UNIVERSIDADE DO ESTADO DO RIO DE JANEIRO
CENTRO DE EDUCAÇÃO E HUMANIDADES
INSTITUTO DE LETRAS

Gabriela Cavalcante Fróes de Souza

Obasan, Obāchan: Japanese Canadian History, Memory, and the Noisy Silences of Joy Kogawa and Hiromi Goto

Rio de Janeiro
2007
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Dissertação submetida à Pós-Graduação *Stricto Sensu* em Letras, área de concentração Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, como requisito para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em Letras.

Orientadora: Profª Drª Peônia Viana Guedes

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Esta dissertação foi julgada e aprovada, em sua forma final, pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação *Stricto Sensu* em Letras, área de concentração Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa, para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em Letras.

Aprovada em _____

Banca Examinadora:

CATALOGAÇÃO NA FONTE
UERJ/REDE SIRIUS/CEHB

S729 Souza, Gabriela Cavalcante Fróes de.
Obasan, Obāchan: Japanese Canadian history, memory, and the noisy silences of Joy Kogawa and Hiromi Goto / Gabriela Cavalcante Fróes de Souza. – 2007.
99 f. : il.

Orientador : Peônia Viana Guedes.
Dissertação (mestrado) – Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Letras.

1. Kogawa, Joy, 1934-. Obasan. 2. Goto, Hiromi, 1966-. Chorus of mushrooms. 3. Literatura canadense – História e crítica – Teses. 4. Japoneses – Canadá – História – Teses. 5 Identidade na literatura – Teses. 6. Mulheres na literatura – Teses. I. Guedes, Peonia Viana. II. Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Instituto de Letras. III. Título.

CDU 820(71)-95

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Profª Drª Peonia Viana Guedes (Orientadora - UERJ)

_____

Profª Drª Marci Dória Passos (Titular - UFRJ)

_____

Profª Drª Leila Asumpção Harris (Titular - UERJ)

_____

Profª Drª Heloisa Gonçalves Barbosa (Suplente - UFRJ)

_____

Profª Drª Maria Aparecida Ferreira de Andrade Salgueiro (Suplente - UERJ)

DEDICATION

To my parents and brother, for always supporting me in every crazy thing I have done until today, and to my grandmother Annita, for being such a great storyteller.

To my husband Ricardo, for always holding my hand and telling me everything is going to be all right.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are some people I have to thank:

- Professor Peônia Viana Guedes, my advisor, for the honor of working with her during these two years, for her patience, her caring friendship, and for making me a better student and a better reader;
- All the teachers in the Masters program, with special thanks to Professor Leila Assumpção Harris, for being such a good friend since the beginning, for encouraging me to enter the Master's course and for making me fall in love with contemporary literature;
- Professor Carlinda Nuñez, for her passion for literature, commitment and support of her students;
- Bruno Ferrari, for thinking so much like me, for being my friend for all moments, and for teaching me how to be patient;
- Gisele Mendonça, also known as Sofia Grant, for saying the right things in the right moments, for being such a great friend, for understanding me, and sharing bits of pop culture with me everyday;
- Marina Job and Marcella Sousa, for being my study group after graduation. If it were not for you, I would not be writing this today;
- My friends Bianca Paschoal, Fábio Trajano, Leonardo Grosszmann, Maíra Lacerda, Odácio Jr., Ramon Lemos, Rodrigo Alva, Tatiana Robaina and Silvia Pantoja, for being good companies, good conversations and, most important, for making me laugh.

Where there's a Wall

where there's a wall
there's a way
around, over, or through
there's a gate
maybe a ladder
a door
a sentinel who
sometimes sleeps
there are secret passwords
you can overhear
there are methods of torture
for extracting clues
to maps of underground passageways
there are zepplins
helicopters, rockets, bombs
bettering rams
armies with trumpets
whose all at once blast
shatters the foundations

where there's a wall
there are words
to whisper by a loose brick
wailing prayers to utter
special codes to tap
birds to carry messages
taped to their feet
there are letters to be written
novels even

on this side of the wall
I am standing staring at the top
lost in the clouds
I hear every sound you make
but cannot see you

I incline in the wrong direction
a voice cries faint as in a dream
from the belly
of the wall.

(Joy Kogawa)

RESUMO

SOUZA, Gabriela C.F. de. Obasan, Obāchan: *Japanese Canadian History, Memory, and the Noisy Silences of Joy Kogawa and Hiromi Goto*. 2007. 99f., il. Dissertação (Mestrado em Letras) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, 2007.

O objetivo desta dissertação é discutir o contraste entre voz e silêncio, assim como as formas pelas quais o pós-colonialismo se manifesta nos romances autobiográficos *Obasan*, de Joy Kogawa, e *Chorus of Mushrooms*, de Hiromi Goto, utilizando as relações familiares como tema central de minha investigação. Ambos os romances tratam de famílias nipo-canadenses, sendo a primeira, no romance de Joy Kogawa, uma família de segunda geração de japoneses no Canadá (*Issei*), e a segunda, no livro de Hiromi Goto, uma família de terceira geração (*Sansei*). Em *Obasan*, Naomi, a personagem central, é uma mulher de trinta e cinco anos que, em conseqüência da morte de seu tio, inicia uma jornada em busca de seu passado e de sua família. As lembranças de Naomi estão relacionadas à Segunda Guerra Mundial e ao processo de deslocamento de imigrantes japoneses e de seus descendentes para campos de concentração que se seguiu. O livro é uma mistura de narrativa pessoal, cartas oficiais e sonhos. Em *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Murasaki, a personagem central, conta a seu amante as lembranças que tem de sua infância em Alberta, onde viveu com seus pais e sua avó em uma fazenda de cogumelos. As histórias estão divididas entre três vozes: a da Murasaki adulta, a de Murasaki no passado, e a de Naoe, sua avó. São histórias dentro de histórias, em uma mistura de tradição oral, romance e autobiografia. Hiromi Goto lida com hibridismo e assimilação, e tenta criar pontes entre as culturas japonesa e canadense através de elementos que vão desde a linguagem até a comida. Este livro também é uma coleção de memórias. O principal foco do romance é a relação entre três mulheres, três gerações da família Tonkatsu: Naoe, Keiko e Murasaki. Os dois romances têm em comum mulheres fortes, sendo a principal diferença as formas de comunicação usadas para mostrar tal força. *Obasan* e *Chorus of Mushrooms* falam sobre como negociar um lugar entre culturas, e como fazer as pazes consigo mesma e com o passado.

Palavras-chave: História e literatura nipo-canadense; pós-colonialismo; hibridismo; memória; identidade.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to discuss the contrast between voice and silence, as well as the ways postcolonial issues are present in the autobiographical novels *Obasan*, by Joy Kogawa, and *Chorus of Mushrooms*, by Hiromi Goto, using family relations as the central theme of my investigation. Both novels deal with Japanese Canadian families, one being a second generation (*Issei*) family, in Joy Kogawa's novel, and the other a third generation (*Sansei*) family, in Hiromi Goto's novel. In *Obasan*, Naomi, the central character, is a thirty-five year old woman who, as a consequence of her Uncle's death, begins a journey in search of her past and of her family. Naomi's memories are related to the Second World War and to the Japanese Internment in Canada. Kogawa´s book is a mixture of personal narrative, official letters, and dreams. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Murasaki, the central character, tells her lover about her memories as a child in Alberta, where she lived with her parents and grandmother in a mushroom farm. The stories are divided between three voices: the adult Murasaki´s voice, Murasaki´s voice in the past, and the voice of Naoe, her grandmother. There are stories within other stories, in a mixture of oral tradition, novel and autobiography. Hiromi Goto deals with hybridism and assimilation, and tries to establish bridges between the Japanese and the Canadian cultures through elements that go from language to food. The book is also a gathering of recollections. The main focus of the novel is the relationship between three women, three generations of the Tonkatsu family: Naoe, Keiko and Murasaki. Both novels have in common strong women, the main difference being the ways of communication used to convey this strength. *Obasan* and *Chorus of Mushrooms* are about how to negotiate a place in-between cultures, about how to make amendments with yourself and with your past.

Keywords: Japanese Canadian History and Literature; Postcolonialism; Hybridism; Memory; Identity.

SINOPSE

Discussão sobre o contraste entre voz e silêncio, assim como as formas pelas quais o pós-colonialismo se manifesta nos romances autobiográficos *Obasan*, de Joy Kogawa, e *Chorus of Mushrooms*, de Hiromi Goto, utilizando as relações familiares como tema central. Análise da relação entre as mulheres nas famílias, fazendo uso da história nipo-canadense e da teoria e crítica pós-colonial.

SYNOPSIS

Discussion about the contrast between voice and silence, as well as the ways postcolonial issues are presented in the autobiographical novels *Obasan*, by Joy Kogawa, and *Chorus of Mushrooms*, by Hiromi Goto, using family relations as the central theme. Analysis of the relationship between women in the families, making use of Japanese Canadian history as well as postcolonial theory and criticism.

PICTURES CREDITS

Photos 1 and 2: Joy Kogawa: *Save Kogawa House* Website. Available on the Internet via <http://www.kogawahouse.com/>. Last retrieved January, 2007.

Photo 3: Joy Kogawa family picture: *Anglican Curch of Canada* Website. Available on the Internet via <http://www.vancouver.anglican.ca/diocese/Portals/0/Images/News/March2006/Kogawa3.jpg>. Last retrieved January, 2007.

Photo 4: *The exodus of The Japanese*. In: PATTON, Janice. *The Exodus of the Japanese*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1973. Available on the Internet via <http://www.lib.washington.edu/Subject/Canada/internment/internment_redress.html. Last retrieved January, 2007.

Photo 5: Japanese Canadian fisherman having his boat confiscated: *The British Columbia History* Webpage in Canadawiki (virtual encyclopedia). Available on the Internet via <http://canadawiki.org/images/3/3d/1941confiscationsm.jpg>. Last retrieved January, 2007.

Photo 6: Japanese Canadian fisherman #2 having his boat confiscated: National Archives of Canada/PA-37468. Available on the Internet via <http://www.canadianheritage.org/images/regular/20944.jpg>. Last retrieved January, 2007.

Photo 7: Poster hung in public places: Vancouver Public Library. Available on the Internet via <http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/Canada/internment/ images/japannot.gif>. Last retrieved January, 2007.

Photo 8: Relocation of Japanese-Canadians to camps in the interior of British Columbia: National Archives of Canada (C 46350). Available on the Internet via http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/legacy/images/ph-203ht.jpg. Last retrieved January, 2007.

Photo 9: A Japanese-Canadian family being relocated to a camp in the interior of British Columbia: National Archives of Canada (C 46355). Available on the Internet via http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/legacy/images/ph-204ht.jpg. Last retrieved January, 2007.

Photo 10: Hiromi Goto: *WordFest* (Banff-Calgary International Writers Festival) Website. Available on the Internet via <http://www.wordfest.com/2005/ images/2004PressKit/hGoto.jpg>. Last retrieved January, 2007.

Photo 11: Hiromi Goto #2: *Canadian Writers* Website, from Athabasca University. Available on the Internet via <http://www.athabascau.ca/cll/writers/ goto/goto.html>. Last retrieved January, 2007.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> *Soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.
> (Gloria Anzaldúa)

According to the definition in the *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, postcolonialism "deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies" (ASHCROFT, 2002: 186). Postcolonial studies began somewhere in the middle of the 20th century, when many colonized peoples started to question issues related to imperial authority. Postcolonial studies are involved with the experiences of minority groups as well as with issues related to ethnicity, gender, slavery, migration and assimilation. Postcolonial literature will be produced mainly by ethnic and gender minorities, who felt the need to find a counter-discourse to challenge Western hegemony.

In his article "New Ethnicities", postcolonial thinker Stuart Hall discusses the Black politics of representation, arguing that a shift has been occurring in these politics, which leads to two distinct ways of seeing representation. The first would be representation based on a mimetic theory, an imitation of reality, the way "one images a reality 'outside' the means by which it is represented". The second way of seeing representation, which is more relevant to this dissertation, is related to culture and discourse. It emphasizes the fact that the meanings given to things are cultural – since they may change from one culture to another – and are mediated and legitimated by discourse. In this sense, the way things are represented in a culture and its systems of representations play a prominent and constitutive role in it (HALL, 1997: 224).

Linda Hutcheon, author of several works on Postmodernism, a theory that very often intersects with Postcolonialism, adds to the aforementioned Hall's statement that:

> (…) it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as "natural" (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact "cultural"; made by us, not given to us. (HUTCHEON, 1995: 2)

Postcolonialism is a movement that deals with the first encounter between colonizer and colonized, and the relationship established between them (HART & GOLDIE, 1994:

155). One of the main discussions of postcolonial theory is that the colonized subject often internalizes the oppression projected by the colonizer, putting himself in a position of "Other". However, moving away from the role of "Other" to the role of "Self" is something that demands a more complex conjunctural change. Homi K. Bhabha, a well-known postcolonial critic, states that "The 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'" (BHABHA, 1995: 4). The colonized needs first to acknowledge his position as a subaltern subject to, then, find a voice that is not an echo of the colonizer's discourse.

Theorist Stuart Hall adds to Bhabha's notion of a hybrid subject, a mutant form that results from the encounter between "colonizer" and "colonized", and that will use the very imperialist hegemonic discourse as a tool to subvert the imposed conventions, the idea that there are, in consequence, hybrid nations. Hall also defends that, because of the violent colonizing processes, a nation is always a structure of cultural power; what seems to be a unified nation is actually a *representation* of that unification:[1]

> Everywhere we see emerge new cultural identities that are not fixed, but suspended, in *transition*, among different positions; that take their resources, at the same time, from distinctive cultural traditions; and that are the product of these complicated cultural mixtures and crossings that are each day more common in our globalized world. It may be tempting to think of identity, in a global era, as being destined to fade away some place or another: or returning to its "roots", or disappearing through assimilation and homogenization. (HALL, 2001:88)

Hall also defends that the postmodern subject is fragmented, with many identities, and that modern nations are, in fact, *cultural hybrids* (HALL, 2001: 62). These ideas of otherness, hybridism, diaspora and identity are the core of this dissertation.

Diaspora is related to migration, dispersion and dislocation. It is also related to taking risks, throwing yourself in a new country, in which language and culture will clash with the ones from your homeland. Vijay Agnew, a well-known theorist, talks about how diaspora can be terrifying, but always, in a broader sense, character-building, in the introduction of *Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A Search for Home*:

> Immigrating to a new country and a different culture means crossing frontiers and borders that can intimidate, but (...) it also allows for possibilities of personal and intellectual growth that shapes the character and tests the mettle. English-language

[1] All quotations from this source (HALL, 2001) were consulted in its Brazilian Portuguese edition and freely translated by me.

> classes are a microcosm of a new culture. The women sit quietly and repeat with great determination words that twist their tongues in new foreign ways. This, too, is an act of courage. (AGNEW, 2005:20)

The diasporic act can be seen as an act of courage because of its audacious aspect. Such dislocation can implicate a lot in the identity of the person or people involved, and one can never predict how they will cope with the situation. As Agnew mentions, "sometimes immigrants are successful in realizing their dream of a better standard of living, yet, like many other compatriots, they feel nostalgic for their cultural and linguistic homes" (AGNEW, 2005:20). In the novel *Chorus of Mushrooms*, we have a strong example of both situations: the mother in the novel assimilated completely the new culture and the grandmother refused to accept any aspects of the country, from culture to language itself.

In Canada, probably no group of people experienced as much hardship and oppression as the Japanese Canadians. Their suffering began on 8 December 1941; one day after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Within hours of that attack, Ottawa ordered that fishing boats operated by Japanese Canadian fishermen were confiscated and that all "Japanese aliens" were registered with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.[2]

This was only the first injustice against Japanese Canadians that, unlike their counterparts in the United States, were kept under detention in internment camps until the end of the war. After the conclusion of warfare, about 4,000 Japanese Canadians succumbed to pressure and left Canada for Japan. Of these, more than half were Canadian-born, and two-thirds were Canadian citizens.

The conclusion of the Second World War indicated the end of three decades of slow immigration and the subordination of humanitarian considerations to anti-Semitism and economic priorities. It also set the stage for a renewed interest in welcoming newcomers and a great upsurge in immigration.

In this dissertation I intend to discuss the contrast between voice and silence, as well as the ways postcolonial issues are present in the autobiographical novels *Obasan*, by Joy Kogawa, and *Chorus of Mushrooms*, by Hiromi Goto, using family relations as the central theme of my investigation. Both novels deal with Japanese Canadian families, one being a second generation (*Issei*) family, in Joy Kogawa's novel, and the other a third generation (*Sansei*) family, in Hiromi Goto's novel. According to Mark Libin in "Lost in Translation:

[2] The data presented here and the following in relation to the Japanese Canadian process of Internment in this Introduction were taken from the article "The Plight of the Japanese Canadians", from the Citizenship and Immigration Canada Website.

Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*", the two texts offer a fluid, and necessarily partial, translation to each other (LIBIN, 1999: 139).

In the first chapter of this dissertation, Canada's history and memory will be the central theme. I will develop the idea that Canada is a multicultural country and has, for many years, been one of the most diverse countries in the world, not only for being an officially bilingual country but because its diverse politics of immigration have been considered very open and non-judgmental. Even so, during the Second World War Canada began to suspect their immigrants, immigrants' children and, at some point, the matter was not anymore related to immigrants, but to racism. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Canada began a process of Internment of all alien citizens, then of all Japanese Canadian men, and finally to all women and children of Japanese descent. They were kept in concentration camps until after the war had ended. It was an unfair situation, and it took the Canadian government forty years to acknowledge their mistake and offer a formal apology to the Japanese Canadian citizens, together with a compensation package that was far from being an actual compensation for the losses these people suffered. The memories of these people cannot be erased. Their history is imprinted in their minds and, for some, in their novels. One of these novels is the theme of Chapter 2.

In *Obasan*, Naomi, the central character, is a thirty-five-year old woman who, as a consequence of her Uncle's death, begins a journey in search of her past and that of her family. The second chapter will focus on this autobiographical novel by Joy Kogawa, a Japanese Canadian whose childhood was partly spent in an internment camp. The central character in the novel is Naomi Nakane, whose childhood memories are related to the Second World War and to the Japanese Internment in Canada. Kogawa's novel is a mixture of personal narrative, official letters, Japanese legends and dreams. Naomi and her brother were prevented from learning the fact that their mother was actually in Nagasaki during the bombing in 1942, and not in Tokyo as they were told. Naomi grew up believing that her mother had left her and her brother and had simply gone back to Japan. The novel only does not become a tragedy because of the silent strength of the title character, Obasan (Japanese for Aunt). She holds the truth about the past, to which Naomi must reconcile herself.

Reconcilement will be the focus of the third chapter, using as a primary source *Chorus of Mushrooms*, an autobiographical novel by Hiromi Goto. Goto was born long after the Internment had ended, and the focus of her novel centers in the effort she makes to reconcile with her past, with her ancestors. "*Mukâshi, mukâshi, ômukâshi*"... this is the central character Murasaki's version for "once upon a time". In a book which is a gathering of recollections,

this is how the young Japanese Canadian woman begins every story. Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, however, is not a book of fairy tales, filled with code-switching strategies; it is about a code-switching life. Set in a mushroom farm in Alberta, Canada, family stories are intertwined with Japanese folk legends and myths, in a mixture of oral tradition and memories. With a grandmother who refuses to speak English and a mother who refuses to speak Japanese, Murasaki dances "bilingually" while searching for an identity to call her own, swinging among narratives in which time and space overlap, just like in fairy tales.

The main objective of this dissertation is to analyze both novels as postcolonial narratives, focusing on key concepts such as hybridism, otherness and cultural tradition, keeping in mind the fact that both novels are declaredly autobiographic. For that matter, I chose not to approach the mythical part of both novels, thus the folkloric and legendary elements will not be addressed. I will focus in excerpts that deal with the effects of the Second World War in the first novel and the search for a lost heritage in the second novel. I will focus also in themes such as food as tradition, family relations, and the contrast between the excess of silence (in *Obasan*) and the excess of voice/sound (in *Chorus of Mushrooms*). I also intend to discuss the clashing of generations and the relationship between identity and space, tradition and family, culture and nation – and how they all end up by complementing each other.

CHAPTER 1

From Japan to Canada, Remembering and Forgetting

> *My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence — in which I do not for a moment believe — but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting..*
>
> *(Edward Said)*

Canada became a choice for Japanese people to immigrate to around the 19th century, when most Japanese immigrants were looking for a place to live, to fish and to grow food. Canada is nowadays and for a long time has been recognized as a multicultural country, being its politics quite open-minded and in favor of immigration. It is known to be a place where various peoples from many different countries co-exist together, apparently in harmony.

During the Second World War, Canada was on the allies' side and Japan joined Germany and Italy, enemy countries. A serious problem then arose. Japanese descendants that were born and/or naturalized in Canada and that had been living in the country for decades were now seen as the enemy. Together with other Italian and German immigrants, Japanese and Japanese Canadian families were sent to concentration camps and were interned there for as long as the war lasted and for some more years, and were considered a menace to the country. A few more decades passed until the Canadian government acknowledged the country's guilt for its actions, and finally apologized to its immigrant citizens.

A formal apology and the compensation money given by the government to compensate the treatment given to Japanese immigrants during the war, of course, would never truly compensate the shame and disappointment felt by those people. The question of identity becomes, then, stronger than ever. It was difficult to trust a country that did not trust its immigrants or their descendants, Canadian citizens, but to go back to their home countries could be even harder, given that some of them had never even been there. Where was then their "home"? Did they have one? These questions will be discussed in this chapter, together with Canada's pre- and post-war history.

1.1 – Canada: A Multicultural Country

> *Multiculturalism to me is a way of managing seepage of persistent subjectivity of people that come from other parts of the world, people that are seen as undesirable because they have once been colonized, now neo-colonized. So we are not talking about the Germans or Finns and Swedes or the French (...) We are talking about the undesirables.*
> *(Himani Bannerji)*

Multiculturalism is a term that emphasizes the unique characteristics of different cultures in the world, especially as they relate to one another in receiving nations. But particularly in Canada the term acquires more power than in other countries, because Canada is a country of immigrants. Linda Hutcheon, in the Introduction to *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, claims that:

> The history of Canada, as it was taught to most of us, is the history of immigration. (...) Whichever way the story is told, what we today call "multiculturalism" figures prominently: all Canadians of other than native stock are originally immigrants from somewhere, and even the native peoples are and were plural ─ in other words, multicultural. (HUTCHEON, 1990: 10)

Canada is a country known by its diversity. Linda Hutcheon continues, stating that "the multicultural history of Canada is not a recent one. And the traces of that longer history can be seen literally in the marks left by many immigrants on the face of the cities and farms where they lived and worked" (HUTCHEON, 1990: 11).

Sneja Gunew, in her book *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalism*, dwells on the idea that multiculturalism is a political action in favor of the minorities, but ends up inevitably dealing with a majority. Canada has, to some degree, pioneered the broader concept of multiculturalism, as a government policy in dealing with minorities (GUNEW, 2004: 18).

Gunew also reminds us, in her article "Multicultural differences: Canada, USA, Australia",[3] that Canada has a Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, and that there is a Multicultural Act in Canada. Judy Young comments on this Act:

> The 1988 Act affirms the "diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and [commits the government] to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in economic, cultural and political life of

[3] GUNEW, Sneja. "Multicultural Differences: Canada, USA, Australia", Internet source.

> Canada" (Multiculturalist Act, Preamble). This Act has much to say about recognizing, respecting, and responding to difference while ensuring equal opportunity and equitable treatment for all. (YOUNG, 2001: 6)

The more friendly side of multiculturalism is that its discussion has provided, as Gunew says, "an impetus to challenge the traditional production of knowledge",[4] and this is the main reason why the literary production of immigrants in Canada is so varied and rich.

Multiculturalism is a term that can encompass many definitions, but it also means that many cultures co-exist in the same country. Literary scholar and thinker Northrop Frye affirms that:

> The famous Canadian problem of identity may seem a rationalized, self-pitying or made-up problem to those who have never had to meet it, or have never understood that it was there to be met. But it is with human beings as with birds: the creative instinct has a great deal to do with the assertion of territorial rights. The question of identity is primarily a cultural and imaginative question, and there is always something vegetable about the imagination, something sharply limited in range. (FRYE, 2003: 107)

The Japanese Canadian community was not the only foreign community living in Canada during the wars, and certainly was not the only community to be discredited and to have its immigrants suffering because of their ethnic backgrounds. The fact that different cultures live together in the same space does not mean that all of them have the same "home", but it tells us that, at the same time that "home" can exist in many different spaces, and that a person or a community can have two or more "homes", the same country can also easily be the "home" of different communities and peoples.

Even today, Canada keeps its doors open to immigrants and is still known for its politics of multiculturalism. The table below was taken from Bumsted's *A History of the Canadian Peoples* (BUMSTED, 1998: 396), and it shows the immense variety and the high number of immigrants of Asiatic origins now living in Canada:

[4] GUNEW, Sneja. "Multicultural Differences: Canada, USA, Australia", Internet source.

Immigrants Arriving by Place of Birth, 1981–1990

Place	Number	Percentage
Europe	351,511	26.4
Great Britain	81,460	6.1
Portugal	38,630	2.9
France	15,256	1.1
Greece	6,884	0.5
Italy	11,196	0.8
Poland	81,361	6.1
Other	116,724	8.8
Africa	72,941	5.5
Asia	619,089	46.5
Philippines	67,682	5.1
India	90,050	6.8
Hong Kong	96,982	7.3
China	74,235	5.6
Middle East	90,965	6.8
Other	199,175	15.0
North & Central America	114,073	8.6
US	63,106	4.7
Other	50,967	3.8
Caribbean & Bermuda	89,908	6.7
Australasia	5,877	0.4
South America	67,936	5.1
Oceania	10,040	0.8
Other	375	
Total	**2,416,423**	

Source: *Canada Year Book 1994* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1994):116.

Half a century ago, most peoples immigrating to Canada were of European descent. Nowadays, most immigrants are from Asia and, as a result, the number of visible minorities in Canada is growing. In the 1990's, visible minorities[5] made up 73 percent of all immigrants to Canada, compared to 52 percent in the 1970's. From 1996 to 2001, the visible minority population increased by 25 percent, compared to 4 percent for the population as a whole. Visible minorities now make up 13.4 percent of the Canadian population. This figure rises to 37 percent in Vancouver and Toronto; Toronto has one of the highest proportions of foreign-born residents of any city in the world. It is predicted that visible minorities will make up 20 percent of the Canadian population by 2016.[6]

[5] Visible minorities are peoples who are not of the majority race in a given population. For example, in Canada, visible minorities are defined as persons, other than Aboriginals who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour. The term is primarily used in Canada and is a demographic category used by *Statistics Canada* in connection with the country's multiculturalism policies. It is also occasionally used in the United Kingdom, but not in other parts of the world. (Source: "Visible Minorities", in *Wikipedia*)

[6] Source: "Multiculturalism", the *Canadian Heritage* Website.

Canada is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, not only for becoming an officially bilingual country shortly after the Second World War, but also because much of its territory is inhabited by immigrants or immigrants' descendants. The Japanese diaspora led many Japanese citizens to Canada, but not only Japanese people went to Canada in the 20th Century, as Bumsted's table shows.

It is important to point out, however, that not all theorists agree entirely with this image of Canada. Roy Miki, a very important political voice in the Redress movement, does not quite believe that Canada is a country where many cultures live harmoniously:

> The fantasy of liberal individuation is belied by the regulatory shorthand of not-so-white designated identities declassified through signs of gender, class, and race.
> (...)
> This is a country that asks its citizenry in polls whether "non-white immigrants should not be allowed into Canada", and then prides itself on its "toleration". The question of the question never becomes the news, only the poll results. It's still a "white man's country", the poll does not say.[7]

Even though Miki's point of view contrasts with most theorists on the subject, it is evident that "toleration" [sic] is a strong subject matter in *Obasan*, given the Second World War setting and the Internment process. Most certainly, Miki is not making reference only to the WWII period, and for that reason the statement also applies to the much more recent novel by Hiromi Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, that deals altogether with this same "politics of disavowal".

In short, Miki explains that, however hard it may be for people to perceive multiculturalism as so,

> the term (...) has been deployed strategically by policy makers to project a political and cultural history built on 'tolerance' and 'inclusiveness'. For those who have internalized the networks of racialization, this narrative remains a fantasy that deflects the colonial history of white supremacist power. [8]

Miki's fear, as it is also the feeling of other theorists, is that Multiculturalism slowly becomes a politics of erasure, and that ends up wiping away the cultural differences within the country. The fear is that a strong politics of multiculturalism might lead to cultural homogenization.

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[7] MIKI, Roy. "Can I See Your ID?: Writing in the 'Race' Codes that Bind", Internet source.

[8] Idem.

The truth was that Canadian immigration policies were ethnically selective – and remained so – during the first half of the 20th century. Preference was given to British and American immigrants, followed by northern and then central Europeans. Least desired immigrants were the Asians, Blacks and Jews. Non-preferred immigrants were usually admitted to perform risky or undesirable jobs, such as farming in remote areas and building the railway.[9]

Pamela Sugiman, in the article "Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Canadian Women's Life Stories", talks about the consequences of the Internment to the following generations, and how the generations that went through it mainly dealt with the process:

> (...) Japanese Canadians continue to live with the injustices and indignities of the past. In response to this act of violence, for years the *Nisei* (second generation) attempted to filter the painful memories of their internment – by not putting reminiscences on paper, nor verbally articulating their experiences as part of a public discourse. In an effort to shield their own children from the racial hostilities they themselves endured, *Nisei* parents have furthermore promoted the cultural assimilation of their own children, the *Sansei* (third generation). Assimilation involved shedding the cultural markers of their Japaneseness: the Japanese language, contact with Japanese Canadian peers, and an appreciation of traditional Japanese art forms. Japanese Canadians' fears of again being punished as a culturally and economically distinct group have resulted in what some writers have termed their "racial erasure" from history. (SUGIMAN, 2005: 49)

At a certain point in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the main character, Murasaki, declares: "My mom didn't tell tales at all. And the only make-believe that she knew was thinking that she was as white as her neighbour (GOTO: 1994, 29). This excerpt clearly illustrates what Sugiman points out, being Murasaki a *sansei*. It also enhances that not only multiculturalism is a politics of inclusiveness, but also that immigrants want desperately to believe the former to be true. However, even the 12-year-old Murasaki knows that tolerance is not that easy to come by.

If we think about immigrant writers and about creativity as a whole, multiculturalism will always be present, not only in Canada but in every country. The writer's social and historical experience will always be one particular point of view and it can never fully represent a national point of view. Northrop Frye explains that from the other way round:

> American writers are, as writers, not American: they are New Englanders, Mississipians, Middle Westerners, expatriates, and the like. (…) the question of

[9] Source: "Canadian Immigration Overview", in the Virtual Museum of the *Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre* Website.

> Canadian identity, so far as it affects creative imagination, is not a "Canadian" question at all, but a regional question. (FRYE, 2003: 107)

This is probably the most important meaning of multiculturalism. Because more than a regional question, the writer's experience in the creative process will always be almost personal, or related to groups of people who had had similar historical/social experiences. These experiences are usually not related to just one physical space, region or country. They relate to invisible, imaginary spaces, as well as to groups of peoples who have been through similar experiences, no matter how physically apart they can be from each other. And, by the same token, multiculturalism will encompass all these different cultural experiences in the same physical spaces, that is, regions or countries. A country cannot have one distinguishable identity, because each different people who constitute that country have their own personal experiences. Multiculturalism is enrichment of, not a lack of cultural identity. Multiculturalism *is* the cultural identity.

Bearing this view of multiculturalism in mind, this chapter intends to focus on the Japanese diaspora to Canada before and between the two world wars. It is important to stress that Canada was in the past, and still is, a country known to welcome its immigrants.

1.2 – The Japanese Canadian Diaspora: Looking for Freedom

> *What does it mean to think about the politics of diaspora in the present historical moment? (...) I have had "homes" in four of the five continents – Asia, Africa, America and now Europe. When does a place of residence become "home"?*
>
> *(Avtar Brah)*

The word *diaspora* comes from two Greek verbs, *dia* (meaning "over") and *speiro* (meaning "to sow"). The metaphor of sowing fits perfectly here, when the actual meaning of *diaspora* would be migration, dispersion. The term is broadly used by critics nowadays to represent any kind of medium-sized dislocation (not as huge as the Jews dispersion) that involves the reconstruction of identities and communities in new spaces. Critic Robin Cohen reinforces this idea: "Other peoples abroad who have also maintained strong collective identities have, in recent years, defined themselves as diasporas, though they were neither active agents of colonization nor passive victims of persecution" (COHEN, 1997: ix). Vijay Agnew talks about how diaspora and memory intermingle:

> The concept of the diaspora has been widely adopted in academic discourses on forced dispersal, immigration, displacement, and the establishment of reconfigured transnational communities. Memories are the glue that holds the past and present together. They give shape and texture to women's subjectivity, to identities that are fragmented by women's hearts and is reflected in the journeys they have chosen to undertake with hope but also trepidation, mindful of dangers but determined to be courageous. In crossing borders and boundaries, they imagined and then re-imagined their homes and bonded with those they had previously thought of as strangers in order to form new communities. Many pursued their dreams and were caught by surprise when they blossomed in new and different ways. (AGNEW, 2005: 3)

Agnew's statement positively reinforces the main focus of this dissertation, for both *Obasan* and *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the two novels that will be analyzed, deal mainly with how memory will help two women connect their present to their past. Sneja Gunew, in her article "Can ghosts emigrate? Diaspora, exile and community", thinks of diaspora as "an endless process of traveling and change rather than simply being framed by leaving and arriving" (GUNEW, 2004: 107). Moreover, Avtar Brah, in her book *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, sees diaspora as a means of traveling not only from space to space, but from home to home. Brah believes that "home" is a much broader concept:

> (...) It is a discourse of locality, the place where feelings of rootedness ensue from the mundane and the unexpected of daily practice. Home here connotes our networks of family, kin, friends, colleagues and various other "significant others". It signifies the social and psychic geography of space that is experienced in terms of a neighbourhood or a home town. That is, a community "imagined" in most part through daily encounter. This "home" is a place with which we remain intimate even in moments of intense alienation from it. It is a sense of "feeling at home". (BRAH, 1996: 4)

This idea of "home" is very strong especially in situations like the one that characterizes the Japanese Canadians. In 1942, they were sent to internment camps by the same people, by the same nation that represented their idea of "home" at that period.

The Japanese diaspora began in the 17th century, and there were three main groups of people that migrated from Japan. First, there were business people trying to expand their contacts and sales. The second group consisted of Japanese Catholics trying to escape religious persecution in Japan. The last group was composed of mercenaries and political exiles as a result of battles dating from the beginning of the century. Many of these were also veterans from the Korean wars in the 1590s, and some of them were *ronin*, samurais without masters. Besides them, there were laborers, crew members of foreign vessels, servants, bondsmen, and slaves (WRAY, 2006: 8) moving out of Japan in the 17th century. But the

Japanese diaspora in this period mainly included countries from Southern Asia as a destination.

The first migrations to Canada happened in the 19th century, initially to the western region of the country. Most of the first wave of Japanese immigrants settled in the province of British Columbia, along the west coast. Their major activity was fishing, although with time a huge percentage of immigrants began to work in the agricultural sector. According to sources of the Department of Labor in Canada, 1942, of all the employed Japanese Canadians in 1941, 16.3% worked in fishing, but almost 19% made their livelihood from agriculture (SUNAHARA, 1981: 159).

The first group of Japanese arrived in Canada between 1877 and 1928.[10] They are the *issei*, first generation Japanese after migration. By 1914, about 10,000 Japanese had settled permanently in Canada. Before 1907, almost all Japanese immigrants were men, usually young and literate. In 1907, Canada insisted that Japan limited the migration of males to Canada to 400 per year. From then on, most immigrants were women joining their husbands. In 1928, the restriction decreased to 150 Japanese immigrants annually. In 1940 Japanese immigration stopped, and did not begin again until 1967.[11]

In the 1920s, the federal government tried to exclude Japanese Canadians from their traditional livelihood of fishing by limiting the number of fishing licenses they were granted. During the 1930s, the British Columbia government denied their licenses and paid Japanese Canadians only a small percentage of the social assistance paid to whites. At this time, Japanese Canadians were completely segregated and not welcomed at all by the Canadian society. They developed their own social, religious and economic institutions, built their own churches, schools, community halls and hospitals, which were also staffed only by Japanese.

The second wave of Japanese immigrants began arriving in 1967, way after the end of the Second World War. Their culture was very different from the one brought by the *issei*, as they came from an industrialized and urban Japan. The *issei* were the first generation of Japanese immigrants, born in Japan. The second generation of Japanese from this point on, the sons and daughters of the *issei*, were the *nisei*. The culture of the new immigrants included

[10] There is not much documented/published historical information about the Japanese Canadian diaspora available. All the information about the specifics on the matter was taken from *The 1998 Canadian & World Encyclopedia* and from excerpts available online of the episode *Watari Dori: A Bird Of Passage*, aired in 2001 in Canada as part of a 52-episode TV series entitled *A Scattering of Seeds: The Creation of Canada*. *Watari Dori* is a documentary made by director Linda Ohama about Irene Tsuyuki, a Japanese Canadian that, twelve weeks after Japan attacked Pearl Harbour, found herself and her family in an internment camp.

[11] The historical information, dates and main facts related to Japanese Canadian immigration were taken mostly from *The 1998 Canadian & World Encyclopedia*.

Japanese traditions that had been lost to the descendants of the *issei*. This renewal of Japanese tradition in Canada made it possible for young Japanese Canadians (the *sansei* – third generation of immigrants) to learn their ancestors' language and traditional skills.

From the very beginning of their immigration, Japanese Canadians, both *issei* and *nisei*, faced much discrimination. Historian J. M. Bumsted, in his book *A History of the Canadian Peoples*, points out that:

> Canadian society between the wars continued to be profoundly racist. That point was demonstrable in a variety of different ways, although it must be emphasized that very few Canadians saw their racial and exclusionist attitudes as either socially undesirable or dysfunctional. (BUMSTED, 1998: 288)

Until the late 1940s, politicians in British Columbia had separate laws written especially for Japanese Canadians. They were denied the right to vote, even if they were Canadian-born. They were excluded from most professions. Working laws made sure that whoever hired Japanese Canadians would do it only for the most menial and poorly paid jobs, at lower rates of payment than those received white people. Even the *nisei*, who were born in Canada, had grown up fluent in English and usually assimilated more easily the Canadian culture, were prevented from finding decent work outside the Japanese community (BERHANE, 2006: 2). Before 1945, Japanese Canadians could not enlist in the Canadian armed forces, since enlistment would give the right to vote to both the soldier and to his wife.

Jere Takahashi comments on the issue of assimilation in his book *Nissei/Sansei: Shifting Japanese American Identities and Politics*, in which he discusses the situation of Japanese American citizens, one that for sure can be applied to Japanese Canadians as well:

> For *issei* in general, (…) their vision of America and their motives for immigrating were shaped within the political and economic context of Japanese society, where their opportunities for social and economic mobility were severely restricted. (TAKAHASHI, 1997: 16)

Japanese immigrants were for a long time pushed against their will into the fishing and agricultural sectors of the economy of the US and Canada, as simple labor force. This information justifies the settings in the romances of Joy Kogawa and Hiromi Goto. Even in the 1980s, a lot of Japanese Canadians still worked on farms, mostly because after dislocation they lost everything, and had to begin working again in the lowest sectors of Canadian economy.

1.3 – The Second World War and the Internment: Searching for Redress

I must be a mushroom.
Everyone keeps me in the dark
And feeds me horseshit.
(Hiromi Goto)

Canada entered the Second World War in September, 1939. By this time, the country was fully autonomous and was, for the most part, reluctant to go to war. Even so, from a population of little more than 11 million, very substantial armed forces were raised. Over the course of the war, about 1 million Canadians served in the army, navy, and air force. Of these, 55,000 were wounded and about 40,000 "gave up their lives" (BUMSTED, 1998: 295). After the Great Depression of the 1930's, the challenges of the Second World War accelerated Canada's ongoing transformation into a modern urban and industrialized nation. Canada subsequently declared war on Italy in June 1940 and on Japan in December 1941.

The Second World War destroyed the Japanese community in British Columbia. Twelve weeks after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and Hong Kong in December of 1941, the federal government used the War Measures Act to order the removal of all Japanese and Japanese Canadians residing within 100 miles of the Pacific coast. The Canadian government claimed at the time that the Japanese Canadians were being removed for reasons of "national security," despite the fact that the removal order was opposed by Canada's senior military and police officers, who said that Japanese Canadians posed no threat.[12]

The Japanese community was already rejected before the war began in 1939. Immigrants in general were not well-accepted by the Canadian society, but mostly Asian descendants were seen with much prejudice. J. M. Bumsted also discusses about this issue in his book:

> In British Columbia, an anti-Oriental movement flourished during the interwar years. Much of the criticism of the 'menace' from Asia came from economic fears, although there was also a general concern for the racial integrity of the province as a White civilization. The general argument was that the newcomers would not assimilate, although there was considerable evidence that the Japanese, at least, were acculturating rapidly. Moving onto small holdings in the Fraser Valley and into salmon fishing along the coasts, the Japanese appeared to pose a potential military threat should their homeland – which was military aggressive in the Pacific throughout the century – attempt to expand into Canada.

[12] All the historical information, dates and facts related to the World War II were taken from two main sources: *The Politics of Racism*, by Ann Sunahara, and *The Canadian Encyclopedia* Website.

> If people from Asia were highly visible in some areas and in some industries, that fact was partly explained by their exclusion – in law and in practice – from so much of the life of the province. (BUMSTED, 1998: 290)

As Ann Sunahara describes in her *Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War*, the reason the Canadians needed to justify their prejudice against Japanese Canadians came in December, 1941:

> The Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor and Hong Kong on 7 December, 1941 devastated Japanese Canadians. They were shocked that a state of war existed, amazed at the tactic that had precipitated that war, and fearful of what war would mean for themselves, both as individuals and as a group. Some were proud that Japan had shown such strength and ingenuity, and thought it meant that Japan might emerge victorious. Most were appalled. It was one thing to take on a weak and divided China. It was quite another to so directly confront the American colossus. Gathering in their homes in small groups of family and friends, Japanese Canadians on December 7 could only speculate on the meaning of the attacks, on the outcome of the war, and, most importantly, on how the government and the public in British Columbia would react. (SUNAHARA, 1981: 23)

Terrified that the Japanese Canadians could turn against Canada because of their ancestors, and being pressured by the Canadian people and by other countries, like the US, in 1942 the government gave in and began the process of internment of both Japanese and Japanese Canadian citizens, as well as of other immigrants, like the Italian and German communities, and immigrants' descendants. A similar process happened to Japanese Americans in the US. Those unwilling to live in internment camps faced the possibility of deportation to Japan. At this point, Japanese Canadians were not anymore considered Canadian citizens. Ann Sunahara describes this situation:

> With the announcement of a total uprooting, citizenship became irrelevant. Whether *issei* or *nisei*, Japanese alien or Canadian citizen, everyone had become an enemy alien. Everyone was now subject to the same regulations as German and Italian aliens. Like the German and Italian aliens, all Japanese Canadians had to register with and report bi-weekly to the RCMP, could not travel more than twelve miles from their residence or change their address without permission. In addition, all Japanese Canadians, unlike the German and Italian aliens, were required to observe a dusk-to-dawn curfew and to abandon their homes, farms and businesses for an unknown destination. (SUNAHARA, 1981: 46)

Most Japanese Canadians chose to head east, moving to Ontario, Quebec and the Prairie provinces, hoping for better chances to live. Those who chose to return to Japan found a war-devastated country, with disappeared families, the effects of the atomic bombs, and a state of constant fear, as described in the novel *Obasan*, by Joy Kogawa.

The worst blow to Japanese and Japanese Canadians living in Canada was delivered on February 25th, 1942. On that day, Mackenzie King announced in the House of Commons that all Japanese Canadians would be forcibly removed from within a hundred-mile swath of the Pacific coast to "safeguard the defences of the Pacific Coast of Canada."[13] Thus began the process that uprooted a visible minority from their homes, stripped them of their property, and dispersed them across Canada.

William Lyon Mackenzie King[14] was the tenth Prime Minister of Canada from December 29, 1921, to June 28, 1926; September 25, 1926, to August 6, 1930; and October 23, 1935, to November 15, 1948. With more than 20 years of office, he was the longest serving Prime Minister in British Commonwealth history. While Minister of Labor, King was appointed to investigate the causes of and claims for compensation resulting from the 1907 Asiatic Exclusion League riots in Vancouver's Chinatown and Japantown. One of the claims for damages came from Chinese opium manufacturers, which led King to investigate the drug scene in Vancouver. King became alarmed upon hearing that white women were also opium users, not just Chinese men, and he then initiated the process that led to the first legislation outlawing narcotics in Canada, effectively an attempt to save white women from the Yellow Peril.[15]

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, King's government oversaw the Japanese Canadian internment on Canada's west coast, which gave 22,000 BC residents 24 hours to pack. This was done even though the Canadian military had told the Government that most Japanese citizens were law-abiding and not a threat. Major General Ken Stuart even wrote to Ottawa to say "I cannot see that the Japanese Canadians constitute the slightest menace to national security" (SUNAHARA, 1981: 23).The federal government confiscated and sold the property and belongings of the incarcerated Japanese Canadians at public auction. After the war, King offered Japanese Canadians the option of "repatriation" to a war-ravaged Japan, even though many had never been there and did not speak the language; they were not allowed back to coastal areas until his government fell, several years later.

About 21,000 from the 23,000 people of Japanese descent who lived in Canada at that period were naturalized or native-born citizens. Different from the Japanese American

[13] Source: "The Plight of the Japanese Canadians", in the Citizenship and Immigration Canada Website.

[14] Source: "William Lyon Mackenzie King", in the *Canada Lybrary and Archives* Website.

[15] The *Yellow Peril* (sometimes *Yellow Terror*) was a racist phrase that originated in the late nineteenth century with immigration of Chinese laborers to various Western countries, notably the United States. The term, an offensive color metaphor for race, refers to the skin color of East Asians, and the xenophobic fear that the mass immigration of Asians threatened white wages, standards of living and indeed, Western civilization itself. (Source: "Yellow Peril", in *Wikipedia*)

internment, in which families were generally kept together, Canada initially sent the male descendants to road camps in the countryside of British Columbia (*CBC Archives*: "Internment re-examined") or to internment in PoW (Prisoners of War) camps in Ontario. The women and children were sent to abandoned warehouses and parks. The orders came from Ian Mackenzie, considered, together with Mackenzie King, one of the main responsible officials for the internment decisions, and at the time Minister of Pensions and Health in British Columbia (where most of the Japanese Canadian community was located).

Ian Alistair Mackenzie[16] was a Canadian parliamentarian. In 1930, he was appointed to Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's pre-election Cabinet as Minister of Immigration and Colonization and Superintendent of Indian Affairs. While he won his seat in the 1930 federal election the Liberal Party was defeated across the country. Mackenzie entered Parliament as an Opposition Member of Parliament (MP).

When the Liberals returned to power through the 1935 election, Mackenzie returned to Cabinet as Minister of National Defence, where he had the responsibility for pre-war rearmament. With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, however, Mackenzie was moved to the position of Minister of Pensions and National Health, in part because of his role in a scandal involving the awarding of a contract to manufacture the Bren Gun. In 1944, he became Minister of Veterans Affairs.

During the war, Mackenzie began to spread his anti-Japanese sentiment in British Columbia by declaring to his constituents at his 1944 nomination meeting "Let our slogan be for British Columbia: 'No Japs from the Rockies to the seas'". As British Columbia's senior cabinet, Ann Sunahara affirms, Minister Mackenzie had had a key role in the government's decision to intern Japanese Canadians for the duration of the war:

> The fate of the women, the children and the aged plagued the Commissioners of the British Columbia Security Commission from the beginning. (...) Ian Mackenzie's instructions were explicit: "Male Japanese of adult years should be assembled immediately using any available buildings on [the] coast and transferring [sic] as soon as practicable." The women and children could be held at Hastings Park until a more permanent solution was worked out. (SUNAHARA, 1981: 51)

By 1941, Mackenzie had endorsed every anti-Asian proposal raised in the Legislative Assembly, in Parliament and in Cabinet. His fellow politicians considered him a "Conservative racist" (SUNAHARA, 1981: 12).

[16] The information about Ian Mackenzie was taken mainly from his Political Biography from the *Library of Parliament* Website.

The conditions in the internment camps were extremely poor for men, but women had even worst living conditions. Ann Sunahara describes this situation:

> In the road camps, the men had a good diet and healthy, if crude, accommodations. At Hastings Park screaming children, distraught adults, dysentery, nervous tension, prying eyes and the stink of animals defined the women's existence. A wooden horse stall was a luxury; its walls provided limited relief from the tensions of living in full view of a thousand strangers. Only women with sick children or small babies could get such prime accommodation. The rest had to make themselves "homes," for periods ranging from a few days to several months, from the bunks allotted them and the three feet of space between bunks. (SUNAHARA, 1981: 50)

In the Ontario internment camp, the Red Cross sent supplemental shipments to the male with cigarettes, magazines and recreational equipments, in accordance with the Convention of Geneva, to help male interns out of boredom (SUNAHARA, 1981: 77).

In 1946, the government attempted to deport 10,000 more Japanese Canadians to Japan, but was stopped by massive public protests from all parts of Canada. On April 1st, 1949, Japanese Canadians were released and, with time, received the right to vote as Canadian citizens. By the 1950s, almost all of the Japanese descendants were allowed to return to British Columbia. However, since their property had long before been confiscated or sold, many resettled in other parts of Canada. Many others returned to Japan.

J. M. Bumsted affirms that "the 1,421 men who returned home after years in Japanese prison camps had to fight for twenty-three years to win proper veteran's benefits from the Canadian government" (BUMSTED, 1998: 295). Japanese Canadian civilians had to wait a lot more for the apologies of the Canadian government for the Internment years.

In the 1950s, Japanese Canadians worked hard to rebuild their lives, but it was nearly impossible to rebuild their lost community. The third generation, the *sansei*, was born in the 1950s and 1960s, and grew up entirely immersed in Canadian society. They learned to speak English and French but little or no Japanese, as we will see in Hiromi Goto's novel *Chorus of Mushrooms*.

After the war, it was decided that the forced deportation of the Japanese was a crime against humanity, and that citizens could not be deported from their own country. The Prime Minister referred the matter to the Supreme Court in what was to be the first case heard in the newly constructed building housing the Court.

In July 1988, both Houses of Parliament unanimously passed the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*.[17] This marked a high point towards influencing federal institutions to respect Canada's multicultural character and reflect the cultural, ethnic and racial diversity of Canadian society.

The Act had its roots in a body of legislation that had grown with the increasing diversity of the country's population. Each year steady numbers of people from around the world decided to make Canada their home. The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* made Canada the first country in the world to pass a national multiculturalism law, undoubtedly reaffirming multiculturalism as a fundamental value of Canadian society. The Act builds on Section 27 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which calls for the Charter to be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians. It fully supports international human rights agreements.

The Act acknowledges multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society with an integral role in the decision-making process of the federal government. Designed to preserve and enhance multiculturalism in Canada, the Act gives assistance in preserving culture, reducing discrimination, enhancing cultural awareness and understanding, and promoting culturally sensitive institutional change at the federal level. Federal institutions and agencies implement the Act by incorporating sensitivity and responsiveness to the multicultural reality of Canada into their programs, policies and services.

Over the years, federal institutions have striven to ensure that their policies and programs respond to the interests and concerns of all Canadians. This will continue to require sustained efforts by the federal government as the Canadian population continues to change.

On September 22, 1988, two months after the passing of the *Canadian Multicuturalism Act*, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney offered the long awaited formal apologies to the Japanese Canadians in a Redress Agreement signed by the National Association of Japanese Canadians and the Canadian Government, regarding the treatment of Japanese Canadian citizens during and after the Second World War. The Canadian government began to work on a significant compensation one month after President Ronald Reagan did the same in the United States. The compensation package included: the payment of $21,000 to all surviving evacuees; a clearing of all criminal records related to violations of the War Measures Act; a re-instatement of citizenship to the "repatriated" Japanese; a $12

[17] All the information related to the Multiculturalism Act was taken from the page "Multiculturalism", in the *Canadian Heritage* Website.

million community fund; and a $24 million contribution to the establishment of a Canadian Race Relations Foundation. (*CBC Archives*: "Apology and Compensation").

1.4 – Reconstructing Memory and Identity

Memory is the element that shapes tradition, maintaining it alive and reinforcing its power of action.
(Ecléa Bosi)

It is clear that money and public apologies could not erase what Japanese Canadians suffered during the war. The Redress was a legal way to ask for justice, but justice itself cannot be acquired in this case. When something as strong as the Japanese Internment happens, it becomes stamped in the people's collective imaginary. It becomes *history*. Roy Miki, one of the leading figures in the Redress movement, talks about the construction of a redress identity and memory:

> The private accounts of Japanese Canadians affected by the government's wartime policies helped to bring home the real impetus behind the redress movement. The injustices experienced were not generalities that could be glossed over merely by the passage of time. They remained in memory, one minute incident after another. (MIKI, 2005: 251)

Memory is a key-concept in this dissertation. The two novels studied in this work deal mainly with it. Both narratives exist because of memory, and memory alone. In his influential work *History and Memory*, French historian Jacques Le Goff points out that one of the characteristics of the concept of memory is its multiple crossings, interweaving the individual and the collective and involving remembering as well as forgetting:

> (...) collective memory was presented carefully in the struggle for power conducted by social forces. To be empowered by memory and forgetfulness is one of the greatest worries of the classes, groups, and of the individuals that ruled and still rule the historical society. The forgetfulness and the silences of history are revelations of these manipulatory mechanisms that control the collective memory. (LE GOFF, 1986: 12)[18]

[18] All quotations from this source (LE GOFF, 1986) were consulted in its Brazilian Portuguese edition and freely translated by me.

Le Goff points out that Pierre Janet considers the "narrative behavior" the most fundamental act of memorization, which can be characterized, by all means, by its social function, since behavior itself is the act of reporting something done in the absence of the act or of the object that constitutes the motive for that behavior. Here language intervenes, being language itself a product of society (LE GOFF, 1986: 10). Ecléa Bosi, a Brazilian psychologist, explains the importance of language in the process of remembering and passing tradition on:

> The child receives from the past not only the data from written history; she dives with her roots deep into the lived, or better, survived history from the elderly people that took part in its socialization. Without them there would only be an abstract competence to deal with past data, but it would not be memory. (BOSI, 1994: 73)

The concept of *memory*, in this dissertation, will always be intrinsically linked to the concept of *tradition*. Not tradition in the cultural, "folk" sense, but in the sense of passing on any information, anything that resembles the idea of communication within a community or a family.

Bearing in mind that the subjects of this work are Japanese descendants and that at one point they came from another country, it is important to establish that memory has a broader significance here, one we could consider metonymic, because it deals with memories of the past of an individual as well as the memories of an entire community, by means of the recollections of this same individual. Robin Cohen elucidates this matter:

> All diasporic communities settled outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories, acknowledge that "the old country" – a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore – always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions. (…) a member's adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of a similar background. (COHEN, 1997: ix)

The sense of *co-ethnicity* described by Cohen is what most immigrants will develop and most postcolonial critics will call *hybridism*. The incapacity to completely assimilate a new culture and at the same time the necessity to do so is what postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha develops in his concept of a *hybrid subject,* a mutant form that results from the encounter between "colonizer" and "colonized", and that will use the very imperialist hegemonic discourse as a tool to subvert the imposed conventions:

> Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power (…).It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion, that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (BHABHA, 1997: 34-35)

The notion of a hybrid subject will be developed by cultural theorist Stuart Hall as a microcosm of hybrid nations. Hall defends that the postmodern subject is fragmented, with many identities, and that the modern nations are, in fact, *cultural hybrids* (HALL, 2001: 62). Hall also develops the notion of *cultural translation*:

> This concept describes the identity transformations that cross and intersect the natural barriers, composed by people that were forever *dispersed* from their homelands. These people maintain strong bonds with their places of origin and their tradition, but without the illusion of living in the past. They are forced to negotiate with the new cultures in which they now live, without simply being assimilated by these cultures and without completely losing their identities. They carry traces of a particular culture, tradition, language and history that have marked them for life. The difference is that they are not – and never will be – *unified* in the old sense of the word, because they are, irrevocably, the product of cultures and histories interconnected. (HALL, 2001: 88-89)

Paul White asserts that "Migration (...) changes people and mentalities. New experiences result from the coming together of multiple influences and peoples, and these new experiences lead to altered or evolving representations of experience and of self-identity" (WHITE, 1995: 1). This idea of migration leads us back to multiculturalism, being also a "coming together of multiple influences and peoples". Multiculturalism can be seen as the consequence of migrations and diasporas. A country will always be a mixture of migrations and diasporas, and this will result in transnational, multicultural memories. These hybrid memories are the main focus of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

Obasan: The Word Is Stone

For the moment, we are a part of this change – immigrants, migrants, exiles, tourists, dekasegi, refugees, visitors, aliens, strangers, travelers all in search of home.
(Karen Tei Yamashita)

Obasan was the first novel to deal with the Canadian Internment of its Japanese and Canadian Japanese citizens during and after the Second World War. The novel appeared in 1981 while the efforts of Japanese Canadians to win redress from the Canadian government for the internment they suffered were getting into motion. Arnold Davidson, in his book *Writing Against the Silence: Joy Kogawa's Obasan*, declares that "because it prompts the painful awareness that this racism was carried to an almost Nazi excess, *Obasan* is, for Canada, a kind of hall of shame" (DAVIDSON, 1993: 14). *Obasan* has been the focus of much criticism exploring its treatment of Japanese and Japanese Canadian culture, identity, and silence.

This autobiographical novel tells the story of a schoolteacher, Naomi Nakane, who remembers her struggle in growing up as a third-generation Japanese Canadian within the terrors of the Second World War. Being very young when the Internment began, she does not understand what is happening and nobody tries to explain it to her. Naomi loses her mother when she goes to Japan to visit her relatives and never comes back. Then she loses her father when all Japanese men are forced to move to the interior or to work in concentration camps. The thread that put the elements together is Obasan, Naomi's aunt. With her silence, Obasan holds the keys to the past to which Naomi must reconcile herself. Finally, in a sort of epiphanic ending, Naomi embraces and is embraced by the Canadian landscape.

Obasan portrays Joy Kogawa's life as a Japanese Canadian during the Second World War. The novel is the first literary work to deal with this matter, and in it Kogawa makes peace with the injustice of the Internment. Her novel also reflects the endeavor to seek for redress in relation to the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the war. This chapter intends to discuss the relationship between history, memory and the strength coming from the willed (as in opposed to "oppressed") silence of Obasan.

2.1 – Joy Kogawa: Life and Works

My sisters, the task is therefore ours
To make a stronger design / To knit each tale of grief
In the name of the child
Along the quivering edges of our wings
And to birth the new age
Under the banner
Of our true and original name
(Joy Kogawa, "The Song of Lilith")

Writer and activist Joy Kogawa[19] was born Joy Nakayama in 1935 in Vancouver, British Columbia. Kogawa has combined personal, historic, and political issues in literary works which are critically acclaimed worldwide, the most well-known of these being *Obasan*, a novel that exposes the injustices suffered by Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. Kogawa's versatility as a poet, novelist, children's author and speaker has resulted in an unusually broad audience for her challenging subject matter.

Joy Kogawa's parents, both *issei* – first generation Japanese, born in Japan – immigrated to Canada before she was born. Her mother, Lois Nakayama, worked as a kindergarten teacher, and her father, Gordon Nakayama, made his living as a church minister. Kogawa was raised as a *nisei* – second generation Japanese, child of immigrants – and began her childhood in a mostly white, middle-class community.

The Second World War revealed the racism existing in Canada, and together with other immigrants, all Canadian citizens of Japanese descent living on the coast were suspected of being allied with Japan – and serving as spies for the enemy. Kogawa, who was six at that time, and her family were evacuated to the interior of British Columbia, to Slocan. As described in *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*, by King-kok Cheung, Slocan was "a ghost town in the old silver-mining region of eastern British Columbia" (CHEUNG, 1993: 129). Regardless of the terms used to describe the dislocation – evacuation, relocation, dispersal –, Kogawa makes it clear that the Japanese Canadians were essentially imprisoned in internment camps, their property liquidated and sold, even though not a single Japanese Canadian was ever found to be an actual traitor.

Kogawa's primary and secondary education took place in the poorly staffed schools run by the various detention centers she and her family lived in. She began school in Slocan,

[19] Three main sources were used to find biographical information about Kogawa: *Asian American Novelists*, by Cynthia Wong (2000), *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (1997) and King-Kok Cheung's *Articulate Silences* (1993), as well as an interview given to Karlyn Koh (1994).

continued it in Saskatoon, and then settled in Coaldale, Alberta. She attended the University of Alberta in 1954, studying Theology and Music, as well as Writing and Literature. In 1956, she took courses at the Anglican Women's Training College and the Conservatory of Music. She married David Kogawa in 1957 and they had two children together, Gordon and Deidre. She attended the University of Saskatchewan in 1968, and then worked as a school teacher until approximately 1974.

Joy Kogawa´s first position as a writer was composing correspondence for the Office of the Prime Minister in Ottawa, Ontario, from 1974 to 1976. After that, she began to work as a freelance writer – the occupation she still lists today. Her literary career began with her first poetry collection, *The Splintered Moon*, published in 1968. She contributed pieces to many literary publications, from anthologies to poetry periodicals. She was once Writer in Residence at the University of Ottawa, in 1977, and became a member of the Canadian League of Poets, the Writer's Union of Canada, and the Order of Canada in 1986.

Kogawa then decided to try her hand at fiction. Her novel *Obasan* (which is the Japanese word both for "aunt" and "woman"), was first published in 1981 when Japanese Canadians began demanding a compensation from the Canadian government for their forced internment. Kogawa's novel is about Naomi Nakane, who is sent to a detention camp with her family at the same age that Kogawa herself was "evacuated" from Vancouver. Kogawa has stated in several interviews that *Obasan* is highly autobiographical, a story about breaking an imposed silence in order to make amendments. She blends a traditionally Asian appreciation for silence with a distinctly Western awareness of words.

Kogawa followed the success of this novel with the sequel *Itsuka* (Japanese for "someday"), written eleven years later, and published in 1992. *Itsuka* follows the characters introduced in *Obasan* as they seek to chronicle the fight for redress.

In 1985, Kogawa published another collection of poetry, entitled *Woman in the Woods*. Because *Obasan* received awards, acclaim and attention, its success led Kogawa to adapt the story for a younger audience, trying to teach future generations about this dark period in Canadian history. This adaptation, entitled *Naomi's Road*, was quickly translated into Japanese in 1988 (*Naomi no Michi*) and released in Tokyo as well as in Canada. This Japanese issue is still used as a school textbook in Japan, and considered to be relevant and accurate despite its fictional tone. Kogawa also addressed the injustice Japanese Canadians faced during that time in a series of essays and interviews that identified her as an activist fighting for the redress of people like her.

Much of Kogawa's poetry has biblical allusions and nursery rhymes. The reader can also find in her writings a strong empathy for the animal world, and some lyricism – many of Kogawa´s poems are presented as songs – that infuse her work with multiple layers of texture and meaning. Despite her Japanese heritage, critics agree that her work does not maintain an identifiably Asian structure or tone. But Kogawa comments about a "lack of hybridization" in her writing in an interview with Karlyn Koh:

> (...) the different identities, the identity of woman, identity of Japanese Canadian and Asian Canadian, the identity of writer, the identity of mother, the identity of this or that or the other thing, all these different identities, how to negotiate them? I haven't thought about that. I think what happens depends on the people I'm with and on the situation. I can get polarized or I can get categorized within my own mind or within the minds of people, and so when there's a distinct classification (...) then one either addresses that or escapes from one or the other. (KOH, 1994: 26)

In another moment of this same interview, Kogawa says that Japanese was irrevocably her mother tongue, for it was her mother's first language. Yet, it is not the language she identifies herself. "What I have from that language is sound, rhythm, feeling and very little in the way of intellectual construct. The language I can express myself in is English. But I can hear Japanese, and I can feel it" (KOH, 1994: 39).

In 1995, Kogawa released the novel *The Rain Ascends*, a story about a woman who discovers that her father, a minister, had sexually abused young boys in the past. The character, Millicent Shelby, faces the impossible decision of how to confront her father, and whether or not to notify the public of his transgressions.

Obasan was the first novel to deal with the terrible truths of internment, and its adaptation – *Naomi's Road* – was the first book for young readers to do the same. The word "*obasan"*, besides meaning "aunt", can also mean, in a broader context, "woman" in Japanese, and many feminist critics have praised the powerful, feminist tone of the novel.

Kogawa has said that the practice of poetry was, for her, "the sweeping out of debris between the conscious and the unconscious" (KOH, 1994: 21). The way she lets silence speak the horror of the experiences walks the fine line between personal and social elements.

2.2 – *Obasan*: an Autobiographical Novel

There is a state within a state in Canada. The liberal democratic Canadian state enshrines within itself a colonial state.
(Himani Bannerji)

As already mentioned, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* centers on the memories and experiences of Naomi Nakane, a schoolteacher living in the rural Canadian town of Cecil, Alberta, when the novel begins. The death of Naomi's Uncle Isamu (with a capital U, as she calls him), with whom she had lived as a child, leads Naomi to visit and care for her widowed aunt, Obasan. Her brief stay with Obasan, in turn, becomes an occasion for Naomi to revisit and reconstruct in memory her painful experiences as a child during and after the Second World War.

Naomi is the narrator of the novel, a thirty-six-year-old schoolteacher. She is called from her classroom by the Principal to receive the news of her uncle's death. Her story is filled with time shifts but seems to follow Naomi's whole story, being sexually abused, losing her mother, being interned and working in the beet fields. Naomi's narration interweaves two stories, one of the past and another of the present. Mixing experience and recollection, history and memory, she strives to come to terms with both past and present, and this effort forms the core of the novel. The experiences faced by Japanese Canadians during the Second World War described in the book places Kogawa's narrative in the autobiographical novel genre. Writer and critic Tonya Blowers presents, in her article "The Textual Contract: Distinguishing Autobiography from the Novel", an interesting definition of the genre:

> Autobiography is a declared attempt to represent the life of the author; the novel may well represent that life to some degree, introducing characters who might be composites of aspects of the author's personality, but it makes no claims to correspond in any direct way to the author's life. (BLOWERS: 2000, 115)

Obasan fits somewhere in the middle of Blowers' definition. Joy Kogawa combines fiction, personal memories and documentary texts in her search for truth, and yet manages to avoid being too didactic while criticizing oppressive systems. *Asian American Novelists*, by Cynthia Wong, praises Kogawa for trying to address the injustices left out of "official" histories through a "story conveyed with all the cadence and intonation of poetry; the powerful evocation of imposed silence (...) rendered with aching beauty in [her] prose" (WONG, 1993: 164). Arnold Davidson also talks about the importance of the novel:

> The novel is socially significant because it tells us something about ourselves as a society that we long preferred not to hear. The novel is artistically significant because it tells us unpalatable truths with consummate art. The novel is culturally significant because, thanks to the very art with which it addresses large social questions, it claims a special place for the ethnic writer in the ostensibly bicultural context of Canada and thereby encourages us to rethink out paradigms for Canadian culture and literature. (DAVIDSON, 1993: 13)

As for language strategies in the novel, Mark Libin ("Lost in Translation: Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*") brings to our attention what he calls "the echo effect" in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*. The echo effect is a literary resource for the problem of translation in the novel. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, from Hiromi Goto, as we will see in next chapter, the author does not transate the passages in Japanese to the reader, claiming that the protagonist herself could not understand what was being said. In *Obasan*, however, the Japanese words are followed by its translation in English, creating, as Libin defines it, an echo in the voices in the novel.

Obasan begins in August, 1972, with a visit by Naomi and her uncle Isamu to the coulee, a shallow grassland ravine to which they return "once every year around this time" (KOGAWA, 1994: 1). Though Naomi seems unaware of it until the end of the novel, her uncle returns to the "virgin land" of the prairie each year to mark the anniversary of the dropping of an atomic bomb on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945.

Naomi simply recalls that "the first time Uncle and I came here was in 1954, in August, two months after Aunt Emily's initial visit to Granton" (KOGAWA, 1994: 3). Only at the end of the book does Naomi learn the news that her aunt Emily had brought on that occasion: she was the bearer of the letters of Grandma Kato, telling about the suffering of Naomi's mother and grandmother in the aftermath of the Nagasaki bombing.

One month after her latest visit to the coulee, Naomi learns of her Uncle's death. In the days following her return to Granton to take care of her aunt, Naomi tries to communicate with Obasan to understand the silent "language of her grief" (KOGAWA, 1994: 14), to penetrate a Silence that has grown large and powerful over the years. At the same time, she looks over the documents, newspaper clippings, letters, and diaries kept by her aunt Emily, an outspoken political activist determined to denounce the truth about the Japanese Canadian experience of persecution. As Naomi's revisits the past, her memories as a child before and during the war become very present, and the narrative begins to mixture the child and the adult Naomi.

But as the stories of Naomi's childhood unfold, the sources of her confusion and pain begin to appear. Repeated incidents of abuse by a neighbor, Old Man Gower, produce feelings of shame and confusion in young Naomi. Old Man Gower is much more – and much more in Naomi's life - than a metonymic embodiment of Canada's misconduct, as Arnold Davidson claims (DAVIDSON, 1993: 43). There is the matter of his misconduct, as well, which, although never specified, may have extended even to rape. "For the text suggests much more than Naomi consciously articulates", Davidson continues. What Naomi feels in this moment seems to be a mixture of fear and pleasure, and this increases her sense of guilt. She concludes, later, that her mother's going away is a result of this act, as if the guilty pleasure was somehow responsible for the distance established between the two women. She remembers how he would tell her not to tell her mother, and the resultant separation from her mother comes out large in another memory:

> In Mr. Gower's hands I become other – a parasite on her body, no longer of her mind. (...) If I tell my mother about Mr. Gower, the alarm will send a tremor through our bodies and I will be torn from her. But the secret has already separated us. The secret is this: I go to seek Old Man Gower in his hideaway. I clamber unbidden onto his lap. His hands are frightening and pleasurable. In the center of my body is a rift.
>
> In my childhood dreams, the mountain yawns apart as the chasm spreads. My mother is on one side of the rift. I am on the other. We cannot reach each other. My legs are being sawn in half. (KOGAWA, 1994: 77)

The idea of a rift between Naomi and her mother can illustrate how far she felt from her since she was five. "That last sentence", Davidson concludes, "implies something more than loss of union with the mother, and may well be the child's subconscious rendering of a rape that cannot be consciously admitted or acknowledged" (DAVIDSON, 1993: 44). Furthermore, the secret that separates her from her mother is not just the fact that, following Old Man Gower's directions, she does not tell what happened. She fears that if she confides in her mother she will be "torn from her". This bodily rift, too, hints at rape, even as Naomi desperately denies the abuse by claiming that she had consented to whatever was done to her.

When her brother Stephen is beaten up by white boys, King-Kok Cheung observes in his book *Articulate Silences* (CHEUNG, 1993: 142-143), he refuses to tell Naomi what has caused his injury. Naomi then thinks to herself, "Is he ashamed, as I was in Old Man Gower's bathroom?" (KOGAWA, 1994: 97). Rape, as Erika Gottlieb points out in "The Riddle of Concentric Worlds in *Obasan*", is used here as a "metaphor for any kind of violation"

(GOTTLIEB, 1986: 45). Like Stephen, many Japanese Canadians have refused to describe their political and spiritual rape by the Canadian government and society.

Naomi explains that the episode was not one isolated case, and that has happened many times inside the internment camps. She also mentions that she feels these episodes seem to have separated her from her mother:

> Her eyes are steady and matter-of-fact – 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 honored when it is allowed to be, without fanfare, without reproach, without words. What is there is there.
>
> But even a glance, if it is not matter-of-fact, is a betrayal. (KOGAWA, 1994: 71)

When her mother leaves on the fateful trip to Japan, Naomi feels a "sense of guilt", uncertain if her own wrongdoing caused her mother to "disappear":

> I hardly dare to think, let alone ask, why she has to leave. Questions are meaningless. What matters to my five-year-old mind is not the reason that she is required to leave, but the stillness of waiting for her to return. After a while, the stillness is so much with me that it takes the form of a shadow which grows and surrounds me like air. (KOGAWA, 1994: 78)

Shortly after, when the evacuation begins and Naomi's father and uncle are sent to work camps, Naomi, her brother Stephen and Obasan are sent on a train from Vancouver to the mountainous interior of British Columbia. In the "ghost town of Slocan", Naomi and many other relocated Japanese Canadians attempt to reconstruct family and community life. Slocan, slowly and as much as possible, comes alive, after a time, with new small businesses, new social bonds and schools, and the children can enjoy a so-called "normal life".

Stephen, Naomi's eldest brother, had more time to know his mother and he is better able to understand what is happening. Therefore, he is better able to handle his mother's departure and he is also able to reject Obasan as a substitute. Stephen is angry with his family and with Japanese Canadians in general ("He is always uncomfortable when anything is too Japanese" – KOGAWA, 1994: 261). He is frustrated because he is Canadian, he plays European music, and he believes he has nothing to do with the Second World War. Still, he has to be shipped off to the camp in Slocan. Finally, though he does come to Uncle's funeral, Stephen stays away as much as possible and only brings his fiancée into the house for a few minutes. They do not stay to eat.

Present and past intermingle in the novel, partly because Naomi's attempt to send off the past safely to the past has the paradoxical effect of keeping that past always present, a floating history waiting to claim again its narration. So, reading in Aunt Emily's journals and letters an account of the family's difficulties and uncertainties in the face of imminent exile, Naomi soon finds herself almost literally back on the train that carried her, Stephen, and Obasan away from Vancouver to the interior of British Columbia and the former ghost town of Slocan: "It is three decades ago and I am a small child resting my head in Obasan's lap" across from Stephen aboard a train "full of strangers" (KOGAWA, 1994: 132-133).

After several years in Slocan, Naomi and Stephen are happy with the end of the war and the unexpected arrival of their father, but their hopes for a reunited family and a return to their former life are short-lived. Their father is once again dispatched to a work camp, where he later dies before seeing his children again. Meanwhile, Uncle, Obasan, Stephen and Naomi are "relocated" to a sugar-beet farm in the harsh weather of the Canadian plains. On the Barker farm outside of Granton, Alberta (chapters 30-32), they struggle to survive under conditions far worse than those in Slocan, without the consolations of the community that Slocan had brought them. Eventually, Uncle and Obasan manage to leave the Barker farm and move to a house in Granton, where they remain after Stephen leaves to pursue a career in music and Naomi goes away to become a teacher (KOGAWA, 1994: 257).

It is to this home in Granton that Naomi returns after her uncle's death to take care of Obasan. And it is also in Obasan's home, almost thirty years after the bombing of Nagasaki, that Naomi finally discovers about her mother's suffering and the reasons for her silence. Naomi and Stephen had been spared the truth by the wishes of their mother, who had asked for the truth to be kept secret "for the sake of the children" ("*Kodomo no tame*" – KOGAWA, 1994: 263). Even as an adult, Naomi is shielded from the truth, by Uncle (at the coulee), by Obasan (who gives her pictures instead of answers), and by Aunt Emily:

> "What do you think happened to Mother and Grandma in Japan?" I asked. "Did they starve, do you think?"
>
> Aunt Emily's startle was so swift and subtle it barely registered. But I could feel that somewhere, beneath her eyes, a shutter had clicked open and shut at my mentioning Mother and Grandma. It was as if my unexpected question was a sudden beam of pain that had to be extinguished immediately.
>
> She stared into the blackness. Sometimes when I stand in a prairie night the emptiness draws me irresistibly, like a dust speck into a vacuum cleaner, and I can imagine myself disappearing off into space like a rocket with my questions trailing behind me. (KOGAWA, 1994: 222)

Naomi also eventually discovers that her lost mother, trapped in Japan during the war, was in Nagasaki during the summer of 1945, and not, as she had been told, in Tokyo. The mother survived the bomb, but was terribly mutilated, and decided not to impose her tragedy on her children by returning and telling them about her sufferings. Consequently, the uncle and the two aunts (Aunt Emily and Obasan), "*kodomo no tame*" ("for the sake of the children", a recurring phrase repeated throughout the novel), never told Naomi about the real reasons for her mother's absence (DAVIDSON, 1993: 65).

"'Too young' (...) 'Still too young'" (KOGAWA, 1994: 3), Uncle had said when they first visited the coulee, soon after he had found out about Naomi's mother's death, almost ten years after the war had ended. Apparently, Naomi was still too young eighteen years later, since she had not yet been told that the yearly visits were to mark the day of her mother's death. Nonetheless, Arnold Davidson argues that, on some level Naomi knows – or at least suspects – what she and her uncle cannot articulate. The flower she always takes back with her is picked in symbolic mourning for her missing mother (DAVIDSON, 1993: 30).

When the whole family meets for the funeral of her uncle, Naomi and her brother Stephen finally hear the story of their mother's death, through the letter of their Grandma Kato to her husband, who was in Canada:

> The letter is dated simply 1949. lt was sent (...) from somewhere in Nagasaki. There was no return address.
>
> (...) Mother went to help her cousin [who had just had a baby] in Nagasaki. The baby was born three days after she arrived. Early in March, air raids and alarms were constant day and night in Tokyo. In spite of all the dangers of travel, Grandma Kato went to Nagasaki to be with my mother and to help with the care of the new baby. (...) Grandma Kato's sister, their mother, and her sister's husband died in the B-29 bombings of March 9, 1945.
>
> From this point on, Grandma's letter becomes increasingly chaotic, the details interspersed without chronological consistency. She and my mother, she writes, were unable to talk of all the things that happened. The horror would surely die sooner, they felt, if they refused to speak. But the silence and the constancy of the nightmare had become unbearable for Grandma and she hoped that by sharing them with her husband, she could be helped to extricate herself from the grip of the past.
>
> "If these matters are sent away in this letter, perhaps they will depart a little from our souls", she writes. "For the burden of these words, forgive me".
>
> Mother, for her part, continued her vigil of silence. She spoke with no one about her torment. She specifically requested that Stephen and I be spared the truth. (KOGAWA, 1994: 282-283)

For Naomi, the end of the war seems to have been felt in a disturbing way. She awakens one morning, “suddenly, before the regular summons of the rooster”, because “something has touched [her]” (KOGAWA, 1994: 199). That something “not human, not animal” is soon recognized as the “supernatural” presence of her mother:

> She is here. She is not here. She is reaching out to me with a touch deceptive as down, with hands and fingers that wave like grass around my feet, and her hair falls and falls and falls from her head like streamers of paper rain. (...) She is a ship leaving the harbour, tied to me by coloured paper streamers that break and fall into a swirling wake. (KOGAWA, 1994: 199)

That detail of the hair falling evokes Naomi's original separation from her mother, who, indeed, is next sensed as “ship leaving the harbour”, threatening to wash away Naomi even as she fully awakens from this dream/vision (DAVIDSON, 1993: 64). But the hair falling like paper streamers also implicitly invokes the reason why that first parting became permanent. As the novel makes clear, the mother here “appears” immediately after the end of the war. On the previous day, Stephen had come running home shouting "we won, we won, we won" (KOGAWA, 1994: 199). We, as readers, know, while young Stephen and Naomi do not, that Japan unconditionally surrendered only after the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki (DAVIDSON, 1993: 64).

“Only fragments relate me to them now, to this young woman, my mother, and me, her infant daughter”, Naomi reflects, looking at the photograph Obasan has once shown her. “Fragments of fragments (...). Segments of stories” (KOGAWA, 1994: 53). Appropriately enough, one of the first recovered partial fragments is, indeed, a segment of a story. “*Mukāshi mukāshi ōmukashi*” (KOGAWA, 1993: 65), Obasan exclaims over the same photo, and that Japanese equivalent of “once upon a time” takes Naomi back to her earliest memories and to the favorite story told and retold to her from the time even “before [she] could talk” (KOGAWA, 1994: 66).

Obasan tells Naomi one classic Japanese “fairy tale”, the story of Momotaro, the child born from a peach (*momo*, in Japanese) and raised by a childless old couple. The little boy, who was “golden and round as a peach, leaps onto the table from the heart of the fruit before [the] astonished eyes” of the old couple who will be his foster parents. Being so young, Naomi is easily able to accept Obasan as a substitute mother. Even so, she felt that her secret with Mr. Gower prompted her mother to leave and stay away. She wants the past to stay in the past and is quite bothered by Aunt Emily’s insistence that everything has to be told, and that facts have to be known (DAVIDSON, 1993: 41).

The Japanese Canadian experience, recounted in *Obasan* through Naomi's memories of childhood, is rooted in the actual history of 20,000 Japanese Canadians (as explained in Chapter 1). Viewed as dangerous enemies during the Second World War, many of these individuals were stripped of their homes and possessions, compelled to relocate to ghost towns or concentration camps, forced to live and work under terrible conditions, and denied the rights of citizenship. Nancy Peterson, in "Joy Kogawa and the Peculiar 'Logic' of Internment", argues that because to denounce the camps was necessarily also to question of Canada as a democratic nation, little public, official, or cultural support was available for whoever wished to voice their opposition. "Even the internees themselves, and their children and grandchildren, have found it difficult to speak of the experience" (PETERSON, 2001: 138). Throughout Naomi's Obasan, her quest to understand the painful personal story of her childhood intersects this bigger history of suffering.

Himani Bannerji, in "Returning the Gaze: An Introduction", talks about the problems in representation that arise in the writing of the "women of color":

> The words 'silencing', 'absence', 'invisibility', 'exclusion' and 'non-representation' have come to be considered, in Canadian mainstream feminism, as clichés or the rhetoric of 'women of colour' and black feminist politics. But their importance remains undiminished for anyone who has searched for a developed critical voice of non-white women in Canada, and/or tried to put together a course on gender, race and class with Canadian content. (BANNERJI, 1993: X)

The prejudice against Japanese Canadians had probably existed long before the Second World War, but the war enhanced this feeling. The root of the internment lies in prejudice. Early in the novel, when Naomi is first browsing through Aunt Emily's parcel, there is a moment that discusses this problem. Naomi has noted that every time the words "Japanese race" appeared in the new articles or in pamphlets, Aunt Emily has crossed them out and written "Canadian citizens" (KOGAWA, 1994: 165). Therein lies the problem. Naomi's family and other Japanese Canadians were viewed as aliens and, with the outbreak of war, as the enemy. They were never entirely accepted as Canadian citizens.

2.3 – The Bread Is Stone

> Producing a recipe, like retelling a story, may be at once cultural practice and autobiographical assertion.
> (Anne Goldman)

"Eating", Cynthia Wong explains in her article "Big Eaters, Treat Lovers, 'Food Prostitutes,' 'Food Pornographers,' and Doughnut Makers", "is one of the most biologically deterministic and, at the same time, socially adaptable human acts" (WONG, 1993: 18). Wong argues that a meal can be sometimes a simple prelinguistic *phenomenon*, and other times a multivalent *sign* coded in language, manners, and rites.

The first moment in which food is mentioned in the novel is at Obasan's house, the house in Granton where Naomi and Stephen lived with her and their uncle years before. Naomi goes there shortly after Uncle's death, with the intention to take care of her aunt. As usual, Obasan is a very quiet woman, who speaks even less than necessary. In this afternoon, the stone bread comes up:

> We sit in silence sipping and turning the cups around on the tips of our fingers.
>
> Behind her on the counter is a black loaf of Uncle's stone bread, hefty as a rock. (...) The fact that it's uncovered means that it was made yesterday or today. Was making this bread Uncle's last act? (KOGAWA, 1994: 15)

The stone bread from Naomi's Uncle had made before dying is mentioned several times throughout the novel. Cynthia Wong says that alimentary images, thus juxtaposed and read as a group, symbolize *necessity* – all the hardships, deprivations, restrictions, disenfranchisements, and dislocation that Asian Americans have collectively suffered as immigrants and minorities in a white-dominated country (WONG, 1993: 20). The cooked, she continues, is a cultural transformation of the raw, whereas the rotted is a natural transformation.

The stone bread in *Obasan* is not, then, what one would instantly identify as an ethnic sign. After all, originating as Uncle's fanciful variation of a giveaway recipe, it seems distinctive, personal; the source of family jokes ("Shall I get the ax? – KOGAWA, 1994: 15). Its symbolic power can in no small part be credited to the meticulous care with which Kogawa manages her elaborate network of images. Yet if we do as Cynthia Wong suggests, move beyond Obasan as a hermetic text rich in authorial hints and read it intertextually, focusing on its participation in the larger discourse of Asian American literature, the stone bread image begins to look different: "When read alongside the many other images of unpalatable food and strenuous eating found in Asian American literary works, the image

loses somewhat in novelty but assumes the ethnic group-specific meaning of Necessity" (WONG, 1993: 24).

Members of Naomi's family react to the stone bread quite differently. Uncle, Obasan, and Aunt Emily ingest it readily: Uncle pronounce it "beri good" (KOGAWA, 1994: 15), Obasan likes it broken and soaked in homemade weed-tea (16), and Aunt Emily puts raw onion on it (43). Stephen has thought up a way to eat it: covering it with margarine (15); but in the climatic scene in which the family tragedy is revealed he balks at the bread, breaking off a corner of the loaf and then sticking it back on (259). Naomi objects to it vehemently, refusing even to classify it as food: "If you can't even break it, it's not bread", Naomi states. "It's all stone" (16).

What unites the immigrants in these stories, Cynthia Wong observes, is an ability to eat unhopeful substances and to extract nourishment, even a sort of willed enjoyment, from them; symbolically, it is the ability to deal with the limitations and persecutions Asian Americans had to endure as immigrants and racial minorities (WONG, 1993: 25).

As Roger Abrahams remarks, "it is only human that we regard the major orifices, especially our mouths, as providing an access to ourselves that must remain inviolate except in the most privileged moments, when openness is valued more highly than protection" (ABRAHAMS, 1984:19). Opening the mouth to eat is essential to keep alive, but the act itself also brings with it the threat of unwelcome intrusion (WONG, 1993: 26).

Ingestion, Cynthia Wong continues, is the physical act that mediates between self and not-self, native essence and foreign matter, the inside and the outside. The mediating relationship is crucial: until eaten and absorbed into one's bodily system, food is no more than a substance "out there". The nature of this operation becomes apparent when the demands of survival require a creative stretching of the actual definition of food:

> Displeasing food questions the capacity to convert the seemingly useless into the useful, refuse into nutrition. Physical survival is incompatible with a fastidious palate; physiological survival hinges on the wresting of meaning from arbitrary infliction of humiliation and pain. (WONG, 1993: 26)

The stone bread image in Obasan is a brilliant exploration of the various symbolic dimensions of eating. The government's "condensation" of the civil and humans rights of Japanese Canadians is inexcusable, especially given its self-proclaimed commitment to democracy; in that sense, Cynthia Wong again affirms, "it sits like a stone in the gullet of the betrayed – hard, harsh, and implacable, impossible to accept without doing major violence to

one's political and philosophical beliefs" (WONG, 1993: 26-27). As the stone bread, the treatment given to Japanese Canadians during the war was something "hard to swallow":

> Even such common English expressions as to "swallow" one's pride or "stomach" an insult, to have a decision "shoved down one's throat", to find a situation "unpalatable" or a character "unsavory", and to "eat one's words" or "eat crow", all at root alimentary metaphors, bespeak the aptness of the trope for history fraught with involuntariness of all kinds. (WONG, 1993: 26)

As mentioned earlier in Arnold Davidson's book, the fate of the Japanese-Canadians banished into Canada is in some level comparable to that of the Jews in Germany. Teruyo Ueki, in the article "'Obasan': Revelations in a Paradoxical Scheme – Asian Perspectives", compares this situation with the one of the Israelites. Joy Kogawa opens the novel with an epigraph taken from the Bible:

> *To him that overcometh*
> *will I give to eat*
> *of the hidden manna*
> *and will give him*
> *a white stone*
> *and in the stone*
> *a new name written* (The Revelation of John 2:17)

Teruyo Ueki says that whereas Kogawa's reference to "the hidden manna" is derived from her Christian heritage, such symbols as the moon and stone in the novel are inseparable from a Buddhist tradition of the community with which she is in contact:

> Pilgrimages to one's family graves are a common rite observed among the Japanese at the time of Obon [Buddhist "Festival of the Dead"] in summer, when the moon becomes full. Uncle Isamu's annual visit to the prairie under the moonlight meant such a pilgrimage – a tribute to the memory of the dead sleeping underneath the stone. (UEKI, 1993: 7)

Ueki says that Uncle's "stone bread", made under such circumstances, inevitably conjures up this Biblical manna.[20] It is baked for the children, although hard and clumsy like a stone in its outcome, in order to nourish their bodies in their guarded life. The stone bread in Obasan's counter, Naomi tells us in the novel, takes her back to 1946, when her uncle had

[20] *Manna* (sometimes or archaically spelled *mana*) is the name of the food miraculously produced for the Israelites in the desert in the book of Exodus. Manna ceased to appear when the Israelites first harvested their crops in their new homeland. "Man hu", or "manna" in the Hebrew language is translated as "what is it". George Ebers (*Durch Gosen zum Sinai,* 1881, p. 236), derived "manna" from the Egyptian *mennu*, "food" (*JE* "Manna"). By extension, "manna" has also been used to refer to any divine or spiritual nourishment. (*Source*: *The Jewish Encyclopedia* Website)

first attempted to bake it. It was a bread recipe given by the woman in the store for whoever bought flower in that day, and Uncle had decided to bake:

> "Burreddo", Uncle said as he pulled it from the oven. "Try. Good."
>
> "How can you eat that stone?" I asked, poking it. "It'll break your teeth. Shall I get the ax?"
>
> "Stone burreddo. Oishi", Uncle said. "Taste beri good."
>
> He carved a piece off and held it out to me.
>
> (...) Uncle had baked the bread too long. I refused to eat it, but Uncle kept making it that way over the years, "improving" the recipe with leftover oatmeal and barley. Sometimes he even added carrots and potatoes. But no matter what he put in it, it always ended up like a lump of granite on the counter. (KOGAWA, 1994: 15)

While Uncle's stone bread is a meal provided for the children's bodies, Teruyo Ueki observes, Aunt Emily's package is sent for the growth of the children's minds. Both are given as a witness to their love, as the Biblical manna is given to the Israelites as a witness of God's love (UEKI: 1993: 7). The fact that Emily's package is described as being "heavy as a loaf of Uncle's stone bread" (KOGAWA, 1994: 37) implies the author's way of measuring Emily, Uncle, and Obasan in their weight of love, although the modes of language they use for communication are different.

In a sense, the images of the stone bread also provide a metaphor of reading: the reader's endeavor to get through the narrative complexities of *Obasan* parallels not only Naomi's quest for knowledge but also the physical process of ingesting and digesting the stone bread (WONG, 1993: 21). Obasan's silence, Aunt Emily's constant war with the words, and Uncle's stone bread are the means they all found to protect Naomi and Stephen from the truth about their mother during the war. In the interview with Karlyn Koh, Joy Kogawa talks about denial:

> It is terrible not to know. But when you don't know you don't know, it's not so bad. When you're in denial you can go on with your life – it's a great survival tactic, I've discovered. And I look back and I see that I have lived my life in denial and that's what I write about. (...) It's sort of like the atmosphere that surrounds the world: it keeps us safe, it keeps the sun from coming through and destroying us. The sun is like the truth. I mean the truth is what enables things to grow.
>
> But too much of it kills us. And so although one wants the sun, one also – automatically, I think – puts up the show that protects us, that's denial. As soon as you see that, it's denial. You have to tear it away and that's the hard part. It means going in directly to the sun and/or into the flame and surviving that.

> Because another layer will come to protect you (...). You go into the flame and you will find that the safest place to be in a fire is to go directly into it, into the clearing where the ashes are. So that's what you do when you are no longer in denial: you go rushing into the thing, you get to the safe place. (KOH: 1994: 38)

Naomi's tragedy is not a personal one, but a community one, for the decision for silence, Cynthia Wong affirms, was made in the context of the general destruction of the Japanese Canadian community. It was because the family had already suffered so much from the government's repeated betrayals that *kodomo no tame* ("for the sake of the children") became such an overriding concern for Obasan, Emily and Uncle (WONG, 1993: 21).

Faced with one tragedy after another, Uncle's and Obasan's response has been to "swallow", as mentioned before. Their effort to give Naomi and Stephen some resemblance of a family life, their managing to feel grateful to Canada just for letting them stay alive, are the equivalent of drawing sustenance from stone bread:

> "We are the country", [Aunt Emily] answered.
>
> Obasan was not taking part in the conversation. When pressed, finally she said that she was grateful for life. "Arigatai. Gratitude only".
>
> Uncle, who had been listening tensely up to this point, relaxed his jaws and slapped his lap with both hands. "In the world, there is no better place", he said. "This country is the best. There is food. There is medicine. There is pension money. Gratitude. Gratitude." (KOGAWA, 1994: 50)

However, Cynthia Wong argues, for such mute and uncomplaining atittudes they have had to pay a steep price: they themselves have taken on characteristics of stone, having become dry, inert, impassive, no longer capable of crying (WONG, 1994: 27): "How different my two aunts are. One lives in sound, the other in stone." (KOGAWA, 1994: 39).

Teruyo Ueki develops the idea of the bread/food as a link between the uncle/aunts and the children:

> What is noticeable in this characterization of Uncle, Obasan, and Emily is that each is represented in connection with nourishment: Uncle as the baker of stone bread, Obasan as the carrier of bundled food, and Emily as the holder of "white paper bread". (UEKI, 1993: 7)

This, Ueki believes, seems to be a reflection of the writer's interest in the episode recorded before the story of hidden manna in Revelation 2:17, which talks about a people who were tempted to eat the food offered to idols:

> Kogawa told me that she had been drawn to this episode while reading the Bible one day and had come to conceive of "the hidden manna" as "genuine" food given to those who persevere. She defined the eating of idol offerings as the act of taking "as nourishment anything (...) offered to us by way of advertising or off these many things we digest as food. If we resist food that does not really feed us, and we stay true to what is deeper, then 'the hidden manna' is given to us". (UEKI, 1993: 7)

That is to say, the Japanese-Canadian community is pictured as the holder of a genuine food in the form of genuine love or sincerity as expressed for example by Uncle, Obasan and Emily, but because of the suppression, the existence of this food was invisible and, in a way, sacrificed (UEKI, 1993: 8).

Still in this same line of thought, Cynthia Wong reminds us that, to anyone conversant with the bible, the pairing of the two words *stone* and *bread* evokes ready associations. "Christ's dictum on the grace of God comes immediately to mind: 'Or what man is there of you, whom if a son ask bread, will he give him a stone?' [Matt. 7:9]" (WONG, 1993: 23). Naomi asks her absent mother for a proof of love and seems to be endlessly rejected; yet the stone turns out to be bread after all: the mother's love is found to be much greater than Naomi could ever have guessed.

2.4 – **There Is a Silence that *Will* Not Speak**

> *To the issei, honor and dignity is expressed through silence, the twig bending with the wind. The sansei view silence as a dangerous kind of cooperation with the enemy.*
> *(Joy Kogawa, in an interview with Susan Yim)*

Since its publication in 1981, *Obasan* has been the focus of considerable critique, much of it directed to the thematic of speech and silence that clearly runs throughout it. According to Traise Yamamoto in *Masking Selves, Making Subjects: Japanese American Women, Identity, and the Body*, "*Obasan* begins and ends in silence, which is the clearest indication that this is not a novel about the attainment of speech after its long repression. It is a novel that traces Naomi Nakane's growing understanding of the many different modalities of silence in her life" (YAMAMOTO, 1999: 190). Naomi's life, as in opposition to Murasaki's (Hiromi Goto's character), is made of silences. *Obasan* opens with an invocation that shows two different silences, the oppressed and the willed:

> There is a silence that cannot speak.
> There is a silence that will not speak.
> Beneath the grass the speaking dreams and beneath the dreams is a sensate sea. The speech that frees comes forth from the amniotic deep. To attend its voice, I can hear it say, is to embrace its absence. But I fail the task. The word is stone. (KOGAWA, 1994: 1)

As a child, Naomi was very quiet. So much so that her relatives often thought she was mute. However, she did ask questions, especially about her mother. She never received answers and ceased asking. Similarly, in the chaos of being interned to the camp in Slocan, she lost her doll but only asked about it once because she knew it was lost. This linguistic anxiety clearly marks Naomi throughout the story and even marks the adult Naomi, whom we first see troubled by her students' questions about her.

Ironically, in response to a narrative that struggles to reconstruct the dichotomy speech x silence, many reviewers and critics have read the novel in ways that gives new eyes to that opposition and uncritically privilege speech as the vehicle and indicator of subjectivity. King-Kok Cheung, in *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*, argues against that, observing that such critics ignore the Eurocentric assumptions about the role of language, and fail to recognize the force of Kogawa's narrative and the ways in which it subverts any easy distinctions between speech and silence:

> Whereas in English "silence" is often the opposite of "speech", the most common Chinese and Japanese ideogram for "silence" is synonymous with "serenity" and antonymous with "sound", "noise", "motion" and "commotion". In the United States, silence is generally looked upon as passive; in China and Japan it traditionally signals pensiveness, vigilance, or grace. (CHEUNG, 1993: 127)

Cheung wisely observes that Obasan "shows a mixed attitude toward both language and silence and reevaluates both in ways that undermine logocentrism" (CHEUNG, 1993: 128). Obasan reveals the strengths and limits of discursive power and quiet patience alike, and in doing so, she maintains the complementary functions of verbal and nonverbal expression. Words can undoubtedly liberate, but they can also distort and wound; and while silence may obliterate, it can also minister, soothe, and communicate (128).

Gayle K. Fujita, in the article "To Attend the Sound of Stone: The Sensibility of Silence in Obasan", an early and often-cited reading of the novel, writes that:

> [Its] essence (...) is Naomi's nonverbal mode of apprehension summarized by the term 'attendance'. This sensibility, rooted in Naomi's *nikkei* inheritance and her before-the-war Vancouver home, is therefore not simply the novel's stylistic

> achievement but a form of Japanese Canadian and American culture. (FUJITA, 1985: 34)

Kogawa's use of silence as a mode of signification has been well argued by Cheung and Fujita. Traise Yamamoto adds to these thoughts that the connection between silence and absence in the novel suggests that not only silence must be understood as a mode of agency, but that absence also must be restored as a site of subjectivity (YAMAMOTO, 1999: 187). The failure to do either reduces in importance the maternal side of the novel to passivity and erasure. In the essay "Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference", Trinh Minh-ha reveals the psychoanalytic downside of such associations:

> Silence can only be subversive when it frees itself from the male-defined context of absence, lack and fear as feminine territories. On the one hand, we face the danger of inscribing femininity as absence, as lack and as blank in rejecting the importance of the act of enunciation. On the other hand, we understand the necessity to place women on the side of negativity and to work in undertones, for example, in our attempts at undermining patriarchal systems of values. Silence is so commonly set in opposition with speech. Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored. (MINH-HA, 1990: 372-73)

The problems Minh-ha suggests is particularly evident in relation to Kogawa's novel, in which silence and absence are inextricably linked. The mistake, Traise Yamamoto says, is not in the configuration of these elements, but rather in ways they are read in accordance with the uncritical privileging of speech and/as presence. Such privilege is the implicit foundation of psychoanalytic, psycholinguistic readings of *Obasan*, which tend to argue that Naomi's journey enacts the crisis of maternal separation that marks entry into language (YAMAMOTO, 1999: 188).

In her quest for resolution, Cheung states, Naomi is influenced by her two aunts' contrary responses to their traumatic experiences during the war. Obasan, the reticent aunt who raises Naomi, encourages her to forget and forgive. Aunt Emily, the political activist, represents the impulse to speak out bluntly against the injustices done against Japanese Canadians. As she presses her niece to "write the vision and make it plain" (KOGAWA, 1994: 38), she challenges Naomi to confront her past (CHEUNG, 1993: 132). Emily brings to mind the Old Testament prophets who cry for justice; Obasan, the New Testament preaching of humility, forgiveness, and charity. Both sets of behavior also have roots in Japanese culture.

As Michiko Lambertson points out in her "Review of *Obasan*" in 1982, "There are two poles in the Japanese way of thinking. One is a fatalistic attitude of acceptance, endurance, and stoicism and the other is a sense of justice, honour, and fair play" (LAMBERTSON, 1982: 94). Obasan's behavior is as much Buddhist as Christian, as we have seen before in this chapter. She moves with equal ease in Christian and Buddhist burial ceremonies, always ready with her serving hands. Emily's activism is ascribed to her Canadian schooling. But this is also reflected in Kogawa's rendition of the Japanese tale of Momotaro, the boy who defends his people valiantly against cruel bandits (FUJITA, 1985: 40-41).

As Goellnicht points out in "Minority History as Metafiction: Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*", "Language shapes, rather than merely reflects, reality for both victimizers and the victims, its manipulation resulting in empirical, concrete actions" (GOELLNICHT, 1989: 291). It becomes especially deceitful when abusive insults pass for news and oppressive pronouncements pass for laws. Emily writes, "There's this horrible feeling whenever I turn on the radio, or see a headline with the word 'Japs' screaming at us" (KOGAWA, 1994: 99). The newspapers, according to her, are printing "outright lies": "There was a picture of a young Nisei boy with a metal lunch box and it said he was a spy with a radio transmitter" (KOGAWA, 1994: 101). Similarly, the government justified evacuation of Japanese residents by claiming they were a security risk; but not a single charge of treason was laid (CHEUNG, 1993: 134-135).

In due course, Naomi doubts the very effectiveness of language. She wonders whether anything tangible can come out of Emily's polemics:

> All of Aunt Emily's words, all her papers, the telegrams and petitions, are like scratchings in the barnyard, the evidence of much activity, scaly claws hard at work. But what good they do, I do not know-those little black typewritten words-rain words, cloud droppings. They do not touch us where we are planted here in Alberta. (...) The words are not made flesh. (...) All my prayers disappear into space. (KOGAWA, 1994: 226)

To Naomi, Cheung observes (CHEUNG, 1993: 138), Emily's collections of facts and didactic analysis are but so much sound; they hardly alleviate actual suffering or inspire redeeming vision, let alone "bring contentment" (KOGAWA, 1994: 42). Speaking of her own writing, Magdalene Redekop quotes Joy Kogawa in "The Literary Politics of the Victim": "Documents and facts are intended to direct our prejudiced hearts but rarely provide direction

by themselves. I have boxes and boxes of documents but what I need is vision and vision comes from relationship. Facts bereft of love direct us nowhere" (REDEKOP, 1989: 15).

The stoic silence of the *issei* is presented with a similar mixture of appreciation and criticism. The *issei* believe in *gaman,* in quiet forbearance, in dignified silence (CHEUNG, 1993: 145). During the war they gathered enormous strength to swallow white prejudice, endure the ravages of the internment and, above all, shelter the young as much as possible from physical and psychological harm. Wakako Yamauchi wisely talks about this quiet strength, which the *nisei* have also inherited:

> The *sansei* accuse us [*nisei*] of not wanting to talk about the evacuation experience. And it's true. (...) And when we do see those old photographs of the mass evacuation, (...) few of us can hold back the tears that most often smack of self-pity, but maybe somewhere behind those tears we know that this is the event that changed the course of our lives, and though there were those among us who had more insight, more courage, whatever path we chose, we have survived-whole. Maybe that's why so many of us remain silent about our camp experience. Maybe in our silence we ask you to honor us for that survival (...). The fact of our survival is proof of our valor. And that is enough. (1979, lxxi)

Naomi is a *nisei*. In her narration, however, her voice is steady. She has not raised her voice to tell about the injustices done to her people as her Aunt Emily would, nor has she kept silent – which in a Eurocentric culture amounts to passive acceptance. Instead, her writing about a silence and through references to her own juvenile state and the many references to juvenile tales are an even-voiced, steady documentation of a history of a wrong. The result is a declaration of cultural enrichment. Is it not ironic that a novel in which the central theme is silence was actually not only the first to break the silence of a suppressed Japanese Canadian history, but was also the first to speak about the Japanese Canadian experience?

CHAPTER 3

Chorus of Mushrooms: *Mukāshi*, *Mukāshi*, *Ōmukashi...*

I can never unzip my skin
and step into another.
I am happy with my colour until someone points
out it clashes with my costume.
I hold my culture in my hands and form it on my own,
so that no one else can shape the way it lies upon my body.
(Hiromi Goto, "The Body Politic")

Chorus of Mushrooms is a gathering of recollections of the Japanese Canadian author Hiromi Goto, or, as stated by her, "(almost) always a work of fiction" (GOTO, 1994: 1). We might consider, in the same way as *Obasan*, that this is an autobiographical novel. Murasaki, the central character, tells her lover about her memories as a child in Alberta, where she lived for many years with her parents and grandmother in a mushroom farm. The stories are divided between three voices: Murasaki in the present, the adult main narrator; Murasaki in the past, a 12-year old girl; and Naoe, her *Obāchan*, Japanese for grandmother. The stories are told in the present, and always in the first person. They are stories within stories, intertwined with Japanese folk legends and myths, in a mixture of oral tradition, life telling and memories:

> Murasaki: Obāchan, everyone wants to hear stories. And I can't finish them. They scatter like sheep. Like dust.
>
> Naoe: No need to tie them up. There is always room for beginnings. (GOTO, 1994: 63)

Chorus of Mushrooms is a novel about beginnings and happy endings ("an immigrant story with a happy ending. Nothing is impossible. within reason, of course." – GOTO, 1994: 212). It is about making amends with yourself. The main focus of the novel is the relationship between Murasaki, Naoe and Keiko (who is Murasaki`s mother and Naoe`s daughter). The novel deals mainly with aspects of hybridism, assimilation and community, and tries to establish bridges between the Japanese and the Canadian cultures through several elements, such as language and food, as we are going to see in this chapter.

3.1 – Hiromi Goto: Life and Works

I must be a mushroom
Everyone keeps me in the dark
And feeds me horseshit
(Hiromi Goto)

Hiromi Goto[21] was born in 1966 in Chiba-ken, Japan. Her family immigrated to Canada in 1969. They moved to Vancouve, in British Columbia, and eight years later went to Nanton, Alberta, where her father started a mushroom farm. This mushroom farm is the main setting for the novel *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Goto attended the University of Calgary, and graduated in 1989 with a B.A. in the Humanities (English and Art).

Chorus of Mushrooms, first published in 1994, is Goto's first novel, and it won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1995 for Best First Book in the Caribbean and Canadian Region, and was also co-winner of the Canada-Japan Book Award. Her short stories and poetry have been widely published in literary journals and anthologies. She also writes feminist revisions of traditional Japanese folk legends for periodicals, and academic articles. Her first children's novel, The *Water of Possibility*, was published in 2001. Hiromi Goto is an active member of the literary community, a writing instructor and editor. She is also the mother of two children, and nowadays lives in Burnaby, in British Columbia.

Hiromi Goto's eighty-year old grandmother, Naoe, did tell her Japanese stories while she was growing up. Her work is also influenced by her father's stories of how life was back in Japan. These stories often featured ghosts and folk creatures such as the *kappa* – a small creature with a frog's body, a turtle's shell and a bowl-shaped head that holds water. These creatures were also inspiration for Goto's second children's novel, *The Kappa Child*, first published in 2001, which was nominated for the Sunburst Award for Literature of the Fantastic as well as for the Commonwealth Prize for Best Regional Book. The *Kappa Child* also won the James Tiptree Jr. Memorial Award.

In 2004, Hiromi Goto published a collection of short stories entitled *Hopeful Monsters*. As defined on the back cover of the book, hopeful monsters are, "abnormal organisms that, nonetheless, adapt and survive in their environment". Having alterity as a

[21] The biographical references were taken from three main sources: *Hiromi Goto's Homepage*, "Hiromi Goto: Brief Biography" in the *Athabasca University* Website, and from an interview with Goto by Gavin J. Grant, given when the novel *The Kappa Child* was published, for the Website *Booksense.com*. Different from Joy Kogawa, there is not much information available, published or online, about Hiromi Goto's life.

central issue in the stories, the Japanese Canadian author tells stories about women characters that feel displaced, *othered* (ASHCROFT, 2002: 11), in plots filled with family relations in which men, dead or alive, rarely speak.

In an interview given to Gavin J. Grant when *The Kappa Child* was released, Hiromi Goto talks about her sense of dislocation as a Japanese Canadian:

> The geographical move from Japan to the west coast and then to the prairies is one that I experienced as a child. I develop many ideas for stories and novels from my life and fragments of every day. My job as a writer is to take these experiences and shape them for a specific effect, though it goes without saying that what I'd intended may be a long route to something else altogether. (...) As an adult, I look back to how my child eyes saw, and the ironies and humor are a rich source of story. [22]

Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* is a novel that deals with memories. Memories of Goto's childhood, memories of her parents and grandmother, memories of her grandmother's childhood. The book is about looking back and discovering that you are the result of your experiences. There is a thin line between past and present, between hers and her grandmother's voices, between folk legends and "true stories" [*sic*].

3.2 – *Chorus of Mushrooms*: (Almost) Always a Work of Fiction

> *The named 'other' is never to be found merely over there and outside oneself, for it is always over here, between Us, within Our discourse, that the 'other' becomes a nameable reality.*
> *(Trinh T. Minh-ha)*

As already mentioned, *Chorus of Mushrooms* is a gathering of recollections. Murasaki, the main narrator, whose English name is Muriel,[23] opens the book talking to her lover, telling him about her memories as a child in Alberta, where she lived with her parents and grandmother in a mushroom farm:

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[22] "Hiromi Goto interviewed by Gavin J. Grant", in the *Booksense.com* Website.

[23] The main character was born Muriel Tonkatsu, but her grandmother only calls her Murasaki. Later in the novel she explains: "My mother calls me Muriel, but I out-grew that name when I came to realize that I came from a specific cultural background that wasn't Occidental" (GOTO, 1994: 189). Given also the fact that the titles in which the narrator's voice is indicated before a series of memories also refers to her as Murasaki, and because this dissertation focus mainly on the postcolonial aspects of the analyzed novels, I made the choice of not referring to her as Muriel. Some critics do that, however, and I maintained their choices when quoting them.

> We lie in bed (...). You lift your hand to rest its weight, the palm rough, just beneath my breast.
>
> (...)
>
> "Will you tell me a story about your Obāchan?"
>
> "Yes," I close my eyes and breathe deeply. Slowly.
>
> "Will you tell me a true story?" you ask, with unconscious longing.
>
> "A lot of people ask that. Have you ever noticed? (...) It's like people want to hear a story, and then, after they're done with it, they can stick the story back to where it came from (...)." (GOTO, 1994: 1)

The question of truth in the story seems to be a big issue, since it is mentioned several times. As stated by Goto in the beginning of the book, this novel "should (almost) always be considered a work of fiction". Many of the memories are true, or so Murasaki believes. "Here's a true story" (GOTO, 1994: 2), she says to her lover, and begins her series of memories. The constant mentioning to the telling of "true stories" seems like a very good use of irony,[24] being memory itself so unreliable most of the time. Goto seems to be clearly aware of that.

Different from Joy Kogawa's novel, *Chorus of Mushrooms* deals with personal memories, and does not seem to have the intention of representing a community most of the time, although several passages could be considered a microcosm of the Japanese immigrants' situation in Canada. However, even though it is mainly a book about family memories, private, particular memories, sometimes it is possible to find similarities in both Goto's and Kogawa's intentions in the novels. Mark Libin clarifies this situation:

> In Obāchan Naoe, Goto constructs a figure who re-addresses Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*. For just as *Obasan* begins and ends with a call for *redress*, for a healing of the community, *Chorus of Mushrooms* attempts to provide an "immigrant story with a happy ending", a text that – while addressing the issues of racism and assimilation that concern Kogawa – tries to approach these issues in a playfully subversive way. (LIBIN, 1999: 137)

Individual and collective memories mix and overlap if we compare both novels, probably because so many of the individual registers are also social. Memory, then, becomes

[24] As Linda Hutcheon states in her *Poetics of Postmodernism*, "(...) irony may be the only way we *can* be serious today. There is no innocence in our world. We cannot ignore the discourses that precede and contextualize everything we say and do" (HUTCHEON, 1988: 39).

a way of de-naturalizing the notion of the existence of one unique Cartesian "Truth", which is also part of the feminist and postmodern ideology of breaking up with the standard grand-narratives. As Canadian theorist and critic Linda Hutcheon affirms in when interviewed by Kathleen O'Grady, postmodern thinking challenges universals and stresses on the local and particular (O'GRADY, 1998: 21). As Hutcheon also affirms in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, the narrator – whether in fiction or history – "constructs those very facts by giving a particular meaning to events. Facts do not speak for themselves" (HUTCHEON, 1999:56). Facts are given meaning and become discursive wholes by narrators' intervention. All memory is fictionalized in some degree.

At a certain point in the novel, Murasaki`s lover asks her about the breaking with the concept of truths:

> "I thought that you didn't learn how to speak Japanese until after you grew up", you say, taping your finger on your lips.
>
> "That's right", I answer.
> (…)
> "Then how do you know what your Obāchan said? I thought you couldn't speak with her when you were growing up in Nanton. Or did I get it wrong?"
> (…)
> "No, that's right."
> (…)
> "Then how can you be telling a true story if you never knew what your grandmother said?", you ask.
> (…)
> "I'm making up the truth as I go along." (GOTO, 1994: 12)

This dialogue shows how *Chorus of Mushrooms* plays with the idea of memory and truth, breaking the boundaries between them and reconstructing both. Again, there is a constant questioning as to whether the stories are true or not. Being an autobiographical novel, it is possible to assume that this might be an actual concern of the author in relation to her own memories.

The stories in the novel are divided between three voices: Murasaki in the present, Murasaki in the past, and Naoe. Each voice seems to have complete autonomy in their own turns. Bahktin says that "in prose literature we may have several contestive voices representing a variety of ideological positions which can engage equally in dialogue" (PARYAS, 1993: 610). We can see these voices in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Murasaki in the present is the voice who apparently "controls" the narrative, mediating the two other voices –

hers and her grandmother's in the past. It is not made clear that there is only one narrator – Murasaki as an adult –, but it is equally difficult to say if Naoe's voice is actually hers. The memories do not seem to have any strict chronological order.

The book begins with a dedication: "For Kiyokawa Naoe, I love you Obāchan". Since the grandmother's name in the book is also Naoe, and because of the biographical information we have about the author, one can affirm that this is an autobiographical novel. In the "Acknowledgements" section, Goto explains that "this novel is a departure from historical 'fact' into the realms of contemporary folk legend". The memories in the book are sometimes mixed with folk legends and fairy tales from Japanese mythology.

Murasaki begins her stories by saying the words, "*Mukāshi*, *mukāshi*, *ōmukashi*…", the Japanese equivalent to "once upon a time". This can also be seen as a reference to *Obasan*, Joy Kogawa's novel. In the novel, Naomi's Obasan says those words when she begins to tell Naomi the memories that came as a consequence of looking at a photograph. In Mari Sasano's article "'Words like Buckshot': Taking Aim at Notions of Nation in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*" (1998), the critic states that Goto's novel is in part a response to Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, and that this response enables the imaginative recreation of the "traditions" of Japanese culture as well as the retelling and reproduction of a Japanese Canadian identity. Sasano develops this thought:

> In their struggle to find where they fit in between Canadian (read 'white') norms and (largely forgotten but always menacing) Japanese traditions, the Tonkatsu family in *Chorus of Mushrooms* inhabits Bhabha's "limited space" within the nation, performing a different, acceptable, yet subversive Canadian identity. Goto's characters experience marginalization, but ultimately dissolve the center/margin dichotomy upon which it relies, resisting the prescribed notions of Canadianness and Japaneseness in the Canadian context through the performative act of writing themselves into the nation. (SASANO, 1998: 1)

This act of "writing themselves into the nation" in *Chorus of Mushrooms* is what, at the same time, installs and subverts the traditional autobiographical genre. As Japanese Canadians, Goto and her family struggle to find their place between two countries that do not see them as belonging to any of these countries, and the act of writing about this, the act of being published, is both a female subversive strategy and a means of acquiring visibility. As Other (term used by Homi Bhabha to describe the postcolonial subject), Goto subverts the autobiographical genre by means of the very act of writing; as a feminist postmodern subject,

she parodies the standard autobiographical novel by giving it new meanings, making use of postmodern strategies.

Linda Hutcheon, in her *Politics of Postmodernism*, argues that the narrator, whether in fiction or history, "constructs those very facts by giving a particular meaning to events. Facts do not speak for themselves" (HUTCHEON, 1991: 58). These facts are given meaning and become discursive wholes through the narrators' intervention. Guy Beauregard, in "Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and the Politics of Writing Diaspora", completes this idea:

> Through her revisions of the folk traditions and *Obasan*, Goto insists on the provisional nature of cultures and identities, and negotiates shifting and evasive Japanese Canadian feminist subject positions. (BEAUREGARD, 1996: 47)

According to Linda Hutcheon, "difference and eccentricity replace homogeneity and centrality as the foci of postmodern social analysis" (HUTCHEON, 1991: 5). *Chorus of Mushrooms* is a fragmented novel, filled with "extracts of memory" in no linear order of events; the eccentricity in the form of the novel – fragmentation, irony, and even the postcolonial discourse itself – works as a metonymy for the marginalization and the feeling of displacement of the characters.

The main focus of the novel is the relationship between Murasaki, Naoe and Keiko. The grandmother, Naoe, who came from Japan decades earlier, speaks Japanese and only Japanese, even though she has been living in Canada for more than 20 years and can understand and speak English perfectly. She refuses to assimilate the Canadian culture, and spends her days sitting in her chair near the house entrance door, in a position from which she can see everything that happens, everyone that goes in or out of the house. It is her way to keep the control she no longer has over her family. She says, "no one moves in this house without meeting my eyes. Hearing my voice. Take no notice, I say. I'll try not to stare. I'll nod and smile. Welcome! Welcome!" (GOTO, 1994: 4).

Naoe also expresses her indignation towards the fact that Keiko pretends not to see her and talks about her as if she were not in the same room:

> I might be stupid as well as deaf. How can they think a body can live in this country for twenty years and not learn the language? But let them think this. Let them think what they will, for they will. Solly, Obāchan no speeku Eeenglishu. Maybe I'm the fool, but stubborn I am and will remain. Keiko glances at me these days. More often than before with that curl of tofu curds lingering in her mouth. I'm not blind. I've heard the talk. "I think we should start looking for a h-

> o-m-e." As if I can't spell. Eighty-five years old and cast from my home. (GOTO, 1994: 4)

This resistance to assimilate the Canadian culture is something common among *issei* people, first generation Japanese. This happens because they usually move away from their country against their will and try to hold their traditions, the only ones they feel comfortable with. Naoe's memories of Japan are nostalgic and portray a better place to live, where there is windy weather and good quality food. She accepts her fate, but refuses to accept the new culture: "My words are only noises in this place I call a home" (GOTO, 1994: 11).

If, on the one hand, Naoe refuses to speak a language that she understands and that would make it easier for her to be heard and accepted, on the other hand, Keiko, her daughter, equally knows both languages and refuses to speak Japanese, even to communicate with her mother.

Different from *Obasan*, in Goto's novel there are several passages which include Japanese words, expressions and sentences, and they are never translated or explained in English. Here, more than in the code-switching strategy, the technique acquires a different level. It is more than a political point-making. When asked about that, Goto says the following:

> I (...) integrate Japanese words for my Japanese Canadian characters who are bilingual. This is the language I speak with my sisters and bilingual friends. Much of it remains untranslated in my texts because, although books often make transparent the translation for narrative purposes, language in everyday life doesn't work that way. We don't live with universal translators. If you don't know the word, meaning is not always accessible. What then? You ask someone or you look it up. Or you don't bother and you never know. I'm not interested in writing novels that ultimately narrow down into a "We're actually all alike" kind of mentality. Very real differences exist across all spectrums of human interaction. I'm interested in making language "real," not smoothing over the difficult terrain. [25]

Mark Libin, in the article "Lost in Translation: Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*", confirms this idea saying that "in Goto's novel, the passages of Japanese text are substantial and frequent, and the narrative rarely offers its own translation" (LIBIN, 1999: 123). The question is, the Japanese language passages inserted in the novel are not only strange to us, readers, but also to the very main character, Murasaki. Murasaki was prevented from learning Japanese since she was little, because her parents wanted to immerse her completely in the

[25] "Hiromi Goto interviewed by Gavin J. Grant", in the *Booksense.com* Website.

Canadian culture. But her grandmother Naoe refused to do so, and to that purpose did not speak English, as a means of resistance to that country's culture. In the same article, Libin elucidates the matter:

> The longing to translate is articulated from the beginning by Goto's narrator (...). Born and raised on a mushroom farm in the rural Alberta town of Nanton, Muriel is unable to understand her Obāchan's ongoing Japanese monologue, and instead makes up her own translation based on intuition and empathy. (LIBIN, 1999: 123)

Instead of the previously mentioned "echo effect" used by Joy Kogawa in *Obasan*, and defined by Libin, in *Chorus of Mushrooms* the narrator cannot translate the Japanese words mainly because she does not understand many of them. This comes from the fact that her parents have always made a huge effort to assimilate the Canadian culture. By the last pages of the novel, Murasaki's father, Shinji (or Sam, his "Canadian name"), gets it off his chest, talking about him and Keiko (whose "Canadian name" is Kay) and their decision to erase their Japanese past:

> When we moved to Canada, your Mom and I, we decided it would be best for our children if we let them slip in with everybody else. Sure, we couldn't change the colour of their hair, or the shape of their face, but it could make sure they didn't stand out. That they could be as Canadian as everyone around them. (...) We decided, your Mom and I, that we would put Japan behind us and fit more smoothly with the crowd. 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. (...) But after the day I lost my words, I didn't have the heart to talk so much. I just put my energies into the farm, grew mushrooms in the quiet of the dark. Kay put it all behind her. She has a strong will, your Mom, so she just said, that's fine. That's life then. And carried on like nothing happened. We don't talk about it. Some things, you don't talk about. And I was feeling like I was half missing (...). Even if the third or fourth generation Japanese Canadians could speak only English, like me, it wasn't the same. They weren't half a person like I was. (GOTO, 1994: 207)

Keiko is a second-generation Japanese Canadian, a *nissei*, born in Japan but brought to Canada very young. She has completely assimilated the Canadian culture. She does not cook Japanese food, she does not tell childhood stories and she does not want to be called by her Japanese name, and insists to be called Kay by family and friends. Naoe, her mother, on the other hand, refuses to assimilate, and does not speak a word in English. The young Murasaki stands in between these two women, each talking in their own language, the one that makes

each of them feel at home, the one with which they identify culturally and socially. Naoe, the grandmother, describes the situation in one of the passages in which she is the main narrator:

> I mutter and mutter and no one to listen. I speak my words in Japanese and my daughter will not hear them. The words that come from our ears, our mouths, they collide in the space between us.
> (…)
> Ha! Keiko, there is method in my madness. I could stand on my head and quote Shakespeare until I had a nosebleed, but to no avail, no one hears my language. So I sit and say the words and will, until the wind or I shall die. Someone, something must stand against this wind and I will. I am. (GOTO, 1994: 4-5)

Naoe's voice flows in a stream-of-consciousness technique and becomes mingled with Murasaki's voice later on the book. This may mean that Murasaki's memories of Naoe at some point begin to become blurry and she can't tell the difference between Naoe's memories and those of her own anymore.

The relationship between Keiko and Naoe is difficult, full of friction, but they still have a great respect for each other and this is shown in the moment where Keiko asks Naoe to clean her ears and combs Naoe's hair in exchange. Even so, Naoe cannot accept the fact that her daughter refuses to speak Japanese: "it's funny how children grow inside your body, but they turn out to be strangers" (GOTO, 1994: 69). She compares Keiko's behavior with Shinji's, Murasaki's father:

> I suppose if a body can learn a new language in twenty years, you could unlearn one as well. No, Shinji has truly forgotten the language he left behind. I can accept this, but Keiko is another matter. A child from my heart, a child from my body, but not from my mouth. The language she forms on her tongue is there for the wrong reasons. You cannot move to a foreign land and call that place home because you parrot the words around you. Find your home inside yourself first, I say. (...) I'll never forgive Keiko in words and she will never utter to me the words I wish to hear. We love each other in noisy silence. (GOTO, 1994: 48)

.

Let us not forget that even though Naoe, the grandmother, has a strong voice in this book, this voice is actually Murasaki`s memories of her. French historian Jacques Le Goff points out that one of the characteristics of the concept of memory is its multiple crossings. It may interweave the individual and the collective; remembering and forgetting; temporality and mobility as well as invention and register (LE GOFF, 1986: 28).

Murasaki began working at the mushroom farm as a young girl, a job that she hated: "it was difficult growing up in Nanton, daughter of a father who grew mushrooms, daughter

of a mother who became an other, granddaughter of a grandmother who never shut up until she left the house forever" (GOTO, 1994: 36). She was too young to learn about responsibilities and considered it unfair to have to work at her age.

Murasaki is the "product" of two cultures which intersect and interconnect; from her mother's side she is told to be a true Canadian, she is not taught Japanese, she does not learn about her mother's past in Japan. Her grandmother, Naoe, speaks a language she cannot understand, but she can feel that her cultural heritage also comes from her. Even though Murasaki does not understand what her grandmother says, she listens to her and makes up stories that she believes are being told to her. She is eager to assimilate both cultures: on the one hand, Murasaki wants to make clear that she is Canadian, and not Japanese, but there is not one single moment in which she denies her family's Japanese culture and tradition.

Murasaki experiments in her flesh the sensation of being a hybrid. Theorist Homi Bhabha developed this idea of a *hybrid subject*, and talks about this place of difference installed in the postcolonial subject in his article "Signs Taken for Wonders":

> The place of difference and otherness, or the space of the adversarial, within such a system of disposal, is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional. It is a pressure, and a presence, that acts constantly, if unevenly, along the entire boundary of authorization (...). The contour of difference is agonistic, shifting, splitting, rather like Freud's description of the system of consciousness which occupies a position in space lying on the borderline between outside and inside, a surface of protection, reception, and projection. (BHABHA, 1997: 32)

This place of difference, as Bhabha defines, is not only something imposed, but also internalized by the postcolonial subject. In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Cherrie Moraga explores this idea of internalized oppression, commenting on how literature depicts a relation between dark and evil, dark and unknown, and how this functions as a form of racism:

> The "unknown" is often depicted in racist literature as the "darkness" within a person. (...) Consequently, each of us - whether dark, female, or both - has in some way *internalized* this oppressive imagery. What the oppressor often succeeds in doing is simply *externalizing* his fears, projecting them into the bodies of women, Asians, gays, disabled folks, whoever seems most "other". (MORAGA, 1981: 32)

Moraga also reminds us that the racism portrayed in literature is expressed not only against people with dark skin but against anyone who is "othered" in some way. Following this line of thought, it is possible to conclude that by internalizing the fears of the oppressor,

the postcolonial, hybrid subject ends up a cultural misfit instead of a culturally enriched individual. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha talks about how culture can be a means of survival as well as of displacement:

> Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the middle passage of slaver and indenture, the voyage out of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement – now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of global media technologies – make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue.
>
> (...) The transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation – makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. The natural(ized), unifying discourse of nation, peoples, or authentic folk tradition, those embedded myths of cultures particularity, cannot be readily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition. (BHABHA, 1994: 247-248)

Bhabha's statement leads us to the idea that culture can be seen as a construct, and following that thought one can reach the conclusion that culture can then always be used in one's favour. Bhabha's aforementioned idea that the postcolonial subject is seen as the "Other" is the case of Keiko, Murasaki`s mother. Her assimilation of the Canadian culture was not only something imposed by the "colonizer" – the country in which she now lives –, but it is also *internalized* by the her, in a way that she is convinced that the only way to be accepted in the Canadian culture is to pretend that she does not have a past. Murasaki explains this feeling very well in a few words: "My mom didn't tell tales at all. And the only make-believe that she knew was thinking that she was as white as her neighbour" (GOTO, 1994: 29).

As the story goes on, we can see that Murasaki little by little begins to construct her identity. In a newspaper article attached to the book, she and her mother tell a little about themselves. We can see the difference between them through the descriptions of what is like to be a Japanese Canadian:

> My name is Keiko, but please call me Kay. I've lived in Alberta for twenty years and like it very much. (...) I've had a happy and easy life here, and I would never want to live anywhere else. This is my home. These are my neighbours. (GOTO, 1994: 189)

> My name is Murasaki. My mother calls me Muriel, but I out-grew that name when I came to realize that I came from a specific cultural background that wasn't Occidental.
> (...)
> The place where we lived didn't foster cultural difference. It only had room for cultural integration. (GOTO, 1994: 189-190)

Obasan, though similar to *Chorus of Mushrooms*, ends up being less complex and effective in its representation of the situation of Japanese Canadian citizens. Aunt Emily is constantly repeating to herself and Naomi that Japanese Canadians are *Canadian*, no questions, no qualifications. "We are the country", she says (KOGAWA, 1994: 42). Aunt Emily asserts that, as a citizen, she is entitled to justice because she believes fundamentally in Canada, regardless of her racialized position: "Canada is supposed to be a democracy" (KOGAWA, 1994: 86). Bhabha, in "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation", explains that such a move is typical:

> The minority does not simply confront the pedagogical or powerful master-discourse with a contradictory or negating referent….Insinuating itself into the terms of reference of the dominant discourse, the supplementary antagonizes the implicit power to generalize, to produce the sociological solidity. (BHABHA, 1995a: 306)

There is no contradiction in Aunt Emily's mind with having a Japanese heritage and being *fully* Canadian: "We're Canadian, aren't we? Everything a Canadian does is Canadian" (KOGAWA, 1994: 54). However, this simple categorization does not call into question the difficult position of being a citizen in a country that has historically acted and continues to act in a racist manner, against its own citizens. In a similar way, Keiko seems to have forgotten not only her Japanese past but also what Canada has done in the past to Japanese Canadians. *Chorus of Mushrooms* does not discusses the the Second World War or process of Internment, but Keiko in a general way wants so desperately to fit in the Canadian culture that she ignores all the downsides of this effort.

Chorus of Mushrooms is mainly a rescuing of family traditions. Murasaki is the character that will put the pieces together and show that identity and space, culture and nation are separate issues that *can* work complementing each other. Murasaki also believes that being a hybrid has a bright side:

> And you know what I learned, Obāchan? I learned that there's no way to say I love you in Japanese except to espouse or lover. Not to your sister or brother or daughter or son or aunt or uncle or cousin or mother or father. Or grandmother. All you can say is *Daisuki yo*. A tepid, I like you very much. But I'm glad I learned Japanese because I can juggle two languages and when there isn't one word in English, it will be there in Japanese and if there's something lacking in your tongue, I'll reach for it in English. So I say to you, in English, I love you, Obāchan. (GOTO, 1994: 54)

While Keiko refuses to assimilate two cultures, Murasaki knows that to do so is to lose tradition, to erase the family`s past. She learns to negotiate with what she has got and to take advantage of her situation. In the end of the novel, she becomes bilingual and "bi-cultural".

Murasaki goes through a process of development as the novel progresses, and I say "kind of" because the story is actually composed of memories, and do not happen at the time in which they are described. But *Chorus of Mushrooms* certainly tells the reader about Murasaki's growth from a naive child to a woman in peace with herself, and the reader can follow, even if not in chronological order, this process in the girl's life. Murasaki's criticism becomes sharper as the novel develops, as we can see in the following excerpt:

> Mind you the story can be anything, but there have to be details. People love to hear details. The stranger, the more exotic, the better. "Oooooh", they say. "Aaaaaaah". Nothing like a freak show to make you feel normal, safe by comparison. (...) It's not about being bitter. You're invited somewhere to be a guest speaker, to give a keynote address. Wherever that is. Everybody in suits and ties and designer dresses. You're the only coloured person there who's not serving food. It's not about being bitter. You just notice. People talk, race this, ethnic that. It's easy to be theoretical if the words are coming from a face that has little or no pigmentation. (GOTO, 1994: 89-90)

There is also a lot of resentment coming from Murasaki in relation to her mother. She compares Keiko's voice to "a tiny mushroom in an otherwise empty bucket", stating that her mother places herself in a position in which she ends up being the one that does not fit:

> Mom never told me of her childhood stories. There is a hollow in my hearing I must fill on my own. Not like Obāchan, who breathed words in and out all day. Mom's voice only rattled like a tiny mushroom in an otherwise empty bucket. Her stories must be ugly things filled with bitterness and pain. The pain of never having told. (GOTO, 1994: 32)

Murasaki`s observation that Keiko alone cannot produce audible sounds is a very strong concept which contrasts the impotence of the individual compared to the power of a community. This is also a clear reference to the title of this book, *Chorus of Mushrooms*.

Charlotte Sturgess, in her article "Hiromi Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*: Tracks in a Textual Landscape", confirms that:

> [*Chorus of Mushrooms*] proposes the exploration of a personal and textual territory which is both hybrid and multiple, thus subverting the teleology implied in both origin-centred and origin-lacking narratives.
>
> To this end, the "chorus" of Goto's title aptly signals the undermining of a unique narrative consciousness. It also points to this collective voice – strangely assigned to "mushrooms" – as taking on paradoxical dimensions. (STURGESS, 2003: 20)

Keiko does not tell stories, refuses to accept her past and wants to erase these memories. Like her, there are many Japanese descendants, and descendants of many other countries, that also reject their pasts. Like Keiko, there are many tiny mushrooms spread all over, making isolated noises with their isolated voices, and not being heard. A tiny mushroom may have no voice, but a chorus of them would probably do the trick.

3.3 – An Edible Bridge from Japan to Canada

Food becomes narrative, narrative becomes ingestion.
(Mark Libin)

Food is a strong element in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. It is the element that unites and distinguishes the characters. Keiko does not cook Japanese food, and does not speak Japanese. Naoe, on the other hand, eats Japanese food sent by her brother, who lives in Japan. She mentions that in the novel:

> I have a piece of dried salted squid in my pocket and I tear it a bit off. I must chew and chew. Like beef jerky, but much tougher. I chew and the juices begin to fill my mouth. It gives me energy, this squid, the more I chew, the tastier it gets.
> (...)
> It is Shige and his wife who send me the packages, of course. (GOTO, 1994: 14)

Naoe also tells us about her memories of sharing this with Murasaki in her room during the night, eating Japanese food hidden under the bed sheets, the food sent by her brother, Shige:

> Salted squid. They send me salted squid. Not always, because it is so expensive, and *osenbei*. Crisp rice crackers dipped in soya sauce, I crunch them in bed at four in the morning. It's Muriel who sneaks the packages up to my room when everyone is asleep. My granddaughter, your daughter, Keiko. You taught her no words so she cannot speak, but she calls me Obāchan and smiles. She brings the packages and we crumble the *osenbei* together in my narrow bed. Muriel does not suit her, Keiko. I call her Murasaki. Purple. She cannot understand the words I speak, but she can read the lines on my brow, the creases beside my mouth.
> (...)
> Murasaki places her head in my bony lap and I begin to speak my words.
> *Mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi*... (GOTO, 1994: 15)

Naoe most of the time directs her memories to herself, or to us, but several times she directs her speech as if she were talking to Keiko, her daughter.

Mark Libin says, in his article "Lost in Translation: Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*", that "for certainly food – at least the Japanese and Chinese food described in the novel – signifies desire in *Chorus of Mushrooms*" (LIBIN, 1999: 131). There are writing strategies to show the reader the importance of food as an element of Naoe's empowerment. The inflected syntax and the onomatopoeic resonances of the passages create the atmosphere in which grandmother and granddaughter connect, establish complicity, and through which Naoe is able to pass on to her granddaughter the culture she is so proud to maintain. It is, for sure, about desire. In a passage in which Murasaki is the narrator, it is possible to see these elements together:

> I could still taste the *sake* lingering in my mouth. Licked my lips again, to taste the last drops. Obāchan smacked her lips. Mom always ragged on her to cut it out, how rude she sounded, but it's really appropriate to smack lips. It's like a symbolic gesture of respect to what you've consumed – how truly wonderful it is to swill the *sake* in your mouth, rolling in on your tongue, letting it drip drop by drop into your eager throat. Smack, smack. Ahhh. That was good. (GOTO, 1994: 17)

Goto's narrators intermingle the literal and the symbolic, describing tastes and experiences in which the available language is not enough; hence the onomatopoeic descriptions. But food can also be a means of reunion, of bringing people together. Food in *Chorus of Mushrooms* is also about community gatherings. Food becomes a metaphor for when a story begins to be told, for oral tradition:

> 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. (GOTO, 1994: 201)

There is a strong idea of a community in this passage. As Mark Libin describes it, "the reader is invited into the possibility of the 'we', the possibility of entering a community through food and story, the possibility of a 'different telling'" (LIBIN, 1999: 133). It is an invitation to the world of the narrator's family, a synesthesia activated by reading, not by smelling or tasting.

Cooking and culture are intrinsically related in this context. To speak of specific foods reinforces the bonding with a specific country or culture, and provides a means to articulate the ethnic subject. Speaking or writing about food can also be seen as an autobiographical practice. Anne Goldman explains, in her article "'I Yam What I Yam': Cooking, Culture and Colonialism", how the act of producing a recipe, like retelling a story, may be not only a cultural practice but also autobiographical assertion.:

> If it provides an apt metaphor for the reproduction of culture from generation to generation, the act of passing down recipes from mother to daughter works as well to figure a familiar space within which self-articulation can begin to take place. (GOLDMAN, 1992: 172)

Hiromi Goto does not hide this desire of putting together food and storytelling. For Murasaki and Naoe, the Japanese food sent by Naoe's brother is a means of communication between the two women. It is with the food that Naoe transmitted her culture to her granddaughter. And, later in the novel, the adult Murasaki tells us that she resents her family for not presenting her to the Japanese culture in a more open way: "I feel a lot of bitterness about how I was raised, how I was taught to behave. I had a lot of questions about my heritage, but they were never answered" (GOTO, 1994: 189-190).

Heather Latimer, in the article "Eating, Abjection and Transformation in the Work of Hiromi Goto",[26] says that eating is a social, cultural and psychological act, tied to both gender and race:

> Eating is a gendered and racialized act that constantly informs how the characters see themselves emotionally and psychologically. Food, race and identity are slippery categories in Goto's work, and she purposely mixes them up to highlight their constructed nature; eating is part of how the characters explore their backgrounds, tell their histories, and come to terms with racism. (LATIMER, 2006)

[26] LATIMER, Heather. "Eating, Abjection and Transformation in the work of Hiromi Goto", Internet source.

As Marilyn Joy Iwama argues in *When Nikkei Women Write: Transforming Japanese Canadian Identities 1887-1997*, Goto is challenging the referentiality of metonymy: "Words are lost to the untrustworthy materiality of food; identities are created by and through the food people eat" (IWAMA, 1998: 196). The evocation of flavors can work as a microcosm for the evocation of an entire way of life. "Food is important to see how protagonists see themselves culturally and emotionally", says Heather Latimer. Eating with Naoe is the only available way for Murasaki to access a shared heritage, learn and bond with the Japanese culture that was denied to her by her parents. Charlotte Sturgess, in her article "Hiromi Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*: Tracks in a Textual Landscape", goes deeper in this matter:

> For to eat or not to eat Japanese [food] is synonymous in the novel with the recognition or non-recognition of cultural heritage, but it also renders problematical the question of seemingly rigid borders which separate heritages. Just as the grandmother and granddaughter surreptitiously share the "crackers dipped in soya sauce (...)", that Naoe has sent over in secret – so the daughter's "forgetting" the language goes together with her deliberately renouncing the taste of Japanese food. (STURGESS, 2003: 33)

Eating in *Chorus of Mushrooms* is a celebration. Naoe and Murasaki speak to each other through food. Murasaki may not understand what her grandmother says literally, but she can understand her culturally and emotionally (LATIMER, 2006). There is a passage in the novel in which it is evident the mixing between food, culture and words:

> 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 slowly until it swells and softens. Obāchan always chewed like mad, words falling out with each snap of her jaw. I held my words inside my mouth until they swelled and softened. (GOTO, 1994: 17-18)

Food becomes the catalyst for communication. This process of exchanging food and words is what slowly constructs the young Murasaki's experiences and will help form her identity as an adult. There is always this exchange of food and words in the novel. This becomes more obvious when, at some point, Naoe leaves home and Keiko suffers a nervous breakdown that leaves her in an almost catatonic state. "Naoe leaves to re-think (and re-eat) her own identity, but her absence throws Keiko into a state where she is unable to speak or eat" (LATIMER, 2006). At some level, Naoe was the connection Keiko still had with her cultural background, and Naoe's absence was exchanged by Keiko's silence and refusal to eat. Suddenly, Keiko cannot anymore affirm herself as a Canadian citizen.

And, again, it is by means of food that Murasaki finds a way to "save" Keiko. Unsure of what to do, she begins to cook Japanese food for her mother based on the telepathic-like conversations she has with Naoe. Keiko begins to speak and leaves her room again after she eats Japanese food and – one more time – exchanges this food for Naoe's presence and constant chattering. This situation signals to Murasaki a new way of communicating with her mother. In fact, she finds a new and previously unknown emotional connection with her family as she cooks for them and they sit and eat together (LATIMER, 2006).

Food here becomes an extension of Naoe, becomes the sensuality, the pleasure and excess she represents. She is the voice that tells her granddaughter to go buy Japanese food – which evidences how important food is to subjectivity in the novel. It is at the food store that Murasaki is told that "eating is a part of being" (GOTO, 1994: 138) and is informed that her last name, *Tonkatsu*, means a "type of breaded deep-fried pork cutlet" (GOTO, 1994: 137). She then buys the Tonkatsu and cooks it for her family. The surname is a good example of how food, language, and body are mixed in the text, "a theme which reaches its apex when Muriel actually cooks and eats her own name" (LATIMER, 2006). The act of cooking and eating her own name is a kind of absorption, almost cannibalistic, of her culture and her family. By cooking Japanese food to her mother, Murasaki is rescuing her past and her family tradition. By cooking the tonkatsu, the family is acknowledging their hybridism and coming to terms with their past.

There is also a place in the novel in which food becomes a racial issue that can cause shame and signal otherness. It is mentioned that young Murasaki used to eat a lot of Mandarin oranges, and one Christmas her hands turned yellow. As the girl finds the fact extremely funny, and gets excited with watching her hands become brighter and brighter: "Look, Mom! Lookit my hands!" (GOTO, 1994: 92), Keiko becomes desperate with the image:

> "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 turningyellow she'sturningyellow she's –" (GOTO, 1994: 92)

Completely panicked, Keiko only stops when Naoe, who constantly chattered in Japanese, stops talking. This "sudden silence after fourteen years of torrential words hits [Keiko] over the head like a concrete block" (GOTO, 1994: 92) and she ends up spending three days in bed recovering from the shock. Keiko's reaction to Murasaki's "turning yellow" proves that her identity as a Canadian is very fragile. The memory of the "yellow peril" of the war years, the fear of the realization of having a daughter that isn't as white as she imagines terrifies her. Heather Latimer talks about it:

> (...) "turning yellow" takes on new significance. Keiko's panic reflects both the vulnerability of her identity as a "normal" Canadian and her realization of that vulnerability; she is terrified by anything that threatens the homogeneous "white" lifestyle she has created. As she states herself, "if you live in Canada, you should live like a Canadian" [GOTO, 1994: 189]. (LATIMER, 2006)

We see that later in the novel Keiko makes peace with this fear, but the point here is that once more Hiromi Goto uses the food element to represent postcolonial issues. Food in *Chorus of Mushrooms* is bridge, conveyance and traveler. It is the element that links people and memories together, and that allows the characters to make peace with themselves. As Charlotte Sturgess beautifully put, "In a vital way, you 'are what you eat' here" (STURGESS, 2003: 33).

3.4 – I Mutter and Mutter and There Is no One to Listen

There was a time when I could have been evicted for being colored,
but at this present time in history, and in this geographical location, I
am lawfully tolerated
(Hiromi Goto, "Stinky Girl")

Chorus of Mushrooms is clearly a novel that constantly invokes and dialogues with Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*. Heather Latimer confirms this statement saying that "Goto's choice to use the same settings and names in *Chorus of Mushrooms* as Kogawa's text is an obvious sign she is writing back both to *Obasan* and to this canonization of the Japanese Canadian experience" (LATIMER, 2006). Goto's novel has nothing of ordinary or repetitive in relation to Kogawa's work. *Obasan* might have served as inspiration and intertext for Hiromi Goto to

write her own memories and the Japanese Canadian experience that both women share, but that choice seems to be an homage paid to the power and strength of Kogawa's novel.

Chorus of Mushrooms is a novel of strong women. Of strong voices. Murasaki is the little girl that grows up between her mother and grandmother, two remarkable women in their own way. Keiko is a woman who decides to put her past behind and throw herself entirely in a new country, a new culture. Naoe, as well, is a woman of attitude, stubborn, refusing to accept the culture she feels it is being imposed to her.

One of the main differences between the two novels is the contrast between noise/voice and silence. Mark Libin says: "In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Obāchan is a whirlwind of words, as opposed to the hauntingly silent Obasan of Kogawa's novel" (LIBIN, 1999: 137). A recurrent observation made by Murasaki is that Naoe would never stop talking, and that she was constantly mumbling, even when talking to Murasaki, who did not understand Japanese. Naoe seems to have a strong necessity of making noises, of being noticed, of being heard, even when no one is listening. She is constantly described in the novel as a "chattering" woman; Murasaki says: "it was difficult growing up in Nanton, (...) granddaughter of a grandmother who never shut up until she left the house forever" (GOTO, 1994: 36). Naoe's voice is so important in the novel that it even overcomes her physical presence; after Naoe leaves the house, she keeps talking to Murasaki, in the girl's imagination.

Kogawa's novel tries to reshape given "truths" by the retelling of stories. In *Obasan*, Naomi tries to imagine her mother's return (KOGAWA, 1994: 67), creating a happy ending to her story. That never happens, as we know, and the rest of her life is spent trying to forget. In the words of Mari Sasano in the article "Words Like Buckshot", the desire to forget "paradoxically underlines the necessity of remembering, since she is not set free by the forgetting" (SASANO, 1998: 8). Stories need to be told and retold as an alternative to the "official" telling. Mari Sasano gives an example:

> For example, Aunt Emily's clipping of a picture of relocated beet farmers as "grinning and happy" is only "one telling. It's not the way it was" [KOGAWA, 1994: 197]. Her files and activism in the redress movement are attempts to retell the story as she saw it. Her rallying cry is "remember!" While the Tonkatsus' [in *Chorus of Mushrooms*] attempts to erase their history cause an amnesia in which they even forget their family name, Emily, Naoe and Murasaki are trying to excavate the past and expose it, even if it hurts to challenge the dominant Canadian narrative. (SASANO, 1998: 9)

In *Obasan*, Naomi's internment experience is reasserted in the clippings, documents and also in Aunt Emily's journal. Emily refuses to forget: "You are your history. If you cut

any of it off you're an amputee. Don't deny the past. Remember everything. If you're bitter, be bitter. Cry it out! Scream! Denial is gangrene" (KOGAWA, 1994: 49-50). This thought could certainly be shared by Hiromi Goto's Naoe, who had a lot of resentment about the way Keiko, her daughter, decided to erase her Japanese past.

Chorus of Mushrooms is about finding other options, other spaces. Through Naoe's voice we learned that she got divorced when her children were still young. Divorce, as we see in the novel, is a way out for Naoe, the grandmother, an alternative to the story that a woman is to be only a wife or daughter, and Murasaki's refusal to marry is also a way for her to exit this prescribed destiny of women. Goto's characters are fluid in their identities and are fully aware of the stereotypes to which they are resisting. They are not totally within or without the Japanese or the Canadian cultures, and they play freely with their inside/outside status (SASANO, 1998).

CONCLUSION

I live and write in more than one culture, and I speak and write in more than one English register and dialect and sometimes in more than one language. I move frequently across different national and geographical spaces, between American and Asian societies. More complexly, however, I write from strata of experiences that can be glimpsed wherein the subject often operates simultaneously in or strung on interconnected planes composed of more than one culture and language world. If American culture and the Englis language form the singular norm by which an Asian-American identity has been recognized, then clearly I am insufficiently American.
(Shirley Geok-lin Lim)

In the Introduction of this dissertation, I stated that my main objectives in writing this work were to analyze *Obasan* and *Chorus of Mushrooms* as postcolonial narratives, focusing on key concepts such as hybridism and cultural tradition, keeping in mind that both novels are autobiographical pieces of writing. I believe that it was made clear that Joy Kogawa and Hiromi Goto as well as Naomi and Murasaki are, undoubtedly, postcolonial subjects. They come from a cultural background that is not occidental and that is not shared with the mainstream population of the country in which they live. They experience more than once in the novel situations of otherness and that place them as hybrid subjects (as, for example, Naomi's relocation to the concentration camps, or Naoe, Murasaki's grandmother, speaking Japanese to her, which made her feel as "other" from both sides, both as Canadian and as Japanese). They try to overcome the differences by rescuing their pasts and accepting their condition as postcolonial hybrid subjects.

In this dissertation I tried to focus in excerpts that dealt mainly with the effects of the Second World War in the first novel and the search for the lost heritage in the second novel. Also, my main themes were food as tradition, family relations, and the contrast between the excess of silence (in *Obasan*) and the excess of voice/sound (in *Chorus of Mushrooms*). These issues were explored because, as postcolonial subjects, the authors and the characters experience them in a very peculiar way. Food and silence were the bridge between Naomi and her relatives and the voice (it was a voice, but not a sound, that told Naomi about her past, for she read the truth in her grandmother's letters) ended up being the key to reconcilement; the stone bread, the inedible food that the family shared and that was prepared by the uncle said a lot about the excess of silence in the novel. "The word is stone", Kogawa says in the preface, and also the bread was stone. Everything in the novel is heavy and almost too tough to deal with.

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, on the other hand, the bridge was made of food and voice. The excess of voices and of eating run over the textual form, and the onomatopoeic descriptions are, at the same time, an excess of words and of the act of eating. Eating is what links Murasaki to her grandmother, and it is what keeps them together from the beginning, when she did not understand what Naoe was saying, to the end, when she cooks as a result of telepathic-like conversations with the absent grandmother. Everything in the novel is excessive, the food, the noises, Keiko's reactions…

When asked to describe Canada, 85% of Canadians described the country as being a multicultural society.[27] As we have seen in the previous chapters, even though Canada became a choice for Japanese people to immigrate to around the 19th century, when most Japanese immigrants were looking for a place to live, this idea of multiculturalism was not as strong as it is today. However, Canada is nowadays acknowledged as a multicultural country, its politics being allegedly quite open-minded and in favor of immigration. Canada is known to be a place in which different peoples from different countries are able to live together.

The generational difference between the authors, Kogawa and Goto, certainly influences their positions as speakers of their communities. This aspect also contributes to the difference shown in the characters, both of whom are portrayed as postcolonial subjects. As Pamela Sugiman describes in the article "Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Canadian Women's Life Stories", the consequences of the Internment to the following generations are very singular:

> (...) Japanese Canadians continue to live with the injustices and indignities of the past. In response to this act of violence, for years the *Nisei* (second generation) attempted to filter the painful memories of their internment – by not putting reminiscences on paper, nor verbally articulating their experiences as part of a public discourse. In an effort to shield their own children from the racial hostilities they themselves endured, *Nisei* parents have furthermore promoted the cultural assimilation of their own children, the *Sansei* (third generation). Assimilation involved shedding the cultural markers of their Japaneseness: the Japanese language, contact with Japanese Canadian peers, and an appreciation of traditional Japanese art forms. Japanese Canadians' fears of again being punished as a culturally and economically distinct group have resulted in what some writers have termed their "racial erasure" from history. (SUGIMAN, 2005: 49)

The dates and the fact that Hiromi Goto is a *sansei* might suggest that, even though she was not born in Canada, she might have relatives who suffered with the Internment experience. However, this matter is not addressed in the book, probably because as a third-

[27] *Communications Canada* survey on "Role of Social Values", March 2003. Source: "Multiculturalism". in the *Canadian Heritage* Website.

generation Japanese she experiences this fact in a different way. To conclude, in this dissertation I have analyzed two Japanese Canadian writers that break with the tradition of silence with the very act of writing. First, Joy Kogawa, who broke new ground confronting, in a courageous and poetic way, the official story about the role of the Canadian government in the Internment process and their attitudes in relation to Canadian citizens of Japanese origin. Then, Hiromi Goto, several years later, discusses controversial and very up-to-date issues: those related to assimilation, cultural heritage, and to the different ways immigrants' generations react to all that.

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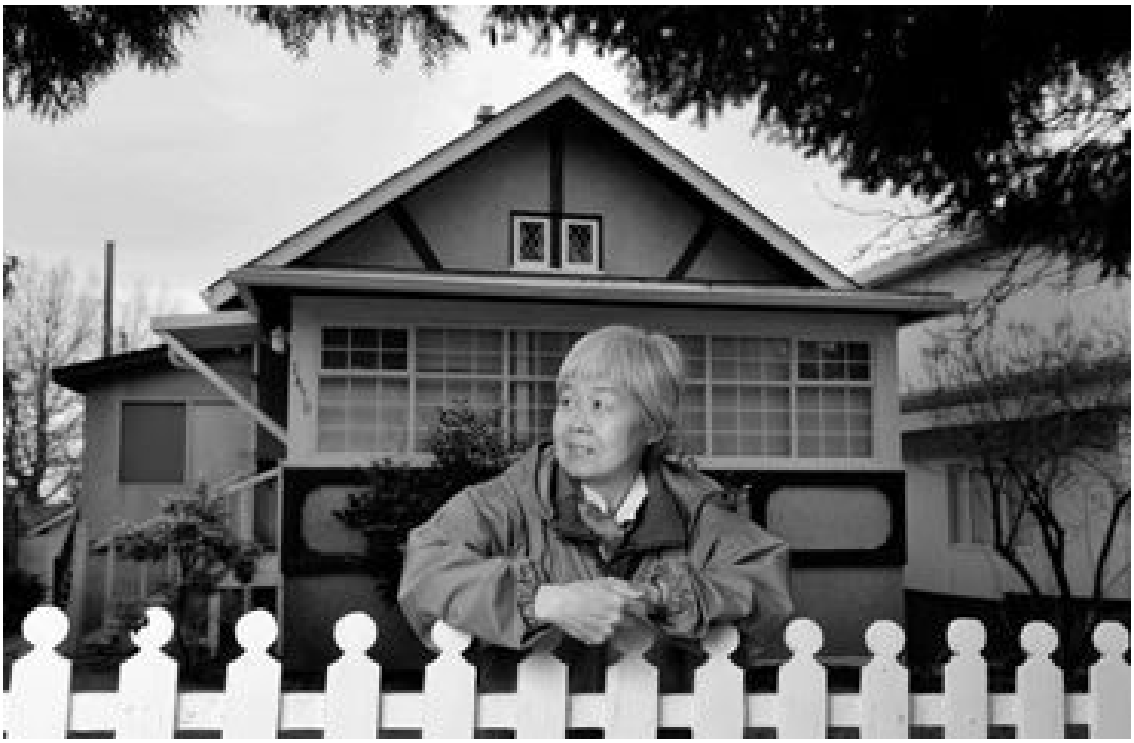
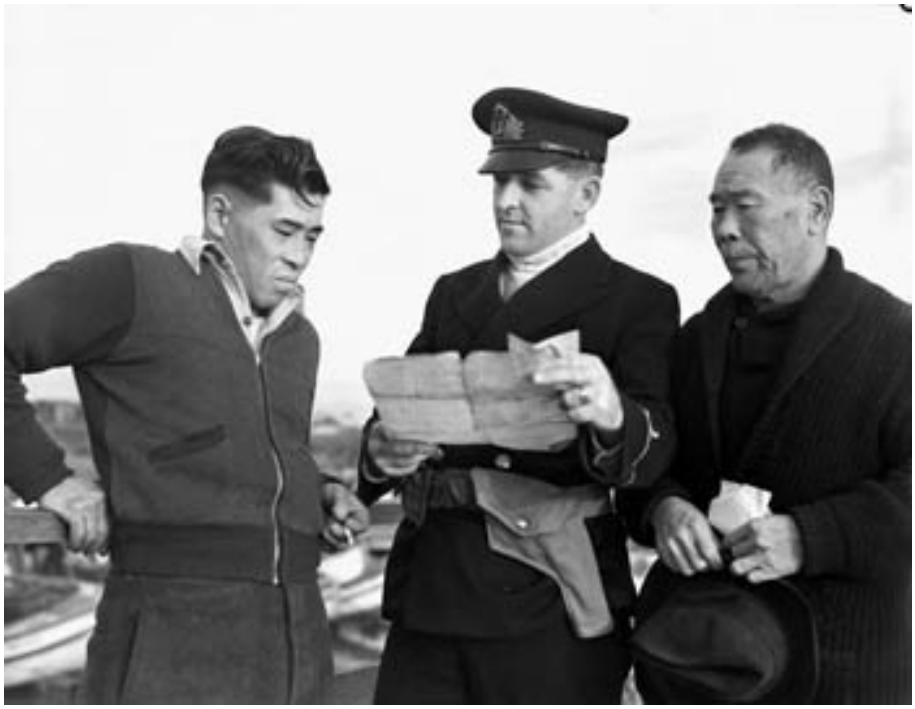
APENDICES

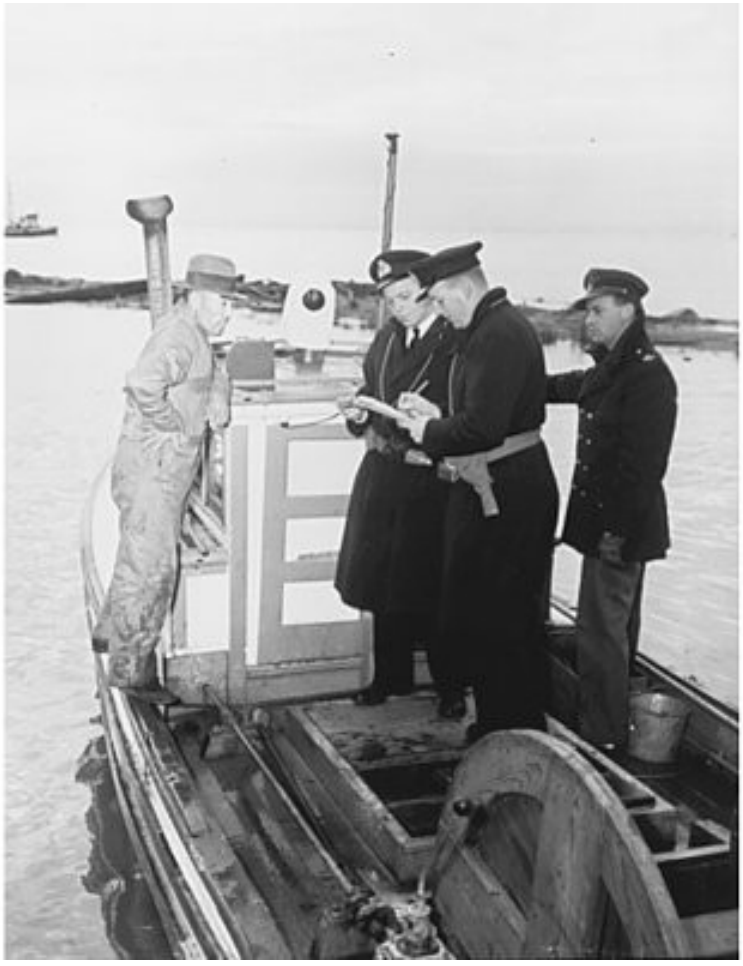


Photos 1 (above) and 2: Joy Kogawa in front of her childhood house in Vancouver, where she and her family used to live before the war

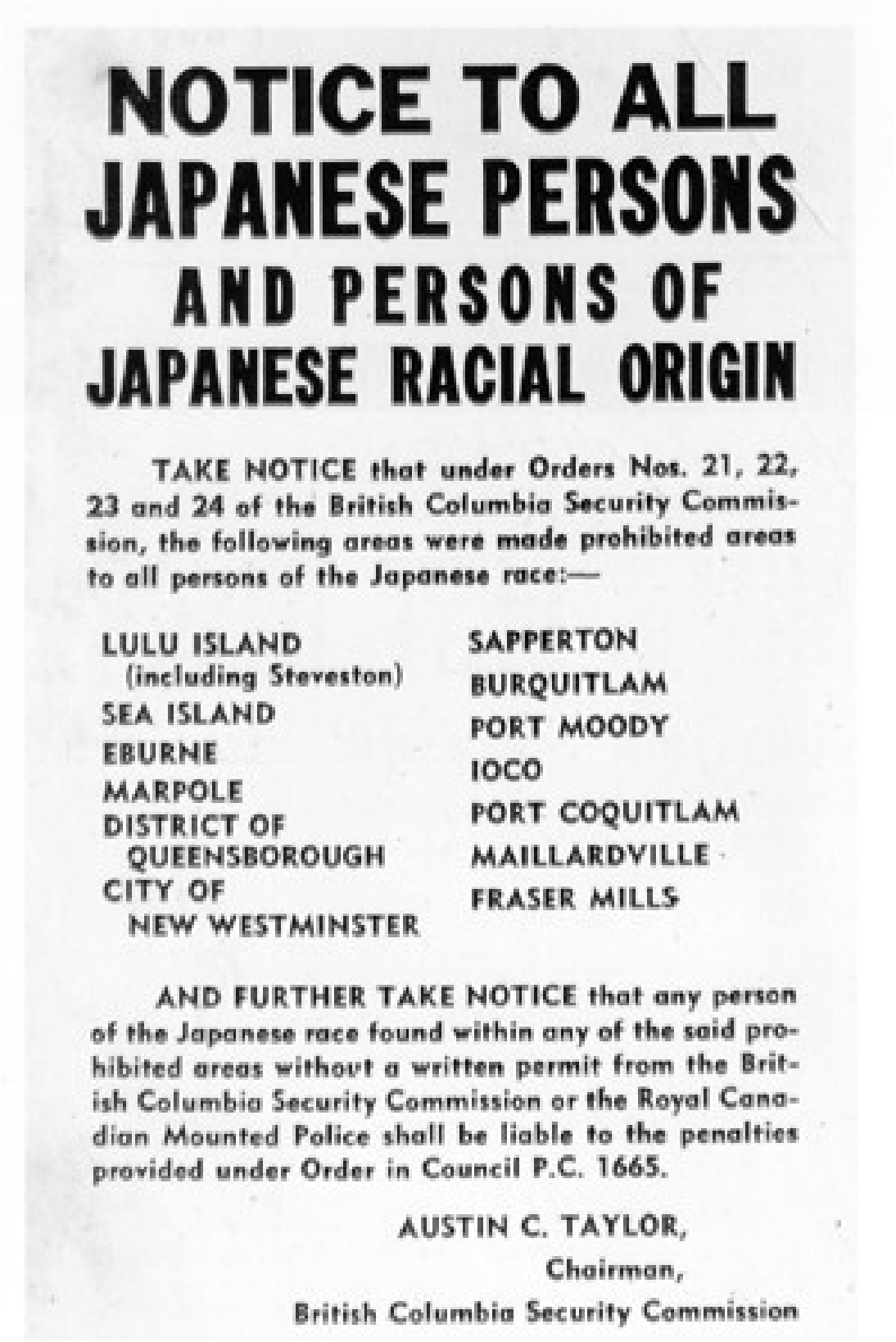
Photo 3: Lois, Gordon, Joy [Kogawa] and Tim Nakayama

Photo 4: *The Exodus of the Japanese*





Photos 5 and 6: Japanese Canadian fishermen having their boats confiscated by the officers from the Canadian government, in 1941.



NOTICE TO ALL JAPANESE PERSONS AND PERSONS OF JAPANESE RACIAL ORIGIN

TAKE NOTICE that under Orders Nos. 21, 22, 23 and 24 of the British Columbia Security Commission, the following areas were made prohibited areas to all persons of the Japanese race:—

LULU ISLAND (including Steveston)
SEA ISLAND
EBURNE
MARPOLE
DISTRICT OF QUEENSBOROUGH
CITY OF NEW WESTMINSTER
SAPPERTON
BURQUITLAM
PORT MOODY
IOCO
PORT COQUITLAM
MAILLARDVILLE
FRASER MILLS

AND FURTHER TAKE NOTICE that any person of the Japanese race found within any of the said prohibited areas without a written permit from the British Columbia Security Commission or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police shall be liable to the penalties provided under Order in Council P.C. 1665.

AUSTIN C. TAYLOR,
Chairman,
British Columbia Security Commission

Photo 7: Poster hung in public areas restraining Japanese Canadians to go to certain areas (especially near the sea)

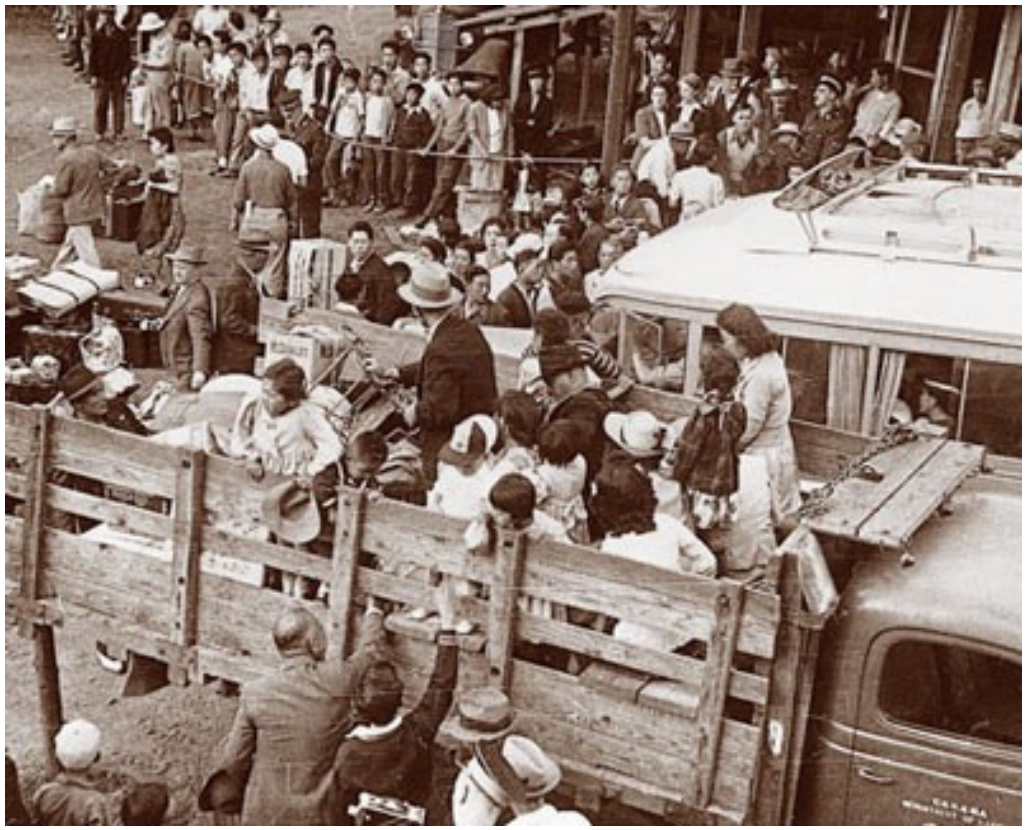


Photo 8: Relocation of Japanese Canadians to camps in the interior of British Columbia during the Second World War, 1942-1945

Photo 9: A Japanese Canadian family being relocated to a camp in the interior of British Columbia during the Second World War, 1942-1945

Photo 10: Hiromi Goto

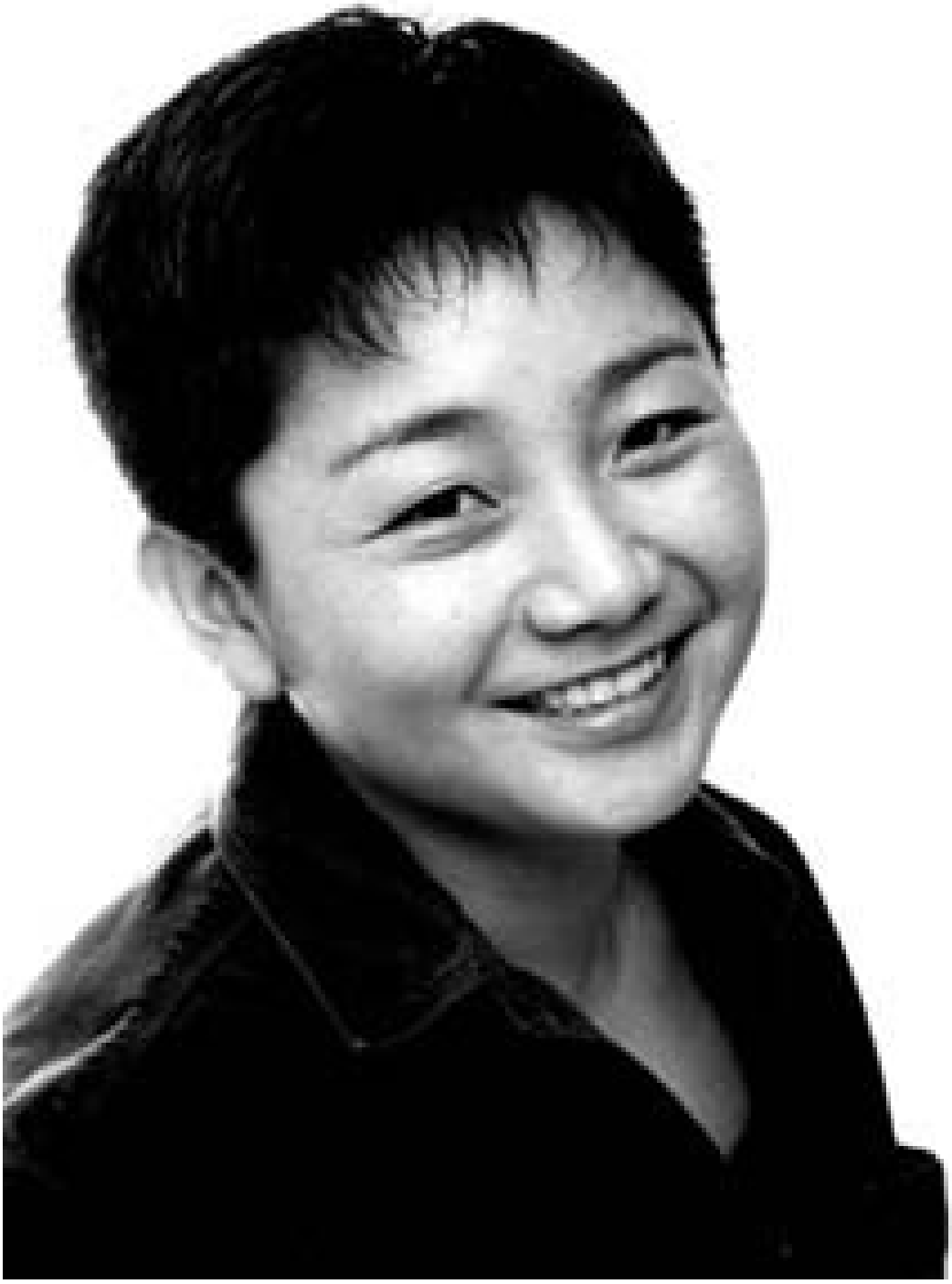


Photo 11: Hiromi Goto

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