

The Future of Racial Memory: Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Redress in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka*

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Article abstract

The majority of criticism surrounding Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka* assumes that reconciliation and resistance to racial injustice are incompatible, thereby overlooking Kogawa's complex exploration of the transformative potential forgiveness and reconciliation can provide Japanese Canadians in resisting and defusing the power of the oppressor. Forgiveness can only follow an apology that acknowledges wrongdoing; it does not merely reinscribe ideologically racist messages of power operating in Canadian society, nor invoke the "model minority myth" to avoid compensatory action. Such recognition of the past, however, is necessarily dependant on memory, which both texts represent as unstable and unreliable yet essential to the healing process. Kogawa contends with the tension between these postmodern and humanist concepts of memory through the issei word "Itsuka," meaning "someday," which captures the Japanese sense of the anteriority of the future. Forgiveness essentially constitutes a form of renarration that recollects the past while simultaneously opening up possibilities for a future.

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The Future of Racial Memory: Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Redress in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka*

JULIE MCGONEGAL

IN A RECENTLY PUBLISHED ARTICLE on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Rosemary Jolly contests the simplistic and reductionistic formulation of Christianity in postcolonial and postmodern criticism as merely "superficial pacificism" or "regressive naïvete" (696). According to Jolly, suspicion of the colonialist legacies of Christianity has translated into an outright rejection of any mode of postcolonial resistance inspired by Christian myth, language, or ritual. The failure to recognize modes of resistance that do not conform to a secular, rationalist framework has resulted, Jolly suggests, in a too-hasty foreclosure of the TRC, which drew substantially on a Christian ethic of forgiveness in a bid to foster national reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. While the focus of this essay is Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka* and their contexts of Japanese-Canadian internment and redress, Jolly's insight is nevertheless relevant to the argument I make here. For there is an assumption in much Kogawa criticism that the thematics of forgiveness and reconciliation that dominate her texts — thematics influenced by an admixture of Christian *and* Buddhist heritages — undermine their project of resistance to racial persecution, suffering, and injustice. This response shortchanges the powerful and complex role that faith plays in Kogawa's writing and activism. My reading of *Obasan* and *Itsuka* thus begins by cautioning against an easy denunciation of forgiveness and reconciliation as, say, a reactionary response to colonialism, or as an acceptance of in-justice on the part of marginalized peoples.

While forgiveness and reconciliation might be seen as premature and disempowering responses for women and racial minorities, underestimating their importance for marginalized groups can also be a way of overlooking conceptualizations of agency and liberation that fall outside of

mainstream definitions. Kogawa acknowledges as much in a lecture she delivered on the topic of reconciliation to the Canadian Caucus On Human Rights; she qualifies her statement that “Our wholeness comes from joining and from sharing our brokenness” by acknowledging that

Many feminists would say that the imagery of inadequacy and brokenness are [*sic*] inappropriate ones for women and do not assist us to the kind of transforming strength which is now needed. It is true that doubt and ambivalence can sometimes so immobilize us that in the end we serve to maintain oppressors in their positions of power. But healthy doubt is also that which prevents us from succumbing to the demonic power of an unthinking trust. (“Just Cause” 20)

Here Kogawa resists the perception that projects of reconciliation are necessarily humanist in the worst kind of way by proposing that they may actually arise out of disparity and difference. As William James Closson asserts, writing of the interrelation of theology, art, and politics in her novels, Kogawa shows up the failure of mainstream Canadians (those of European ancestry) to live according to their own ideals. “Her view,” he writes, “is that minorities can be the healing ‘leaven’ within society, perhaps paralleling and legitimating her own prophetic artistry, providing the majority with the means of their own restoration and salvation” (224). In *Obasan*, the ethic of forgiveness that lies at the core of the Christian narrative of redemption is eminently practiced by Japanese Canadians.

In what follows here I suggest that condemning or dismissing Kogawa’s narratives of forgiveness and reconciliation overlooks the transformative potential she locates in these ideals — their capacity to allow dialogue, communication, and communion between victimizers and victims. In proposing a departure from the view that forgiveness and reconciliation are necessarily complicit in modernity’s logic of universal morality and teleology, I challenge critical evaluations of *Obasan* which suggest, as Smaro Kamboureli has, that the novel’s imagery of forgiveness “is hardly a political answer to the ravages of the past” (176) and that Naomi is “a product of the kind of pedagogy that aspires to reconciliation for the sake of the presumed comfort that comes with imposing a telos on things” (220). While such criticism of *Obasan* as an essentially naïve search for consolation and closure is understandably concerned to rectify other criticism that strips it of its resistant force by appropriating it in the service of dominant ideology, it ignores Kogawa’s alternative approach to forgiveness and reconcili-

ation, an approach that moves beyond equations of reconciliation with repression, consolation, or sentimentalization. It is time we interrogated reductive dualisms that insist on the incompatibility of resistance and reconciliation.

* * * * *

Although Kogawa's novels present the possibility of reconciliation and forgiveness, they nevertheless insist on the importance of conditions: for instance, repentance and restitution. Indeed, as I discuss in what follows, Kogawa maintains a strong degree of critical distance from claims of forgiveness that are extended when neither remorse for wrongdoing has been expressed nor projects of restitution enacted. To some, her position might seem to compromise the concept of "authentic forgiveness" that Jacques Derrida tries ardently to preserve in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, in which he proposes that "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable" (33), and that acts of forgiveness are invalidated the moment they are fraught with aims or objectives. In a recent interview published in *PMLA*, Julia Kristeva responds to Derrida's position by insisting that forgiveness offered in the face of no repentance and no promise of change is problematic at the very least, and may not even qualify as forgiveness in the first place. "Those who call on an absolute forgiveness without repentance are in an *oblativité*" ("Forgiveness" 283), Kristeva maintains, and by this she means that their generosity, while extraordinary, too easily rescinds the limits that define social relationships. For this reason, Kristeva rejects the validity of such public scenes of forgiveness as those witnessed in the truth commissions of Argentina and South Africa, and instead reserves the act for the private sphere exclusively and the psychoanalytic scene ideally. Describing forgiveness as an act of interpretation that does not rationally reconstruct the crime or offense but rather renarrates the past in the interests of moving beyond the trauma, Kristeva treats forgiveness as existing outside of community and its principles of jurisdiction and punishment. There are as many points of agreement as of disagreement on the subject of forgiveness between Kristeva, the linguist and psychoanalyst, and Kogawa, the fiction-writer and activist: both recuperate forgiveness as a potentially transformative and empowering act (in contrast to those who conflate it with a refusal of power) while nevertheless reminding us that the meaning of the act is bound up with the fulfillment

of conditions. But whereas Kristeva treats forgiveness as private and secular, Kogawa refuses to conceptually disembell forgiveness from the terrains of politics and religion. And whereas Kristeva considers forgiveness an act that more or less benefits the criminal or oppressor, Kogawa considers how it is that forgiveness can actually empower the victim or survivor. (Indeed, a significant problem with Kristeva's view of forgiveness is that it focuses on the perpetrator to the point of assuming that the analyst can unproblematically forgive on behalf of the victim). Kogawa's novels illustrate how the determination not to be imprisoned in the category of the victim can sometimes motivate the pursuit of forgiveness on the part of the wronged; they further suggests that this wish to defuse the power of the oppressor constitutes a form of agency that should not be overlooked out of a dogmatic adherence to principles of judgement and punishment.

Yet Kogawa's belief in the agency that forgiveness can offer by no means blinds her to the danger of the language of forgiveness and reconciliation being abused or practiced as a means to an end, such as social unity or racial harmony. It is important, in this sense, that Naomi responds with skepticism and uncertainty, for example, to the prayers for forgiveness of Nakayama-sensei, Obasan, and Uncle. As a way of registering her feeling that these prayers are unbearable, even odious in their refusal to acknowledge the crimes committed against her family and community, Naomi, who is "not thinking of forgiveness," "stand[s] up and abruptly leave[s] the room" (263) as they are offered. Of course her position is by no means unreasonable: in their intimation that Japanese Canadians are partly answerable for their own mistreatment, these prayers seem to placidly defer rather than demand racial justice, thereby accepting a process whereby responsibility for racial crimes and their exoneration is transferred onto the shoulders of the victims themselves. This deferral of racial justice is also witnessed in Nakayama-sensei's earlier speech urging co-operation that "sounds half like an apology, as if he were somehow responsible" (130), in Obasan's almost incantatory statements exhorting forgetfulness, and in Uncle's entreaties to Aunt Emily that gratitude, not anger or dissatisfaction, be shown for putative Canadian benevolence and goodwill. In these instances, what poses as forgiveness might instead be an expression and effect of hegemony, of a situation whereby the oppressed complicitly disavow the Canadian government's responsibility for racial crimes committed and, even more problematically, erroneously bear that responsibility themselves.

Yet to attribute these responses to a complicitous attitude alone would be to account only partially for the readiness and consistency with which various *issei* in *Obasan* make recourse to invocations of mercy and compassion. The prayers for forgiveness on the part of the older generation raise the question of what forgiveness means when it is *for* the wronged rather than the wrongdoer: whereas the conditions of contrition and restitution constitute absolutely essential conditions in the latter situation, in the former, the specific conditions (and indeed whether conditions exist at all) are the prerogative of the oppressed. These prayers also point, moreover, to the critical exigency of accounting for the role of cultural difference in paradigms of apology and forgiveness. For apology and forgiveness play (or at least *did* play, a generation or two ago) far more constitutive roles in Japanese culture — the apologizing culture *par excellence* — than they do in most others. According to Takeo Doi, whereas there is often no moral imperative to apologize in Western cultures, apologies usually fulfill an important social regulatory function of repairing harm and restoring harmony in Japanese culture. And whereas apologies in Western cultures do not discharge offenders of their obligations or responsibility, in Japanese culture, they render one unaccountable through their context of dependency. In other words, because apologies generally emanate from fear and guilt in Japanese culture, the apologizer's dependent status is crucial for the achievement of an efficacious apology.

In the context of Japanese-Canadian immigrant cultures, one could speculate that the fear and guilt that typically motivate the apology in Japanese culture become *racial* fear and guilt — in this sense, the apology uttered by, say, Obasan to Mr. Barker emerges out of a nexus of asymmetrical power relations, in which case the apologetic gesture temporarily provides a sense of alleviation and even agency without actually transforming the system that produces such power relations. For if the apology constitutes a proclamation of defenselessness and vulnerability in the Japanese context, or what Doi calls “a child-like plea to the other party” (41), in the Canadian context it inadvertently aids in the production of white fantasies of Asian dependency and vulnerability.

In other words, performative displays of dependency and vulnerability unfortunately operate, in a North American context, to supplement white fantasies that imagine Asians, and particularly Asian women, as childlike and submissive. These stereotypes gain further cultural power when apologizing routinely and almost ritualistically is a reflexive re-

sponse to racial marginalization and social subordination.⁴ Thus Obasan's apologetic gestures unintentionally collaborate with Japanese cultural practices of apologizing to reinforce her subordination, a situation that uncannily resembles the ways that Mr. Barker's expression of regret for the violations committed against Japanese Canadians successfully reinforces his domination.

If practices of apology and forgiveness are unsatisfactory or suspect in that they can function, intentionally or not, to reinscribe ideological messages about the racist operations of power in Canadian society, one of the problematic messages they can relay is that racism in Canada belongs to a putatively discontinuous past. Thus the past tense, the "we did," of Mr. Barker's articulation of remorse cannot initiate genuine forgiveness because it remembers the internment for the sole purpose of isolating it from a multicultural present, of containing its potential to disrupt comforting nationalist illusions about the achievement of racial harmony. But genuine forgiveness is also not enabled by, say, Obasan's prayerful utterances or acts of hospitality, for forgiveness itself does not and cannot constitute a negation or annihilation of the past, an excision from collective and individual memory of racial pain and suffering. Genuine forgiveness, according to Kogawa's pedagogy, must be dissociated from amnesia of any kind, for it is neither a willful dismissal of an essentially embarrassing or self-contradictory past nor an involuntary erasure from memory of events too painful to recall.

Yet if forgiveness entails remembrance, how, Kogawa asks, is forgiveness possible when trauma and catastrophe give rise to collective and individual memory loss? And if forgiveness necessitates revisitation of the past, is its achievement even worth the psychic agony of recollection? By having Naomi answer the latter question in the negative, at least initially, Kogawa accounts for the possibility that forgiveness, to the extent that it requires remembrance, may not be as affirmative or desirable an attainment as is often thought. Thus a few pages after her reflection on the excruciating experience of retrieving traumatic memories, described in intensely visceral language as "memory drain[ing] down the sides of my face ... pull[ing] the growth from the lining of my walls" (214), Naomi considers that the benefits of mourning, as well as its attendant possibilities in the form of closure and healing, may be overrated given that no amount of remembering can provide an adequate or equivalent return to the past: "I can cry for the flames that have cracked in the dryness and cry

for people who no longer sing. I can cry for Obasan who has turned to stone. But what then? Uncle does not rise up and return to his boats. Dead bones do not take on flesh" (219). Naomi's sense of the potential futility of engaging the tasks of remembrance and forgiveness — her awareness that they can provide neither adequate restitution nor complete reconciliation since they cannot return the most victimized victims, victims on whose behalf it may seem presumptuous, if not irrelevant, to forgive — calls into question the common equation of remembering and revealing with healing. *Obasan* thus registers, through the musings of Naomi, a heightened degree of self-consciousness about its own narrative project of recollecting history, for Kogawa is intensely aware of the reasons for a cultural and historical preference of forgetfulness to forgiveness. Forgetfulness, as Naomi speculates, provides a sought-after avoidance of affect, a welcome relief from the oppressiveness and grief of racial memory:

Some memories, too, might be better forgotten. Didn't Obasan once say, "It is better to forget"? What purpose is served by hauling forth the jar of inedible food? If it is not seen, it does not horrify. What is past recall is past pain. Questions from all these papers, questions referring to turbulence in the past, are an unnecessary upheaval in the delicate ecology of this numb day. (48)

To the extent, then, that Naomi articulates the objection that racial paralysis may be preferable to racial pain, and that remembrance may actually further injure racially injured subjects, Kogawa thinks arguments in favour of forgetfulness sufficiently substantial and compelling to deserve consideration.

Yet Kogawa's narrative eventually works against the logic of amnesia insofar as it favours recollecting the past to the alternative of having it dismissed, denied, or discounted in dominant versions of history. Through the experience of Naomi, *Obasan* bears out Kogawa's claim, asserted in interviews and critical writings, that "we must not ever forget lest we repeat the evils of our ancestors.... To embrace that and to demand of ourselves a refusal to repeat that history is a great calling" ("Interview with Jeanne Delbaere" 465). So while Kogawa seems to sympathize with the inclination to remember the past with the aim of eventually escaping it — with Naomi's recourse to remembrance as a way "to get away from all this ... from the memories, from the deaths, from the heap of words" (201) — she nevertheless discourages an approach to

remembrance that recollects only in order to forget. But Kogawa's narrative defense of recollecting as opposed to effacing the past is not made without rigorous interrogation of the meanings and purposes of remembrance, and of the possibilities and problems of accessing memory as a coping strategy for dealing with the present. Kogawa's thoughtful reflections on the import and uses of memory have been peculiarly overlooked in the overwhelming majority of literary criticism on *Obasan*,⁵ much of which has interpreted *Obasan* as "getting over" Canada's racist past in order to "get on" with a present in which racism is still going strong — as extending a form of forgiveness by proxy to an ostensibly redeemed Canadian nation — but to imply that the novel's exhortation of remembrance enables a form of forgetting is to miss its critical point, articulated by Naomi, that "the present is shaped by the past" (25).

As much as *Obasan* ultimately privileges the relation between forgiveness and memory, it nevertheless demonstrates a considerable awareness of the impartiality and mutability of the latter. Naomi's reflection that "the present is shaped by the past" is located in a passage that constitutes a larger meditation on the ontological nature of memory and on its potential to render epistemological claims about the certainty of truth suspect: "All our ordinary stories are changed in time," she thinks, "altered as much by the present as the present is shaped by the past" (25). Her observation asks us to consider what it means for the possibilities of forgiveness and reconciliation when competing versions of history vie for authority. In other words, if forgiveness requires a relation to the past, if reconciliation requires remembrance, are the former viable or realizable aims given that, as Naomi knows, narrative memory can be inaccessible, uncertain, and subjective? The question is all the more vexed because Kogawa's novels and critical writings share Paul Ricoeur's view that "Forgiveness is a sort of healing of memory" (*The Just* 144) even as they demonstrate a profound awareness that memory itself can be unstable, indeterminate, and unreliable. Indeed, the tension in Kogawa's work between a humanist perspective and a more postmodern one — between an awareness of the importance of such currently devalued conceptual entities as truth, history, and memory, on the one hand, and an understanding that these entities are not always as reliable and responsible as we might like, on the other — has created a sharp divide in literary criticism on the novel, with critics such as Rachelle Kanefsky and Minh T. Nguyen strongly contesting Donald Goellnicht's claim that *Obasan* demonstrates

“that history is not fixed, but discursive, a ‘form of saying’ founded in language, which is always in a state of flux” (294). Yet Kogawa’s suggestion, conveyed through the medium of Naomi, that truth can be “more murky, shadowy, and grey” (33) than Aunt Emily’s intensely literalist approach allows does not, it seems to me, contradict or negate her humanist aspirations to develop what Ricoeur calls a “culture of just memory” (“Memory” 11). Indeed, were Kogawa to adopt a purely immanentist perspective, were she to suggest in radically postmodern fashion that past events remain trapped in their pastness, then it would seem that the only position that would be available to her would be one that insisted on forgetfulness. Yet she rejects this position and adopts the view — similarly adopted and elaborated by Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* — that the past is available only through memory, and that while this does not eliminate the ontological inviolability and irretrievability of pastness, it does mean that the original past is open to modification and revision. Forgiveness and reconciliation, from this perspective, do not undo the past but strive to renarrate it. They are not a forgetting of events themselves, but a different way of signifying, a way of signifying that “gives memory a future” (Ricoeur, *Figuring* 13).

And Kogawa affirms the view, articulated in different ways by Ricoeur as well as Kristeva, that forgiveness constitutes a form of renarration that recollects the past while simultaneously opening up possibilities for a future. One of the reasons the novel ultimately disappoints the possibility of forgiveness is that the Canadian government seeks to rationally reconstruct events in such a way that thwarts the possibility of rational reconstruction. Thus the document placed at the end of *Obasan*, a memorandum produced by the Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians for the Canadian House of Commons and Senate, forestalls the movement toward resolution not only through its failure to index the voices of the oppressed but also through its discourse of dogmatic rationality and univocal meaning; it displays, in Kristevan terms, the characteristics of “signification” that suggest the impossibility of forgiveness. In its negation of the affective and political aspects of internment survival, the document uncannily resonates with the “carnivorous” speech uttered by the spectre-like figure of the Grand Inquisitor, a distant and disembodied speech that signals both “a judgment and a refusal to hear” (250), an indifference to real human suffering. The production of this mode of speech would certainly constitute a vain labour and an ineffectual exer-

cise to Naomi, for whom Emily's collection of data and official records constitutes white noise or meaningless speech that does not capture or resonate with the actual ordeal endured by her family and community: "All of Aunt Emily's words, all her papers, the telegrams and petitions are like scratchings in the barnyard," she reflects, "the evidence of much activity, scaly claws hard at work. But what good they do I do not know. . . . They do not touch us where we are planted here in Alberta" (208). At the source of Naomi's distrust of official records and documents is her conviction that they exclude the felt specificities of survivors' own experiences of internment and its aftermath.

Naomi's distrust suggests that even as she ultimately affirms the potential value of epistemic "truth" and "reality," she also has deep misgivings about the "objectivity" of apparently factual information that through its "cool print" (208) or sanitizing language undermines the full affective range (including bewilderment, anger, abjection, frustration, etc.) of Japanese Canadians' responses to internment. Her insights into the complex workings of language complicate a somewhat simplistic and exaggeratedly polarized critical debate on *Obasan's* putative postmodernism or supposed humanism. If Naomi ultimately disavows the potential disillusionment, or even nihilism, of a radically postmodern position and avers Emily's humanist credo that "It matters to get facts straight," and that "Reconciliation can't begin without mutual recognition of the facts" (201), she nonetheless retains an indispensable suspicion of the relevance of factual discourse for reconciliation on the basis of its potential insufficiency or even ineffectualness when not supplemented by other forms of discourse. Because they register a failure to listen and a shortage of social feeling, official documents alone do not and cannot efficaciously mediate the processes of forgiveness and reconciliation processes that, Kogawa suggests, must follow genuine attendance to the repressed and marginalized voices of those who were (and may still be) wronged.

But while the inefficacy of rational reconstructive language would seem to unite Kogawa and Kristeva on the subject of forgiveness, there is a crucial difference in their views: whereas the former seems to adopt an Arendtian view that forgiveness and reconciliation are temporal and historical, the latter insists on their atemporality and ahistoricity. Kristeva strategically holds onto her assertion in *Black Sun* that forgiveness exists outside of the time of scansion, that "pardon is ahistorical. It breaks the concatenation of causes and effects, crimes and punishment, it stays the

time of action" (200), in order to argue that forgiveness cannot force its way into the public realm. As she explains in an interview, "I insist on this phenomenon of the atemporality of forgiveness because it helps us understand why forgiveness cannot inscribe itself in the social arena" ("Forgiveness" 285). For all the similarities between Kristeva's and Kogawa's views on forgiveness, where their positions clearly part ways, then, is in the question of temporality: for Kogawa, forgiveness is strongly rooted in the temporal, and is precisely what ensures the continuity of time. Whereas Kristeva's insistence that forgiveness is atemporal derives from her position that it belongs to the private realm alone, and ideally to the psychoanalytic scene, Kogawa's suggestion that it is temporal obtains from her view that "The private and the public, the personal and the political, the internal and the external are all co-extensive" ("Just Cause" 20).

Kogawa's notion that forgiveness is very much a temporal concept applicable to collective contexts is witnessed, to varying extents, in *Obasan* and *Itsuka*. Specifically, these texts configure the temporal constitution of forgiveness, as well as reconciliation and redress, as the future anterior. By this I mean that they suggest that the teleology of such phenomenon "is not unlike determinism, but it is dispersed rather than operationalized through linear causality. The future inhabits the present, yet it has not yet come" (Fortun 196). From this perspective, how the past is recollected in the present affects the future, for events that occur in the present achieve their significance from what will occur henceforth. While the future can be folded back in detrimental ways, as when the past merely replicates the future, reconciliation and redress, Kogawa suggests, anteriorize it positively by redirecting it toward new possibilities; they thus render interpretation incomplete and responsibility infinite, always ahead of themselves, aware of how the present generates the future. Kogawa posits reconciliation and redress, then, in terms that account for the temporal boundedness of past and present, envisioning them as resignifying the former in ways that enable positive intervention into trajectories already in motion.

Obasan, for example, works against Naomi's relentless speculations that redress is temporally out of joint, unhinged from time altogether. It counters her logic that to seek redress is to unnecessarily excavate a past that "belongs to yesterday" when "there are so many other things to attend today" and ultimately avers Emily's axiomatic statement — made in response to Naomi's conjecture that because the "past is so long," perhaps

“we should turn the page and move on” — that “the past is the future” (45). In other words, the text confirms the latter’s perspective that redress pulls the past into significance for the sake of rerouting the future. Uncle’s almost incantatory enunciations of “itsuka,” a word that translates as “someday,” is highly relevant in this sense. The term, which is consistently invoked in the context of the possibility of recuperation or reconciliation, is clearly structured on a logic of deferral—“someday” indefinitely suspends the future even as it looks steadfastly toward it. To the extent that the term is only partially present, dependent on a dialectical tension between present and future, it speaks directly to Kogawa’s dedication to conceptualizing reconciliation and redress as anticipating new possibilities that have not yet come.

Kogawa’s commitment to exploring the possibilities of redress for enacting a liberatory future lays the narrative groundwork of *Itsuka*. The title itself cues us to this commitment, as well as directing us toward her notion that reconciliation and redress are never definitively achieved but always *not quite* or *in process*. Yet criticism on the text has overlooked the openness and incompleteness of *Itsuka*’s representation of the so-called “achievement” of redress by ineluctably interpreting its final scene as fulfilling rather than deferring reconciliation and resolution.⁵ Redress in *Itsuka* does not, however, represent a precipitate rush toward the telos of racial harmony but a symbolic starting point for the not-yet-realizable yet nevertheless worthwhile project of striving toward reconciliation. Indeed, in this text, more so even than in *Obasan*, we encounter Kogawa’s view that redress exceeds the present by encompassing both the past and future.

It is because the text is keyed to the anteriorization of the future that Naomi narrates in detail her experience of Obasan’s physical and mental decline and gradual death; for while this sequence of events might seem anomalous in a book that is otherwise preoccupied with describing the former’s involvement in the redress movement, it suggests that the movement itself emerges out of an awareness that the future has a provenance. It is significant, in this sense, that Uncle repeats “itsuka” again and again in *Obasan* and that the title character of the former novel almost ritualistically invokes the same refrain in *Itsuka*; for in many ways what we might call the travail of redress functions as a tribute to those who suffered the internment without ever experiencing an official apology or acknowledgement of the wrongs committed against them. The spectres of Obasan and Uncle emerge, then, as “the dead [who] stand with

their feet in doorways, asking not to be forgotten" (149), as the "political unconscious" or the absent presences of *Itsuka* specifically and the redress struggle generally. They rest beneath the surface of Kogawa's prose, haunting it as ghosts that render thinkable the principle of responsibility that inheres in redress.

What the text's working and reworking of time further suggests is that the *issei* conceive of temporality in radically different terms than do Anglo-Saxon Canadians. For as Naomi notes, whereas the former understand the present as modified by cuts and projections, the latter generally perceive it in a rigid, narrow, and overdetermined manner. Observing, for example, Pastor Jim's profound incapacity to communicate with (and thus convert) the *issei*, she reflects that

The difficulty Pastor Jim has with the *issei* has something to do with time. For Pastor Jim, the moment is "now." "Now," he says, "is the hour of decision." The past with its sorrows is to be redeemed in the present. Truth is spontaneous. We are to stand straight, look forthrightly in each other's eyes, and the more transparent our feelings, the more we're to be trusted. But the *issei*! To them such demonstrations are aggressive, arrogant and, at the least, extremely rude. Pastor Jim, I suppose, must think they are mentally retarded or emotionally dead. I know, however, that they are acutely sensitive and that their feelings are all the more intense for being contained. (31)

Where Pastor Jim possesses an absolutist view of the now, one that cannot account for the possibilities of ghosts, inheritance, and generations, the *issei* have retained a Japanese perception of time that accounts for the temporal excess of the present, for its inclusion of those who are *not yet* and *no longer*.⁶ But the latter's recognition that the present exceeds itself also emerges out of their experience of oppression as outsiders in Canadian society. Not unlike other ethnicized groups that have immigrated to North America, the *issei*, Kogawa suggests, view their racial suffering and hardship in the present as palliating or even eliminating suffering and hardship for future generations. In other words, as victims of racist and nationalist violence, the *issei* endow the future with the justice that the present lacks. Naomi recalls Nakayama-sensei explaining that, "*issei* immigrants were people of sacrifice. They came to the new land only to perish in the culture clash. 'Itsuka,' he'd say, 'your sacrifice will someday be known. ... They endured for a future that only the children will know. Their endurance is an act of faith and love'" (241). If the movement for

redress views the present as a “sacrifice,” a responsibility, or better yet, a gift to the future that is proffered out of a faith in its possibility, then this view, as we see here, follows forth from a concept of time that marginalized groups such as the *issei* have generally tended to construct.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that the redress movement draws strictly and rigidly from Japanese constructions of temporality. For while Japanese Canadians (particularly *issei* but also *nisei*) have a strong sense of the anteriority of the future, Kogawa suggests that they often have disjunct views on what the future looks like and how it ought to be achieved. Without wanting to essentialize *Itsuka* as a necessarily accurate or authentic representation of the redress movement, then, I would suggest that it does point up some of the contradictions and differences between the conceptual frame of temporality suggested by redress and the concept of time ascribed to by many *issei*. For if the ideology of redress purports that a liberatory future in the material world can be made possible through political struggle, to many *issei* such struggle simply cannot be afforded and justice in the future must merely be awaited. These potentially incompatible configurations of the future structure in *Itsuka* can be seen in the split that runs through the motif of “itsuka” or “someday”: for while the text itself seems to offer and draw energy from the possibility that “someday” represents a just future that can be made possible (or at least more possible) through political agitation, when the word itself is invoked by Obasan and Uncle, for example, it is alternately as an acquiescent expectation of return to pre-internment conditions, an admission of capitulation to forces that one can presumably not control, and an appeal to eternal transcendence. In other words, while “someday” represents an attempt to make realizable what is unreal in the context of redress, it also represents, as Naomi speculates it does for Obasan, an attempt to “make realizable what is real” (*Obasan* 49). For *issei* such as Obasan, whose familiarity with the intensely repressive and racist policies of the Canadian nation-state has convinced her of the impossibility of productive resistance, recourse to the promise of a transcendent future seems to provide some form of consolation in the face of overwhelming oppression and suffering. To this extent, *issei* cultural perceptions of temporality as future-oriented problematically facilitate, validate, and reinforce the agenda of the dominant culture.

By drawing attention to the particular ways that Japanese notions of mutual and partial responsibility for conflict and conflict resolution play

out in the context of redress,⁷ Kogawa reveals that even as these notions open up the possibility of political struggle, they nevertheless operate to produce internal resistance to it. For if *issei* like Obasan are deeply suspicious of the movement, preferring instead to co-operate with the political process rather than work in opposition to it, that has not only to do with their concept of time, but also with their preservation of such cultural values as compromise and negotiation. While these values might be said to have enabled redress in a part of the world where institutions and bureaucracies have, until very recently, been viewed as incapable of regret, remorse, or affect generally (Tavuchis 43), for many *issei*, these values overlap with and reinforce the concepts of tolerance and harmony that the myth of multiculturalism has put into cultural circulation. Naomi, for her part, registers the convergences between the Japanese concept of “wagamama” — a term that translates as “selfish individualism” — and Canadian multicultural illusions when she imagines that “Obasan would probably say that redress was wagamama. After all and after all, Canada was a wonderful country” (147). The problematic interplay between cultural values of co-operation and harmony, racial affect such as fear and shame, and nationalist discourses of multicultural diversity and tolerance, becomes more and more evident as Naomi’s account of the redress struggle becomes more detailed, more focused on the internal rivalries that constituted that struggle.

Indeed, much of the latter part of *Itsuka* constitutes a sustained critique of that elite fraction of the redress movement that worked in opposition to the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) by exploiting *issei* values of co-operation and harmony, using them to elicit feelings of racial abjection and guilt for the sake of mobilizing support for a profoundly inadequate compensation package. The dark twists through which this more politically legitimized group manipulated the *issei* emphasis on harmony into a tool for the production of complicity are observed by Naomi: “Some of the strongest, the most political conscious, are bowed down by a sense of shame. Their deepest belief in harmony has been completely distorted” (241). Certainly drawing on disempowered people’s cultural beliefs in social harmony to generate self-guilt and shame constitutes a pernicious rhetorical strategy, particularly when that strategy is actually intended to shut down potential sites and modes of enabling some sense of such harmony. But this rhetorical strategy becomes more pernicious still when it establishes an uncritical equivalence between

Japanese and Canadian values of harmony, tolerance, and the pursuit of collective good in order to establish a false contradiction between these values and the project of redress. Such a strategy is at work, for example, when Nikki maintains that “people [i.e., Japanese Canadians] want to be cooperative” and “want forgiveness,” that “the idea of individual compensation is the real sell-out” not only for this reason, but also because “Canada has always put the group ahead of the individual. We’re not Americans” (217). In this problematic formulation, the selfish and ungenerous motivations behind the Canadian government’s refusal to provide individual compensation are transmuted into the selfishness and ungenerousness of those Japanese Canadians seeking compensation; moreover, the latter are represented as opposing, betraying, and possibly even threatening, once again, the “altruistic” and “benevolent” Canadian nation. We encounter more of this hegemonic logic in Dr. Stinson’s claim that “your [the Japanese-Canadian] community doesn’t need any money. If you were sincerely interested in justice, you’d concern yourselves with the genuinely disadvantaged” (221). Through recourse to the model minority myth, this logic seeks to displace the responsibility for Japanese Canadians’ success or failure within the Canadian nation squarely on their own shoulders. It does so by reasoning, very speciously, that it is those Japanese Canadians seeking redress, and not the Canadian government that interned and dispersed them, who idealize an individualist ideology. This reasoning erases the political and elides the material history of the internment by drawing on “an ideology of depoliticized self-healing” (Palumbo-Liu 396) that deflects attention away from serious social critique. So while invocation of the model minority myth may produce persuasive arguments against compensation — as Naomi admits Dr. Stinson’s position “is hard to dispute. Japanese Canadians are not needy. We’re middle-class, law-abiding citizens. A model minority” (177) — in truth they rely on a model of assimilation that suggests that the traumatized and marginalized are themselves responsible for their own psychological and material adjustment.

Naomi’s admission indicates, on its own, the troubling power that hegemonic discourse has to inaugurate (racially and other) marginalized subjects who disavow their marginalization. Her initial response to the redress effort — her claim that it “is rather inconsequential if you consider what’s going on in the world” (102) — is a testament of sorts to the efficaciousness of anti-redress and anti-resistance rhetoric. Yet the narra-

tive trajectory of *Itsuka* traces, in a mere fifty pages, Naomi's movement from profound suspicion and distrust of redress to an affirmation of it: if she discloses to readers that "I'm not a true believer in redress. I'm not a true believer in anything much" (154), she soon recants this statement, asserting that "We all know we are a people who were wronged. It's time to stand up. It's time" (203). In the context of the refusal of the Canadian and other so-called democratic governments to acknowledge responsibility for the commission of atrocious acts, Naomi realizes that the redress struggle, to the extent that it might demystify the myth of multiculturalism by refuting the putative truths that official discourse seeks to "pass off" as facts, could enable a liberatory future. She throws support behind Aunt Emily's position that "The lie is alive in the world. It was there in Nazi Germany. It's in South Africa. In Latin America. In every country in the world. This is why redress matters. Because there are many people intent on defending the oppressor's rights no matter what the truth, and they are in places of power" (222). How are we meant to reconcile this new affirmation of truth with Naomi's earlier insistence, in this novel as well as *Obasan*, that truth is intensely fragmented, subjective, and self-referential? After all, even in Kogawa's critical writings on reconciliation, there is an intense awareness and open acknowledgement that subjects and collectivities alike are, to borrow her own terminology, "broken" and "inadequate." And even Aunt Emily, arguably a humanist *par excellence*, concedes that "There are as many stories [of redress] as there are individuals" (239). While the most obvious response would be that for Aunt Emily, as perhaps for Kogawa, there are several versions of essentially singular (if extraordinarily impenetrable) truth, I would also suggest that it is the case that Kogawa affirms redress because, in the manner theorized by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, it constitutes a "real revolutionary practice" to the extent that it "takes control of the production of truth" (151). To this extent, to quote that earlier passage from *Itsuka* again, redress is about taking over the production of truth from those "intent on defending the oppressor's rights no matter what the truth" who "are in places of power" (222).

It is precisely because the official apology for the internment and its aftermath includes an acknowledgment of wrongdoing — and hence a corrective to the falsehoods produced by the dominant culture — that Naomi's reaction to the achievement of redress is almost fulsomely euphoric. The moment of apology is described in a language of overflow.

The apology itself clearly moves her. Its transformative capacity is registered in her description of it as “the magic of speech” and a “ritual thing that humans do, the washing of stains through the speaking of words” (274). It is perhaps particularly registered in her fascinating suggestion that through its locution, she returns to an originary or pre-symbolic state: “I laugh. I am whole. I am as complete as when I was a very young child” (276). But while the apology might seem to contain a mystificatory power, its power, I suggest, actually lies in its potential to demystify. In other words, if apologies are “illocutionary acts” — acts that, according to J.L. Austin, in saying do what they say, when they say — what apologies *do* (at least what efficacious apologies do) is reveal a formerly repressed truth. After all, it is the apology that acknowledges a formerly unacknowledged version of events that is felicitous; apologies that do not include a full confession insult those who receive them, if they have an affective impact at all. Apologies are, as we see in *Itsuka*, acts of revelation. That is why Naomi calls them “magic” and why the sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis says that they are “transformative” (5). They transform because they take hold, in a positive or liberating way, of the production of truth.

But while the apology provided by redress enables a certain degree of control over the production of truth, we might find ourselves asking just how much control it allows. After all, in the case of the Japanese-Canadian internment, a single subject — the then Canadian prime minister, Brian Mulroney — uttered the apology. Was it him, the state, or Japanese Canadians who took control of the production of truth on 22 September 1988? Without supplying any ready answers to such a question, Roy Miki, in writing about that day of so-called “victory,” and specifically about the politics of the Canadian prime minister’s apologetic speech to Japanese Canadians, registers the readiness with which an anti-racist struggle was recuperated and contained by racist discourse. Noting the implications of the ways that the scene of apology was spatially configured — the Prime Minister became the star actor on a national stage, while Japanese Canadians were consigned to the role of spectators and guests in the parliamentary gallery — Miki notes the expedience with which an occasion that should have been about recognition of racial difference was converted into an event for promoting the nationalist multicultural ideology of harmony and unity. With one exception — the reading of an excerpt from *Obasan* by Ed Broadbent, the New Democratic party leader at the time — Japanese

Canadian voices were, Miki claims, strikingly silent (or rather silenced) during that moment:

“Japanese Canadians” were re-presented through the handful of subjects in the guest gallery above the politicians, but the official discourse was managed by the translation of “Canadian of Japanese ancestry” from surviving “victim” to exemplary “citizen.” In this moment of closure, the narrative of JCs was rewritten by the larger political system as a national story of resolution” (*Broken* 197).

While Miki calls into question the degree of control that redress provided Japanese Canadians over the production of truth, Naomi’s account, rendered as it is in understandably excited discourse, is disappointingly uncritical of the imbrication of redress in institutional structures of power. Her reaction seems to idealize that power as sovereign, or at the very least, to idealize the speech act associated with it as sovereign. In this sense, Naomi’s response to the prime-ministerial apology constitutes, I think, the overdetermination of the scene of utterance that Judith Butler painstakingly theorizes in *Excitable Speech*. Fantasizing or figuring power vis-à-vis a culpable subject (even when that subject stands in for the state) who is imagined as speaking with the forceful voice of that power exhibits, according to Butler, “a wish to return to a simpler and more reassuring map of power, one in which the assumption of sovereignty remains secure” (78). In other words, establishing language as the site of politics resurrects an old political terrain in which power was a sovereign formation at a time when globalization, as Hardt and Negri point out and Butler confirms, is dispersing and deterritorializing power. Butler’s meditations, while they concern hate speech, enable many insights apropos of public apologies. Specifically, her warning about reducing elaborate institutional structures to the actions of the subject cautions us against interpreting redress as Naomi seems to: that is, as an act that entirely restores agency to disempowered subjects.

Rather than interpret redress as unequivocally empowering, I would suggest we realize that it can comply with and facilitate nationalist discourse. While this might not be problematic on its own, it becomes problematic when redress enables the perpetuation of multiculturalist myths based on illusions of racial justice. Perhaps, however, we might read the official document that closes *Itsuka* in the same way that we read the official document that closes *Obasan* — that is, as a text that does not affirm the ideology of multiculturalism *tout court*, but that in some important ways

resists it. In *Itsuka*, this document contains a section that reads: “Canadians commit themselves to the creation of a society that ensures equality and justice for all regardless of race and ethnic origin.” It also contains an article that claims that on behalf of Canadians, the Canadian government “recognize[s], with great respect, the fortitude and determination of Japanese Canadians who, despite great stress and hardship, retain their commitment and loyalty to Canada and contribute so richly to the development of the Canadian nation” (n. pag.). Considering *Itsuka*’s narrativization of the Canadian government’s repeated and protracted attempts to circumvent the issue of redress, how else can we read the placement of this document at the end of the text except ironically? And what should we make of the explicit reference to Japanese-Canadian “loyalty and commitment” to the Canadian nation? Might it suggest that as a so-called “model minority,” Japanese Canadians are more “worthy” of an apology and reparations than other groups (e.g. Native Canadians or Holocaust survivors), that practices of “good citizenship” reap “rewards”? I formulate these questions not to discount the importance of the redress struggle and achievement, but to suggest that uncritically praising them as unequivocally emancipatory may encourage the perpetuation of multiculturalist “lies” that the redress movement and *Itsuka* set out to perforate.

Neither the redress struggle nor the text of *Itsuka* constitutes the redress achievement as actually “achieved.” Kogawa’s novel, in particular, recognizes that the structures of institutionalized racism in Canada (and elsewhere) are far too complexly interwoven into the fabric of people’s daily lives to be eliminated or diffused in a single moment in time. Even if it refers to the national apology, as well as redress generally, as “a promise fulfilled, a vision realized” (275), *Itsuka* nevertheless suggests that these attainments, however significant, remain unfulfilled, unrealized. Indeed, despite the language of plenitude, completion, and closure that characterizes the text’s final pages, Kogawa ultimately suggests that redress does not close the past and the present but rather opens up the future. It is to an anti-transcendent horizon of justice and hope that the title of *Itsuka* most refers, I think, a horizon towards which Miki gestures when he writes that “For a collective struggle supplemented by the impossibility of full ethical engagement ... the future is always around the corner; there is no victory, but only victories that are also warnings” (199). While Naomi conceives the redress “victory” less as a warning and more as a beacon of sorts — referring to the official apology as “a distant sun, an

asterisk to guide us through the nights that yet must come" (274) — she does imagine it in the same open-ended terms that Miki does. Insofar as it "exposes the vacillating boundaries of speech" by revealing the limits of sovereignty while nonetheless pointing toward a "new form of speaking" that opens up rather than forecloses "new kinds of worlds," the official apology to Japanese Canadians represents what Butler refers to as "the kind of speaking that takes place on the border of the unsayable" (41) but what Kogawa simply calls "someday." From what *Itsuka* ultimately suggests, the achievement of redress does not represent "someday," but it could help to draw it, in the form of forgiveness and reconciliation, further into the realm of the possible. Kogawa confirms this much in an interview in which she was asked how the concept of forgiveness in *Itsuka* can be instituted in the political realm. She responded thus: "What is healing for a community is more than just a solution of a political kind. What heals is a process of empowerment" ("Literary" 15). Someday may then be a series of moments, moments that reinvigorate time itself by bringing into view the possibility of a future that enables new forms of utterances, other kinds of relationships.

NOTES

¹ According to the sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis, oppressed individuals and collectivities apologize "promiscuously and excessively" and as a "defensive and propitiatory reaction" (40) to an unrecognized and unstable subjectivity.

² See Amoko and Beauregard for recent discussions of the multiculturalist ideology underlying Kogawa criticism.

³ While *Itsuka* has been relatively ignored by critics, when it has been examined its narrative reconstruction of the Redress Settlement has been inevitably interpreted as providing closure and resolution. Rachelle Kanefsky, for instance, argues that the text "fulfil[s] the dream that '*itsuka*,' someday the better day will come," and maintains that readers witness how the "struggle for historical legitimacy is finally won" (28), while Elizabeth Kella maintains that "the coda of *Itsuka* functions as a mark of closure, integration, and resolution" (208) by "imaginatively and optimistically resolv[ing] what might be called a crisis" (189). On the grounds that the text represents redress as concluding struggle rather than enabling it, Davina Te-Min Chen borrows from the liberation theory of Gustavo Gutierrez in order to argue that it reveals "how hegemonic forces may define even the modes of resistance to oppression and thus preclude the authentic liberation of 'continuous creation, never ending'" (100).

⁴ For recent sociological and anthropological studies of Japanese constructions of temporality, see Ben-Ari and Larson.

⁵ In her historical account of the role of Japanese cultural values and conventions in the struggle for redress, Maryka Omatu explains that "Traditionally Japanese hold everyone

involved in a conflict partly responsible for it. There is a common saying that even a thief is thirty per cent right. To this day, it is through mutual apology and compromise that the Japanese strive to avoid the public notoriety of a law suit" (111).

⁶ The extent to which apologies are potentially transformative or viewed as such is also a matter of culture. The legal scholar Eric Yamamoto considers the role of culture in his discussion of conflict and resolution in American racial conflict. He notes, for example, that whereas in Western legal culture a genuine apology is viewed as "an admission of liability" rather than "a legitimate legal remedy" or "a component of justice" (193-94), in the Japanese legal system, compensation is perceived as less important than reparation and an apology for wrongdoing plays a central role in repairing group harmony.

⁷ Yamamoto raises this possibility in his interrogation of whether or not redress is indeed a radical project. Asking if Japanese-American redress was only about reparations for a minority viewed as cooperative and consequently deserving, he speculates on whether redress means the redistribution of wealth, power, and justice for all or if it only concerns those minorities who fit into the "patriot/supermodel minority." Without providing any definitive conclusions, he seems to suggest that redress is more about an alleviation of white guilt than a radical reorganization of structures of power that privilege whiteness.

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