

“Roll with It”

Structures of Feeling and Sexual Abuse in the Writings of Joy Kogawa

Jodi Lundgren

Volume 41, numéro 2, 2016

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/scl41_2art07

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0380-6995 (imprimé)

1718-7850 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Lundgren, J. (2016). “Roll with It”: Structures of Feeling and Sexual Abuse in the Writings of Joy Kogawa. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, 41(2), 117–136.

“Roll with It”: Structures of Feeling and Sexual Abuse in the Writings of Joy Kogawa

JODI LUNDGREN

IN JUNE 2015, TWO BISHOPS OFFERED a public apology on behalf of the Anglican Church to the Japanese Canadians who had been sexually abused as boys by Joy Kogawa’s late father, Goichi Gordon Nakayama, during his sixty-two years as an Anglican minister (Little). Taking advantage of his position of trust and exploiting the vulnerability of those already collectively traumatized by policies of internment and dispersal during and after World War II, Nakayama inflicted further physical and psychological harm on countless victims. Although he acknowledged and expressed regret for his “sexual bad behaviour” in a letter to the Anglican Church written in 1994 (the year before he died at the age of ninety-four [Todd]), his apology was not conveyed at that time to those he had harmed (Swift), nor was a police report filed (Little). Instead, the public apology that was eventually offered to Nakayama’s victims — not unlike the formal apology issued by the Canadian Government in 1988 for the internment of Japanese Canadians¹ — resulted from many years of grassroots agitation that finally culminated in a demand for accountability.

In the novels narrated by Naomi Nakane (*Obasan*, *Itsuka*, and the substantive revision of *Itsuka* entitled *Emily Kato*), Joy Kogawa’s father makes cameo appearances as Nakayama-sensei — a minister who bicycles between rural B.C. communities and intones from a tape recorder in Toronto hospital rooms. Though Nakayama-sensei is not characterized as a perpetrator, sexual abuse figures in all of Kogawa’s novels to date, including *The Rain Ascends*, in which it forms the central focus. In her 2016 memoir, *Gently to Nagasaki*, Kogawa discusses the sexual abuse committed by her father and compares being interned as a Japanese Canadian to being ostracized as the daughter of a paedophile (97). In fact, the sexual exploitation depicted in *Obasan* has often been interpreted as a metaphor for the racially motivated oppression suffered

by Japanese Canadians during and after World War II (Davidson 44; Merivale 74; Rose 222), yet this critical move elides the specificity of sexual abuse as a traumatic experience. While Julie Tharp, in contrast, addresses sexual abuse as a trauma in its own right in her discussion of *Obasan* and *Itsuka*, she nonetheless conflates disparate traumas when she considers recovery, attributing Naomi's healing from abuse to her involvement in the Japanese Canadian redress movement (223). The call by Nakayama's victims and their supporters for a distinct apology from the Anglican Church demonstrates that, on the contrary, redress for the internment has not necessarily consoled survivors of a separate (though related) trauma. Instead of a universal approach to redress and recovery, particular political and/or therapeutic actions may be required according to the needs that emerge within each affected group.

In order not to homologize different forms of oppression nor, "conversely, to inscribe a didactic hierarchization of injuries," Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham note that it is important "to thematize the complex articulations and disarticulations that shape a heterogeneous field of actors and grievances" (5). Such thematizing can be furthered by examining the way that in Kogawa's novels, a heterogeneous community unifies around redress for the internment while concurrent abuses remain publicly unacknowledged. In both situations, community members' particular internal experiences consistently anticipate and eventually guide public action. In *Obasan*, a "collective social conscience" among Japanese Canadians is both lamented as missing by Naomi's Aunt Emily (35) and forged rhetorically in Naomi's narration only to emerge in *Itsuka* as a political reality, articulated in and through the redress movement. Similarly, the painful aftermath of sexual abuse — kept private in *Itsuka* — begins in *Emily Kato* to precipitate into a collective discourse, one that would later subtend calls for an apology from the Anglican Church to the victims of Goichi Gordon Nakayama.

The intertextual relationships among *Obasan*, *Itsuka*, and *Emily Kato* can be illuminated through Raymond Williams's concept of a "structure of feeling," which involves "defining a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating" (*Marxism* 132). In a discussion of *Wuthering Heights*, Williams further contends that "social experience,

just because it is social, does not have to appear in any way exclusively in . . . overt public forms”:

In its very quality as social reality it penetrates, is already at the roots of, relationships of every kind. We need not look only, in a transforming history, for direct or public historical event and response. When there is real dislocation it does not have to appear in a strike or in machine-breaking. It can appear as radically and as authentically in what is apparently, what is actually personal or family experience. (*English* 65)

Instead of dismissing the political relevance of personal experience and of emotion, then, Williams provides a methodology by which “specific qualitative changes” in experience “are from the beginning taken as *social* experience, rather than as ‘personal’ experience or as the merely superficial or incidental ‘small change’ of society” (*Marxism* 131). As a novel of interiority, *Obasan* thoroughly delineates a socially-saturated structure of feeling. While the character of Aunt Emily expresses outrage over the injustice of the government’s actions against “Canadian-born Canadians” (*Obasan* 38), the emotions of nostalgia, longing, and grief fill the novel and constitute its most potent rhetorical effects. Not merely individual personality traits, Naomi’s isolation, introversion, and frustrated longing for her absent mother symptomize a collective experience that had yet to be widely acknowledged at the time of the novel’s composition. The particular importance of affective social content for Williams is that it often gives voice to an emergent element of society before it crystallizes into a “manifest social formation” (*Marxism* 134). *Obasan* expresses just such an emerging counter-hegemonic force in that its 1981 publication coincided with the rising wave of activism concerning redress for the internment, dispossession, and dispersal of Japanese Canadians during and after World War II.²

The text of *Obasan* politicizes the psychological effects of Naomi’s early childhood experience by rooting them in the articulation of a collective condition. Indeed, as Jonathan Kertzer notes, the novel’s “evocation of intimate experience is so strongly national in character that all its definitions, even its definitions of privacy, bear a communal sign” (141). Communal experiences for Japanese Canadians living in British Columbia (where the vast majority of the community resided in 1941) included deracination, dispossession, and internment during

World War II, followed by a further four years of proscribed movement: they were not permitted to return to the B.C. coast until 1949, and many families — impoverished and bereft of property, belongings, and livelihood — never returned. This originary loss is doubled and particularized within *Obasan* for Naomi by the loss of her mother, who is trapped in Japan during the war. A painful sense of emotional deprivation assumes a broad scope in *Obasan*, from the opening scene, whose date of August 9 alludes to losses incurred (including the loss of Naomi's mother) by the bombing of Nagasaki on that date in 1945, to the emphasis placed on the celibacy of the thirty-six-year-old narrator, who has formed no intimate attachments outside of her family and lives at some distance from all of her relatives. When Naomi receives news that her Uncle has died, she returns to the home of her aunt, Obasan, whose "language of . . . grief is silence" (14). Late that night, Obasan ascends to the attic and conducts a search (without telling Naomi, who accompanies her, what she is looking for): "'Lost,' she says occasionally. The word for 'lost' also means 'dead'" (24). The imagery of this chapter compares Naomi and Obasan to insects in a spider's web, "trapped" by their "memories of the dead" (26). They are thus victimized by the past, of which Naomi later says, "If I linger in the longing, I am drawn into a whirlpool" (53). These passages illustrate a few of the endless permutations of the theme of profound and far-reaching loss — of belongings, property, family members, landscape, community, love, sensuality, and self-worth — that occur throughout *Obasan*.

Consonant with Raymond Williams's own critical use of the concept of structure of feeling to identify "broad patterns of change in a whole society" (Matthews 185), historian Ken Adachi has shown that, even before World War II, the Nisei (the first Canadian-born generation), negatively impacted by the disjunction between their Japanese heritage and their North American location (Adachi 157-78) and by what Aunt Emily refers to as "long years" of "prejudice" (*Obasan* 80), collectively exhibited many of Naomi's personality traits. Adachi describes the Nisei as "a perplexed, generally introverted lot" whose efforts to navigate in a bicultural milieu often resulted in "rigidity, timidity or shyness" (170). Adachi's allusions to short stories published in *The New Canadian* also attest to precedents for *Obasan's* pervasive structure of feeling:

The typical fictional character seen in *The New Canadian* was a Byronic figure, full of frustration and resignation: a sensitive, rebel-

lious introvert. . . . The Nisei “hero” was . . . filled with unconsummated desire, while the real energy and will of the world swirled beyond him. This feeling of passivity and helplessness, the sense of being on the periphery, was part of the consciousness of a group accustomed to living on the fringes of the larger society. (170-71)

Discrimination drove the Nisei to the fringes of the mainstream: denied the vote until 1949, Japanese Canadians were barred legally from some professions and practically from most others — hence Aunt Emily’s inability to find a teaching post “after graduating at the top of her class in Normal School” (*Obasan* 21) — and were subject to many other forms of overt and covert racism within what Kogawa in a poem calls “my British / British Columbia, my / first brief home” (“Road” 67). In *Obasan*, Aunt Emily, frustrated with the apathy of many of her peers, exclaims, “You’d think, after all we’ve been through — you’d think there’d be some collective social conscience” (35). Yet, unlike groups whose collective experience of oppression has provoked solidarity, historical determinants — including a “code of honour” internalized by the Issei in Meiji Japan “requiring them to gaman, to endure without flinching . . . for the love of parents, for the honour of ancestors, for the sake of the whole” (*Itsuka* 124) — produced an initially acquiescent response to the “order to disappear” (*Itsuka* 116) among many Japanese Canadians.

Naomi’s celibacy can be seen as a response to the injunction to disappear in that it reflects her isolation and results in childlessness, but it also follows from a more specific form of victimization: she has suffered sexual abuse as a child at the hands of her next-door neighbour, Old Man Gower, and later by an older boy at school, Percy Bower. The racialized nature of this sexual abuse is not incidental, as Naomi’s recurring dreams of naked “oriental women” being pursued, held prisoner, and shot at by British soldiers make clear (*Obasan* 61-62).³ One of these women moves “seductively” (61), as doing so is the only way “to be saved from harm” (61). A similar survival tactic is evident in Naomi’s subsequent confession that she goes “to seek Old Man Gower in his hideaway” and “clamber[s] unbidden onto his lap” (*Obasan* 65). Critics have argued that Naomi’s sense of complicity in her own abuse figures Japanese Canadians’ collective sense of complicity in their own oppression (Merivale 74; Davidson 44), and that rape serves as the novel’s “central metaphor” (Rose 222), largely because the racist logic that blames

the visibility of Japanese Canadian communities for provoking racism resembles the misogynistic logic that accuses women of inviting sexual assault by dressing provocatively. In *Itsuka*, Aunt Emily herself employs a related simile in an editorial: "Over the years, the Japanese Canadian community went into hiding and became silent as rape victims" (174). Insofar as this comparison facilitates an understanding of the far-reaching psychological effects of the internment, it may serve a valuable purpose. It is problematic, however, in that appropriating sexual abuse as a metaphor for racial discrimination obscures the specificity of sexual abuse as a traumatic experience. While the effects of sexual abuse may overlap with and/or exacerbate the effects of racism, one form of oppression cannot incorporate and so erase another. Taking sexual abuse as a figure for racial discrimination ignores the imbrication of racism, misogyny, and/or internalized homophobia in racialized, gendered violence.

Naomi's individual victimization in *Obasan* does not so much metaphorize the oppression of the Japanese Canadian community as it exposes mutually reinforcing structures of domination. The contrast in Naomi's dream between white, imperial, militarized masculinity and "oriental," colonized, imprisoned femininity reveals not only that these discursively constituted differences overlap but also that they simultaneously divide into asymmetrical binary oppositions. In addition to feminizing Asian cultures and emasculating Asian-identified men, these intersecting discourses effect the oppression of Asian-identified women, not as first female and then Asian, but concurrently and specifically as "oriental women" (61). Racialized, gendered violence symptomatizes a nexus of unequal power relationships, and that Naomi suffers sexual abuse as a child exposes a further disparity on the basis of age. Naomi's abuser, Old Man Gower, is a white man who when visiting "seems more powerful than Father, larger and more at home even though this is our house" (69); Gower's apparent powerfulness crystallizes the interlocking and hierarchical discourses of race, gender, and age. Accordingly, Naomi's memories of abuse contribute to a structure of feeling that signals the emergence of a collective yet heterogeneous consciousness among Japanese Canadians.

Whereas *Obasan* played a role in the redress movement by raising awareness of the internment, *Itsuka*, first published in 1992 and then revised and republished in 1993, offers a fictionalized account of the emergence of the redress movement itself into what Williams would

refer to as a “manifest social formation” (*Marxism* 134). In the sequel, a communal Japanese Canadian subjectivity evolves from a structure of feeling “*in solution*” into one that has “*precipitated*” (Williams, *Marxism* 133) into a fulcrum for political organizing. The novel opens in a time of “not yet sight” (*Itsuka* 1) and includes references to the loss and/or lack of Japanese Canadian community: “The government’s ‘Dispersal Policy,’ Aunt Emily says, was a ‘smashing success’” (8). As the redress movement begins to take shape, images of emergence abound: at one of the first redress meetings that Naomi attends, she reveals that “There’s some faint stirring inside, of curiosity or sympathy or memory” (155); when at a later meeting of the National Association of Japanese Canadians, a motion is passed to create a “new structure of involvement and accountability,” Naomi perceives that “A tiny green political shoot has nudged its way through a long winter’s sleep” (167); finally, at a demonstration on Ottawa’s Parliament Hill, Naomi reports that “Some people are seeing this event as evidence of the reawakening of a buried community. . . . [T]his gathering is alive. We have come from out of the shadows of Government past and the community that once was” (265). These images of emergence, whether related to individual memory, to the earth, or to darkness and light, figure the coming into being of political organizations that exert agency through repeated acts of public agitation, thus manifesting the collective consciousness that remains a structure of feeling in *Obasan*.

As soon as a collective consciousness emerges in *Itsuka*, it is followed by political pressure for Japanese Canadians to speak with one voice. This process is to be expected, according to Williams, who points out that when a new cultural practice “emerges, and especially to the degree that it is oppositional . . . the process of attempted incorporation significantly begins” (*Marxism* 124). In *Itsuka*, the Canadian government conducts preliminary negotiations about redress with an individual Japanese Canadian politician, Nikki Kagami, depicted as a charismatic, power-mongering autocrat. (Her first name closely resembles the word *Nikkei*, meaning North Americans of Japanese descent, perhaps an allusion to the way that she deems herself capable of singly representing to government all of the Canadian *Nikkei*.) Although elected as president of the Toronto Japanese Canadian League, Nikki appears to exercise unidirectional power, ruling over her constituents rather than representing them, as Naomi observes at a meeting: “Nikki Kagami frowns.

Almost imperceptibly, the others are also frowning. The room has one mind” (95). Her machinations include having “appointed herself head of a defunct League committee,” thereby putting herself in charge of Japanese Canadian redress and petitioning the federal government for twenty-five million dollars with “no mandate” to do so (142). She later manipulates an election with the secret and unilateral introduction of new regulations that disenfranchise most of those who present themselves to vote (224-30). Indeed, the novel focuses less on the process of community building than on a binary conflict between Nikki Kagami and the “Democracy group” that forms in order to combat her.

Although the members of the “Democracy group” oppose Nikki largely because of her desire to represent Japanese Canadians with a single voice, they repeatedly state the same conviction: “We’ve got to speak with one voice” (198). Already in *Obasan*, Emily has expressed her support for political single-voicedness, noting in her wartime diary that “All three Japanese papers have been closed down. That’s fine as far as I’m concerned. Never needed so many anyway. It’s good for the *New Canadian*” — an English-language, Japanese Canadian publication — “which is now our only source of information and can go ahead with all the responsibility” (81). Though in her essay “Is There a Just Cause?” Kogawa draws attention to the cruel irony of the federal government’s “demand that this people which it scattered now miraculously speak with one united voice” (21), her characters accept the need for univocality. Indeed, in *Itsuka*, differences within the community are typically seen as devastating. When the novel’s Minister of Multiculturalism uses internal dissension as an excuse to postpone negotiations, saying, “I’m reluctant to try to resolve the situation until the Japanese Canadian community speaks with one voice” (211-12), Naomi does not question the insistence on homogeneity but internalizes it:

I can’t bear the thought of the shock and unhappiness across the country among all the people who have been labouring all this time for the sake of our “one voice.” But there’s no question about it now. We’ve lost. It isn’t only the League’s actual unity that matters. It’s the perception of unity that counts. And the perception is lost. (212)

Throughout the narrative, however, the existence of a unified Japanese Canadian subjectivity is challenged by the recurring depiction of

Naomi's private experiences of intense suffering. As in *Obasan*, a structure of feeling in *Itsuka* articulates an experience not yet recognized as social.

Although, unlike *Obasan*, *Itsuka* does not depict sexual abuse, it does include a scene of Naomi as a child working in the beet fields and being accosted by a stranger who is "lurching towards [her], a five-dollar bill in his thick hand, his eyes so wide they are bulging" (26). While she walks as "casually" as possible towards her Uncle and her brother, "the dizziness and the pain roll through" her. She doubles over and must spend the rest of the day resting in the dirt cellar (26). As Julie Tharp notes, "Naomi's extreme reaction to the threat of the stranger resembles nothing so much as sexual retraumatization" and is consistent with the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (214). In Naomi's adulthood, one of the most obvious effects of childhood sexual abuse is her inability to engage in intimate relationships, especially sexual ones. Naomi's failure to do anything but freeze or flee in response to romantic, physical, or sexual overtures is continually presented as involuntary. A familiar "nauseous dizziness" recurs every time she is approached by a man, whether it is her Granton suitor, Hank (44), or her Toronto friend Father Cedric. At the very thought of "Father Cedric in a sleeping bag beside" her, Naomi reports that "The sudden nauseous pain extends from somewhere around my navel and across the abdomen. I bend double and attempt to ride the tide" (112). The similarity of her reactions indicates their psychosomatic status. With respect to Father Cedric, Naomi admits, "It's altogether inappropriate. My reaction. The slight choking sensation. The frozen flight in my limbs. The terror is ridiculous but so palpable I cannot stop the trembling of the invisible violence within" (110). Controlled by panic, Naomi has not been able to enter into romantic or sexual involvement.

Naomi admits that the "psychogenesis" of her "illness" may lie in the past but avoids confronting its dimensions (*Itsuka* 112). Whereas in *Obasan*, Naomi shares with the reader her experiences of sexual abuse and the toll they take on her relationship with her mother (61-65), in *Itsuka* she makes only vague allusions: "My abominable abdomen. Something vast as childhood lies hidden in the belly's wars. There's a rage whose name has been forgotten" (112). It appears that Naomi does not want to or cannot acknowledge the effects of childhood sexual abuse on her adult life. While Naomi certainly benefits from supportive

interpersonal connections forged through her participation in Japanese Canadian community politics, at no time in *Obasan* or *Itsuka* does she form an awareness of belonging to a collective of sexual abuse survivors; this aspect of her recovery narrative is elided. In an interview given while she was writing *Itsuka*, Kogawa admits that “There is no conspicuous feminism in this book but maybe there needs to be” (“In Writing” 158). In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman asserts that “in the absence of strong political movements for human rights, the active process of bearing witness inevitably gives way to the active process of forgetting” (153). The absence of feminist discourse in *Itsuka* and the limiting of the human rights struggle strictly to a homogeneously defined minority ethnic group means that Naomi’s “bearing witness” to her experience of sexual abuse in *Obasan* gives way to just such a process of forgetting in *Itsuka*. Although feminist struggles were and are contemporaneous with Japanese Canadian struggles, to address multiple oppressions simultaneously without either hierarchizing or homologizing them requires a paradigm shift that had not yet taken place at the time Kogawa was writing *Itsuka* and is, in fact, still in process.

It is perhaps telling in this regard that when Kogawa takes on the subject of child sexual abuse in a sustained manner in her 1995 novel *The Rain Ascends* (republished in a revised edition in 2003), the perpetrator, an Anglican minister, is a white man of British descent (like Naomi’s abuser). In fact, all of the central characters, including the narrator (Millicent, the abuser’s daughter), are white Canadians; Kogawa has claimed that the issue addressed in the book has “little to do with being Japanese Canadian” (“Sources” 225). Although the representation of abuse in *The Rain Ascends* strips away the disparities of gender and race (all of the victims are male, and any racial differences are not elaborated), the text troublingly invokes a motif of pederasty that inadequately distinguishes between child sexual abuse and male homosexuality. In questioning her father about his behaviour, Millicent focuses her “revulsion” (170) on the act of anal penetration and not on issues such as abuse of trust, lack of consent, and the imbalance of power between a child and an adult, especially an adult in a position of authority, as was Reverend Shelby (168-70). Paedophilia, sexual assault, and homosexuality are further conflated when Millicent asks, “It was mostly with young men? Is that right?” to which her father answers “Yes” (168). Millicent proceeds to ask several questions about the “boys” he

was “involved with” (169). When pressed, her father admits their ages: “Twelve. Fourteen. Twenty. Mostly around twenty” years old (170). Reverend Shelby does not draw a categorical distinction between boys of twelve and “boys” of twenty, but, apart from using the term “young men,” neither does Millicent, which is surprising given that, concerning the affair she had as a nineteen-year-old with an older professor, she notes, “He was experienced and I wasn’t, but I have never absolved myself of responsibility” (113).

In contemporary North American society, twelve-year-olds and twenty-year-olds are positioned on opposite sides of the legal age of consent with significantly different degrees of access to power, yet these distinctions are once again blurred in a 2011 interview in which Kogawa reveals that *The Rain Ascends* is based on her life. Speaking of her father, she says, “Any effort to justify his vile crimes or to diminish the harm he caused could only add to the suffering of his victims. . . . I think most of his liaisons were with young men or contemporaries, but there were also boys” (“Interstitality” 311). It is certainly plausible that Nakayama coerced young men and contemporaries as well as boys and that consent was never given, but in that case the word “liaison,” with its connotations of mutuality, is imprecise to the point of falsity. Regrettably, insufficient differentiation between “vile crimes” against children and homosexual “liaisons” perpetuates misconceptions about both child sexual abuse and homosexuality.

In *The Rain Ascends*, Kogawa’s narrator questions her father about his own childhood sexual experiences and learns that he suffered trauma (167–68; 178). That Reverend Shelby shifted from the position of victim to that of victimizer illuminates not only the cyclical nature of abuse but also the fluidity of identity; as Sheena Wilson further notes, in this novel Kogawa “incorporates the monstrous into human nature instead of extracting the monstrous as inhuman” (Kogawa, “Interstitality” 337). Nonetheless, the humanist set of ethics that pervades the novel emphasizes identification, empathy, and equality among individuals to the point of obscuring the role of collective, asymmetrical relations of power in structuring those relationships. The overt focus on power relations in the novels of internment and redress may have contributed to their clearer negotiation of the complexities of sexual abuse.

A belief that “the trauma narrative must be adapted and reshaped in light of new historical realities and new injustices” (Lefebvre 168)

arguably motivated Kogawa as much as did her sensitivity to a hostile review (Posner) to further revise *Itsuka* and re-release it in 2005 under a new title, *Emily Kato*. Indeed, Kogawa's revisions to the novel draw attention to the transhistorical, global nature of racially or ethnically motivated acts of war and genocide; for example, Cedric's altered heritage in *Emily Kato* now provides an occasion to recall the Armenian genocide of 1915 (Sarkowsky 39). In addition, a final chapter narrated after the events of 9/11 depicts redress not as "a means for repressing or resolving Canada's legacy of racist injustice in a naïve search for closure" but as "a tool for strategically reconstructing and renarrating the past" (McGonegal 81). In another renarrated part of *Emily Kato*, the private pain that is a structure of feeling in *Itsuka* begins to crystallize into a collective discourse of domestic violence and sexual abuse — one that would eventually enable the formation of the Reverend Nakayama Disclosure Project Working Group and underpin the group's demand for an apology ("Reverend").

A dramatic shift between the two novels occurs in that the illness from which Naomi suffers in private throughout *Itsuka* is removed from her and given to a secondary character, Anna Makino. The scene of being accosted in the beet field is concomitantly reassigned to Anna — and intensified. Whereas in *Itsuka* Naomi becomes ill when a stranger calls out to her, in *Emily Kato* Anna is molested in the field by a church leader, Brother Leroy, in a repetition of his previous assault on her years earlier (*Emily* 59–60). Concurrently, the sexual assaults are racialized: in singling Anna out on the night of her "salvation," the perpetrator tells her she is "special" because she is a "Jap child," and during the attack, he is "all the time telling her" she is "a little Jap girl, a good slave child" (*Emily* 58). In a crucial departure from Naomi's silence about the abuse, Anna shares her experience not only with her sister and with Naomi but with her therapist and with the members of a self-help organization called "Fundamentalists Anonymous" (56). While there is still little in the way of "conspicuous feminism" in *Emily Kato* (Kogawa, "In Writing" 158), the depiction of sexual abuse changes profoundly from a suppressed secret with unacknowledged effects to a verbalized experience that is shared with others.

Not only are abuse and its effects no longer confined to the realm of internal thoughts in *Emily Kato*, but abuse is also shown to affect a number of characters rather than just one and to take a variety of

forms, suggesting its systemic nature. Anna's sister, Kim, suffers from domestic violence (168), a fact that she attributes to her husband's being a Nisei (169). Anna and Kim also have a younger brother, Min, who as a child suffered physical abuse by a teacher (31), bullying by peers (55), and, Anna strongly suspects, sexual abuse by an older boy, Ken, who would later become Kim's abusive husband (239-40). Whereas in *Itsuka* Min is characterized as a promising-artist-turned-psychiatric-patient, bereft of family and epitomizing a state of being "un-at-home" with which Naomi strongly identifies (172), in *Emily Kato* Min is not only shown to be a victim of multiple forms of abuse but is also connected to caring sisters and granted moments of wellness, as when he takes Naomi rowing on a lake: "It was as if he'd been released from land to an element where he belonged. A fish back in water" (243). The revisions to Min's characterization suggest that psychological and social integration can begin only once the specificities of abuse have been named.

Although in *Itsuka*, Naomi's attacks of physical illness happen in private, in *Emily Kato* the evidence of Kim's and Anna's experiences of abuse erupts during a "Friday-night Redress Discussion Group" (169). The redress meeting takes place in the domestic space of Aunt Emily's home, indicating not only the subsumption of Emily's personal life into political activism, but also, more importantly, the grassroots nature of this redress movement. Despite its grassroots origins, the redress movement depends, as Roy Miki has shown, on the strategic construction of a unitary Japanese Canadian subject (*Redress* 264-67), one defined exclusively with reference to "the principle of citizenship and the violation of citizenship rights" (*Redress* 266). As a member of the group relays a news story that evinces internal fractures within the redress movement, Kim beckons Naomi into the traditionally feminine zone of the kitchen to discuss family struggles, including the "horrible fights" with her husband Ken (168), which have led to bruises "in more than one spot" (171). During the same meeting, Kim and Naomi find Kim's sister Anna in the private space of the upstairs bathroom where she, too, reveals the effects of trauma on her body. As women impacted by physical and sexual assault, both leave the political gathering, thereby signalling their differences from a unitary Japanese Canadian subject.

By breaking their isolation and exposing their woundedness to each other, the women also open themselves up to receiving support. Kim

comforts Anna as she first “vomits a sickly brown stream” and then “her bowels empty explosively” (171). These details, much more graphic than Naomi’s oblique references to her “abominable abdomen” (*Itsuka* 112), attest to the visceral impacts of oppression and suggest a physical rejection of it. In *Itsuka*, Naomi tries to comfort herself internally and privately: “Roll and roll with it, I always tell myself. Breathe deep. . . . Eventually the wave will break” (113); conversely, in *Emily Kato*, Kim rubs her sister’s back, speaking words of comfort out loud: “Roll with it, Anna. Just roll with it. You know it’ll pass” (171). In contrast to Naomi’s internalization of her physical suffering, Kim’s and Anna’s voicing of their pain and their receptivity to support reveals a gradual emergence of abuse and assault from a private sphere into one that is communal, if not yet public.

Kogawa’s writing itself has blurred the lines between private and public and between fiction and non-fiction, as can be seen especially in the similarities in theme between the novel *The Rain Ascends* and the memoir *Gently to Nagasaki*. In the latter, Kogawa reveals her belief that, by publicly admitting to the autobiographical basis of *The Rain Ascends*, she helped to foment rage against her late father (178). Kogawa’s involvement in saving her childhood home from demolition and converting it into a center for “works of reconciliation” (*Gently* 176) sparked further resentment and led in 2014 to a “public meeting about [her father’s] criminality” (178) to which none of those “who had been assaulted, nor members of their families showed up” (179).⁵ To date, Gordon Nakayama’s victims have shared their experiences only in supportive circles of friends and family. The reticence of Kogawa’s fictional character Min Makino, who does not speak directly about his own abuse but is spoken about by his sister (*Emily Kato* 239), is paralleled by the choice of the men abused by Nakayama to forego direct dialogue with the Anglican bishops (Kitagawa). Instead, in 2015, Mary Kitagawa, a woman whose uncles and brothers had been abused by Nakayama, accepted the bishops’ apology on behalf of the victims. In her oral response, Mary Kitagawa expresses hope that men who “have suffered silently throughout their lives” will now “come out of hiding and verbalize their pain and anger” in order to benefit from the healing “power of conversation.” Victims of sexual abuse who are men share a specific trauma that affiliation with other male survivors may mitigate. As Roy Miki has said about the formation of a redress identity, “In the

process of sharing stories, individuals who have experienced trauma are able to see the personal in relation to an imagined collective" (*Redress* 264). To heal from multiple traumas, claiming membership in more than one imagined collective may be necessary, both for Nakayama's victims and for the female characters in *Emily Kato*, who tellingly retreat from a redress meeting to reveal their suffering to each other in more intimate spaces.

Although varying kinds of oppression cannot be equated or hierarchized, they may overlap within the experience of particular individuals, as is demonstrated by the racialization of acts of sexual and physical abuse in *Obasan* and in *Emily Kato*. Rather than use either sexual or physical abuse as a metaphor for the oppression of Japanese Canadians, *Emily Kato* alludes to the often multiply determined nature of suffering. Anna, for instance, has been attacked by articles in a Japanese Canadian community paper that depict her and a male colleague as "young militant radical latecomers" (169), and a copy of the paper lies next to her on the bathroom floor during her attack (170). When Naomi asks Kim what causes her sister Anna's illness — "Is it food? An allergy?" — Kim replies, "Call it anything you want — racism, fundamentalism — it's anything she can't stomach. . . . I call it *The New Canadian*. Her therapist thinks it's Brother Leroy" (172). Resisting a simple causal logic, the text of *Emily Kato* acknowledges that while the experience of internment affected the community as a whole, many other forms of trauma exist alongside it.

In *Itsuka*, although Naomi reveals her attacks of physical illness only to the reader and not to other characters, her illness gradually abates once she develops a trusting intimate relationship with Father Cedric. Glenn Deer suggests that "The sexual abuse of Naomi, experienced in *Obasan*, initially thwarts Cedric's attempts to develop a closer relationship with her in *Itsuka*, though his kindness allows her to heal and develop a mutually respectful sexual relationship for the first time in her life" (61). Despite this mutuality, the dynamic of a wounded woman who is healed by a man reinscribes a gendered — and, in this case, a racialized — power imbalance between them. In *Emily Kato*, by removing Naomi's physical symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and by revising the character of Cedric, Kogawa rebalances this intimate relationship. Rather than serving simply as a foil for Naomi's development, as his counterpart does in *Itsuka*, the character of Cedric in *Emily*

Kato — no longer a cleric and now possessing a mixed ancestry that includes a Japanese Canadian grandfather — suffers from intimacy issues himself: he has “fled from the women who pursued him” (135), is known to be unreliable (146), and may be concealing another lover from Naomi (251). Still, their relationship is described in terms of mutual vulnerability and mutual healing: Naomi feels that she has “been made alive by the most gentle of men” (161) while Cedric tells her, “You give, like the trees. You give air. You allow me to breathe” (161). Aunt Emily tells the couple that “Companionship is balm for the soul. . . . It does my heart good to bask in your glow. . . . You’re both thriving” (207). The reciprocity between Naomi and Cedric exemplifies the mutuality that Aunt Emily believes “heals people” (*Emily* 200). However, by showing that several characters’ lives have been touched by abuse, and by refraining from having Cedric single-handedly “heal” Naomi from sexual abuse, Kogawa in *Emily Kato* no longer suggests that there can be a private solution to a communal problem.

In *Gently to Nagasaki*, Kogawa expands on what she revealed in an interview published in 2011 (“Interstitiality” 302): the physical illness experienced by Naomi in *Itsuka* and by Anna in *Emily Kato* is one that Kogawa herself began to suffer from upon learning that her “adored father was a paedophile”: “I did not stop loving him, although at times the roiling within caused my skin to crawl. Bouts of nausea assailed me, attacks so severe I would feel they could not be endured” (52). Notably, Kogawa’s own illness was cured not by a personal relationship but by the writing of *The Rain Ascends*, with its focus on Reverend Shelby’s paedophilia: “The secret shame in my family was out, even if only in fictional form, and a lifelong sickness ended” (*Gently* 68). In an analysis of Kogawa’s revisions and rewriting that draws on and extends Roy Miki’s critical vocabulary (*Broken* 115), Benjamin Lefebvre notes that “Kogawa’s larger body of work is not resolutionary . . . but rather, the pattern that emerges across her texts . . . is that these traumas are inconcludable” (166). Whereas the narrative of *Itsuka* reaches a resounding closure in redress, at the end of *Emily Kato*, Naomi admits that she does not know if “the hearts and psyches of Japanese Canadians were transformed by the struggle for redress” (273); certainly the Makinos (Anna, Kim, and Min) continue to struggle with the traumas of domestic violence, sexual assault, mental illness, and spiritual abuse. That Kim’s husband Ken abused Min when Min was a boy is something

“everyone knows” (239), but he is not confronted or held accountable either for this historical abuse or for his ongoing violence towards Kim. He is accorded an impunity not unlike that granted to Goichi Gordon Nakayama during his lifetime.

In recent years, Nakayama’s impunity and that of the Anglican Church itself have been challenged by calls for disclosure, as a formerly disavowed trauma affecting some rather than all Japanese Canadians has come into the open. Although the collective Japanese Canadian consciousness that is a structure of feeling in *Obasan* contains some heterogeneity, internal differences are suppressed in *Itsuka* by the political pressure to “speak with one voice.” At the same time, recurring instances of private pain suffered by Naomi and by Min — and, in *Emily Kato*, by both Anna and Kim — trouble the notion of a universal Japanese Canadian experience and demonstrate the inadequacy of conflating oppressions. In addition, the increased global consciousness effected by such aspects of *Emily Kato* as Cedric’s Armenian ancestry and allusions to the post-9/11 “war on terror” (272) suggests that Japanese Canadians’ historical petition for full inclusion in the Canadian nation has been supplemented by a post-national porousness of identification that fosters coalition. In one example of a coalitional initiative, the Reverend Nakayama Disclosure Project Working Group in 2014 held an event at which Aboriginal elders shared stories and offered “advice about addressing sexual abuse within a community” (“Anglican”); in another instance, community members gathered in 2015 to hear the Anglican bishops’ apology, and Councillor Deborah Baker of the Squamish Nation first “shared her personal reflections on apology and reconciliation in the context of Indian residential schools survivors” (“Anglican”). By forming such alliances and sharing knowledge, minoritized groups may continue to destabilize the binary relationship between victim and victimizer, thus mitigating the risk of becoming further marginalized through their very participation in a redress process.

With a model of subjectivity — and, indeed, a model of redress — that allows for solidarity among incommensurable differences, “marginalized constituencies in search of justice for grievances” can achieve “something more than the . . . ‘coming together’ or ‘eliminating of differences’ often associated with reconciliation,” and that “something more” includes “accountability, compensatory action, and concrete reparations” (Henderson and Wakeham 9). Postcolonial theorist Homi

Bhabha refers to an “incommensurability of cultural values and priorities that . . . cannot be accommodated within theories of cultural relativism or pluralism” (173), but among which the differences can be translated into “a kind of solidarity” (170). This may ultimately be the kind of solidarity that Joy Kogawa and her brother Timothy Nakayama express in their 2014 “Open Letter to Japanese Canadians”:

We are aware of an initiative that is underway by the JCCA [Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association] Human Rights committee in Vancouver to clear the air and bring closure for the victims of our father's heinous sexual attacks while he was a priest of the Anglican Church. We express our solidarity with all those he harmed, the young men and boys, their families and our community and express our profound grief as members of his family. May the truth be told. May the truth be heard. And may the Love that is among us and in the universe bring healing to us. (Nakayama and Kogawa)

NOTES

¹ The full text of the acknowledgement signed in Parliament on 22 September 1988 by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney is included as the final page of Kogawa's novel *Itsuka* (281). *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress* contains a valuable appendix of primary documents on “Japanese Canadian Internment and Relocation” (Henderson and Wakeham 423-42).

² Japanese Canadians pursued redress between 1977 and 1988, when a settlement was reached with the Canadian federal government; passages from *Obasan* were read in Parliament to mark the occasion of the redress agreement. Roy Miki's *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* gives a painstaking, first-hand account of the redress movement from an activist's perspective.

³ The nationality of the soldiers is not mentioned in this dream scene, but in Naomi's recounting of an earlier dream, she specifically identifies a soldier as British (29-30); the interconnectedness of the dream imagery in *Obasan* (“Always, I dream of soldiers eager for murder” [227]) justifies the inference that the soldiers in the later dreams are also British.

⁴ Kertzer reads the abuse somewhat differently but still metaphorically as a figure for assimilation (139-40).

⁵ The story of the campaign to create Historic Joy Kogawa House is told by Ann-Marie Metten in her article “The Little House that Joy Saved.”

WORKS CITED

- Adachi, Ken. *The Enemy that Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians*. Toronto: McClelland, 1976. Print.
- "Anglican Church Apology." *The Bulletin: A Journal of Japanese Canadian Community, History, and Culture*. The Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association, 23 July 2015. Web. 25 May 2016.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Davidson, Arnold. *Writing against the Silence: Joy Kogawa's Obasan*. Toronto: ECW, 1993. Print.
- Deer, Glenn. "Revising the Activist Figure in the Novels of Joy Kogawa." *Wilson* 43-70.
- Henderson, Jennifer, and Pauline Wakeham. "Introduction." *Reconciling Canada* 3-27.
- , eds. *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2013. Print.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: Basic, 1997. Print.
- Kertzer, Jonathan. *Worrying the Nation: Imagining a National Literature in English Canada*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998. Print.
- Kitagawa, Mary. "Speaking to the Apology by the Anglican Clergy, June 15, 2015." *The Bulletin: A Journal of Japanese Canadian Community, History, and Culture*. The Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association, 23 July 2015. Web. 25 May 2016.
- Kogawa, Joy. *Emily Kato*. Toronto: Penguin, 2005. Print.
- . *Gently to Nagasaki*. Halfmoon Bay: Caitlin, 2016. Print.
- . "Interstitiality, Integrity and the Work of the Author." Interview by Sheena Wilson. *Wilson* 278-340.
- . "In Writing I Keep Breathing, I Keep Living . . ." Interview by Janice Williamson. *Sounding Differences: Conversations with Seventeen Canadian Women Writers*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993. 145-59. Print.
- . "Is There a Just Cause?" *Canadian Forum* Mar. 1984: 20-24. Print.
- . *Itsuka*. Rev. ed. Toronto: Penguin, 1993. Print.
- . *Obasan*. Toronto: Penguin, 1981. Print.
- . *The Rain Ascends*. Toronto: Penguin, 2003. Print.
- . "Road Building by Pick Axe." *Woman in the Woods*. Oakville: Mosaic, 1985. Print.
- . "Sources of Love and Hate: An Interview with Joy Kogawa." Interview by Harold Ackerman. *American Review of Canadian Studies* 23.2 (1993): 217-29. Print.
- Lefebvre, Benjamin. "In Search of Someday: Trauma and Repetition in Joy Kogawa's Fiction." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 44.3 (2010): 154-73. Print.
- Little, Marion. "How to Apologize for Abuse." *Anglican Journal*. Anglican Church of Canada, 23 July 2015. Web. 24 May 2016.
- Matthews, Sean. "Change and Theory in Raymond Williams's Structure of Feeling." *Pretexts: Literary and Cultural Studies* 10.2 (2001): 179-94. Print.
- McGonegal, Julie. "The Politics of Redress in Post 9/11 Canada." *Wilson* 71-99.
- Merivale, Patricia. "Framed Voices: The Polyphonic Elegies of Hébert and Kogawa." *Canadian Literature* 116 (Spring 1988): 68-82. Print.
- Metten, Ann-Marie. "The Little House that Joy Saved." *Wilson* 256-77.
- Miki, Roy. *Broken Entries: Race, Subjectivity, Writing*. Toronto: Mercury, 1998.
- . *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*. Vancouver: Raincoast, 2004. Print.
- Nakayama, Timothy Makoto, and Joy Nozomi Nakayama Kogawa. "An Open Letter to Japanese Canadians." *The Bulletin: A Journal of Japanese Canadian Community, History, and Culture*. The Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association, 3 Mar. 2014. Web. 24 May 2016.

- Posner, Michael. "Restoring a Book to Life." *Globe and Mail* 9 Mar. 2006: R3. Web. 23 May 2016.
- "Reverend Nakayama Disclosure Project Working Group." *The Bulletin: A Journal of Japanese Canadian Community, History, and Culture*. The Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association, 29 May 2014. Web. 21 Aug. 2016.
- Rose, Marilyn Russell. "Politics into Art: Kogawa's *Obasan* and the Rhetoric of Fiction." *Mosaic* 21.2-3 (1988): 215-26. Print.
- Sarkowsky, Katja. "Nisei Negotiations: Citizenship and the Nation in Japanese Canadian Writing." *West Coast Line* 42.3 (2008): 28-41. Print.
- Swift, Diana. "Bishops Apologize for Japanese-Canadian Priest's Abuse." *Anglican Journal*. Anglican Church of Canada, 17 June 2015. Web. 24 May 2016.
- Tharp, Julie. "'In the Center of My Body Is a Rift': Trauma and Recovery in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka*." *Creating Safe Space: Violence and Women's Writing*. Ed. Tomoko Kuribayashi and Julie Tharp. Albany: State U of New York P, 1997. 213-25. Print.
- Todd, Douglas. "Joy Kogawa 'Very Emotional' about Public Exposure of Abusive Father." *Vancouver Sun*. Postmedia, 15 June 2015. Web. 24 May 2016.
- Williams, Raymond. *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*. New York: Oxford UP, 1970. Print.
- . *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.
- Wilson, Sheena, ed. *Joy Kogawa: Essays on Her Works*. Montreal: Guernica, 2011. Print.