with food, transformation. In addition to examples in the writing of Kaoru Ikeda, Mona Oikawa, and Hiromi Goto, in her autobiographical prose poem Shizue Takashima describes the aesthetic beauty in her mother's performance of "women's" chores in the fresh air of the internment camp, as well as her mother's advice to assert the rights of women (52 & 92). Yet the daughters who witness the resistance of their "issei mothers," invoke a generational discourse that repeats the same stereotypes. As early as 1940, Muriel Kitagawa's journalism was challenging the usefulness of the identity of timid submission, without testing its veracity in tangible experience:

Our Japanese women are dubiously noted for their uncomplaining endurance. Is it the virtue that people say it is? For my own part, I would much prefer that she sometimes traipses around and told me funny stories about it, than leave me worried about her over-working, or leave me motherless. Wouldn't the fathers prefer their wives chatty, sometimes in the way of course, but anyhow right there, right beside them, live as live, and not a cherished memory of heroic sacrifice and silent suffering? ("Nisei Wives, Let's Step Out!" *New Canadian* 4 Sept. 1940, 6)

Within the historical and political context of the times, Kitagawa's position is understandable, if not inevitable. The Canadian-born nisei had not yet won the franchise. Many had completed university, yet because they were excluded from the voters' lists, they were barred from those professions for which they had been educated. These nisei were also determined to win what they determined were their rights, as Canadian citizens, to lives comparable to their Canadian cohorts, especially with regard to marriage. As Kitagawa later stressed in the same publication:

Daughter needs sympathy and understanding for her real needs; carving a career if that is her bent, and being encouraged, not forced into a thankless marriage just because the parent wills it time enough. (*New Canadian* 18 July 1941, 3)

These nisei were coming of age at a time when popular sentiment, especially in British Columbia, still favoured a white Canada.<sup>448</sup> Regardless of their actual experience and values, in writing nisei imagined and divorced themselves from what they described in polarized terms as the “Japanese” experience of their parents:

By the 1930s there were as many Nisei as Issei but unlike their parents, this Canadian-born generation had a difficult choice to face. They could maintain the heritage of their parents or break with it and become ‘westernized’. (*A Dream of Riches* 65)

It is possible that the nisei refused to inscribe the resistance that their mothers displayed towards “Japanese” models of behaviour for fear of compromising their own political aspirations. Certainly there seems little qualitative difference between the manner in which Kitagawa and Imada describe a loveless “Japanese” marriage.

This textual inconsistency may also be explained by the variety of ways in which individuals and groups define and enact resistance. In her ethnography of workers in a Japanese pastry shop, Kondo observed that the behaviour and attitudes of her co-workers appeared similarly inconsistent in relation to cultural norms:

For the people I knew in the factory, the deployment of the notion of *uchi no kaisha* [our company] was laced with contradiction, irony, and compromise. No single meaning, no single effect, could be isolated in its pristine abstraction. Workers could invoke *uchi no kaisha* subversively, yet in so doing they also reproduced and legitimized the idiom. (218)

Kondo concludes that such inconsistencies are only contradictions when resistance is considered as a site of competing authenticities, “[. . .] for apparent resistance is riven with ironies and contradictions, just as coping or consent may have unexpectedly subversive effects” (224). Thus, in the context of the nisei struggle for the franchise amid their parents’ fears that their children were forsaking their heritage, the polarization of the modern nisei “girl” and the hopelessly “traditional” issei mother may be the result of a strategic engagement with authenticity. Similarly, the narrowly circumscribed role of “isei wife” demanded that the women living lives culturally defined by that position were continually—and sometimes simultaneously—

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<sup>448</sup> As discussed in Chapter One.

complying with, and subverting the identity of, "heroic suffering and silent sacrifice" by which others defined them.

### *Once Having Eaten*

Throughout this chapter I have discussed many ways in which the writing of Nikkei women displays an engagement with food as a central component in processes of identity formation. I have shown that these texts are concerned with food as language, as mythology, and as a defining symbol of individual and group identity. In the course of writing about identity formation, Nikkei women displace the hierarchical significance of food as metaphor with an insistence on the equally important expression of tangible food as a literal means of becoming. This is not to say that texts by Nikkei women writers forsake the metaphorical. Rather, their egalitarian inclusion of the material in projects that are inescapably representational—the written word—necessitates a dependence on the metaphorical. Neither do the writers depend on metaphor only as a way of expressing the literal. What we read in these journals, novels, poetry, letters, and scholarly writing is a complex interaction of the literal and the metaphorical as a way of representing similarly interrelated identities. The path of this interaction traces a route through excesses of being that intersects with and departs from the conventionally possible.

A cluster of stereotypes has ossified in the historical and sociological record of Nikkei women in Canada. Until recently, in such writing Nikkei women appeared as quiet, submissive, heterosexual wives and mothers whose only significant achievement was the taming of rowdy male immigrants and the bearing and rearing of well-adjusted children. The loving invocation of such stereotypes by Nikkei offspring and husbands has blocked a fuller understanding of Nikkei women's experiences as much as has the scholarly dependence of the dominant society on the same stereotypes. Locked within this grid of rigid expectations and selective memory, Nikkei women who expressed (or wanted to express) identities discordant with the circulating generalizations could only be portrayed as exceptional eccentrics.

When Nikkei women write about food, they inscribe multiple processes of identity formation that include the impossibly familiar as only one facet in a cluster of excess. While many Nikkei women appear to be accommodating the Meiji dictates of “good wife/wise mother,” they are subverting the expectations of that role in imaginative ways. Others are more blatant in their resistance, opting for solitary lives outside of the established patterns of behaviour. Yet others complement their public acceptance of the gendered stereotypes with an awareness and resistance that finds expression only in private writing. As I have introduced in this discussion of food, in the next section I show that the engagement of Nikkei women writers with stereotypical discourses of sexuality and the body continues to expand the range of experience.

## Chapter Four

### Desiring Bodies

At the conclusion of her first “volume of poetry,”<sup>449</sup> Baco Ohama shares her “hope,” that honest acceptance of difference will one day be a natural part of experience and that words and ideas like ‘feeling’, ‘healing’, ‘spirituality’, and ‘touch’ will hold a valid position in art practices, as well as in life, alongside and possibly intertwined with other forms of critical engagement.<sup>450</sup>

In this section, I review Nikkei women’s writing for signs of these experiences, of the critical engagement of Nikkei women’s texts with the body and desire.

discovering in my surroundings  
in history in memories  
  
my body  
my spirit  
my sense of self

grounding my words  
constructing and rebuilding

feeling the weight of years upon my back  
in my muscles  
and blood (Red Poems of Rain and Voice)

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<sup>449</sup> Ohama is also a visual artist. *Red Poems of Rain and Voice* and *CHIRASHI stories from the garden* are texts that communicate through words printed in varying shades of gray through black, “empty space” on the page, opaque and translucent pages, and photographs. Because Ohama’s textual meaning depends on all of these elements, I have attempted to present them on these pages as they appear in the bound text.

<sup>450</sup> Because Ohama’s texts are not paginated, I simply present quoted material in quotation marks, or otherwise clearly distinguish them from the body of my text.

*The Body Speaking*

In writing about Nikkei women throughout this century, the most commonly evoked image has been that of the dutiful wife and sacrificing mother. As I have shown, texts that rely on this image sustain it by disregarding or diminishing the significance of Nikkei women's experiences that lie outside of those spheres. Yet absent from even the image of maternal piety is the physical body on which the stereotype depends. Rarer still is the inscription of bodies living out desires apart from this image, with or without paying for their transgressions. Sexuality has always underwritten or defined even the most constrained representations of marriage, mothering, and the "acceptable" limits of Nikkei women's identities. However, the bold or celebratory representation of Canadian Nikkei women's sexualities is a recent phenomenon. For these reasons, it is an entirely significant focal point in this final look at writing by Nikkei women. I conclude my study by introducing this nascent phase in the processes of identity formation, examining various ways in which Nikkei women writers inscribe a range of transgressive identities by writing through the body.

Overwhelmingly, Joy Kogawa portrays the body as the most trustworthy of communicators. In *Obasan*, Obasan's hand "moves on the table like an electrocardiograph needle" (46). Naomi reads the "determined kind of stillness" around Obasan's mouth (38), and the "fearful calligraphy" of insect bones (26). She "talks" throughout the novel with her "silent Mother." Other mothers appear in *Itsuka*, also communicating many of their lessons non-verbally. In this later text, although Naomi suffers repeated physical betrayals, Kogawa continues to privilege the communication of the body:

How much more accurate it is to address a person by touch than by words. The spontaneous warmth is there, unedited in the body's parchment. Better the instant language of limbs than the stilted messages we form and reform with the tongue. (242)

Finally, Kogawa subverts even this conflicted position by having Naomi match action with words in her involvement with the campaign for redress.

In *Chorus of Mushrooms* the body becomes significant as a way to communicate in spite of differences. For Keiko and Naoe, this kind of communication is wholly unmediated by verbal language, and occurs while they are caring for each other's bodies. Naoe passes her sweetest moments when Keiko washes her hair, allowing her own irritations and anger to melt away in the warmth of the laundry room. Pressing her head against Keiko's belly, "[w]arm and soft, like *manto* [a heavy, quilted cape]" (42; italics hers), Naoe feels her pain pass into her daughter. The steam rising from the hot water blurs the outlines of objects and Keiko gently massages and cleans her mother's body, "the heat and moisture embracing my body, my pleasure, the atatakai [warm] sun" (44).

Keiko's turn to relax into her mother's belly comes when Naoe cleans her ears.<sup>451</sup> Cleaning a child's (or husband's) ears has long been a woman's chore. Like bathing and sleeping together, the act of cleaning another's ears represents and creates a sense of intimacy and "skinship" (Lebra 1976, 138).<sup>452</sup> Writers before Goto have relied on the practice as a rich metaphor of communication and interrelated identity, especially between mother and child:

i am still sitting here trying to get a handle on my childhood  
pear tree but all i can hear in its 'ukiyoe' branches is the voice of my mother as  
she bends over my head delicately lifting  
tiny spoonfuls of wax from one pink ear then the other.  
how many languages have I lost losing my childhood pear tree...  
(Kiyooka 1987, 32)

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<sup>451</sup> The ears are cleaned with a mimikaki or ear pick [from mimi or "ear," and kaku meaning "to scratch"] a slim piece of bamboo with one spoon-shaped end covered in cotton.

<sup>452</sup> Lebra discusses the importance of bodily contact in the early socialization of the child. Physical proximity (although not, necessarily, physical contact) continues into adulthood through the activities of bathing and sleeping together, not always in same sex groups. Again, this does not generally involve sexual activity. Cooperative ear cleaning also continues in adulthood. Of the several Japanese I have surveyed informally about ear-cleaning, all of them recall their mothers or grandmothers cleaning their ears in childhood; some acknowledge that they and their friends or sisters still clean each other's ears.

Like Kiyooka, Goto treats ear cleaning as a physical metaphor of true hearing and the transmission of culture. Even after Naoe Obāchan leaves Nanton, she and her granddaughter Muriel (Murasaki) continue communicating wordlessly. With Naoe's departure Keiko also "leaves" the family by sinking into catatonia. As we saw previously, on Naoe's advice, Muriel eventually rouses her mother by feeding her Japanese food. When Muriel tells Naoe about the blossoming intimacy she is enjoying with her mother, Naoe directs her to ask Keiko to clean her ears. Although Muriel finds the thought "disgusting" (154), she does as her Obāchan says. As her mother begins, her actions evoke in Muriel the sensuous<sup>453</sup> reaction of warmth and utter relaxation that Naoe enjoyed during her contact with Keiko's body. However, Goto describes Muriel's intimacy with her mother in terms of a woman's first sexual intercourse:

Anticipatory shudder of fear or longing or I don't know what. The thrill of bamboo piercing fragile tissue, tearing through tender flesh, but the longing for the first touch, the unknown. [...] Scrapes against skin never touched before but so softly itchy I never noticed until now, thrilling to the danger of bamboo piercing ear-drum yet the incredible unbearable pleasure. 156-157

Naoe and Keiko enjoy a familiar proximity to ear cleaning that, in its foreignness, Muriel finds incomprehensible—until she experiences it. We see here the same critical distance that left Shimpo unable to understand or translate Imada Ito's journals.

In *Tsunami Years*, Hawaiian writer Juliet Kono also explores the maternal body and its functions as a metaphor for communication. Three times the mother in the poem "Tongue" cares for her child by placing her mouth on her child's sick and injured body. Like Goto, Kono pairs intimacy with images of food and eating: the mother sucks irritating dust out of her child's eye "as if she were sucking / out my eyeball, / the way she sucks out fish eyes to eat" (118). When a bee flies in the child's ear, the mother "secured me between her legs, / and came down

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<sup>453</sup> The sensual is certainly a significant component in the image of the bawdy Obāchan, if not in each deployment of it. For instance, "horny" as Naoe may be, the pleasure she finds in her hair washing sessions with Keiko has more to do with the clarity and strength of the sensuous generally than it does with sexuality or the sensual. "She rubs small powerful circles with her fingers and thumbs, the tension rising up, off my head, floating upward like angels to heaven" (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 42).

on my ear with her tongue [...] she retracted her tongue / with the bee curled on its tip" (119).

The third image challenges my idea of motherly responsibility:

Honeycomb of lungs  
 sticky with infection  
 held me to the sick bed for days.  
 She placed her mouth over my nose  
 and sucked the green muck as if she were slurping noodles.  
 Her tongue helped clear  
 my blocked nasal passages,  
 and heaved my wheezing out like bath water. (118)

Unlike the concrete practice of ear cleaning, Kono's images of a mother sucking out the poisons from her child's body may be based more on imagination than on any concrete cultural practice. If that is so, the "foreignness" and effectiveness of these images result more from their association with the familiarly disgusting than from their strangeness.<sup>454</sup> In both cases—the familiar intimacy of ear cleaning and the (possibly) strange intimacy of sucking out a child's infection—the body is the sight of unmediated communication.

*The Body Writing*

here

within this body  
 in this place at this time  
 I feel history's presence against my back  
 I feel it on the surface of my skin  
 seen by others and myself

it has hurt me confused me puzzled me  
 but it has also given me a sense of pride  
 calm and trust  
 in myself and more recently  
 in you (*Red Poems of Rain and Voice*)

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<sup>454</sup> Even if this is the case, Kono still depends on culturally specific images (for instance, the relish and animation in slurping and sucking at noodles and fish eyes) to emphasize the familiar.

When Goto writes of ear cleaning as a sexual experience, and a gateway to “really” hearing, she is creating a synaesthetic world of confounded senses. To a synaesthete, Muriel’s response to ear cleaning makes perfect sense:

[...] Mom scratch scratching so unbearably perfectly my teeth ache with the pleasure, a taste in my mouth like nectar. [...] After Mom cleaned my ears [...] I walked around in wonderment, tilting my head from side to side, so the sounds could trickle into my ears more fully. (157)

But this is Muriel’s “first touch” and she is “bemused” (157) by the delightful confusion she senses. Though Muriel and Naoe are, by this point, profoundly intimate, Muriel’s communication with Naoe still depends heavily on language. Muriel comes as a stranger to the world of communicating through the body, and the granddaughter needs Naoe Obāchan’s words (even the Japanese ones Muriel claims not to understand or speak) to interpret the other senses to her.

Looking more closely at the word “mimikaki” may help to explain the concept of tangible words that Muriel is trying to understand. Mimikaki comes from the noun *mimi* meaning “ear,” and *kaku*, the verb “to scratch.” Although they are represented by different characters, “to scratch” is pronounced just as the verb “to write” is. Thus, the inner surface of Muriel’s ear physically “hears” the words that Keiko “writes” with the mimikaki.

Tangible words also appear in *Itsuka*, in the “[a]udible calligraphy” (15) of crickets, and in the body fragments that Naomi and her friend Mitzi send each other in the mail:

She’d send wispy locks of her blonde-white hair and I’d send flat slabs of my coarse black taped to pieces of cardboard. We even exchanged fingernails and toenails. These bits of our bodies sailing through the mails were the ingredients of our magic. (14)

However, this is not the synaesthetic world of *Chorus of Mushrooms*. In Kogawa’s hands, the communicating body represents meaning; it is the medium of unedited communication. Echoing Naomi, Keiko “reads” the skin surrounding Naoe’s mouth (15). But in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the body is also its own message, able to bruise with the weight of angry words:

Ahh, words grow heavier every day, upon my bony back. My body folds over itself under the weight. My back groaning akiramete. Give it up. You crush your crinkled spine with the stones you drop from your mouth, hurl from your gut. (21)

Released from the silent hate of marriage to a weak man, when she grows old Naoe is compelled to speak—a “torrent of words” (21) streaming from her mouth, often unbidden.

*The Body Mythological*

this morning I caught my reflection  
 black hair in a short blunt cut  
 and my yukata<sup>455</sup> sleeves holding light  
 like shoji<sup>456</sup> screens (*Red Poems of Rain and Voice*)

In many ways Naoe, this once silent mother, appears the inverse of Kogawa’s archetypal wise woman:

Squatting here with the putty knife in her hand, she is every old woman in every hamlet in the world. You see her on a street corner in a village in southern France, in a black dress and black stockings. Or bent over stone steps in a Mexican mountain village. Everywhere the old woman stands as the true and rightful owner of the earth. (*Obasan* 15–16)

Goto makes the contrast obvious in her parody of Kogawa’s image:

You will see me on every street, on every corner, in the semitrailer that passes your truck. I’ll be that woman who picks up the dirty trays in the food fair at the zoo. I’ll be the systems analyst in the office building you will some day go to work in. I’ll be the teacher in the community centre when you go to learn the art of flower arrangement. You will pass me in Mac’s and see me in Woolco and step on my foot at the race tracks. (*Chorus of Mushrooms* 202)

Certainly, the grittiness and specificity of Goto’s image deflates the universalizing romanticism of Kogawa’s archetype. Yet, however disparate, both passages construct the image of the wise old woman.<sup>457</sup>

What is distinctive about Goto’s treatment of the image is that it acknowledges agency. Whereas Kogawa creates a visual metaphorical image in the third person, Goto’s image

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<sup>455</sup> informal cotton kimono, often used for sleeping

<sup>456</sup> a sliding door or screen made of translucent paper glued to a wooden lattice

emerges in a conversation between social actors—the co-construction of cultural symbols that Geertz (1973) imagined.<sup>458</sup> The agency in this passage gains significance in relation to Keiko's mis-interpretation of her mother's sexual behaviour, an incident I discuss below. On a larger scale, this conversational construction of cultural symbols models the implied expectations Goto (1997) has of researchers:

(The bones of my family thrown on a growing heap called culture. Who made the pile? Who named it? The desire for cartilage, the bend and give beneath fingertips, tongue.) (15–16; parentheses in original)

Once again, the question of who constructs and names cultures is as important as the meanings represented. Interpretations imposed from outside will probably persist: Oikawa (1992) has acknowledged, for instance, that she “cannot stop white people from writing about people of Colour” (107). But a pragmatic response to such interpretations might be to accept that cultural critique and histories written from the outside are translations of a culture that may be read as yet another story:

How translation is always subject to indifference.  
How the I is mistaken for another  
and consonants are swallowed without sound. (Goto, “Anatomy,” 15–16)

Goto speaks of two contiguous facets here: the lost and found of translation. Translation replaces the “original” text with a “new” meaning, and a second author (I) appears; the translator “tidies things up by cutting and therefore ‘improves’” the original story.<sup>459</sup> We speak with clichéd certainty about what has been “lost in the translation” because we have become familiar with that kind of ingestion:

The procedures of a language consumed

<sup>457</sup> In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Naoe Obāchan speaks these words as part of her farewell advice to the trickster figure with whom she has been travelling.

<sup>458</sup> “The whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is, as I have said, to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them” (24).

<sup>459</sup> This quotation is from Seidensticker's translation of *The Tale of Genji*, the volume that Goto cites in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Here Seidensticker is commenting on Waley's translation of Shikibu's work, concurring with Waley's “impatience with clothes and meals and ceremonies” (xiv).

without being tasted. ("Anatomy" 15–16)

Translation may provide us with a new story, but only by diminishing the stories that came before. In *Chorus of Mushrooms* Goto offers a translation abundant with taste and pleasure, but one that we have to work for. Naoe names Muriel "Murasaki" after, it seems, Murasaki Shikibu, the probable author of *The Tale of Genji*. Japanese is "foreign" to Muriel at the point where she asks her Obachan, why "Murasaki"? "Anta ga jibun de imi o sagashite chiyodai," (17) replies Naoe, "please search for the meaning yourself."

*The Body Belonging*

I am Japanese Canadian            it is true  
 but as I have said                so many times before  
 I am also a farm kid  
 still have dreams of being a pool shark  
 feel a close connection to the prairies  
 the Rockies  
 and to rue St. Laurent

you cannot define me            only  
 by the colour of my skin  
 or by the country of my Grandparents' birth (*Red Poems of Rain and Voice*)

As a metaphor of community, the body becomes an expression of belonging and inclusion. *Come Spring* describes Haruko Okano's search for belonging as an attempt to find a connection to the Nikkei community "through" her family (10). Contrasting Kiyooka's reaching back to history through her father's memories, this search involves examining archival material and inquiring of other Nikkei after a family that is gone. While Okano's historical exercise of investigation provides evidence of her history, she depends on the evidence only as elements in a process that leads her to knowledge of her "real" history as a Canadian Nikkei:

I had personal, intimate human history. It wasn't a case number. It wasn't statistics. My family history was the real history of actual people. Now, I know I belong here. (10)

Coming to this knowledge of her history has been, for Okano, a process of identification and naming: the first of her family to arrive in Canada, the date of arrival, occupation, residency—all as a means of knowing her people and tracing the pathways of their mingled existence. “This country, this land has my own life blood invested in it. I belong here” (10).

Kogawa’s poetics also depend on the body as a metaphor of community. Naomi describes happy evenings in the bathhouse at Slocan:

The bath is a place of deep bone warmth and rest. It is always filled with a slow steamy chatter from women and girls and babies. It smells of wet cloth and wet wood and wet skin. We are one flesh, one family, washing each other or submerged in the hot water, half awake, half asleep. (*Obasan* 160–61)

Through this multi-layered metaphor, divisions between individuals become indistinct. Free of clothing, their flesh is joined by the water of the ofuro, this most “Japanese” symbol of cleansing and purity<sup>460</sup> that also, for this Christian family, evokes the purifying waters of baptism which render the individual one with Christ and one with the body of Christians. Because this is the women’s side of the bathhouse, we are also reminded of the ultimate union of the amniotic bath. Furthermore, as we saw in Goto’s treatment of pleasurable eating together, the shared bath removes even the distinction between the inanimate and the living—wet wood, wet cloth and skin. Yet just as the thing which obscures the outlines of the bathers is at once water and steam, the women retain their individual selves, washing each other, chatting.

The exclusion defined by the lines of inclusion is, of course, also figured in Kogawa’s metaphors of the body. In her poem, “Glances,” the body bears the documentary evidence of belonging. The narrator arrives in Japan to find that eyes are “fierce” and “fearful” spotlights trained on the cultural faux pas of the Nikkei visitor, and on the symbols of Japanese culture that exclude her: the scars from moxibustion,<sup>461</sup> “stomach ulcers and suicide” (*A Choice of Dreams*

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<sup>460</sup> For discussion of the bath as a symbol of moral and physical purity, see Clark (1994) and Ohnuki-Tierney (1984).

<sup>461</sup> Moxibustion is a treatment commonly used in Japanese *kanpō*, or “traditional” (that is non-biomedical) Japanese medicine. The practitioner burns small cones of dried mugwort leaves on the body, generally to treat pain and paralysis (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984, 98–99).

17). Similarly, in "Dwarf Trees," both male and female Japanese bodies are "stunted," "twisted," and "pruned" by what the narrator interprets as cultural constrictions on their behaviour. Yet a sense of the metaphor's relativity emerges in *Itsuka* when we read that it is in contrast with Canadian Nikkei, not Japanese, that Hawaiian Nikkei seem "as unbent as free-standing trees" (*Itsuka* 92). This time, it is the loss of culture, rather than its imposition, that diminishes Nikkei: "unlike us crippled bonsai in Canada, they've retained community here" (92).

The destruction of community is implicit even in the amniotic bliss of the bathhouse in Slocan. After all, the "Slocan" Nikkei built the bathhouse because they were forced to leave Vancouver. The scene in Slocan also evokes the bath Naomi shared with her Obāchan in Vancouver, now both memories of a lost paradisiacal belonging (48–49). More bodily evidence of the disappearing community appears in Naomi's description of her role at the death of another family member:

I'm an undertaker disembowelling and embalming a still-breathing body, removing heart, limbs, life-blood, all the arteries, memories that keep me connected to the world, transforming this comatose little family into a corpse. (*Itsuka* 75)

This account of the disintegrating cultural body resembles, but should not be confused with, the disappearance of the physical body in death.

Shortly after Aunt Emily's description of Hawaiian Nikkei, Naomi recounts a dream in which she disappears from the realm of the physical:

The instant I look down, I know it's happening. I've passed the boundary. My limbs—legs—arms—are gone. There's nothing left to see or touch, yet I find myself plummeting, further, into the infinitesimal. (93)

Here Kogawa uses the metaphor of the (disappearing) body as a passageway into the presymbolic, where "I, the thought and the person, am one, indivisibly, consciously and utterly myself" (93). This is also the unthinkable place of utter communion where, because there is no separation,

[t]here is no death. There is no disappearance, no finality in the drift downstream. Annihilation is not possible. Individual consciousness cannot be extinguished. So that's what death is. (94)

Thus, in Kogawa's poetics, the death of the body is qualitatively different from the body of death. The physical destruction that accompanies the death of the body signals the end of physical existence and is a fruitful metaphor for the physical disintegration of community. Conversely, the body of death is an imaginative sphere in which one overcomes the separation of tangible and intangible in exchange for a third realm of the utterly unified. For this reason, Kogawa's writing is replete with images of the body as community and perfect communication.

The biaxial nature of the body in death means that, in Kogawa's writing, the body holds both the greatest threat and the surest promise for community as a whole, and for individual community members. Naomi "fear[s] touch as much as the inability to touch" (*Itsuka* 2). She runs from personal intimacy as desperately as she runs from identity with the Nikkei community, describing her emotionally arid state as a coma from which she must be revived (3). In Toronto at Aunt Emily's behest, Naomi finds herself at the distal end of a chain of exile from her past selves and communities. As young Naomi awoke to her desire, Pastor Jim was there to translate that desire into "the sins of the flesh." Her body now carries a vast accumulation of desire from which the middle-aged Naomi still flees. Naomi has succeeded at repressing her desire (for both belonging and the release of passion) to the point where she suffers the somatization of the exiled, by which the shattered body of the foreigner bears the marks of repression (Kristeva 1991, 31).

My abominable abdomen. Something vast as childhood lies hidden in the belly's wars. There's a rage whose name has been forgotten.[...] Pastor Jim's message of hell probably spread within me a fear of life. (*Itsuka* 119)

Naomi's body is, quite literally, so ravaged by desire that even Father Cedric's gentle, ministerial courting sends her fleeing to her bed in pain.

In her poem, "the portrait" [sic], Noriko Oka writes of another bathhouse scene that invites, rather than refuses, a community of desire:

I have in my room  
     a picture  
 Japanese womyn in a bath  
 imagine: steam

permeates these four walls

one womyn  
yes, her back is always turned /

want to run

my hand slowly  
down the fine curves of her spine.  
another, breast-deep in water  
hair in a bundle  
watches her own reflection.  
other misty shadows drift  
in the corners.

yearning

to join these womyn  
to sweat profusely among them  
washing each other's back [...] (105)

We have seen that Nikkei women writers depend on food and the body as metaphors of identity. Yet however much the images in this portrait represent an idea of belonging, or an ironic comment on conventional notions of purity, they also direct our thoughts to actual bodies. The writing releases or returns repressed desire by "embodying" it in the exile.

When reading what Nikkei women write, there may be a temptation either to over-interpret or overlook the desire on the page. Any desire is a product of the subject's particular context. However, since texts by marginalized writers are so often read exclusively as history or as sociological evidence of ethnicity, overt connections between desire and political context can be imagined where there is none. On the other hand, connections that writers make between the larger context and personal desire may be misinterpreted or rejected as "self-indulgent," especially by privileged readers (Lim 1990). A recent theoretical challenge is the growing body of writing around lesbian and bi-sexual identities. Historians and theorists of Asian North American writing have only recently been addressing women's transgressive sexualities.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Less than a decade ago, Shirley Geok-lin Lim observed, "Why they [Asian women] write is a mystery because their readers are still marvelling at the fact that they write at all [. . .]" (1990, 153). As I said above, Nikkei women have been writing in private all along, but the published textual self really only began circulating in 1980, the year *Obasan* was published. When writers from the dominant culture began questioning the autonomous self, marginalized writers were just constructing her. Transgressive sexuality was a much later creation, expressed at a greater cost by women who were already marginalized by race and gender:  
And nights when you think you're dying

Thus, there is still a danger that this emergent writing will be considered idiosyncratic, an “alternate” view too easily marginalized again.<sup>463</sup>

One way to avoid this danger is to heed the theoretical register within the fiction, poems, short stories, and essays by lesbian writers. In “Maiden Voyage: Excursion Into Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America,” Dana Takagi counsels scholars not to consider that the theoretical job has been done once the voices of lesbian writers have been added to the body of Asian American literature: “[...] the topic of sexualities ought to be envisioned as a means, not an end to theorizing about the Asian American experience” (10). Takagi’s advice evokes Lacan’s view that *jouissance* is not an end point in the search for identity. However, by making multiple sexualities relevant to the whole of Asian American experience, Takagi is not only emphasizing the importance of process, but insisting on the significance of identities that have been marginalized by previous critical approaches.

Takagi’s advice parallels the concern that women’s experiences be added to history as a compensatory act, and as part of the process of changing how history is regarded, recorded, and interpreted. As Cixous exhorted, we must not only write, but “write through” women’s bodies (256).

I mean, if I found my body, if I were back in it, I might not write. I might not have to, I might actually be happy (laughter) and I’m not. (Kogawa 1995, 29)

Here Kogawa is responding to Karlyn Koh’s query about whether she sees writing as a way of “reclaiming the body” (29). Kogawa quips that she is denying her body just then because “it’s a terrible mess” (29). Without dismissing the interviewer’s question, Kogawa acknowledges the way the material (aching, aging, pregnant, hungry, fit, tired) body insinuates itself in writing

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It’s the end of the world and you’re going insane  
 And there are words for this  
 Jap, bitch, chink, dyke (T. Kobayashi 15)

<sup>463</sup> Returning to Mochizuki’s reflections, we see that the denial of homosexual practice within the Nikkei community makes the textual exploration of homosexualities a risky venture: “Within the JC [Japanese Canadian] community, pressures are present which deny my existence. They are subtle but destructive all the same. ‘Japanese and gay? Not possible. Who ever heard of that?’

regardless of academic intention. That is, the body is, in a sense, pre-eminent; “present” or “absent,” the body is always being written. What can be reclaimed in a transformative piece of writing, then, is the writer’s lost union with a body.

This is not to say that the union of the material body and the intangible self is a condition of transformative writing. The writer’s separation from her body and its representations is, in itself, textually productive.<sup>464</sup> By testifying to a personal and/or communal history of division between the experienced self and the represented self, the complex self emerges. In fact, the body of Nikkei women’s writing would be slight without textual investigations into the exclusion and warping of the body by stereotypical representations of race, beauty, gender, sexuality, and class. From this historical place of denial, Nikkei women have constructed selves that depend on the body as a means of knowing and communicating.

### *The Body Controlled*

you sound surprised  
 that I would fold        these origami cranes  
 and use them in my work  
 since they        signify something ‘Japanese’  
 (*Red Poems of Rain and Voice*)

Tamai Kobayashi speaks of the need for other ways of telling a life in her poem, “for renee” [sic].<sup>465</sup> In the poem, memories of childhood plenitude and safety—“echoes of the first songs / and stories in this exile’s heart”—form the background to both sexual intimacy and the utter exclusion created by attacks based on perceptions of race and sexuality. This was a time

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Under such constraints it becomes almost impossible for a Japanese person to explore sexuality issues” (Mochizuki, 13).

<sup>464</sup> Among many possible readings, *Obasan* may be read as a textual exploration of the mother’s absent body.

<sup>465</sup> Each of Tamai Kobayashi’s poems is from *All Names Spoken*.

with the mother/lover when words were unnecessary and silence was “deep with dreams,” when speaking was an act of looking, touching, and remembering:

remembering the sound of her voice  
 as she whispers your name  
 the shape of her hand  
 remembering her touch  
 against the streets of fear  
 and mornings  
 gazing at her  
 in sleep  
 with the simple joy  
 of watching her breathe

The poem vaults from a time and place where communication does not depend on utterance, to “the streets of fear” where the need for language attacks comfortable, sufficient silence:

Remembering the skinheads down on yonge  
 With their white skin sneers and swastikas  
 And nights when you think you're dying  
 It's the end of the world and you're going insane

And there are words for this  
 Jap, bitch, chink, dyke

Kobayashi acknowledges that the story of exile in this place can only be told with a language of desire:

you see we must have words for this  
 slipping by  
 as a dream, desire

to awaken in her eyes (15)

The shape of this language is not simply counter-discursive. These words defend against the violence of language by (re)collecting that first plenitude—”echoes of the first songs / and

stories [...] slipping by / as distant as a dream”—with the second—the memory of it. Merging the concrete past with its present traces gives form to desire in the present.

The naming of self through the naming of desire is central to Kobayashi's poetry, as is the coupling of the tangible with the intangible. In “for lola” [sic] (18), the narrator goes to Michigan for the feel of the soil on her feet, and the sight of “the long black braid / against brown skin.” But it is also in the poem that experience is given a name: “you are chinese / we are lesbians.” Similarly, experience that has been denied is named in “for mona” [sic], a poem that might be read as a response to Takata's claim that the sansei were “unscathed by the ordeal” of internment (159):

internment  
 your past  
 the camps still haunt you  
 sansei daughter  
 fear the enemy  
 the outcast  
 ourselves (20)

Many effects of the internment on the Nikkei community have been identified and documented, especially as an integral part of the campaign for redress. However, the effects of the event and its legacy on the bodies of women are less well known. Kogawa introduces this segment of internment history in *Obasan*. In a journal of letters addressed to her elder sister (Nesan), Aunt Emily writes on 2 March 1942:

And the horrors that some of the young girls are facing—outraged by men in uniform. You wouldn't believe it, Nesan. You have to be right here in the middle of it to really know. The men are afraid to go and leave their wives behind. (87)

Although *Obasan* is a historical novel, the bulk of Emily's “diaries” are rewritten excerpts from Muriel Kitagawa's papers. In a letter from Kitagawa to her brother Wes, dated the same day, Kitagawa writes:

And the horrors that some young girls have already faced. . . outraged by men in uniform... in the hospital... hysterical. Oh we are fair prey for the wolves in democratic clothing. Can you wonder the men are afraid to leave us behind and won't go unless their women go with them? (*This is My Own* 91)

Fictionalized by Kogawa, reprinted by Miki, Kitagawa's account explains how Canadian military authorities disciplined the Nikkei community by usurping what were held to be men's rights to Nikkei women's bodies.

The horror, "outrage." and hysteria cannot be what Takata means by being "unscathed" by the internment. Nor can this: "Sachiko was sent to the beet fields, worked as a domestic and was raped" (*Itsuka* 168). Nor this:

Several days later a Mounted Police car draws up in front of Yoko-san's house. Mr. Yoko is led by the policeman. They get quietly into the car and drive away. No one comes out of his house to say good-bye. That night father hears at the bath-house that Mr. Yoko attacked the young girl, and she has just given birth to a child right in the house. We are so surprised for she did not look pregnant.

A month later, I see the girl again. She sits silently in front of the house. She does not see us any more. Her eyes are dead behind her round glasses. She just sits there and ignores the baby. Her mother tends it as if it were her own. I see the baby all wrapped up and I feel sad. The girl seems so alone. (Takashima 82)

As Takashima describes it, this internment episode concerns experience that is not empirically verifiable: the splintering of desire within a female self that has internalized society's antipathy towards it. With their power already limited by the racist structures of the larger society, Nikkei men are further emasculated by the internment. They assert the remnants of their power by facilitating its complete exercise within these constraints through absolute control over female sexuality.<sup>466</sup> Before the unnamed "girl" is raped by her father, Shizuye's father dismisses his wife's and daughters' mistrust of the man as needless worry about a harmless

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<sup>466</sup> For a discussion of the creation of docile bodies through internment, see Nakagawa (1992). Nakagawa's argument may be extended to address the gender specific aspects of this process, and the manner in which mechanics of social control within the Nikkei community were also affected by the disciplinary act of internment.

man, essentially renaming women's realities to be consonant with his desire (82). The rape is publicized to the men at the bathhouse, where they are submerged "as one flesh" in the steamy, purifying water.

Rather than drawing the child into communion, communal knowledge of the act isolates her and redefines her position in the family. The neighbours do not see the girl again for a month, at which time Mrs. Yoko complies with the redefinition of her own role by caring for her daughter's baby as if it were her child. The rape also invalidates female experience through a symbolic murder: "the girl" is left for "dead" behind her eyeglasses. Numb to the maternal instincts that "ought" to blossom in every Nikkei woman, the terrible ambiguity of the girl's self cannot be accommodated by the conventional image of the mothering Nikkei woman.

We might interpret this passage from *A Child in Prison Camp* as another metaphorical representation of internment as the rape of the Nikkei community. But knowing (or even not knowing) that Takashima's prose poem is, like *Obasan*, based on historical events, we cannot only swallow in metaphor the force of this alienating assault on the real (interned) body.

such irony

to be forced to leave  
during the spring

when sakura blossoms

give faint drifts      of incense<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> Baco Ohama, *CHIRASHI stories from the garden* [sic]. Vancouver: Baco Ohama, 1997, np; *sakura* are cherry blossoms.

One level of situational irony in the timing of the internment is, perhaps, obvious: to be uprooted forcefully in spring signaled death for the Nikkei community just at the time of new life. Responding to this death, Ohama depends on the metaphor of the “scattered” [chirashi] garden as a way of creating a life, and as a means of recollecting, understanding, and telling the story of that life. For Asayo Obāchan [Ohama’s grandmother], to be flung out of Vancouver just as the short-lived sakura were falling to the ground was also to be scattered like the poppy seeds she flings into her chirashi garden. A second irony, then, is that being forced out of the “garden”<sup>468</sup> in spring can actually yield growth; like the timing for the planting of perennials or the “forcing” of bulbs, the death of winter is also a time of life. Thus, out of this scattered garden Ohama is able to recover, understand, and tell parts of a life’s story.

Before interpreting “the girl’s” rape metaphorically, then, we need to be mindful of the ironies informing that idea. One reason Nikkei women writers may incorporate rape as a metaphor of the internment is that the narrating of its figurative influence is actually a safe way of testifying to its concrete reality. Understanding rape as one effect of disciplinary social control intensifies the narrative significance of the metaphor. But interpreting rape as a metaphor for community experience also relieves individual women of the weight of personal testimony. “Disguised” as the representation of a communal burden, rape can be testified to without forcing any one individual to carry the responsibility and solitude of bearing witness.<sup>469</sup> Until Nikkei writers are comfortable with the strength of the communities they have narratively constructed and reclaimed, the idea of sexual impropriety within the community, like the rape of

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<sup>468</sup> In *Obasan*, Naomi recalls Vancouver as a lost Eden (49–53).

<sup>469</sup> “Since the testimony cannot be simply relayed, repeated, or reported by another without thereby losing its function as a testimony, the burden of the witness—in spite of his or her alignment with other witnesses—is a radically unique, non interchangeable, and solitary burden” (Felman 1995, 15).

this young girl, will probably still be treated as rare and idiosyncratic—until they resist other assaults “endless and too real.”<sup>470</sup>

*The Body Disorderly*

Obachan stood	facing the man she was to marry looked at him thought about her future and refused
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(CHIRASHI    *stories from the garden*)

In *Mothertalk*, Kiyooka does treat the violation of sexual norms as a significant part of the text and of community life, even for the issei women who emerge with such propriety in most Nikkei texts. Kiyooka's treatment covers three aspects of sexual expression: 1) prostitution as an economic necessity; 2) romantic sex; and 3) sexual humour. The first category occupies the balance of Kiyooka's writing on sex.

While prostitution is an acknowledged part of Nikkei history, especially in the early days of the community in Canada, textual treatment of it has been minimal, concerned with reporting the fact of prostitution as uncommon and illicit:

This [interior British Columbia] was one region of Canada where Japanese women appeared (in 1890) as early as the men, but sadly; they were there for illicit purposes, with some of the men as their procurers. Two bordellos in Nelson boasted the names “Japanese House” and “Tokyo House.” (Takata 1983, 97)

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<sup>470</sup> T. Kobayashi 1992, 17.

To this account, Takata adds a photograph of several women and two young girls standing on the porch of a house with the pejorative caption: “‘Ladies’ of Cranbrook pose with young visitors from a nearby settlement” (98). He does not provide details of their lives, nor does he discuss to what degree their communities ostracized these women.<sup>471</sup> Ayukawa (1995) acknowledges that being sold into prostitution was “undoubtedly quite different” (114) from choosing prostitution as an alternative to domestic violence or the poverty of widowhood. However, she does consider prostitution as a valid option for survival, especially given the racist exclusions of the larger Canadian society.

Ayukawa describes Mrs. Tanaka-Goto, a picture bride who left her husband to open a bawdy house, as “[o]ne of the most colourful of these rebels” (115). “Colourful” as she may find Tanaka-Goto’s rebellion, Ayukawa is not suggesting that prostitution was a happy alternative to life as a picture bride, nor that prostitution freed Nikkei women from a gendered existence. In fact, after Mr. Goto paid for his estranged wife’s hospital treatment for venereal disease, she returned to him long enough to work off her debt by cooking and doing laundry for his railroad crew. Perhaps Tanaka-Goto’s most blatant resistance was her refusal to be interned. For this act, Tanaka-Goto spent several months in Oakalla jail before she was ultimately “shipped off” (116) to Greenwood. Ayukawa analyzes women’s resistance to normative behaviour by clarifying intentions. Thus, women who engage in non-traditional behaviour in order to sustain traditional structures cannot be said to challenge the gendered expectations of society. To qualify as resistant or subversive, behaviour must displace women from their position within the normative structure. From Ayukawa’s theoretical standpoint, while Imada Ito’s complete participation in non-traditional occupations is impressive, it is not, like Mrs. Tanaka-Goto’s actions, subversive enough to qualify as transformative.

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<sup>471</sup> M. Nakano (1990) says that American Nikkei women who worked as prostitutes were “shunned” by their communities and targeted by the press as an “immoral” influence (23). Of course, communities still practice shunning as a way of marginalizing and, therefore, denying that immorality is part of the fabric of any community. Michele Kanshiro-Christiansen recalls her grief at the death of a friend, Carol, also a prostitute: My mother was gonna give me

Like Tanaka-Goto, Hana Murata continued to create for herself a social position independent of the web of official practices and policies intended to control Nikkei social reality. After the government ordered Nikkei to leave the protected area, Murata “held out” (Makabe 85) as long as she could, arriving in Slocan in October of 1942. Impatient with being idle,<sup>472</sup> Murata then left the camp for Toronto where she applied for employment at the exclusive Holt Renfrew store.

The personnel manager said ‘Don’t you know there’s a war on?’ and I said ‘I know, but the war doesn’t have anything to do with me. All I want is a job,’ but they wouldn’t hire me. I kept insisting, and at last the boss phoned and sent for me, and said he’d hire anybody, any nationality, as long as they wanted to work. (Makabe 87–88)

But Murata’s independence and pragmatism marginalized her within dominant Canadian and Nikkei society. Her refusal to submit to the image of the Meiji woman left her with many lonely years in Vancouver, few friends, and mostly white customers. In Slocan she was critical of the “loafing” and “fighting” among her fellow Nikkei, and found herself “getting into silly arguments”(86). Yet in Toronto she was the only Nikkei employee at Holt Renfrew, and met with racism from whites who were unused to Nikkei and therefore, she recalls, “afraid” (87).

In *Mothertalk*, Kiyooka frankly discusses the economic necessity of prostitution. According to Kiyooka, although many issei will not discuss it now, in the past—especially during the depression on the prairies—prostitution was as accepted by Nikkei communities as it was necessary. Kiyooka’s own familiarity with the topic is evident in her willingness to identify one of the women in her family photograph album:

The woman beside her is from Kagoshima. We all knew she made extra money seducing all sorts of men in the back room of her barber shop but we didn’t make a big deal out of it. I mean things were really hard and everybody did what they had to survive. (103-105)

Kiyooka specifies the historical context of this perceived economic necessity at various stages of settlement in North and South America. In addition to the hardships of the 1930s, Kiyooka

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valiums, here take a valium, it’ll make you feel better. But I just cried harder. My mother couldn’t understand. To her, hookers aren’t real people. It’s like they’re disposable” (141).

<sup>472</sup> Murata was a dressmaker. Because of the economic hardship of the uprooting and internment few Nikkei women had money for new dresses, and Murata found herself unemployed.

cites poverty in Meiji Japan, and Canada's immigration policy as two factors that contributed to the "need" for prostitutes among recent immigrants to Canada. Kiyooka also describes the structural framework of bawdy house ownership that sustained prostitution in the Nikkei and white communities (72). Although Kiyooka focuses most of her discussion on prostitution among settlers, she also comments on the economic significance of prostitution in Japan, and in Canada today. Her discussion addresses harmful effects of the sex trade on women's spiritual and physical selves, such as the scars women bear from venereal disease and the violence that society may not condone. But Kiyooka also treats the topic of sexual exploitation among Nikkei broadly enough that a complex picture emerges of both the trade and the women on whom it depends.

What I understand from Kiyooka's interpretation is that the systemic victimization of (in this case) women through prostitution may be exploited by the individuals it targets. That is, women engaged in prostitution may subvert the system that exploits them in such a way that they reclaim the agency that the system is designed to destroy. Kiyooka tells of one good friend who, after being tricked into prostitution, eventually saved enough money to escape:

She wanted to earn her keep in a respectable way but try as she might she couldn't find any housework so she returned to prostitution and in the end she became the madam of her own house. She used to go to the pool hall and take on one of the locals and whip his pants off. (73)

In addition to beating men at their own game, reclaiming agency sometimes included finding love in spite of a scarred past. The woman mentioned above finally exchanged prostitution for marriage, after which: "Everyone noted how she got younger and had her hair dyed red" (73).

At several points in *Mothertalk* Kiyooka blurs the lines between prostitution, marriage, and romance in such a way that the three categories seem less well defined than they have historically been represented. One such instance occurs in Kiyooka's narration of her return trip to Canada following the stay in Japan with her children George and Mariko. On the boat

Kiyooka meets a “nice-looking guy from Osaka” who is travelling to California (68). The two chat briefly before the young man warns Kiyooka to be careful that she is not sold into prostitution.

O no, that won't happen to me. I have a husband waiting for me at the other end, I said, as if saying so could hide my feelings. O I felt my heart beating for this brash young guy in a way I never felt for Papa. [...] There was no doubt in my mind that we found each other attractive but that was it. O there were other men who were fond of me and asked for my hand but none of them equalled this three-week boat romance. (68)

Kiyooka sets the complicated boundaries of her attraction in terms of *honne* and *tatemae*: admitting she is legally bound to someone (*tatemae*) does not diminish the strength of her attraction (*honne*), yet that attraction has no bearing on the force of her legal commitment. Having the young man broach the topic of prostitution casts an illicit air about the potential union. However, because Kiyooka's sexual attraction and legal commitment are conceptually separate or compartmentalized she can safely (that is morally) satisfy her desire without compromising her marriage; “You know,” she continues, “when a Meiji man and woman got married it was for keeps” (68). It may have been through their acceptance of the social organization of *honne* and *tatemae* that many of Kiyooka's *issei* contemporaries integrated prostitution into the social life of their communities. While this integration did not cause them to reconceptualize prostitution as a moral activity, assigning it to the realm of the private and unspoken may be as much a reason for its absence from written history as is the shame and immorality attached to it.

Kiyooka also sprinkles her text liberally with a bawdy humour that distinguishes it from other writing by *issei* women. Kiyooka incorporates sexual joking as a narrative technique and as a way of deflating social tension. She recalls counselling many young picture brides who were disappointed dockside at the sight of their future husbands. One such incident involved a woman of eighteen who decided on the spot that she could have no future with a husband twenty years her senior. Kiyooka recalls soothing the young woman by pointing out that “she had nothing to lose but her virginity” (52). Kiyooka relates another story in which she told one

man that she knew all about the leisure activities of the fishermen who visited their town, namely drinking and visiting prostitutes. Challenged by the man to identify her source she recalls, "I told him how it [the source] came home every night in the guise of a drunken husband who gambled all night with the guys and nearly lost his shirt not to mention his penis" (38).

Kiyooka's humour and forthrightness distinguish her (auto)biography and, therefore the story of her self from among other issei women writers.<sup>473</sup> Her idiosyncratic treatment of sexuality is consistent with the non-stereotypical image we have of her in the text. Fitter in every way than her weak, "rotten egg" (39) brother to be their father's heir, Kiyooka sustains the image of herself as a true samurai throughout *Mothertalk*.<sup>474</sup> Her sexual banter usually concerns the sexual foibles of men and is generally addressed to a man. As her father's treatment of the "tomboy" (21) child does, this narrative technique also removes Kiyooka from the stereotypical realm of issei women. Her stories grant her access to the community of men, eliciting smiles and chuckles from them that draw Kiyooka into fellowship. Kiyooka recalls the reaction of the "old guy" on hearing the witticism about her husband's penis: "He was so happy that someone still remembered those days he bawled his head off. We agreed to meet again but he never came by. All of us Issei are dying off like summer flies" (38).

### *The Bawdy Obachan*

She had flowers of all kinds. Spread all over the place. She liked it disorganized. Auntie Yae

It was like wild, eh? Mom

Scattered all over. That's what made it interesting. Auntie Yae

(*CHIRASHI stories from the garden*)

The advancing age of the pre-war issei<sup>475</sup> may be another reason that Nikkei women writers are challenging the stereotype of the Meiji woman with the image of the bawdy

<sup>473</sup> However, remembering that this text has multiple authors, any connection we make between it and Kiyooka herself must remain heavily qualified.

<sup>474</sup> "Because my brother didn't have the physical strength my father taught me [martial arts]. If I were a man I wouldn't be here in Canada. I would have succeeded him. But what could I do? I'm a woman" (Kiyooka 1997, 20–21).

<sup>475</sup> Each first generation of immigrants is, in the strictest sense, "issei." However, among Nikkei writers and other community members, the term "issei" has come to signify those Nikkei

Obāchan. Repeating the pattern of visiting the grandparents' "homeland" as a way of revisiting one's roots, Baco Ohama visits Japan only to find her "Japanese" identity challenged:

lost in Japan

I ask directions from a businessman

and am rudely questioned why I cannot speak Japanese

[...] <sup>476</sup>

my lack of nihongo

meant I remained lost

Ohama returns to Canada and begins learning Japanese as a way of communicating with her Obāchan. What she discovers is that coming to the language actually involves a process of "coming back" (n.p.) to something that is "both foreign and familiar" (n.p.). The communication she desires entails a body of history known to her Obāchan, but, because they cannot comfortably communicate verbally, just out of Ohama's reach. As she struggles to learn Japanese, language articulates Ohama's connection to that history and to Obāchan, who, at ninety-nine is just now "a garden in full bloom" (n.p.). As writers discover the actual vigour of

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pioneers who came to Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries. Thus, new post-war immigrants are referred to as shin-ijusha or shin-issei.

<sup>476</sup> As I said above, space is a textual element in Ohama's writing. What has been left out of this quotation is a large expanse of blank space on the page, suggestive of the lack or absence Ohama confronts in Japan. "Nihongo" refers to the Japanese language. Ohama does not italicize "Japanese" words.

issei grandmothers,<sup>477</sup> images that once added metaphorical zip to discourses of identity gain new power from their concrete certainty.

The bawdy Obāchan has been appearing in the larger body of American Nikkei writing for several years now. In her novel, *The Floating World*, Kadohata (1989) introduced the nasty, selfish, cigar-smoking, and—above all—sexy “Obāsan.”<sup>478</sup> Assigned to accompany her grandmother on her many walks “just in case” (10), Olivia finds her life intertwined with this “tormentor” (3) who interrupts the physical abuse of her granddaughter with the briefest of kindnesses. In search of work, Olivia’s family travels about the country, in what Obāsan calls the ukiyo<sup>479</sup> or “floating world.” As Cynthia explains, ukiyo is the name given to Japan’s “water” (5) or sex trade, but also refers to the ambiguities brought on by change. The ukiyo is an apt image of the world occupied by a grandmother and granddaughter who transmit (sexual) knowledge in a process of physical merging and parting.<sup>480</sup>

Sylvia Watanabe (1992) presents a milder version of the bawdy Obāchan in her short story “Anchorage.” In this story, Maui’s Lahaina coast is yielding to developers, and Hana must leave Hawaii for a teaching job in Alaska. This time the bawdy Obāchan is Hana’s “Little Grandma” who turns out to be one of a pair of thieves who have been stealing underwear from

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<sup>477</sup> This statement is ironic because the young women are “discovering” something that has existed for decades. Also, although all issei women are not grandmothers, according to the Meiji standards they are seen as upholding, they must be.

<sup>478</sup> Olivia’s use of the formal “Obāsan” (instead of “Obāchan”) to signify her own grandmother is consistent with the ambivalence of their relationship.

<sup>479</sup> The root word is *uku*, meaning to float.

<sup>480</sup> Unlike the silently submissive “Meiji woman, Obāsan insists on telling her history to Olivia, even if it means running after her and shouting, “My first husband and I had sex in a public bathroom!” (6). Olivia’s parents try to shield their daughter from the sexual side of Obāsan; when they needed to leave their children for a time, they refused Obāsan’s offer of help because, according to Olivia, Obāsan’s third husband had just died and she was living with her “boyfriend” (16).

Regardless of her parents’ efforts and her own fear of Obāsan, Olivia models her life after her grandmother, choosing the bathroom floor as the location for her first sexual encounter, and coming to knowledge of herself by exploring her body.

neighbourhood clotheslines late at night. When caught, Little Grandma protests that the crime's instigator was actually her son (Hana's father), who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. She explains how, in the face of his determination—and thinking that the underwear would make a lovely quilt depicting the town's history—she continued to accompany her son in search of archival material. Here, Watanabe relies on the bawdy Obāchan to emphasize the legitimacy of intimacy as an expression of history.<sup>481</sup>

The bawdy Obāchan has appeared more recently in the writing of Canadian Nikkei writers, especially in Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*. As she narrates the story, Naoe Obāchan is “eighty-five years old and horny as a musk-drenched cat” (39). She spends the long, dusty Alberta days planted on a wooden chair in the hallway of her daughter's house, watching the comings and goings around her, muttering, cursing, shouting, indulging whichever of her body's desires she might. Obāchan's daughter Keiko considers each of these behaviours as evidence of her mother's growing senility, but is particularly angered when she discovers her mother about to masturbate:

This muttering, old, lamb-haired Obachan wearing elastic-waisted polyester pants, brown collarless shirt with pink flowers, grey cardigan and heel imprinted slippers. Just pulling out the waistband with one quavering hand and the other just about to slip into cotton briefs, toying with the idea of— (39)

The scene reverses the configurations of the typical discovery scene in which the teen-age lovers are found out by their parents. Because to her the thought of her mother's raging sexuality is as unbelievable as it is repulsive, Keiko interprets the “strange” (40) act as a symptom of senile scatology:

“I read somewhere that when some people go senile they start soiling their pants like babies and smearing their feces all over themselves, or even eating it! [...] just can't deal with feces.” (40)

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<sup>481</sup> For further examples of the bawdy Obāchan in American Nikkei writing, see Kono (1995) and Yamaguchi (1995).

Had Keiko taken pains to attend to both “the foreign and the familiar” that she observed in Naoe Obāchan, the meaning of her mother’s sexual behaviour would have been clearer. Choosing rather to attach her own interpretation to her mother’s “strange” actions simply results in the foreign remaining so: Keiko mistakes Naoe’s laughter at her daughter’s shock and ignorance for choking, and pries open her mother’s eyes that are shut tight against the glare of the daughter’s ignorant curiosity (41).

Obāchan admits that her sexual appetite may be “unseemly” for one her age, but she finds the fact humorous rather than scandalous, just as she does Keiko’s reaction. Obāchan also understands that years of silently accumulated hate is likely the cause of her latent passion and Keiko’s alienation.<sup>482</sup>

Although Goto dedicates much of *Chorus of Mushrooms* to creating a female place of unmediated communication, this construction is one of the liminal zones through which she moves the text. Male and female characters spend a great deal of time with their heads cradled in a woman’s lap, “swallowing sound.”<sup>483</sup> While this technique suggests that Goto is privileging women’s ways of knowing and communicating, the balance of the story (especially the details of Naoe’s journey of self-discovery) suggests rather that uterine communication represents a gestational period in the process of identity formation. From this perspective, for Naoe to ride bulls in the Calgary Stampede disguised as the ambiguously gendered “Purple (“Muraski”) Mask” challenges conventional concepts of gender far more than it does the supremacy of patriarchy.

This interpretation does not diminish the absolute significance of the womb as a metaphorical and (given Goto’s construction of tangible words and synaesthesia) concrete symbol of identity formation and transformation. Like Kadohata’s chick hatchery,<sup>484</sup> the

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<sup>482</sup> “Keiko lay between us. Her Otoosan [father; sic] weeping and I, I was a silent *katamari* [mass or lump] of hate” (39).

<sup>483</sup> For instance, see pages 15, 29, 52, 86, 155, 186, and 198.

<sup>484</sup> In *Floating World* the chick hatchery is a windowless “cavern of heat and moisture” (119); it “possessed a sort or mean sexuality” (112). Olivia’s summer job is innoculating chicks at the hatchery, alongside the “sexers.” Kadohata’s hatchery is the scene of multiple alignments and

mushroom barn is a womb-like enclosure where Naoe's shrivelled body is reborn and she finally realizes her own desires. The objects and pathways of desire are effectively different in each case: the teen-age Olivia blossoms into a heterosexually active woman in the chick hatchery, whereas the elderly Naoe "regresses" into a young woman who is content to masturbate. Nonetheless, in both cases the womb is the fulcrum on which the dualistic structures of identity balance.

Goto's construction of the bawdy Obāchan suggests that the language of the body opens up for interpretation another realm of critical proximity. The bawdy Obāchan is an extreme metaphor, a grand gesture with an intention that is matched by the quality of its meaning. In creating the bawdy Obāchan Nikkei women writers have taken sexuality—as Nikkei discourse has created it—beyond its imagined limit to the point where a shrivelled, bent, eighty-five year old woman can be both an aging grandmother and "horny." By so over-extending conventional notions of women's sexuality, the writers have opened an expansive imaginative territory in which they explore the fullest range of sexuality as way of knowing and communicating.

A sustained look at the symbols and practices that Nikkei women's writing deems important will help researchers continue to analyze the construction and representation of cultures. Some of the symbols I have reviewed in this study include the significance of silence as a means of communication and resistance; food as an avenue and emblem of desire; and the relationship between "alternative" sexualities and identity formation. Among the topics I have not discussed, taiko [drumming], for example, is also an important expression of belonging and homecoming (Oikawa 1992, 85) for many Nikkei women:

My sisters' arms are raised and I know their bachi [drumsticks] will soon hit the drumskins. I see their rippling muscles; Asian women powerful and proud, pouring out histories, every movement a choreography of time and telling. (82)

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unions: the sexers with the chicks, the sexers with each other; and Olivia with her lover Tan. The technique of determining the sex of day-old chicks was developed in Japan in the 1930s; an experienced sexer was able to check 1,000 chicks per hour (Takata 1983, 29).

Others sense that taiko may precipitate a kind of ethnic expression or identification that theory cannot yet explain:

Although I have difficulties communicating it, my experience of Uzume [a Vancouver taiko group]'s London gig was such that I became intuitively aware of a certain value in the process of identifying with ethnic or cultural phenomena—a value perceptible not through rational reflection but perceptible only through intuition. It maybe [sic] that this 'intrinsic' value of ethnicity cannot be accounted for in academic terms. Perhaps it just doesn't lend itself to theorizing. Perhaps it just is. (Fuji Johnson 21)

The different politics and world views of the many Nikkei women's communities enliven each of these symbols and practices. If readers remain alert to the seduction of reading subversion into even the most assimilative texts, it may still be apparent that Nikkei women's writing is creating worlds of difference.

Very little is certain,  
almost nothing is finished,  
and the possibilities for creation are infinite.

(Audrey Kobayashi and Suzanne MacKenzie 11)

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## Appendix One: Race and Class in British Columbia Studies

In the early 1980s, the intellectual specificity regarding categories of being resulted in a debate in the journal *BC Studies* over the significance of race and class in British Columbia. Citing a dearth of scholarly attention to British Columbia's modern social structure, Historian Peter Ward (1980) offered an analysis of the subject that incorporates the "subjective" (18) aspect of E. P. Thompson's definition of class. Ward rejects the structural definition of class as a category to which individuals are assigned because, he says, such "objective" criteria neglect the reality that social boundaries are "ultimately of the mind" (18). Ward does consider certain structural components of class, such as the participation of minority groups in trade unions and the prevalence of exclusive unions and other social institutions within minority communities. However, he relies on the more fluid "class-consciousness," or perception of class, to illustrate the pre-eminence of race—the true historical reality—as the determining factor in social structure within pre-war British Columbia:

In sharp contrast to the limited extent of class consciousness, belief in the persistence of major racial differences was extremely widespread in the province. [ . . . ] These beliefs emphasized the perpetual inferiority of Asians and Indians and encouraged the differential, discriminatory treatment they received at the hands of successive generations of whites. In particular such attitudes underlay the limitation of social economic opportunity for members of both minorities. For them race was more than a state of mind. It was a daily experience, a living reality in a way that class among whites seldom was. (29)

Ward's emphasis on the affective or perceived aspects of class, as distinguished from the material reality of race, coheres with the conviction he expresses in *White Canada Forever* that racism is a psychological phenomenon.<sup>485</sup> This arrangement of social experience considers race as given, much in the way that the sympathetic Theodore Boggs and Henry Angus confined race to the realm of the "natural." Race is the problem that spontaneously ignites the latent animosity in individuals who fearfully guard their own ethnic borders.<sup>486</sup> Ward's analysis

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<sup>485</sup> "To me, economic strains, while in many instances important sources of racial conflict and prejudice, ultimately were subordinate to psychological tensions as the central locus of racial animosity" (*White Canada Forever*, ix).

<sup>486</sup> In *White Canada Forever*, Ward describes the 1907 Powell Street riot (discussed in Chapter One) as "simply a spontaneous outburst" (69). Regarding the decision to remove forcefully Nikkei from British Columbia's "protected area" during the Second World War Ward states:

of race as the real reality and his obvious concern with Canada's ineffectual attempts at destroying the "beast of prejudice" (*White Canada Forever*, xix) contribute to the process of defining a white racial identity. That is, by writing against racism and developing a model of non-racist identity, Ward counters the normative aspect of whiteness which views race as an attribute of non-whites only (Helms 1990; Frankenberg 1993).

However, the individualist (what some might call "liberal humanitarian") nature of Ward's argument diminishes its impact on institutionalized, systemic racism in Canada.<sup>487</sup> If we accept Ward's suggestion that racism is a type of psychological predisposition within the individual,<sup>488</sup> then we must accept that it is, like any other mental weakness, susceptible to treatment and the curative effects of individual will power. Also, in managing the unwieldy concept of class by limiting the concept to a narrow definition (as Patricia Roy trimmed the bulkiness of "race"), Ward's discussion is technically satisfying but can only be criticized for beginning at the wrong place. In "Race and Class in British Columbia: A Comment," sociologist Rennie Warburton challenges Ward on this point.

But he [Ward] completely ignores the experienced objective relationship which workers have as a result of their commodity status in the structure of industrial capitalism, an experience and a relationship on the basis of which they may or may not become class-conscious. (80)

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"More or less simultaneously, thousands recognized an obvious threat and identified the equally obvious solution. [. . .] the outburst was both widespread and largely spontaneous" (158–59).

Ward follows a well-established tradition that regards racism as a latent irrational response that ignites in response to certain stimuli. "Race prejudice may be regarded as a spontaneous, more or less instinctive defense-reaction, the practical effect of which is to restrict free competition between races" (Park 1950, 227; See also Allport 1958).

<sup>487</sup> I distinguish three strains of racism. Individual racism includes all those behaviours, ideals and beliefs that are intended to confirm the "natural" superiority of one race and to exclude (and therefore marginalize) all others. Institutional or systemic racism refers to those laws, policies, and regulations that are intended to achieve the same end at the level of the institution. Cultural racism is the group exercise of individual racism. These ought not to be considered as developmental stages or isolated realms, but are interdependent expressions of racism. (Omi and Winant 1994; Bannerji 1995).

<sup>488</sup> Ward does not make this point explicitly. He does, however, rely on a cluster of terms (such as "animus," "latent animosity," "anxiety," and "spontaneous reaction") that suggest racism, nativism, and nationalism are all innate psychological states.

In turn, Ward acknowledges that the foundationally different perspectives he and Warburton have on ideology and human behaviour make them “two ships that pass in the night” (“Race and Class in British Columbia: A Reply,” 52).

One difficulty with Ward’s argument is that, by accepting the concept of race as “real,” it does not examine the category of analysis. Ward’s assumption about race ensures that the concept of class will be analyzed. Yet, because of the philosophical imbalance, any gain in our understanding of how class operates in the social structure of British Columbia fuels intellectual debate while limiting our understanding of the linked operations of class and race in the lives of individuals.

In the discussion of Nikkei subjectivities it is helpful to remember that such a position is not evidence of the weakness of a particular study, but indicative of a general tendency in research into race. This common acceptance of race as a given also means that researchers may fail to examine their own contribution to the construction of race as a “prediscursive” category.<sup>489</sup> Zack (1995) emphasizes the popularity of the perception that race “refers to something real, even though racial prejudice and discrimination are unjust” (xv). I would add that the acceptance of race as real is also commonly considered both rational and reasonable, even when the racism that feeds discrimination may be seen as irrational.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Ferber 1995, 160

<sup>490</sup> I am thinking of Goldberg (1993) here: “One may be highly rational within a framework and still be irrational, for the framework itself maybe irrational and one may hold on to it dogmatically” (120).

## Appendix Two: Native Nationalism and Cultural Construction in Hawaii

Because the force of the disagreement over cultural construction has magnified the debate among Hawaiian natives and anthropologists (and native anthropologists), a summary of this academic skirmish may be useful as a way of distinguishing further the specificities in discussions of Nikkei culture in Canada.

Two of the most passionate and vocal participants in this debate are faculty members at the University of Hawaii, Manoa: Haunani-Kay Trask, Director of the East-West Center, and anthropologist Jocelyn Linnekin. These scholars are at the forefront of the Hawaiian debate, Trask arguing for native nationalism, and Linnekin for cultural construction.<sup>491</sup>

In his essay, "Cultural Construction and Native Nationalism: Report from the Hawaiian Front," Jeffrey Tobin<sup>492</sup> attempts to interpret the debate for a wider audience. He begins by summarizing the similarities among the cluster of discourses surrounding cultural construction:

All such discourses share a certain distance from "reality," which is, of course, always in quotation marks. The quotation marks indicate a discourse that is about discourse, in which nothing is natural but is naturalized, and nothing is present but is represented. This sort of scholarship is characterized by its step back—its step out of the hustle and bustle of everyday meaning into the stratified world where meanings are made. The emphasis is not on culture but on the context in which culture is produced. 147

Thus we can expect ethnographies based on the cultural construction model to be disengaged from the perceived content of culture, and to maintain a significant theoretical distance between their analyses of cultural process and others' analyses of cultural products.

But does cultural construction release scholars from the demand to interpret to actors the "real" events of their culture any more than does Geertzian semiotics?<sup>493</sup> In "On the Theory

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<sup>491</sup> The line between cultural construction and native nationalism is not as neatly drawn as this statement suggests. However, for those who write from locations where native nationalism and the legacies of passionate daily realities coalesce, the academic controversy *is* polarized. As Linnekin (1992) explains, "[. . .] talking about culture is intrinsically controversial; the personal and political stakes are too high. Visions of tradition are profoundly bound up with our informants' sense of cultural and personal identity—and with our own" (259–260).

<sup>492</sup> Tobin has, he says, been "consistently privileged" to have been taught by both Linnekin and Trask. He also relates being caught "between" them, "asked to comment on drafts of papers each has written about the other" (1995, 151).

<sup>493</sup> As Trinh's criticism suggests, the native voice still tends to be muffled in Geertz's interpretations.

and Politics of Cultural Construction in the Pacific” Linnekin stresses that it does, that in presenting culture as constructed rather than “passed down” (251) through the generations,

culture becomes a more or less conscious model, a representation [sic] embedded in a particular social and political context and subject to interested human manipulation, an idea or a locus of competing ideas, rather than a thing. (251)

Interpretive theories portray culture as a semiotic backdrop to human activity, an obscuring curtain through which the theorist alone can pass in order to retrieve and unveil cultural meaning for each actor and observer. As Linnekin describes cultural constructionist theories, cultural actors do not appear in relief against this veil of meaning, but are involved in an endless process of weaving that obscures nothing but another cultural tapestry. With each actor involved in the production of culture, cultural construction can hardly be said to threaten the relative significance of cultural practice. That is, cultural practice can neither be weighed for its authentic content—nor dismissed for its triviality.<sup>494</sup> In the context of Nikkei culture, sansei and yonsei are engaged in their own phase of cultural construction (what Miyashita calls the distinctly Japanese Canadian culture),<sup>495</sup> and thus cannot be portrayed as “less traditional” than the issei because they are farther removed from the (Japanese) source of culture.

However, Linnekin’s definition also injects ideas of falseness and manipulation into the process of cultural construction in such a way—and at such a time—that the discourse may be understood to threaten the self-determination of marginalized cultures. As Trask notes in “Natives and Anthropologists: the Colonial Struggle:”

In the Hawaiian case, the “invention” criticism has been thrown into the public arena precisely at a time when Hawaiian cultural and political assertion has been both vigorous and strong willed. [. . .] Two decades of struggle have resulted in the contemporary push for Hawaiian sovereignty, with arguments ranging from complete secession to legally incorporated land-based units managed by Hawaiians, to a “nation-within-a-nation” government akin to Native American Indian nations. (163)

Trask and Linnekin agree that cultures change over time in response to social and political contexts. They also agree that traditions are political. But where Linnekin (1983) locates the political nature of cultures in the political aims of their actors, Trask insists that “native cultural

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<sup>494</sup> See Chapter Two for a discussion of “trivial” situational ethnicity.

traditions are political because they develop in response to imperialism" (*From a Native Daughter* 55). This disagreement over the nature of the political is the crux of one arm of the constructionist/native nationalism debate. As Trask's protest against the idea of cultural invention suggests, it is Linnekin's identity (within the framework of native nationalism) as a representative of colonial power that identifies her theory as a tool of the colonizer. As such, Linnekin's (1983 and 1992) emphasis on the "inventive" nature of all cultures cannot diminish the accusatory nature of the discourse of cultural construction in relation to particular native traditions.

A second major division between the native nationalist and cultural constructionist theories centres on their separate understanding of change. The transformative nature of tradition has become widely accepted across disciplines (Wagner 1975; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Bhabha 1990; Anderson 1983; Smith 1982). However, as theories of transformative tradition merge with those of cultural construction, the result is an attack on the claims of native nationalists:

It is true that the language of cultural construction is pejorative, but this pejorativeness is not incidental to the cultural construction discourse. Whether anthropologists talk about "making culture" or of something fancier, such as "the semiotics of peoplehood," Native nationalists are likely to be angry, because they rightly perceive the cultural construction discourse as a challenge to their own political projects. [. . .] No amount of prettying-up can diffuse this challenge. ("Cultural Construction and Native Nationalism" 148)

This challenge to native nationalism is an inevitable consequence of the theoretical insistence on cultural constructionism.<sup>496</sup> Moreover, nothing short of the cultural constructionists' submission to native nationalists (signified either by being silent or by changing theoretical

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<sup>495</sup> Discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>496</sup> Handler (1985) asserts that there is a "massive commonality" underlying all claims to cultural distinctiveness, including native nationalism, and the premises of most scholarship in that area. "Given such agreement, it seems to me that destructive analysis of shared premises is more important than a dialogue with those who share them" (178). I agree generally with Handler that "destructive" analysis of the structures of common sense (Handler acknowledges Sapir's destructive analysis of underlying grammatical structures) is an urgent theoretical task. However, I do not share Handler's certainty that resisting all hints at autonomous subjectivity and self-identification (individual or collective) is the proper and best response to groups whose subjectivities, of any kind, have been systematically subordinated by dominant cultures.

camps) can satisfy the aims of native nationalism. In Trask's words, the role which "colonizing" academics ought to play in the project of native nationalism is that which natives "assign to them, and no more" ("Feminism and Indigenous Hawaiian Nationalism," 914).

As Tobin wryly observes in "Cultural Construction and Native Nationalism," in Hawaii the dialogue that some anthropologists have proposed between cultural constructionists and native nationalists "is flourishing" (151). A theoretical pause by the cultural constructionists seems unlikely; in fact, even the rigorous disciplinary self-examination that Linnekin says is inherent in cultural construction is either happening out of print, or is a euphemism for the barrage of published personal attacks circulating among Linnekin, Trask, and anthropologist Roger Keesing.

As yet neither anthropological authority nor authentic culture have been seriously challenged by theories of cultural construction. In fact, cultural construction seems to require the notion of authentic culture as a tool that authoritative voices can use to measure spurious traditions.<sup>497</sup> As one example, Linnekin continues to scale the appropriateness of various symbols of Hawaiian culture and to identify instances of authentic Hawaiian tradition.<sup>498</sup> To Linnekin, these projects are emblematic of her status as an ally of Hawaiians, while, as a Hawaiian nationalist, Trask views such anthropology as evidence of high imperialism.<sup>499</sup> If, as

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Furthermore, Handler's evangelistic insistence on the correctness of his project seems philosophically inconsistent with its deconstructive aims.

<sup>497</sup> See Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious," in which the authors show that the transformative nature of invented tradition renders all traditions once considered genuine (that is, unchanging) as spurious, and all so-called spurious traditions as "genuine."

<sup>498</sup> For instance, in the debate over whether or not the island of Kahoolawe is sacred Hawaiian land, Linnekin has dismissed nationalist claims concerning the island's traditional significance. Instead, she points to the bombing of the island by the American military as the reason Hawaiians ought to claim Kahoolawe as "an apt focus for Hawaiian protest" (1983, 246). Regarding her participation in the clean-up of Pahukini Heiau (the remains of what Linnekin (1987) describes as "a major sacrificial temple" (35)), Linnekin calls the participation by Hawaiians in the project "a way to rescue a monument of their own authentic cultural past" (36). In such cases, anthropological authority decides, names, interprets, and inscribes the symbol of authentic native culture.

<sup>499</sup> Trask's disparagement has been directed at anthropology generally, although one of the more pointed attacks on Linnekin (which Linnekin rebuts in "Text Bites and the R-word") occurs in Trask's review of Marshall Sahlins' *Islands of History*. In her rebuttal, Linnekin establishes

Linnekin (1991) has stated elsewhere, these two scholars both accept that tradition is a process of endless change, and share the same goal for Hawaiian culture, how is it that the allies have come to represent two sides of a vituperative scholarly debate? Also, what implications does the souring of the Hawaiian situation have for the study of Nikkei culture in Canada, and Canadian culture generally?

Another look at the Hawaiian situation may clarify what is, admittedly, a fine distinction between this "new" social science and the co-operative model I am proposing. Linnekin (1992) observes that cultural construction may present an uncomfortable option for some anthropologists, "because the concept implicitly challenges our own ethnographic authority as well as our informants' representations" (250). It would seem reasonable, then, for readers to expect from ethnographies by cultural constructionists a challenge that is directed out from the researcher and back again, articulated in a tone of mutual respect. In fact, if scholarly discourse has enjoyed a narrative authority that has been denied the cultural representations under study, we might also expect a temporary imbalance, a period during which the narrative authority of anthropology has more to answer for than do its informants' representations. Linnekin's qualified response to these challenges suggests that the unseating of narrative authority requires a more drastic approach.

Certainly Linnekin evaluates her more recent scholarship as approaching the bi-directional goals of cultural construction. When asked to identify recent methodological changes in her research, Linnekin cited her current reliance on Hawaiian informants as "sources" or "authorities."<sup>500</sup> She rejects the portrayal of her research as authoritative, describing it (in the same interview) as "just my point of view." Yet Linnekin accords anthropology, and the other disciplines she includes in "On the Theory and Politics of Cultural

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her status as honorary native by listing categories of anti-nationalists who find her pro-nationalism work irritating: "In Hawai'i there are developers, missionary descendants, prodevelopment planners, bureaucrats, big landowners, and high-priced lawyers who find our advocacy of cultural preservation and indigenous rights to be a nuisance and an irritation, if not the impediment that we might wish" (175-76).

<sup>500</sup> Personal interview, August 1996.

Construction,” a tone of respect that is absent from her discussion of native representations. Consistently, Linnekin describes disciplinary narration (including the “sophisticated critique” of “Third World’ scholars” [255]) in formal terms. The verbs of narration are those familiar to scholarship: “explore,” “examine,” “characterize,” “denote,” “deconstruct.”

Yet when Linnekin selects one of the multiple and diverse local representations of indigenous Hawaiian culture (representations which Linnekin says are “continually bandied about” (258)), she chooses what she calls “a somewhat lighthearted example to exemplify the style of this negotiated discourse” (259). Linnekin goes on to describe the logo of the helmeted Hawaiian warrior which appears on t-shirts and “dangl[es] from rear-view mirrors in automobiles and pick-up trucks.” After explaining why this helmet was likely no more a part of ancient armor than ancient Hawaiian society was a “countercultural egalitarian Eden along the lines of a ca. 1968 commune,” Linnekin adds:

Similarly, I cannot attest (contrary to t-shirt representations) that helmeted Hawaiian warriors used sword-and-sorcery bows and arrows, had muscles like body builders taking steroids, or kept packs of pit-bull dogs (despite the caption on one shirt representing such activity as ‘TRADITION’). (259; emphasis in original)

There is a critical dissonance between the formal, respectful tone of Linnekin’s narration concerning scholarly representations, and the colloquial dismissiveness of this description of the contemporary fusion of the past and the present—“a combination that sells” (259). Linnekin’s discussion of the theoretical shift in anthropology from objectivism to postmodernism constructs even those scholarly projects with which she disagrees as intellectually worthy, however in need of interrogation she might feel those projects are. Yet she then devalues the local representation by depicting the typical<sup>501</sup> incorporation of the warrior motif as an easy commercial con of the duped by the immoral.

An observation about race is necessary here. Because whiteness as a discursive category has, historically, been associated with European expansion into North America, the idea of dominance in North America has been closely associated with whiteness and racism

(Frankenberg 1993). Thus, I would characterize Linnekin's authoritative analyses of nationalist cultural representations as examples (albeit not necessarily "typical") of racialized, "white" academic discourse.<sup>502</sup> Because this link between dominance and whiteness has itself enjoyed a hegemonic status in research on marginalized cultures in North America, it has acquired an air of inevitability or naturalness. This "inevitable" trio of dominance, whiteness, and racism has served an essential corrective function in research. However, it has also obscured the complexity of dominance, and (as I showed in my earlier discussion on assimilation in Canada) has encouraged the easy association of race with culture.

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<sup>501</sup> The dismissiveness of this passage is heightened by the ironic juxtaposition of the implied "exemplary" (as a connotation of "exemplify") with the utterly crude.

<sup>502</sup> Because Linnekin is from mainland USA, and received her professional training there, her white appearance cannot be "redeemed" or ameliorated by the possession of "local" status. For several reasons (including the relatively even distribution of Hawaiians of "Asian" and "white" ancestry, the high incidence of intermarriage, and the practice of privileging "local" status over "mainlander") the discursive category of "whiteness" is more complex in Hawaii than in the rest of North America. Membership in the category of "haole," or Caucasian, is determined by a number of behavioural factors (such as political allegiance, education, or occupation) as well as skin colour. Therefore, although whiteness is unusually complex, it is still a vigorous analytical category: "People of color comprise more than 75 percent of the student body [at the University of Hawaii, Manoa] while the faculty is more than 75 percent white" (Trask 1993, 202-03). By 1990, multi-ethnic Hawaiians were the third largest ethnic group (after Caucasians and Japanese) in the state (*State of Hawaii Data Book* 38). On the construction of whiteness and the "local," see Miyazaki 1994; De Lima 1991; and Yogi 1997)

In *Itsuka*, Naomi feels a new comfort being one of the many Nikkei in the place Aunt Emily calls "nisei paradise" (93): "In Hawaii the open friendly smiles signal ease and I discover, wonder of wonders, that our ethnicity here is an advantage. Bank tellers know how to spell our names, the clothes in department stores actually fit, food counters have take-out sushi lunches. Imagine being able to eat Japanese food and speak English (92-93). It is in this place where the "ethnic" body is not an indelible sign of difference that Naomi dreams of an identity that is unconstrained by the physical: [. . .] I am without a body, but I am not, I am not without consciousness" (93-94).

### **Appendix Three: Research Design of the Intercultural Traditions Survey**

#### *Transforming Intercultural Traditions in Japanese Canadian Families*

As discussed in the sections in Chapters One and Two, Nikkei and dominant Canadian discourses of gender have asserted that women's experience is, or ought to be, primarily concerned with mothering within the heterosexual family. A significant component of the mothering role is the transmission of culture from parent to child, the concurrent assumption being that women transmit the culture that is "theirs." Within this ideological framework, marriage between a Nikkei man and a non-Nikkei woman ought to represent the greatest threat to the transmission of Nikkei culture. As a way of testing these assumptions, I designed the following questionnaire regarding the transmission of culture within intercultural families.

As I outlined in Chapter Two, the available literature concerning such families accepts structural variables of ethnicity as evidence that intermarriage is a causal factor in the assimilation of Nikkei into dominant society. These variables include, among others, participation of the Nikkei spouse in "ethnic" voluntary organizations, frequency of visits to Nikkei family members, languages spoken in the home, and ethnic identity of best friends. Research into intermarriage generally does not measure evidence of behavioural ethnicity within intercultural families, nor does it investigate the ethnic identity or behaviours of the non-Nikkei spouse. Each of these assumptions of gender and activity within marriage confine Nikkei women's experiences within an ideological grid of authentic culture and normative heterosexuality.

As a supplement to my study of Nikkei women's writing, I designed a questionnaire intended to explore the concrete practices of culture(s) within intercultural families whose demographic make-up might appear most threatening to Nikkei culture, that is conjugal unions between Nikkei men and non-Nikkei women. I secured subjects by placing advertisements in the Vancouver newspaper, the *Georgia Straight* and in the Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association newsletter, the *Bulletin*. I also posted notices in various locations on the campus of the University of British Columbia, and in coffee shops located near that university. I contacted

other subjects by the "snowball" method, whereby family, friends, and acquaintances of those who completed the questionnaire submitted names of others who might be interested in completing it also. Twenty-four questionnaires were either mailed or delivered to possible subjects, and fourteen women actually submitted completed questionnaires.

I formulated the questionnaire in order to gain information in four main areas: 1) demographics, including the length of time the individuals had been together, where they had lived, number of children in the home, and how each woman identified her heritage and that of her husband; 2) what the women perceived culture to be; 3) in what manner the women understood culture was transmitted, and 4) which family members were involved in the process of cultural transmission, and which members the Nikkei father and non-Nikkei mother felt were essential to the process. Although the questionnaire did not specify that the Nikkei partner ought to be male, no women in lesbian relationships submitted questionnaires, nor did I expect that they would. As discussed throughout this study, Nikkei discourse still considers lesbian sexuality to be non-normative and extremely rare. Although I know of one Nikkei lesbian woman living in Vancouver who has a child by artificial insemination, she did not submit a questionnaire. Each of the women who completed the questionnaire discussed heterosexual relationships only.

#### *Questionnaire*

1. How long have you and your partner been together?
2. How many children do you have or want?
3. How old are your children?
4. Which cities or towns have you lived in together, and for how long?
5. How would you classify/describe your culture or "racial" heritage?
6. How would you classify/describe your partner's culture or "racial" heritage?
7. How have you and your partner learned about each other's culture?
8. How do you think one "gets" culture?
9. How would you classify/describe your family's (that is, you and your partner and any children you have together) culture?

10. What cultural celebrations/holidays do you keep in your family? How might—or have—these change(d) with the arrival of children?
11. What do you think is—or imagine would be—important for your children to learn about their culture?
12. How do—or will—your children learn about their culture? (For example: participating in daily home life; lessons; story-telling; reading myths and legends etc.)
13. How important is it to you that your children visit or live in Japan?
14. What connection, if any, do you see between language and culture?
15. Approximately how many hours of the day are you—or do you plan to be—with your children?
16. Who is the main transmitter of culture in your family?
17. Who do you think should be the main transmitter of culture in your family?
18. Who does your partner think should be the main transmitter of culture in your family?
19. What part does your extended family play—or do you think they should play—in the transmission of culture?
20. Feel free to expand your answer on the back of the questionnaire, or add any other comments you may have on women, families and culture.