



Woman Warrior and Obasan do not implicate the texts as necessarily flawed or incorrect. A generous understanding that texts by writers of East Asian ancestry can be Orientalist and that this operation can occur at the psychoanalytic level of the formation of the linguistic subject allows the writer's alienation from her culture of ancestry to function as an affirmative and crucial element in her story-making.

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Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior has generated a great deal of literary criticism since its publication in 1976. The critical writing on Joy Kogawa's Obasan has also been increasing steadily since its appearance in 1981. The significance of the contribution these two works have made to women's writing and writing by persons of colour in the United States and Canada is reflected in the criticism to date on these two works, which focuses largely on gender and race as the central categories of analysis. The Woman Warrior and Obasan are also experiments in the genre of the autobiographical novel. Kingston's and Kogawa's textual subversion of conventions in novelistic writing, autobiography, and historiography have encouraged critics to read their works from a variety of theoretical perspectives. However, it is the influence of the psycholinguistic theories of Julia Kristeva and other feminist psychoanalytic theorists writing in France that has significantly shaped critical analyses of the female speaking subjects of Asian ancestry in The Woman Warrior and Obasan.

This study introduces Julia Kristeva's About Chinese Women (1977), which originally appeared as Des

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criticism of these works.

The term 'Orientalism' that this study refers to comes from Edward Said's book Orientalism, which appeared in 1978, in the same five-year span that included the North American publication of About Chinese Women and the appearance of The Woman Warrior and Obasan. In Orientalism Said describes the discursive systems of scholarship and archival categorization that produced the Orient as an area of expertise for French and British scholars who followed their imperial occupation forces into the lands of the Middle East in the nineteenth century. Said's account of the Orient describes a space of imperial fantasy that is as much rooted in psychology as it is in geography:

The centuries-old assignation of geographical space to the east of Europe as "Oriental" was partly political, partly doctrinal, and partly imaginative; it implied no necessary connection between actual experiences of the Orient and knowledge of what is Oriental. . . . (Said 210-11)

Said acknowledges that for Americans the Orient "is much more likely to be associated very differently with the Far East (China and Japan, mainly)" (Said 1). Said's thesis about the Occidental construction of Oriental culture emerges in the United States around the same time that American writer Kingston and

chinoisés (1974), as an intertext for The Woman Warrior, Obasan, and the current psychoanalytic readings of the two works. Setting Kingston's work and Kogawa's novel in the context of Kristeva's About Chinese Women, I demonstrate that the Asian American and Canadian texts are not categorically exempt from the Orientalist representation of Asian women that characterizes Kristeva's European perspective on Chinese women in the mid 1970s. As for the criticism, Leslie Rabine's interpretation of The Woman Warrior and the writing on Obasan by Donald C. Goellnicht, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, and Robin Potter draw upon the same psychoanalytic concepts used by Kristeva to explore the subjectivity of Chinese women in About Chinese Women. This criticism fails to demonstrate an awareness of the ethnocentrism of Kristeva's original social psycholinguistic analysis of Asian female subjects, an ethnocentrism that was examined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1981 in "French Feminism in an International Frame" and which has been reconsidered more recently by Rey Chow and Lisa Lowe. By recovering the Orientalist ground of Kristeva's early social application of her theory of poetic language, this study traces the persistence of Orientalist typologies in The Woman Warrior, Obasan, and the recent psychoanalytic

Canadian writer Kogawa are producing autobiographical fictions about North American characters who assemble and narrate the stories of their East Asian heritage.

Lisa Lowe argues in her 1991 book Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms that "orientalism is not a single developmental tradition but is profoundly heterogeneous" (ix) and that "each orientalist situation expresses a distinct range of concerns with *difference*" (x). The Orientalist situation of my study differs from the situations described in Said's book and Lowe's book in four major ways: the Oriental culture of concern is that of China and Japan (the Far East rather than the Middle East); the focus of my study is writing by an American and a Canadian instead of that by British and French writers; the study is specifically concerned with writing by women; and the Orientalist situation occurs in writing by Asian North Americans rather than Europeans. As autobiographical fictions, Kingston's The Woman Warrior and Kogawa's Obasan represent the borderland in which the Occidental American and Canadian identity is also the space of the Oriental Chinese and Japanese identity. As North Americans of Asian ancestry, the potential of Kingston's and Kogawa's Orientalism raises a complex cultural problem that stems from the

ambivalence of the authors' subject positions in the operation of cultural dominance: if their representations are Orientalist, they are at once profiting from it as authors welcomed into American and Canadian literary culture, and being victimized by it as women of Chinese and Japanese ancestry.

The idea that Kingston has 'sold out' to white majority American readers is not new; the charge of Orientalism has been laid on The Woman Warrior before by Chinese American male critics. In the first book-length study of Asian American literature, Elaine H. Kim feels the need to introduce Kingston by defending The Woman Warrior against the hostile initial reactions of Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, and Ben Tong. The male critics accuse Kingston in the mid 1970s variously of feminist opportunism, ethnic betrayal, and the emasculation of Chinese manhood (Kim 198). This conflict is still a central issue in Asian American literary studies of the 1990s and is a continuing matter of formal concern to Asian American critics such as King-kok Cheung and Cynthia Sau-ling Wong. The controversy over The Woman Warrior is now almost two decades old, making it arguably one of the oldest and most well known ongoing debates in the study of Asian American literature.<sup>1</sup>

early 1970s by Frank Chin and the AIIEEEEEE! collective were formed before The Woman Warrior appeared, Kingston's book has become a major focal point for the masculinist attack on the allegedly assimilationist texts of Chinese American women writers. The literary feud between Chin and Kingston has been carried on into the 1980s and surfaces in our decade with all of the original misogynist sentiment intact in the collective and individual writing of The Big AIIEEEEEE! of 1991. Beyond the repetition of the few insights that Chin and the AIIEEEEEE! collective originally had about The Woman Warrior, nothing distinguishes Chin's and the collective's recent criticisms of Kingston's texts except the sense that over the years a personal politics of literary envy has superseded the initial radical momentum of social protest. Frank Chin and the AIIEEEEEE! collective have made it difficult for other male critics of Asian ancestry to question the workings of dominant cultural narratives in The Woman Warrior without becoming associated with their superficial, bombastic style and their undisguised misogyny.

The recent interest by Cheung and Wong in the long-standing controversy over The Woman Warrior brings into focus three issues which have formed the major critical contexts of The Woman Warrior over the last

Kingston's popularity in the wider American culture has not been greatly affected by the initial condemnation of her first book by Chinese American male critics. The Woman Warrior met with immediate popular and critical success when it first appeared, winning the National Book Critics Circle Award for nonfiction in 1976.<sup>2</sup> The Woman Warrior was also listed in Time magazine as one of the top ten nonfiction books of the decade. The book has been heavily anthologized and has been taught widely on college campuses across the United States. After more than two decades, Shelley Fisher Fishkin can still credibly assert in 1991 that "Kingston may be the most widely taught living American writer" (Fishkin 782). In 1991 the Modern Language Association of America released an Approaches to Teaching volume on The Woman Warrior, the appearance of which confirms the extent to which The Woman Warrior has become established in the dominant canon of current American literary studies.

The thread of early negative reactions to The Woman Warrior by male critics, initiated by Frank Chin and the editorial collective of AIIEEEEEE! (1974), has not developed over the same period of time into an affirmative or popular mode of cultural analysis. Although the masculinist<sup>3</sup> attitudes established in the

two decades. Cheung addresses the gender controversy because she feels that The Woman Warrior touches the sensitive issue of "the historically enforced 'feminization' of Chinese American men" and questions "die-hard notions of masculinity and femininity in both Asian and Western cultures" (Cheung "The Woman Warrior" 234). Wong raises what she calls the "exoticization" controversy in The Woman Warrior and also writes about the autobiographical debate between Kingston and Chin. The Woman Warrior straddles a complex intersection between the social identities of gender and race while delving into the formative process between the psychic articulation of the subject through language and the placement of that subject within a racialized and sexualized social field. The issues of gender, race, and genre raised by the heated critical discussions have only increased the book's interest from a cultural studies perspective as North American literary study absorbs the momentum of the British and American political movements of race, class, and gender.

The convergence of racial and sexual discourses over the identity of the Asian woman is regarded by some critics as a politically valuable formula. Wendy Ho, in her discussion of The Woman Warrior, observes that "minority women are often caught in a double bind



between their own needs and concerns as women and those of their Chinese American communities in America" (Ho 227). Lim concurs that the combination of racial and gendered critique benefits both cultural struggles. She argues that although texts such as Obasan "force masculinist Asian American critics to come to terms with the significance of women's experience and language in women's writing, they also ask feminist critics to expand their paradigms to include the problematics of race" (Lim "Life Stories" 293). Trinh Minh-ha concurs with Lim's view that women of colour should not have to make a choice in their ideological commitments between ethnicity and womanhood:

[H]ow can they? You never have/are one without the other. The idea of two illusorily separated identities, one ethnic, the other woman (or more precisely female)... partakes in the Euro-American system of dualistic reasoning and its age-old divide-and-conquer tactics. (Trinh 104)

The Asian mothers and substitute mothers in The Woman Warrior and Obasan are constituted not only as sites of cultural resistance but also as sources of epistemic challenge to the dominant social order.

Trinh's suggestion that the combined practices of racial and sexual politics may take place outside of "the Euro-American system of dualistic reasoning" raises the issue of the theoretical status of the Asian

and maturation. In light of Spivak's concern that in post-Enlightenment narratives in which "[o]nly the dominant self can be problematic" while "the self of the Other is authentic [and] without a problem," criticism has to be prepared to consider the possibility that the American and Canadian daughters who narrate in English their own life stories in The Woman Warrior and Obasan may not necessarily be working outside of Euro-American systems of reasoning.

Sara Suleri has used Spivak's remarks to argue that a racial or sexual identity as other within Western culture does not guarantee a unique position of resistance to Western culture. According to Suleri, Trinh Minh-ha's epistemology of the woman of colour "serves as fodder for the continuation of another's epistemology, even when it is recorded in a 'contestatory' position" (766). Rey Chow's critique of the "opposed set of imperatives" between the "First World" theorist who deals in "speculative abstractions" and the "subaltern" who speaks of "positivistic realities" echoes the critical observations of Spivak and Suleri. Chow writes that

the ideological division between "West" and "non-West" is duplicated in the very ways the two are institutionally examined: the former, through painstakingly refined methodologies whose point is the absolute fragmentation of

mothers and maternal figures in The Woman Warrior and Obasan. Using the example of the relationship between metropolitan or 'advanced' French theory from the 'First World' and people in "so-called natural places" such as Africa or India, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies the crucial distinction between the position of the European autobiographer, and the object of the autobiographer's truth claims:

If one looks at the history of post-Enlightenment theory, the major problem has been the problem of autobiography: how subjective structures can, in fact, give objective truth. During these same centuries, the Native Informant, who was found in these other places, his [sic] stuff was unquestioningly treated as the objective evidence for the founding of so-called sciences like ethnography, ethno-linguistics, comparative religion, and so-on. (Spivak "Questions" 66)

Spivak concludes by emphasizing that "[t]he person who *knows* has all of the problems of selfhood. The person who is *known*, somehow seems not to have a problematic self" ("Questions" 66). This to a large extent describes the perspective that the narrator takes towards her mother for most of The Woman Warrior before she comes to a wider appreciation of her mother's life experiences. In Obasan the mother does not exist so much as a subject in her own right but as a point of reference in the daughter's process of psychic healing

the human self (or the basic unit of social participation); the latter, through cathexes of *wholesomeness* that manifest themselves in moralistically "correct" representations of "Third World" collective resistances and/or native traditions. (Chow Woman xiv)

The institutional construction of non-Western wholesomeness is precisely the project that Amy Ling subscribes to when she states that books written by women of Chinese ancestry "have been more authentic, meaning that fewer women have fallen into what I call the alien observer trap" (Between Worlds 15). My concern is over how this rapidly developing area of so-called "minority" or "ethnic" literary writing and criticism gains sympathetic exemption from critical scrutiny by demanding respect for its "difference," while it simultaneously scrambles to replicate the critical structures of cultural dominance.

The move to criticize the most recent generation of Asian American women's writing might be construed as a reactionary desire to silence voices that express difference within the national dream of ethnic and sexual obedience to white patriarchy. However, the need for criticism to investigate the deliberately sexual, racial, and geopolitical typologies that are constructed in texts has never been greater. The discourse of marginalized social groups is exerting a

profound force on the very way in which North American society understands itself. In this environment there is a need for more careful theoretical reflection, rather than less, to prevent radical cultural politics from seeking ideological refuge in the same romantic constructions of subjectivity as those of their predecessors.

In particular, criticism should be prepared to consider the possibility of the ethnic feminist writer who is not "authentically" ethnic or feminist. We should be willing to consider this phenomenon not only in terms of the scandal that some writers are misrepresenting their ethnic culture, as is often the charge against Kingston. Kingston and her supportive critics have been arguing for a long time that she is not so much depicting an established culture as she is constructing a new one (Wong 7, Trinh 121, Rabine 484-485, Pfaff 26, Ho 225). Criticism would be more effective also in asking why the apparatus of multicultural literary criticism and the mainstream American book trade favours a few select authors such as Kingston and Kogawa for the role of "the" Chinese or Japanese voice of America, often to the surprise and discomfort of the authors themselves.

While Kingston's Chinese women are the

within the feminist theoretical enterprise. Once we see that these critical regimes to a large extent predispose reception of French feminist writing as theory and Asian American writing as auto-ethnography, it becomes apparent that The Woman Warrior and Obasan are not so much historically removed from the scene of American and French psychoanalytic feminism as they are generically segregated from it by the reflexes of interpretation.

The critical tools used in this study will necessarily collude with the cultural system I wish to expose, but my point is that the writings of Kingston and Kogawa are already a part of Western discursive constructions of the Asian American subject. As an American academic writer, born and substantially educated in India, Spivak's account of her "stumbling 'choice' of French avant-garde criticism by an undistinguished Ivy League Ph.D. working in the Midwest" describes how tortuously difficult it is to avoid Orientalist conceptions in the attempt to think about other cultures within the confines of conventional critical discourses:

The complicity of a few French texts in that attempt could be part both of the problem--the "West" out to "know" the "East" determining a "westernized Easterner's" symptomatic attempt to "know her own world";

autobiographical reconstructions of her own self, mother, and family, these constructions are also textual acts, open to the intervention of Orientalizing modes of interpretation such as that which may be introduced by psychoanalytic interpretation. Kristeva's Chinese woman is certainly part of a romanticized Western narrative of redemption, but the temptation to revive a positive ancestral lineage is an irresistible one for the Americanized Asian who, set adrift in the modern, rootless culture of North America, yearns for the reassurance of epic, or at least historical, origins.

Sara Suleri cautions that

until the participants in marginal discourse learn how best to critique the intellectual errors that inevitably accompany the provisional discursivity of the margin, the monolithic and untheorized identity of the center will always be on them. (758)

The maintaining of formal and separate categories for theory and the autobiographical woman's text is in itself an anachronism in light of the strategies being explored by innovators in both genres. The disciplining discourse of ethnic and national identity is often overlaid onto Kingston's and Kogawa's texts to such an extent that the dominating interpretive field produces The Woman Warrior's and Obasan's marginality

or of something like a solution,--reversing and displacing (if only by juxtaposing "some French texts" and a "certain Calcutta") the ironclad opposition between West and East. As soon as I write this, it seems a hopelessly idealistic restatement of the problem. I am not in a position of choice in this dilemma. (Spivak Other Worlds 135)

The "position without choice" is the space I wish to explore in Kingston's The Woman Warrior and Kogawa's Obasan. The position of having no direct experience of the culture of their ancestral origins forces Kingston and Kogawa to represent "their" culture symbolically, and to reconstitute their origins in the language, genre, and epistemological traditions of their new societies. This position is shared as well by many critics of Asian American literature, myself included. My particular study here is thus both a critique and a self-critique. As a work of literary criticism that explores and evaluates feminist psychoanalytic approaches, this study proposes that the realm of divided and conflictual drives within the subject is the site of a largely neglected drama of struggle and transformation in Asian American culture.

The Woman Warrior has been received enthusiastically by feminist critics who explore the book through its central concern with women's lives and

experiences. By the end of the 1980s a distinct body of criticism appears which considers the text through postmodern articulations of women's autobiography and mother/daughter relationships. The new readings are formed in many cases through psychoanalytic theories of female subjectivity. The issue of race and ethnicity remains prominent in the critical writing throughout the 1980s and early 1990s as critics set The Woman Warrior's affirmation of a distinct Chinese American identity within their celebrations of the text's rich and varied female narratives. Readings of the text's representation of racial identity around this time by Amy Ling, Leslie Rabine, and Roberta Rubenstein note how Kingston's characters are specific to Chinese American culture and different from the dominant "white" American culture.

Criticism in the 1980s also places The Woman Warrior in the context of European, British, and American autobiographical writing. The book-length studies of selfhood and writing by Paul John Eakin, Roberta Rubenstein, and Sidonie Smith that appeared in 1985 and 1987 place The Woman Warrior within interpretive models whose privileged plot is the narrator's liberation as an individual. These studies do not obscure the ethnicity of the self or subject

an introduction to Japanese Canadian culture for the wider national readership. Commenting on the abundant Canadian literary production of the 1970s, B. A. St. Andrews sees great promise in this Japanese Canadian poet's first novel: "Chief among these new voices in the Canadian literary renaissance is that of Joy Kogawa" ("Reclaiming" 29-30). Ila Goody writes of Obasan that

insofar as the tensions and ambivalences described by Kogawa are variant versions of those felt by many generations in the Canadian ethnic 'cultural mosaic', hers is a very Canadian novel--one which might be called as much an allegory of 'Canadianism' as MacLennan's Two Solitudes. (145)

Obasan's influence as an ethnically representative national text was made concrete as a result of its role in the Japanese Canadian Redress Movement of the 1980s. When the redress settlement for the internment portrayed in Obasan was finally won by the Japanese Canadian community in 1988, Donald C. Goellnicht reports that "parts of Obasan were read in the Canadian House of Commons, and Kogawa herself appeared on national television to praise the compensation agreement" ("Minority History" 306).<sup>5</sup> Kogawa's novel has been so influential that a borrowed phrase from it--"bursts with telling"--graces the subtitle to the first chapter of Ronald Takaki's Strangers from a

portrayed in the work but place their emphasis on how Kingston's text fits into Western cultural traditions of textual self-representation. Amy Ling's Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry (1990), the first book-length study exclusively about Chinese American women writers, sets The Woman Warrior within the ethnic and national context of its production and sets the work within a matrilinear Chinese American literary tradition. Shirley Geok-lin Lim considers The Woman Warrior "a transgressive work because it locates itself in the intersections of sexual, racial, and genre identities" (Lim "Approaches" x). The studies in which The Woman Warrior appears in the 1980s confirm Lim's naming of the three categories that have been the focus of critical concern over Kingston's text.

Joy Kogawa's Obasan has also been enthusiastically welcomed by feminist critics, more so in Canada because of its historical relevance as the first novel of the Japanese Canadian Internment. Appearing in 1981 to instant popular and critical acclaim,<sup>6</sup> Obasan has been highly regarded by a number of critics of Canadian literature. Moreover, this novel has come to occupy an analogous position for the Japanese Canadian community as The Woman Warrior has for the Chinese American community since Obasan is a text that is often read as

Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans (1989).

My study is not the first to bring Kingston's The Woman Warrior and Kogawa's Obasan within the frame of a single analysis. Donald C. Goellnicht reads the two works together in his 1991 essay "Father Land and/or Mother Tongue: The Divided Female Subject in Kogawa's Obasan and Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior." King-kok Cheung's book Articulate Silences (1993) takes an extended look at the two works and the two authors alongside the short fiction of Hisaye Yamamoto. What has not been considered in the critical scholarship is the extent to which psychoanalytic readings of the central mother-daughter relationship in each work relate the subject's psycholinguistic progress from semiotic incoherence to symbolic language through the allegory of a typological social narrative.

This typology describes the protagonist's psychoanalytic development as she extricates herself from an infantile and isolated attachment to her Asian past which she associates with her mother. Once this separation is achieved, she is able to assume her destiny as a speaking subject within a North American multicultural matrix. The protagonist's ethnic origin is a promise of identity that is fulfilled by its contribution to a liberal project of national cultural

diversity. Werner Sollors has elaborated upon the importance of typology in the narratives of American nationhood<sup>6</sup> but also suggests that typological rhetoric "can, alternately or at the same time, serve to define a new ethnic peoplehood in contradistinction to a general American identity" (Sollors 49). The central ethnic typology in The Woman Warrior and Obasan is based on the protagonist's narrative of psychic and linguistic emergence within the structure of a mother-daughter relationship.

Both Obasan and The Woman Warrior are also historical contemporaries of the recent American feminist critical and theoretical interest in mother-daughter relationships, as well as the psychoanalytic accounts of the formation of the female subject. However, it is The Woman Warrior which clearly picks up the converging threads in some of the significant theoretical and experimental texts by women in France of the time. The Woman Warrior shares its year of publication with the classic American feminist analyses of the mother-daughter relationship: Adrienne Rich's groundbreaking Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (1976), Dorothy Dinnerstein's The Mermaid and the Minotaur (1976), and Jean Baker Miller's Toward a New Psychology of Women (1976). Both

sympathetic European observer dwells on women's language and matrilineal culture in much the same way that Kingston's narrative observes Chinese women from the perspective of an American narrator of Chinese ancestry. Indeed, The Woman Warrior is an American text that has a uniquely homologous relationship to the feminist writing in France of the same period. As a text that directs its sense of the new emergent power of women through the metaphors of cultural otherness and militant solidarity, The Woman Warrior appears to its psychoanalytic interpreters as the heralded response to the call from France for a revolutionary female subjectivity from the margins of Western civilization.

It is clear, then, that The Woman Warrior and Obasan emerge from and even anticipate some of the American and French women's writing and theory of the 1970s on mother-daughter relations, female warriors, and cultural psychoanalysis. Not surprisingly, there have been many critical analyses of the two works based on American and French women's psychoanalytic theories. The book-length studies of the mother-daughter relationship that are written in the 1970s do not delve extensively or theoretically into the matter of racial difference; the mother-daughter scholarship, gathered

Nancy Chodorow's The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender and Jane Flax's "The Conflict between Nurture and Autonomy in Mother/Daughter Relationships and within Feminism" arrive on the scene in 1978, two years after The Woman Warrior. Juliet Mitchell's instrumental work Psychoanalysis and Feminism appears in 1975, just before The Woman Warrior's publication. The first texts of what would come to be popularly known in the United States as French Feminist Theory also arrive in North America around this time: Monique Wittig's Les quérillères (1969) is translated into English and made available in the United States in 1973, and Julia Kristeva's Des chinoises (1974) is translated as About Chinese Women in 1977 (New French Feminisms ix). The experimental fiction about women warriors in Wittig's Les quérillères prefigures with considerable similarity the styles and metaphors Kingston uses in her narrative of empowered Chinese and Chinese American women, as do Kristeva's About Chinese Women and Hélène Cixous' essay "Sorties" (published in 1975 in La Jeune Née in France). Like The Woman Warrior, Cixous' essay is also partly autobiographical, partly mythical, and partly about women warriors (the Amazons). Kristeva's analysis of Chinese women from the perspective of a

in Marianne Hirsch's review essay "Mothers and Daughters" in Signs in 1981, tackles the subject from a predominantly European and American cultural perspective. Hirsch's own direction in the study of the mother-daughter relationship in women's writing and theory does not consider the perspective of women of colour until the mid-1980s, an event that she describes in the introduction to her 1989 book The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism (24). The racial strain of that encounter can be understood within the frame of my study in Hirsch's omission of The Woman Warrior. Though The Woman Warrior occupies the historical site of the American feminist surge of texts on the mother-daughter relationship in the 1970s, the novel is somehow excluded from Hirsch's combined study of the literary and theoretical texts of the mother-daughter plot.

The mother-daughter relationship in the recent American feminist psychoanalysis is open to an association with theories of colonialism, and by extension, racial oppression, this connection with race has not been extensively developed. However, the barrier between theories of the mother-child relationship and theories of racial oppression is more the result of the culture and community of mother-

daughter scholarship in the United States than the result of any inherent theoretical impasse. A glimpse of the possibility of discussing race in psychoanalysis in conjunction with the mother-daughter relationship appears in 1937 in the object-relations psychoanalysis of Melanie Klein. In her essay "Love, Guilt and Reparation", Klein uses the metaphor of the explorer to clarify the relations between the child and the mother:

In the explorer's unconscious mind, a new territory stands for the new mother, one that will replace the loss of the real mother. . . . We have already seen that fear of death of the most loved person leads to the child's turning away from her to some extent; but at the same time it also drives him to re-create her and to find her again in whatever he undertakes. (Klein 334)

The child's response to separation from the mother offers a startling connection between the child in psychoanalysis and the colonizer in colonialism. According to Klein, the child in adult life strives to replace the mother through creative achievement as a substitute for the subject's original loss of security. In the same way, the colonizer's psychic need as a displaced person expresses itself as a desire to replace the homeland by establishing colonies as similar in cultural detail as possible to the lost 'mother' land. Said's observation that "as human material the Orient is 'simply' an element in a

mother, in particular, continues to exist only in relation to her child, never as a subject in her own right. And in her maternal function, she remains an object, always distanced, always idealized or denigrated, always mystified, always represented through the small child's point of view. (Hirsch 1989: 167-68)

As creative texts that emerge in the formative age of the psychoanalytic feminism of the last two decades, the issue of how the mother is represented in Kingston's and Kogawa's first-person daughter's narratives is crucial in determining how the mother functions within the daughter's search for power as a speaking subject in The Woman Warrior and Obasan.

The recent feminist interest in Canada and the United States in psychoanalytic feminist theory has produced readings of The Woman Warrior and Obasan that present an asymmetrical relationship between the text that is regarded as the "theory" and the text that is regarded as the literary or creative "writing." The Woman Warrior and Obasan have attracted readings that have been informed by the linguistic psychoanalytic theories of Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Lacan. Leslie Rabine has undertaken a reading of The Woman Warrior through Cixous. A. Lynne Magnusson's reading of Obasan is informed by Lacan; Goellnicht and Shirley Geok-lin Lim have approached Kogawa's text

Romantic redemptive project" (Said 154) compliments Klein's narrative of the post-maternal colony as the site of the child-explorer's heroic and implicitly masculine struggle to establish identity and difference against the harsh elements of the alien colonial outpost.

Susan Rubin Suleiman makes the point in recent cultural criticism that the poet in Klein's and in Freud's theory of artistic creation is always male. Suleiman notices that the mother in these theories is always a servile entity who exists solely to assist in the development of the male child:

Just as motherhood is ultimately the child's drama, so is artistic creation. In both cases the mother is the essential but silent Other, the mirror in whom the child searches for his own reflection, the body he seeks to appropriate, the thing he loses or destroys again and again, and seeks to recreate. (Suleiman 357)

Marianne Hirsch's critique of the feminist reliance on psychoanalysis does not take issue with feminist conversions of psychoanalysis for the female child; the problem is rather that feminist psychoanalysis has internalized the traditional psychoanalytic focus on the child over the parent:

While psychoanalytic feminisms have added the female child to the male, they have not succeeded in inscribing the perspective of adult women. The adult woman who is a

through American and French psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives that include Chodorow, Rich, Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray. The disturbing common thread to these recent analyses is the willingness to relegate the Asian mother to the maternal, pre-verbal, pre-oedipal realm of the "semiotic" or the "Imaginary." The epistemic and cultural privilege enforced by this procedure of critical reading deserves scrutiny. Critics such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Rey Chow, and Lisa Lowe have sensed hegemonic and appropriative tendencies in the analytical gestures of psychoanalytic cultural criticism in the example of Kristeva's About Chinese Women.

Applying the critique of Kristeva's Orientalism to the psychoanalytic readings of The Woman Warrior throws into relief the subtlety and complexity of the crisis of representation when the Asian woman's subjectivity in question is the writer's own. Kingston also generates strong discourses of resistance and parody in alliance with new historical forces of feminism and postmodernist cultural criticism to undermine Orientalist and patriarchal structures. In Kogawa's Obasan the protagonist/daughter reconfigures the lifelong absence of her mother through a powerful linguistic act of individuation that marks her rebirth



into a new politicized speech in which she reclaims her mother's silence. Kingston and Kogawa struggle against the official versions of national history that repress the history of the sexual and racial oppression of Asians in North America, but simultaneously write within the national discourse towards a regenerative multicultural promise.

The central drama of The Woman Warrior and Obasan is the struggle by the narrator to reforge the ties to her ethnic origins and to her mother through a deliberate project of memory and self-invention. The two works place mother-daughter relationships in narratives that thematize the central role of language in the construction of the subject. In each work, the daughter's quest for identity is framed as a private struggle for individuation from the mother. The mother also represents the daughter's neglected ancestral heritage and so the recovery of both constitutes the writer/narrator's public affirmation of her ethnic identity in the national culture. Kingston and Kogawa narrate the daughter's relationship to her mother within the drama of the daughter's acquisition of the powers of language through speech, writing, and, in Obasan, the positive evaluation of the mother's silence.

Warrior and Donald Goellnicht's reading of Obasan represents the Asian mother and/or her culture as the emblem of a pre-linguistic, pre-oedipal motility for which explicitly or by implication, North America is the countervailing father's land. Considering that these readings are not arbitrarily founded but are carefully related to the subjective processes that they identify in the texts, it becomes necessary to investigate whether the recovery of the daughter into full dominant cultural subjectivity is won at the cost of an Orientalist construction of the Asian mother.

As highly popular works, The Woman Warrior and Obasan are subjected to receptions by mainstream American and Canadian readers that often obscure some of the more discrete struggles of the subject in the text. These readers, which do not necessarily exclude those of Asian ancestry, enter these ethnic, multicultural texts at the moment that the protagonist's cultural and maternal loss is converted into recovery. What the protagonist and the English language reader share is the moment of conversion from fragmented cultural division to redeemed cultural unity. The reader gets to meet the Other without ever having to do the work since the Other has gone to the effort of making herself and her culture accessible to

As a result, the narrators of both texts are interested in the various modes of cultural transmission: speech, articulation, "talk-stories," myths, legends, fables, histories, documents, letters, photographs. They also place great importance on questions of autobiography: the existence and nature of truth, fact, experience, and authenticity. The maturity that both protagonists achieve is performed as a verbal response to their mothers through shared story-telling and poetically evocative tribute. By narrating their own lives and memories, the protagonists of these autobiographical narratives enter the political modernity of their own generation as daughters who have successfully negotiated their own identity distinct from their mothers.

The daughters are able to enter a complex modern subjectivity because of the relative distancing of the Asian mother or the substitute Asian maternal figure who is projected into the background of the daughter's struggle for self-fulfilment. The consistent identification of the mother with the ancestral culture is part of a social and symbolic typology that conceives of the maternal ancestral land as an absence that must be recovered by language. The model that is recalled in Leslie Rabine's reading of The Woman

the English language reader. What the reader recognizes in the text is that while some unknown measure of ancestral culture is lost, as readers they do not have to worry about this loss since something as good or even better is reconstituted by the narrator's effort of memory.

While the narrator reconciles herself to the loss of her ancestral culture, the reader often feels that she or he is gaining a privileged entry into it. I suggest that this effect all too often attracts readers who are impelled by the prospect of a painless acquisition of imperial cultural mastery and scholarly expertise in the manner of the Orientalist scholars of the last century. Cynthia Sau-ling Wong refers to this penchant when she writes that "part of The Woman Warrior's popularity has been fuelled by a misplaced fascination with traditional Chinese culture" (Wong "Sources" 35).<sup>7</sup> Kingston herself has written an article criticizing the cultural misreadings of The Woman Warrior by American reviewers. This illusory competence of the new American Orientalism is further encouraged by Reed Way Dasenbrock's thesis of multicultural literature as a text whose precise cultural terms do not have to be intelligible to provide a meaningful effect.

Dasenbrock's essay "Intelligibility and Meaningfulness in Multicultural Literature in English" (1987) uses and extends the currency of Kingston's The Woman Warrior as a representative text of "multicultural" literature in English. The generality of Dasenbrock's discussion of The Woman Warrior results from a failure to define at the outset what he means by "multicultural" and, especially for Kingston's text, how he determines what an "other" culture is. Asserting broadly that multicultural literature is "different" in a way that must be respected and that "another" culture can never be adequately translated "into one's own terms," Dasenbrock claims that in "multicultural literature in English today... difference is primarily established by barriers to intelligibility" (Dasenbrock 18). This may be so in The Woman Warrior from the non-Chinese American reader's perspective, but Kingston at the same time is striving to be as intelligible as she can without descending into caricature. What Dasenbrock describes as a "barrier to intelligibility" is the quality of the text that makes it unique to a specific culture. Dasenbrock's theory of reading "multicultural" texts simply accepts the premise that the text becomes unintelligible at precisely the moment when its

is characterized by the assumption that one's issues are not widely accepted at the national level or at the level of the whole society, again, however one conceives this society. Minority reading and writing is propelled by the feeling of being in constant opposition and struggle against larger cultural groups. The sense of one's marginality and insignificance does not have to be solely generated by people that the minority subject considers to be the majority. In fact, the effectiveness of "minority" as a cultural status requires that persons in the minority think of themselves as 'minor' or less significant individuals. The system of social dominance requires the consent of the minority to be dominated by the majority and is most successful when the minority is not aware that they are providing this consent.

What is peculiar about the dominant national culture's acceptance of minority texts is that the reader and the text meet at the site where the text is seeking an economic and artistic niche in the culture of the dominant readership. The struggle for inclusion is predicated on a discourse of equity and thus to some extent a discourse of sameness that exists simultaneously with the demonstration of cultural difference and uniqueness. The sympathetic

cultural, linguistic, and racial uniqueness is emerging. The respect for difference as a state of unintelligibility is really a capitulation to what is ultimately an ethnocentric inability and/or unwillingness to enter into specific cultural encounters and struggles.

I would like to replace Dasenbrock's unspecific concept of multiculturalism with a model of cultural difference that allows us to think of distinct inequalities in power between different cultural groups. A vocabulary for differences of power is essential if we are to understand how The Woman Warrior operates within differences of culture. The concept of dominance that I am deploying here does not enclose any specific community but refers to a way of reading and writing. Readers and writers who assume dominance also assume the significance of their issues to be national in scope, or at least to have some impact upon their whole society, however far they conceive their society's boundary to extend. This boundary is often open, the universe as the reader or writer knows it, and so this concept of dominance is frequently expressed as a cultural theory of the universality of certain human thoughts and experiences.

Minority reading and writing, on the other hand,

misapprehension of The Woman Warrior by dominant readers, according to Wong, "may mean that the endeavour to produce a 'translatable' Chinese American literature is destined to be undermined by stereotyping and Orientalism." (Wong "Sources" 35) The discussion of Orientalist representation in The Woman Warrior and Obasan depends not so much on the existence of demeaning portraits of Asians as in the ability of the text to accommodate demeaning attitudes about Asians. As long as the works continue to be read within societies that perpetuate Orientalist interpretive practices, we must consider the possibility that these texts may be encoding Orientalist typologies.

The most carefully sustained reading of The Woman Warrior along the lines of what could be called an Orientalist psychoanalysis is Leslie Rabine's 1987 Signs article "No Lost Paradise: Social Gender and Symbolic Gender in the Writings of Maxine Hong Kingston." Referring to Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Sarah Kofman collectively as "symbolic feminists" in the psycholinguistic sense, she deploys their work as theory, using insights from Nancy Chodorow, to analyze gender discourses in The Woman Warrior and China Men (1980). Rabine is determined to cover the blind spot of a symbolic feminism that tends



"to repress the social dimension of gender by collapsing the social into the symbolic" (Rabine 472). In the case of Kristeva, the repression of the social dimension of gender is more the result of Rabine's omission of the text in which Kristeva locates theory in an actual social site. By not considering Kristeva's About Chinese Women, Rabine misses an opportunity to establish comparative links between the social grounding of Kristeva's theory and the creative prose experiments of Kingston's social representation.

Shirley Geok-lin Lim similarly invokes French feminist theorists Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva for the project of establishing a "women's poetics" in Obasan and Monica Sone's Nisei Daughter (1953) that articulates a position of difference from the explicitly masculinist program of Asian American writing advanced by the editorial collective of AIIEEEEE! (Lim 289). Lim's understanding of a women's poetics is based on the otherness of female language from male language (Lim "Japanese" 290, 310). The support for this concept is not drawn from particular texts by Cixous, Irigaray, or Kristeva, but from a summary of Cixous' and Irigaray's theories taken from an introductory text, Chris Weedon's Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (1987), and from a

mutual and reciprocal intertextual dialogue. The practice of using Cixous and Kristeva to read Kingston and Kogawa obscures the subjective, textual quality of Cixous' and Kristeva's work as well as the linguistic, speculative, theoretical qualities of Kingston's and Kogawa's writing. Rabine and Lim also fail to note that Cixous' and Kristeva's body of work includes applications of their theories to the social and political context of the Orient. Cixous' recent plays and Kristeva's About Chinese Women investigate the structure of the East/West binary, the same binary that underlies Kingston's narrative of the cultural transition from China to America.<sup>5</sup> Neither critic demonstrates an awareness that Kristeva's symbolic projection of the maternal semiotic or chora onto China has been substantially criticized for its Orientalism by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay "French Feminism in an International Frame" (1981).

In About Chinese Women, Kristeva is interested in the Orient as an oppositional site from which to base a critique of the West. Kristeva's appropriations have received direct criticism most notably in Spivak's essay but also recently in the anti-Orientalist critique in Rey Chow's Woman and Chinese Modernity (1991) and within the historical survey of different

reference to Kristeva's Revolution in Poetic Language (1984) (Lim "Japanese" 310). While Lim is ostensibly interested in investigating the dynamics of both gender and race in the Japanese American women's life stories of Obasan and Nisei Daughter, she only refers to theories of gender in the works of the French and American feminists and ignores what could be a particularly illuminating comparative text for her analysis of the racial representation of Asian motherhood in her American texts: Kristeva's European exploration of the maternal base of Chinese language in About Chinese Women.

Lim and Rabine work from the convention in literary criticism that categorizes certain texts as "theory" for the purpose of reading other texts which are considered "writing." Rabine is more progressive in choosing to use The Woman Warrior as a social text to question the theoretical grounds of Cixous' and other French "symbolic feminism," but she still maintains the qualitative distinction between the social text and the theoretical text. Both Rabine's and Lim's critical practices tend to apply theory to writing instead of considering both the social and theoretical resonances between the French and North American texts, allowing them to engage in a more

episodes of European Orientalism in Lisa Lowe's Critical Terrains (1991). About Chinese Women is not fundamentally concerned with Chinese social realities; rather, it mounts a critique of Western discourse (Chow 5, Lowe 141). China is useful in Kristeva's socio-symbolic typology because she envisions in China the maternal, pre-oedipal, and pre-linguistic qualities of nurturance, play, and rhythm that she feels are missing in Western conceptual and cultural practices. However, as Chow points out, "Kristeva's critique is complicated by the fact that it is sexualized: China is counterposed to the West not only because it is different, but also because it is... feminine" (Chow Woman 5). The typological binary of East versus West is gendered along the lines Said describes in his characterization of Orientalism as a concept influenced by "the male conception of the world" in which the East is defined as a sexual feminine space (Said 208)<sup>6</sup>.

Kristeva's Orientalism differs from that which Said describes in the context of nineteenth century French and British imperialism in the Middle East. China is not feminized and subordinated to the superior masculine procedures of the West but is rather held above the West for preserving an ancient matrilinear psychic stratum. Kristeva claims that "ancient China

was . . . the best known and most highly developed matrilinear society" (Kristeva "Woman can never be defined" 139). She finds evidence of this in modern Chinese writing which she claims has "maintained the memory of matrilinear pre-history (collective and individual) in its architectonic of image, gesture, and sound" (Kristeva About Chinese 57). In what Spivak describes as one of "the most stupendous generalizations about Chinese writing," Kristeva claims as a result that the life of the speaking and writing individual in China cherishes the "pre-Oedipal phase," with its "dependency on the maternal," its "absence of clear-cut divisions between the order of things and the order of symbols" and its "predominance of the unconscious impulses" (Kristeva About Chinese 56). One recognizes immediately that Kristeva is describing China in terms of her concept of the "chora" as "an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases" (Kristeva Revolution 25). The "chora" is articulated by a semiotic process that occurs in a psychic realm analogous to Jacques Lacan's concept of the Imaginary. Kristeva's chora "is pre-oedipal, chronologically anterior to syntax, a cry, the gesture of a child" and manifests itself in adult

of the "chora" as a social symbolic concept is that although "the chora can be designated and regulated... it can never be posited: as a result, one can situate the chora and, if necessary, lend it a typology, but one can never give it axiomatic form" (Kristeva Revolution 26). In political terms this means that the chora can be used in an Orientalist typology but its position in that typology never has to be explained, justified, or defined.

Under these conditions, China's relevance lies only in its "primitivism" as a contemporary culture that manages somehow to exist "'outside' our time, confined to its own immobility" (Chow Woman 8). Since Kristeva's project has been "not to deconstruct the origin, but rather to recuperate, archaeologically and formulaically, what she locates as the potential originary space before the sign" (Spivak "French Feminism" 146), China becomes the Other, situated "in an ideal time that is marked off taxonomically from 'our' time" (Chow Woman 6). China is fractured by the Western gaze so that, "[r]eflecting a broader Western cultural practice, the 'classical' East is studied with primitivistic reverence, even as the 'contemporary' East is treated with realpolitikal contempt" (Spivak "French Feminism" 138). Since the uniqueness of China

disclosure as "rhythm, prosody, pun, non-sense, laugh" (Hirsch 210). The chora is thus characterized as "rupture and articulations (rhythm)" (Kristeva Revolution 26), "rhythmic space" (26), and is "analogous only to vocal and kinetic rhythm" (26), the realm of "gestural and vocal play" (26). According to Kristeva, the "[m]other's body is...what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic chora" (Kristeva Revolution 27). Thus, the mother is at the centre of Kristeva's theory of Chinese women.

Chow argues correctly that "Kristeva's idealization of the 'maternal' order in China in terms of an 'empty and peaceful center'... in other words, of what she identifies as chora" reduces both the maternal and China to silence (Chow Woman 8). Maternal space, Chinese culture, and Chinese language, are relegated to a pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal, realm of rhythm, music, and play. This psychoanalytic typology is problematic when it is applied back onto the social order where mothers and Chinese people are adults fully capable of speech and politics. In China, as elsewhere, people, including mothers, are organized contemporary subjects who conduct daily lives of speech and action without dissolving into choric pun and non-sense. The weakness

is cast simply as the "'negative' or 'repressed' side of Western discourse" (Chow Woman 7), Kristeva's "Chinese woman" bears no resemblance to modern Chinese women and in fact "erases the situations of women in contemporary China" (Lowe 152).

Kristeva defines the semiotic as connected to the modality known in Freudian psychoanalysis as *primary processes* wherein "[d]iscrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such" (Kristeva Revolution 25). Thus, according to Kristeva's theory, those people and identities typed as the semiotic do not in a strict sense exist as subjects. Since the semiotic chora is the precondition of the thetic phase in the symbolic order (Kristeva Revolution 50), anyone typed as the semiotic is only a potential subject who is dependent on passage into the symbolic for her or his status as a subject. The typing of people and cultures as "semiotic" or "choric" as Kristeva does in About Chinese Women is not entirely consistent with her own definition of those terms in Revolution in Poetic Language (1974). In that book she allows that "there are non-verbal systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music, for example)" (24), but maintains that the two modalities, the

semiotic and the symbolic, "are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language" (24).

Kristeva's elaboration in Revolution in Poetic Language suggests that her cultural assignment of China and Chinese women as whole sites of semiotic and choric motility is a practice that contravenes her own theoretical position on the subject:

Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he [sic] produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both. (24)

My own consideration of Kristeva's theory of poetic language is not adverse to the use of the semiotic or other psycholinguistic concepts for literary interpretation. Kristeva's account of the process of subjectivity offers many insights within the traditions of European linguistics and psychoanalysis and is also potentially useful in other cultural contexts. What is problematic is the typing of whole cultures and genders into what in Kristeva's own theory is a specifically psycholinguistic function. The problem occurs when concepts formed to describe psychic and linguistic functions within the subject are projected onto social space to describe the collective subjective processes of entire nations, genders, and cultures. Recent

Orientalism by failing to consider Kristeva's early problematic application of her psycholinguistic theory to Chinese culture. Rabine refers loosely to "French Feminist" analysis under her own term "symbolic feminist" analysis, which signals Rabine's elimination of the national and social context of Kristeva's Orientalism in favour of a more theoretical and less cultural use of Kristeva. Rabine extracts a de-socialized symbolic method from Kristeva that is operationally identical to the Orientalist psychoanalysis of About Chinese Women and starts fresh on Kingston's text with a culturally sympathetic account of Kingston's reconstruction of Chinese identity in America. Similarly, Shirley Geok-lin Lim ignores the deeply problematic nature of Kristeva's own work on the uses of Chinese identity in the West and includes Kristeva's work as part of a useful theoretical basis for privileging Asian American women's texts' "multiple presences, ambivalent stories, and circular, fluid narratives" (Lim "Life Stories" 290-91, 310). Without the knowledge of the deeply ingrained Orientalism in About Chinese Women, Lim and Rabine are unconscious of the Orientalist practices they may be replicating in their readings of Obasan and The Woman Warrior.

presentations of Kristeva tacitly confirm that her cultural analysis of China which introduced her to North American readers in the 1970s cannot be brought into the 1980s and 1990s. Toril Moi's The Kristeva Reader notes Gayatri Spivak's critique of Kristeva's ethnocentrism and, ironically enough, does not excerpt any material from About Chinese Women. Kelly Oliver's Reading Kristeva, the first book-length analysis of Kristeva's corpus, similarly omits extensive references to About Chinese Women, which it calls "one of Kristeva's 'lesser' works" and which it deems a "most questionable and often offensive text" (Oliver 7). Kristeva herself does not return in her later work to the analysis of the semiotic or choric capacity of non-European cultures.<sup>10</sup>

Leslie Rabine in "No Lost Paradise: Social Gender and Symbolic Gender in the Writings of Maxine Hong Kingston" (1987) undertakes her analysis of Kingston within a methodology that eliminates the social dimension of Kristeva's theory of Chinese women and ignores the American critique of Kristeva's Orientalism. Kristeva's theory of poetic language is not inherently Orientalist but becomes so because she locates all Chinese women in the motility of the semiotic or chora; Rabine reproduces aspects of this

Rabine's interpretive model for The Woman Warrior replicates the conditions of About Chinese Women under which the "Chinese woman is fetishized and constructed as the Other of western psychoanalytic feminism" (Lowe 152). Her remarks evolve out of a sentence Elaine H. Kim offers in the introduction to Asian American Literature. Kim remarks that "[e]ven the strengths of The Woman Warrior, such as its portrayal of ambiguity as central to the Chinese American experience, are misconstrued by some critics" (Kim xvi-xvii). Rabine's analysis of this sentence embarks upon an extended extrapolation:

Kim sees the "portrayal of ambiguity as central to the Chinese American experience"... This ambiguity...is...the result of love/hate relationships to the immigrant Chinese culture and to the childhood myths and memories experienced in that culture. Without a childhood imaginary realm and access to the unconscious it opens up, we would be little more than robots. The power of the childhood imaginary realm also increases the power of marginalized cultures in the United States to resist a social order that turns us all into robots. But its very necessity to us constitutes its danger since it can also draw one back into paralytic unity with the mother, as well as accommodate one to the limits of patriarchal institutions. Kingston's ambiguity shuttles between the necessity and the danger of this childhood imaginary realm. (Rabine 482)

Rabine locates the ambiguity that is central to the Chinese American experience in "the immigrant Chinese

culture" and "the childhood myths and memories experienced in that culture." The daughter in The Woman Warrior has no experience of Chinese culture other than through her immigrant parents and the theory that Rabine is able to derive from this conflates the experience of childhood with the experience of the immigrant Chinese culture. The "childhood imaginary realm and access to the unconscious it opens up" becomes synonymous with the child's total potential for Chinese identity in America. This is made explicit when Rabine associates the childhood imaginary realm with "marginalized cultures in the United States." She claims that the former increases the power of the latter to resist a social order where we would become "robots." On the other hand, the childhood imaginary realm is declared dangerous because it can "draw one back into paralytic unity with the mother." The Orientalist psychoanalytic typologies uncovered in Kristeva reappear in Rabine's interpretation of Chinese American ambiguity: Chinese identity is a pre-modern experience lodged in unconscious childhood memory, and Chinese ethnic identity is the redemptive maternal counterpart of the potentially repressive social order of the American dominant culture.

Childhood is an appealing metaphor for the

naturalization and cultural assimilation in America constrains Chinese identity to the past, into the exclusively feminine and maternal, making it apparent that the Orientalizing of oneself is often the price the Asian American has to pay to be accepted in America. The progress of Kingston's own literary career shows that she has been willing to delimit Chinese identity in this way.

Orientalism of the variety found in Julia Kristeva's psycholinguistic social theory of Chinese women and in Leslie Rabine's feminist materialist and psychoanalytic reading of The Woman Warrior is not an operation unique to mainstream or dominant cultural European and American theory and criticism. Psycholinguistic Orientalism is also apparent in the writing in The Woman Warrior and Obasan. Such a claim would appear to be fundamentally misguided within the framework of the prevailing criticism of these writers. Feminist interpretations of Kingston's The Woman Warrior by Amy Ling, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Leslie Rabine, Roberta Rubenstein and Sidonie Smith tend to adopt what can be described as a liberal multiculturalist perspective. These critics write from a national and cultural perspective based in the United States and take up the project of inclusion by

majority culture's dominance over ethnic minority groups because it allows the majority to justify its oppression as a concern for the child-minority's proper growth and development. Rabine conflates Chinese culture with childhood experience in the American society. The Asian mother serves as the central figure in the artistic reformulation of maternity and Asian identity as a prior, pre-oedipal space. This sets America in opposition as the father's land, ruled by his law and articulated in terms of American ideologies of nationalism and the international order. The existence of an Asian masculinity in America is not allowed for within this model in which the woman is always Asian while the man is always white American.

Rabine's Orientalist psychoanalysis reconstructs Chinese identity as a partial identity that is subordinate to the dominant national culture. The only socially useful Chinese identity is that which can be used in the political struggle to "increase the power of marginalized cultures in the United States." As with Kristeva, "China" and "Chinese" do not signify outside of Western frames of reference. In Rabine's analysis, "Chinese Americans" exist only within the context of an American autobiographical struggle for identity. The general process of immigrant

elevating the marginal author's individuality and by celebrating her lived experiences. The marginal author's text is therefore read as autobiography, as an authentic document that provides insight into what from the dominant perspective is an other subjectivity.

The view that writing by Kingston and Kogawa (and writers in general who are classified as 'minority' or 'ethnic') always refers to the lived experiences of the author and her community regardless of the genre of the writing is an assumption that is uncomfortably similar to making generalizations about the inherent shared qualities of a specific racial group or gender. The Woman Warrior and Obasan do fall within Werner Sollors' understanding of ethnic writing as a writing obsessed with genealogies, origins, families, and ancestors. The mistake that can be made here is that as the self-assigned ethnographer of her own family and ethnic culture, the ethnic writer (and the character of the narrator/protagonist into which her voice is often projected) is not sufficiently distinguished as a subject apart from what she observes and records. Kingston and Kogawa, like most writers, naturally draw upon their own experiences to fill out their narratives, but their first-person narrators scrupulously narrate their conscious sense of

separation from the communities and subjects they write about. By the end of *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator confesses to relying on books to demystify aspects of her family experience (*The Woman Warrior* 204-5); Naomi in *Obasan* is haunted by her mother's absence and concerned at the prospect that she may be betraying her in some fashion with her inquiries (*Obasan* 228). The careful and deliberate distances that are constantly rehearsed in these narratives between the American or Canadian native informer and the Asian native and immigrant 'information' suggest that criticism should be encouraged to theorize the gap between the so-called autobiographer and her subjects rather than elide this difference as the current autobiographical criticism tends to do. The relationship across this gap opens a world of submerged symbolic power relations that requires criticism capable of naming Orientalist structures of representation in the Asian North American texts of the so-called 'authentic' ethnic subjects.

The positive, self-empowered writer and the protagonists she creates in her fictions are not, after all, the objects of Orientalist representation. The liberal multiculturalist recuperation of the narrator/protagonist as a self-authoring individual

society, there is a complementary parent or parental figure who, as the original immigrant, represents the daughter's or son's lovingly recuperated but receding tie to the ancestral homeland.

The narrators and protagonists of *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan* are the children of Asian parents or parental surrogates who are obliged by the narratives to function as the stabilizing source of authentic ethnic, domestic folk wisdom for their modern, distracted progeny. These narratives, like traditional psychoanalysis, position the child as the central character and arrange the parents around her/him as appendages in the assistance of her/his development. In *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan*, the burden of the child's development is placed on real and acting mothers who, whether present or absent, active or passive, are the basis for the daughter's understanding of the Asian culture of her ancestry.

In *The Woman Warrior*, the daughter's fantasies about China are derived from imaginative extrapolations of the mother's stories and from inventive interpretations of the known and discovered details of the mother's life experiences. The Orientalist representation occurs in the daughter's various misrecognitions of her mother in the five connected

assumes the Asian female subject's transcendence from ethnographic objectification and from static external representations as predictable Orientalist stereotypes. Instead, the Orientalist structure lies in how the writer of Asian ancestry, naturalized as a North American, projects the Orientalist gaze elsewhere in the process of constructing the subjectivity and individuality of her Asian North American protagonist. Rather than focusing on how these novels illuminate the arrival of Asian cultural difference to mainstream national literary cultures, I wish to examine how these works advance writers of Asian ancestry as representative ethnic subjects whose narratives are selected for incorporation into the fabric of the dominant national culture.

The reproduction of Orientalism occurs because these narratives of citizenship and naturalization require the projection of some displaced, dislocated figure in relation to whom we can understand the protagonist's coming into being as a national subject. The New World citizen has to be narrated in contrast to an Old World migrant if the affirmative value of the new identity is to acquire definition in cultural space and historical time. For every protagonist or narrator seeking to define her or himself in North American

segments of the novel. The daughter recovers from her various illusions about her mother and her mother's land at the end of the novel. Nevertheless, since her imaginary constructions of China are the formative illusions with which she shapes her identity and her goals in America, her awareness of having spent a childhood under the grip of Orientalist fantasies does not constitute a complete break from it. Defining ethnic ties as belonging to the infantile realm of childhood, and basing the ethnic American's maturity to some extent on an evolution from the constraints of ethnicity is a narrative that reinforces an ideology of assimilation. This ideology assumes that racial minorities are being cleansed of the atavistic tribalism of their Old World ethnicity through a process of cultural purification that has been described as the American 'melting pot.'<sup>11</sup> By depoliticizing and domesticating Chinese identity as a realm of childhood myths and fables, ethnic identity serves the project of nationalism and becomes subordinate to the liberal multiculturalist project of reviving the moral momentum of nationalism under the banner of tolerance and acceptance.

In his reading of *Obasan*, Goellnicht uncovers aspects of Kogawa's representation of Japan that are



similar to Rabine's emphasis in Kingston's The Woman Warrior.<sup>12</sup> Once again, within the subtext of Kristeva's theoretical apparatus, the Asian country is the space of the old "mother culture" (298). As a symbol for Japan, the mother possesses the child in an uncomplicated infantile "subjective space of silent communication" (298) that is prior to the Canadian discursive and social constructions of race. The land of the dominant culture into which the female subject emerges as a full participant is identified as the "father land": "The negotiated balance at the close of the novel... involves an attempt at balance between the old 'mother culture' (in this case Japan) and the new 'father land' (Canada)" (Goellnicht "Metafiction" 298). Within the confines of this interpretive logic, there is no opportunity to theorize Japan as an element in the narrator's present, as a country one could research, visit, and relate to in an adult post-oedipal way. One is not able to think of a Japan that is alive, human, and full of all the discursively and socially constructed complications that render Canadians unique and self-aware. The gaining of a self in Western discourse requires that the Japanese-Canadian subject construct her own mother as the Oriental for the privilege of her own emergence out of

past, but are directed in these texts to specifically modern tasks of establishing new spaces for traditionally marginalized subjects. The Asian tradition in The Woman Warrior and Obasan is represented by North American writers who are one generation removed from the direct experience of their Asian countries of ancestry. It is not reasonable to expect from these writings that are so thoroughly invested in North American culture--from their subject to their genre to their language--that certain assimilated reflexes of the history of North American racism against Asians would be absent.

As critically and commercially successful 'ethnic' writers, Kingston and Kogawa proudly and deliberately write stories of North Americans of East Asian ancestry that validate the East Asian identity of North American nationals based on the privilege and security of their North American citizenship. As writers of the saga of ethnic naturalization, they are not interested in East Asian identity in itself but in how East Asians fit into North America. Interpretive motifs such as Amy Ling's "between worlds"<sup>13</sup> and Roberta Rubenstein's "bridging two cultures"<sup>14</sup> situate The Woman Warrior within cross-cultural discourses of parallelism, mutuality, and reciprocity that obscure the material

that category. The daughter's reward for this betrayal is the Canadian father, as the development of Naomi's sexual identification toward Father Cedric in Itsuka (1992) amply demonstrates. What Naomi gains at the end of this sequel to Obasan is the privilege of living under the father's law of state multiculturalism and in the father's house of a reformed Canadian society.

The following chapters examine The Woman Warrior and Obasan to recover the idea that the racial and matrilinear trace of the Asian subject in North America often chooses already Westernized narratives of subject formation that are based on the construction of Asian identity as ontologically, sexually, and politically dependent on psychoanalytic and imperial discourses. Through individual episodes, the narrator of The Woman Warrior fashions her paternal aunt, herself, her mother, and her maternal aunt as female forerunners in narratives designed to offer her help in her autobiographical struggle to fit in the United States. The narrator/protagonist of Obasan uses the example of her two aunts and her mother to construct a maternal spiritual genealogy through which she can derive the strength to construct and assert her subjectivity as a Canadian. Ethnicity, race, and cultural ancestry are based on the accumulated collective experiences of the

fact that Kingston illuminates the culture of a one-way diasporic migration from China to America. Neither she nor Kogawa make similar physical or spiritual commitments to Asian lands, cultures, and ideologies to those that the immigrant forebears in their narratives make to North American lands, culture, and ideology; the protagonists of The Woman Warrior and Obasan do not seriously consider going back to Asia as a possibility. While the idea of a harmoniously balanced East/West dualism presents an appealing poetic metaphor for describing Kingston's text, the thematic contents and social contexts of her and Kogawa's work cannot honestly be described as representing a reciprocal and mutual exchange between East Asia and North America.

The multiculturalism of Ling and Rubenstein can be defined through this characteristic flaw of assuming a metaphorical equity and exchange of influence between East and West. In its desire to project an optimistic vision of cultural interdependence, this expression of an affirmative multiculturalism obscures predominant aspects of the experience of East Asians in North America whose history is marked in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by economic exploitation and legislated racism at the hands of dominant British and European American groups. The affirmative

multiculturalist interpretive model unintentionally protects an Orientalism which, as a symbolic function in the psychic development of the Asian American subject, surpasses and surrounds the subject and becomes the embedded dominant cultural framework of the Asian American's daily life in America. Orientalism is not overcome or overthrown in these post-immigrant narratives but is absorbed and submerged into the unconscious psychic structure of the new multiculturalist ethos.

The mechanism of the new Orientalism becomes invisible as it is naturalized within the psychic structure of Asian American subjectivity as ethnic pride and affirmative multiculturalism. Kingston and Kogawa constantly refer in their narratives to the physical material of articulation and representation-- stories, diaries, photographs, documents, and letters-- and dramatize the daughter's struggle in a way that follows the psycholinguistic narratives of language acquisition through conflict with and differentiation from the mother or mother substitute. This activity merits close scrutiny as the site where patterns from the dominant cultures are embedded in the psychic processes of the minority subject. The condensation of the Orient as the pre-subjective realm precedes and

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The most recent discussions of this controversy are in Wong's "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour? Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and the Chinese-American Autobiographical Controversy" and Cheung's "The Woman Warrior versus The Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?"

<sup>2</sup> This award is mentioned, among other places, on the back cover of the 1989 Vintage International Edition of *The Woman Warrior*.

<sup>3</sup> My use of the term 'masculinist' does not refer to biological anatomy, although masculinist critics are often male. What I mean by masculinist is an androcentric or patriarchal attitude in society which in its extreme form is misogynist.

<sup>4</sup> *Obasan* received the 1981 Books in Canada First Novel Award, the 1982 Canadian Authors' Association Book of the Year Award, the 1982 American Book Award, and the Periodical Distributors of Canada award for the best fiction book of 1983. In 1986, Joy Kogawa was named a member of the Order of Canada.

<sup>5</sup> For a review of *Obasan's* political impact see Arnold E. Davidson 14.

<sup>6</sup> See the second chapter "Typology and Ethnogenesis" in Sollors' *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (1986).

<sup>7</sup> This statement can apply to critics from outside of the Chinese American community as well as to critics within it, like Frank Chin and the ~~AAAAA~~ collective whose censure of *The Woman Warrior* assumes that Kingston is trying to represent Chinese American culture.

<sup>8</sup> Cixous' recent plays: *La Prise de l'école de Madhubai* (1983) (trans. 1986), *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge* (1985), and *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves* (1987) reflect her preoccupation with the East "as a metaphorical site of values excluded by western modernity" (Shiach 120). Morag Shiach describes *La Prise de l'école de Madhubai* as echoing "many of the arguments of nineteenth-century

prepares for what is represented typologically as an Occidental symbolic order. This relationship functions as the psychoanalytic allegory for the Orientalist domestication of Asian identity in North America under the nationalizing cultural strategy of multiculturalism.<sup>15</sup>

Romanticism, which looked to primitive cultural forms to provide the space for a critique of contemporary culture." (122) Shiach sees Cixous in this play "placing herself within a tradition of western appropriation of the narratives and metaphors of the East." (122) Of the three plays only *La Prise de l'école de Madhubai* has been translated into English at the time of this writing; literary criticism in North America is at the moment largely unaware of Cixous' dramatic works. While there is an opportunity here to undertake a critique of Cixous' Orientalism, the postcolonial critique of Kristeva's *About Chinese Women* is a much more developed controversy in North America and is more accessible to North American critical audiences as a place to locate the Orientalist gestures of the psychoanalytic writing from France of the mid 1970s.

<sup>9</sup> See also Said 138 and 188.

<sup>10</sup> Having determined that certain French feminist psychoanalytic narratives are Orientalist does not imply that comparative approaches between *The Woman Warrior* and the psychoanalytic texts of French feminism should be closed off altogether. Feminist literary criticism has much to gain by not regarding French feminist writing categorically as "theory," a conceptual reflex that Cixous and Kristeva attempt to subvert in their respective projects, "Sorties" and Kristeva's "Stabat Mater" (originally published as "Héretique de l'amour" in *Tel Quel* 74 in 1977) by interspersing their theoretical and critical modes of writing with autobiographical textual gestures. In spite of this, French feminist writing, however autobiographical, is often read in the American context solely as theory. Sidonie Smith's separate discussions in *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (1987) of *The Woman Warrior* as a "reading" and French feminist writing as a "theoretical consideration" is symptomatic of the formalized regimes of discourse that segregate intellectuals of certain cultural groups to their assigned genres. This distribution makes it possible for Kristeva to assume that four weeks in China and a half dozen antiquated texts by Western sinologists are reasonable grounds for a universal theory of Chinese women. In the meantime Kingston must fend off criticism by Asian Americans for not accurately representing her ethnicity while enduring the misdirected praise by European America that she is the



voice of her people. Amy Ling, working as a self-assigned ambassador-critic for the literature of Chinese American women, assigns Kingston a diplomatic role by placing her within a tradition of women writers of Chinese ancestry who are "between worlds"; Roberta Rubenstein titles her chapter on Kingston "Bridging Two Cultures." These sympathetic visions of cross-cultural reciprocity reflect the democratic and hopeful desires that define the movement of liberal multiculturalism in the United States.

The reality is that the disparity of the worlds that Kingston is between are vast and not easily reconcilable; the bridge between two cultures for Kingston's ethnic group has historically supported a flow of immigrant passage in predominantly one direction. The Woman Warrior as a multicultural text may be a bridge between two cultures but the historical movement in Kingston's text is a one-way migration from China to America. Kingston is a writer of the Chinese diasporic presence in the United States and her characters do not emigrate back to China from America. The movement from China to America can be measured in The Woman Warrior in terms of human bodies but the movement back can only be measured in human sympathies. There are fundamental imbalances in the flow of trade across the bridge.

<sup>11</sup> Werner Sollors provides a thorough account of the ideology of the American 'melting pot' in Beyond Ethnicity (66-101).

<sup>12</sup> Goellnicht only "tentatively suggests" a psychoanalytic reading of the female subject in Obasan in his 1989 article "Minority History as Metafiction: Joy Kogawa's Obasan." In this article Goellnicht is more centrally concerned with how Obasan draws from the history of the Japanese Canadian Internment and how it modifies this history as a postmodern work of "historiographic metafiction." The psychoanalytic thesis that he introduces in "Minority History" is developed more fully in his subsequent article "Father Land and/or Mother Tongue: The Divided Female Subject in Kogawa's Obasan and Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior."

<sup>13</sup> From the title of her book on Chinese American women's writing Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry.

#### Chapter One: Kingston's The Woman Warrior

##### Descriptions of China in The Woman Warrior

resemble in striking ways some key features of the psycholinguistic Orientalism of Julia Kristeva's About Chinese Women. Much of the narrator's impressions of China and Chinese women come from the early period in the narrator's life in which she is obsessed with the fear of being trapped by her Chinese ancestral culture. These fears are grounded in North American stereotypes of Chinese barbarism and cruelty. The narrator of The Woman Warrior fears that she will be subject to Chinese foot-binding, that she will be carried to China to be sold into slavery, and that she will be forced into an arranged marriage with a Chinese boy. While these fears have some factual basis in Chinese history, they are largely developed and maintained by the narrator's complex of cultural self-denial in which Chinese ancestral culture is seen as a threat to the narrator's freedom. Unlike Kristeva's remarks in About Chinese Women, the Orientalist representations in The Woman Warrior cannot be directly attributed to the author who maintains a distance from her text by refusing to ascribe a name to the protagonist of her first-person narrative. The Woman Warrior was originally classified

<sup>14</sup> "Bridging Two Cultures" is the subtitle of Rubenstein's chapter on Kingston's The Woman Warrior in Boundaries of the Self: Gender, Culture, Fiction.

<sup>15</sup> Multiculturalism in Canada is an official state-endorsed policy that was put in effect in 1971 following the Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1970). In the United States it is easier to associate the term "multiculturalism" with a politics of cultural resistance and an ethos of radical cultural transformation with less ambivalence than Canadian multiculturalism. Thus, in the Canadian novel Obasan, Aya Obasan can be seen as an unsung hero because she "does not dance to the multi-cultural piper's tune" (226), whereas in The Woman Warrior the American narrator can portray herself as a legendary rebel-warrior whose positive, inspirational vision of multicultural music and dance (27) blends into the political agenda of a peasant insurrection.

by the publisher as autobiography; the most recent edition (1989) still labels it ambiguously as "nonfiction/literature." Postmodernist readings of The Woman Warrior by Paul John Eakin, Sidonie Smith, and Lee Quinby depart from the mimetic assumptions of conventional autobiography and see the text working as a challenge to modern constructions of the individual and the self (Eakin "Narration" 38, Smith 150, Quinby 297). Under such readings it becomes impossible to ascribe any Orientalism to stable forms of the subject such as the narrator or the author.

The indeterminate levels of irony in the postmodern text make it difficult to discover the intentions behind any specific representation of Chinese subjects or culture. Rather than becoming mired in the ethnographic and autobiographic search for the 'true' voice of the author, the experimentation with voices and identities in The Woman Warrior deliberately works to destabilize conventional notions of textual authority and autobiographical inscription. In terms of stereotypical or Orientalist representations of China and Chinese identity, the text uses irony in both its capacity to refer to the stereotype and to subvert it. The double voice of irony accounts for how a text can both exhibit

stereotypes of Chinese Americans and resist them.

I want to stress that when I refer to Orientalist gestures in The Woman Warrior, I am not irrevocably accusing the narrator or the author of a self-denying racism against her own culture. What I am suggesting is that there is no theoretical or historical reason to believe that a Chinese American narrator cannot be influenced by stereotypical narratives of her ancestral culture. Not allowing that the Chinese American subject can absorb dominant cultural views that discriminate against her ethnic background amounts to a failure of criticism to provide space for a major area of the ethnic or minority subject's experience within racist dominant national cultures. Even if one accepts that the narrator's fantastic misapprehension of Chinese culture is a childhood delusion that she later outgrows and repudiates, the narrator's act of textual self-representation still relies upon these Orientalist stories to account for her process of maturity. Orientalist representations do not die because they are proven to be mistaken or false; they thrive because they exist in the open spaces of the imagination as fantasies of cultural otherness that are not bound by any commitment to verisimilitude.

Like Kristeva, the narrator in The Woman Warrior

missing in Kristeva's celebration, the basic construction of the trope is the same. Kingston's narrator advocates the naturalness of the Chinese language, making the connection between language and culture that is the central feature of Kristeva's analysis. The irregular heartbeats that the narrator's mother, a doctor, records, deviate from "the sounds of earth-sea-sky and the Chinese language" (The Woman Warrior 80). The primordial, pre-oedipal root of Chinese writing is an idea championed by Kristeva, who describes the Chinese system of writing as "designed for a tonal language" and an "essential characteristic of the Chinese universe" (Kristeva About Chinese 55). Kristeva's view of the choric quality of Chinese people drawn from her visit to Communist China resembles the reports that the narrator of The Woman Warrior gets from her relatives trapped under Chinese Communism: "They do funny dances; they sing weird songs, just syllables. They make us dance; they make us sing" (190). Even in contemporary forms, the Chinese language is described in The Woman Warrior resembles Kristeva's Orientalist assignment of China as a semiotic realm of choric, nonsensical gestures and sounds.

Kristeva's psychoanalytic Orientalist

is interested in the recovery of matrilinear Chinese knowledge and pursues this knowledge through the same multi-sensory approach taken by Kristeva. The narrator opens a metal tube containing her mother's medical diploma:

When I open it, the smell of China flies out, a thousand-year-old bat flying heavy-headed out of the Chinese caverns where bats are as white as dust, a smell that comes from long ago, far back in the brain. (The Woman Warrior 57)

Kingston adds smell to the sensual registers that fulfil Kristeva's conviction that "Chinese writing maintained the memory of matrilinear pre-history (collective and individual) in its architectonic of image, gesture, and sound . . ." (Kristeva About Chinese 57). The mother in The Woman Warrior reflects Kristeva's claim that "there is nothing less certain than having been in China, in its space and time" (New French 139). The mother echoes Kristeva's argument of China's timeless, unhurried superiority over the West by posing China as a land uninfected by the enervating, frenetic pace of American capitalism: "Human beings don't work like this in China. Time goes slower there" (The Woman Warrior 105). Although Kingston's narrative of the daughter's not fully sympathetic account of her mother's dreamy reminiscences contains an irony that is

configuration is an embedded structure of The Woman Warrior's central themes and relationships. Kingston elaborates extensively upon the theme that the Chinese, both in China and America, are linguistic fugitives in perpetual flight from symbolic ways of naming. Whether in evading American immigration laws, escaping Chinese Communist purges, confusing malicious gods, or observing their own communal traditions of address by kinship title (sister, brother, First Wife, Third Grandfather), the Chinese are portrayed as people who keep their real names forever in play within a mobile, indeterminable realm of semiotic flux: "The Chinese I know hide their names; sojourners take new names when their lives change and guard their real names with silence" (5). The Chinese emigrants not only have officials, bureaucrats, and gods to worry about but are in danger of being exposed by their own children: "They must try to confuse their offspring as well, who, I suppose, threaten them in similar ways--always trying to get things straight, always trying to name the unspeakable" (5). The unspeakable nature of Chinese identity allows the narrator to use her Chinese background as a field of open narrative possibility onto which she can project her own fears and desires. From the perspective of the English speaking narrator,

the Chinese cultural field functions like Kristeva's chora, a pool of prelinguistic potential that the poet can draw from as raw material for her "talk-stories".

The tension between the deceptive silence of the Chinese and the linear, symbolic quest of "trying to get things straight, always trying to name the unspeakable" is also, importantly, a generational tension between the Chinese emigrant and her Americanized offspring. This gap is apparent throughout the narrative in the relationship between the narrator/daughter and her emigrant Chinese mother. The daughter is acutely aware of the cultural divisions which inform her mother's reticence on certain 'inside' issues of Chinese emigrant life: "They would not tell us children because we had been born among ghosts, were taught by ghosts, and were ourselves ghost-like" (*The Woman Warrior* 183). The daughter herself works to exacerbate this gap by declaring her rebellion against her mother in the opening words of the first section, "No-Name Woman." She flaunts her mother's prohibitive injunction over the story she is about to expose: "'You must not tell anyone,' my mother said, 'what I am about to tell you . . .'" (3). The daughter is aware of her status as a traitor who undermines the mother's official version of the family history.

of her parents' involvement in schemes of "Oriental" cruelty (190). She imagines that her mother is keeping her from going to college in the United States and is preparing to sell her into a life of forced marriage, slavery, and torture in China (190). Alternatively, she imagines that her mother wants to lock her into a traditional arranged marriage to a repulsive "Fresh-off-the-Boat" immigrant from China or marry her off to a grotesque mentally retarded Chinese man, a "monster" and a "birth defect" (195), who loiters around her parent's laundry (194-97). The narrator eventually grows out of these Orientalist fantasies but the narrative uses them to fill out the story of her childhood. As mistakes, these perceptions are not omitted from the narrative but included and highlighted as central elements in the narrator's journey to cultural maturity. The narrator's early lurid fantasies are certainly entertaining; I am not criticizing Kingston for relying on them to tell a story. What is shortsighted is the resistance to the possibility that *The Woman Warrior* can collude in the textual pleasures of Orientalism.

The demonstration of Orientalist views by an Asian American narrator is not a simple matter of one's indoctrination into a pattern of cultural self-

The daughter's coming to terms with her family history and her ethnic identity involves an individuation through the symbolic annihilation of her projected misrecognitions of her mother. The daughter emerges out of her mother's shadow and is no longer symbolically dependent on her mother for the psychic grounding of her own existence. She is free to relate to her as an equal and separate entity. The daughter's rebellion with which *The Woman Warrior* opens is simply the initial stage of a maturation process that gets the daughter "out of hating range" (52) so that she can reconcile her differences with her mother and participate in the concluding mutually blended talk story (206) between mother and daughter.

The daughter's strategy of maternal and ethnic disclosure is intimately connected to her feelings about her mother. The daughter is engaged in a love/hate relationship with her mother in a complex dynamic which includes her coming of age in a seemingly repressive Chinese immigrant household in the seemingly liberal United States of the 1960s. She feels threatened by her mother and charges that her mother's cutting of her frenum as a child was a deliberate attempt to silence her (*The Woman Warrior* 202). The daughter, as a child, also concocts elaborate fantasies

loathing, but is also a taking of power by the assumption of the dominant cultural privilege of racist confession. One of the unique privileges of being a member of a dominant culture is the freedom to behave as a racist with impunity. While this is not a freedom that one should ideally aspire to, it is a definite sign of the power that members of dominant cultures have. The confession of the racist sins of one's past is an acknowledgement of one's recovery from that behaviour, but when this confession is made by a racially oppressed subject, it can mark that marginal subject's entry into the dominant culture by association as a person who is powerful enough to be able to admit to racist sins.

The added benefit of empowering oneself through racism or condescension directed at one's own culture is that it does not disturb power relations with outside cultural groups. Since ethnic self-abuse does not alter power relations between ethnic groups or between the ethnic group and the dominant culture, it is politically harmless and in fact, from a conservative civil perspective, responsible in its internal rather than external dispersal of racist sentiment. Kingston is astute enough to sense the ways her book can be cynically reduced by critics but she

has been surprised at the extent of the Orientalist misreading of her book by American reviewers ("Cultural" 55). The Woman Warrior is centrally preoccupied with power struggles inside the family between the mother and the daughter. For most of the book, the stakes are defined by the daughter's anxiety over her ability to come up with competing versions of her mother's champion 'talk-stories.' We can see that Kingston is trying to open readers to the complexity of the narrator's character by presenting the moral ambivalence of her struggle for power.

The conflict with the mother, like the struggle with the mother's generation, is symbolically manifested as a pursuit for name. In China, the mother as a doctor is a formidable figure of power. The mother's elegance remains uncompromised by the delivering of babies in beds and pigsties, and the yanking of crooked bones:

Nor did she change her name: Brave Orchid. Professional women have the right to use their maiden names if they like. Even when she emigrated, my mother kept Brave Orchid, adding no American name nor holding one in reserve for American emergencies. (The Woman Warrior 77)

The mother's hold over her own name is related to the achievement of her medical training in college. Going to college is one of the main items in the daughter's

the No-Name Woman, as a woman whose capacity for self-authoring is jeopardized by maternal and communal codes of silence, patriarchal Chinese tradition, and racist American society.

The daughter's relationship to her mother, the novel's central relationship, is also the central psychoanalytic Orientalist structure in the narrative. Subtitled "Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts," The Woman Warrior's preoccupation with memory, childhood, and the imaginary makes it particularly amenable to a psychoanalytic interpretation. A psychoanalytic reading of The Woman Warrior as a story told from the perspective of a single narrator carries with it different evaluations of the autobiographical perspective. From the standpoint of Sidonie Smith's feminist theories of women's autobiography, one of the functions of the autobiographical frame is that it valorizes women's writing as testaments of self-authorization and self-determination. In addition, writers like Kingston, who use the autobiographical 'I' to bring in the voices of others from the family and ethnic community, are seen by Smith as feminist innovators who break down the masculine, individualist singularity of the autobiographical 'I' and allow for a more contingent, multiple perspective:

primal confession/declaration of independence that she spills out to her mother at the end of The Woman Warrior (202). The daughter thinks that her wish to go to college is a radical departure from the ancient traditions of the household and has to be reminded by her mother that she is not the first woman in the family to go to college. This primal declaration, and the narrative of The Woman Warrior as a whole, represents the daughter's struggle to make a name for herself, a project that reveals the daughter's admiration for her mother, an admiration that exceeds the daughter's own awareness of it.

In "No-Name Woman," the daughter's rebellion against her mother and her mother culture is in an early phase and is, at this point, an entirely negative project. The only way the daughter feels able to make a name for herself is to make the most radically antithetical identification possible against the mother. As part of her rebellion, the daughter appropriates the mother's prohibitive injunction against pre-marital sex, the story of the No-Name Woman, and subverts it in a reinterpretation that serves her own causes as a woman coming into sexual and political maturity in the United States. The daughter, whose narrative never reveals her name, identifies with

A postmodern work, it [The Woman Warrior] exemplifies the potential for works from the marginalized to challenge the ideology of individualism and with it the ideology of gender. Recognizing the inextricable relationship between an individual's sense of "self" and the community's stories of selfhood, Kingston self-consciously reads herself into existence through the stories her culture tells about women. Using autobiography to create identity, she breaks down the hegemony of formal "autobiography" and breaks out of the silence that has bound her culturally to discover a resonant voice of her own. (Smith 150-51)

Psychoanalytic Orientalism evolves in this context because the author's marginalization is not of the same quality as that of her subjects. Her apparently "inextricable" relationship to her community's stories of selfhood involves a development of a sense of self whose process of individuation requires a distancing from the community. Furthermore, the act of "reading herself into existence" involves, however self-consciously, a recourse to the very hegemonic ideology of individualism that Smith claims Kingston is breaking down.

I have already indicated that Kingston consistently associates silence with the Chinese emigrant community and with maternal and parental prohibitive injunctions ("Don't tell," advised my parents...") (The Woman Warrior 184, 185). Smith's autobiographical criticism implies that these ethnic

kinship ties bind her culturally and that she must "break out" if she is "to discover a resonant voice of her own" (151). Autobiographical criticism readily assumes that the discovery of a resonant voice of one's own comes out of an impoverished culture of silence when it is more apparent that the narrator breaks into a culturally rich and vocal Chinese women's tradition of 'talk story' preceded by evidence of embedded feminist resistances in traditional myth and family stories, and by the powerful example of her mother, the "champion talker" (The Woman Warrior 202).

While the daughter as narrator speaks autobiographically, all the other characters are represented *biographically*. What is seen as virtue from an autobiographical perspective--a woman speaking in her own voice but conveying other voices in a deconstructive feminist practice of postmodern autobiography--reveals itself within the racial community as the autobiographer's representation of other voices from her own relatively privileged position. This does not necessarily imply that the autobiographer acts as a unifying ideological filter. Both psychoanalytic and postmodern autobiographical theories recognize the subject as divided or fragmented by competing and often contradictory drives. However,

Warrior largely documents imagined experiences over real ones. The narrator is concerned with filling in the empty, silent, repressed spaces within stories and lives: the unspeakable story of the No-Name Woman, the mother's life in China before the daughter was born, the mother's and daughter's shameful secret coercions. While my critique of Kristeva's psycholinguistic Orientalism remains firm, I do not intend by this critique to suggest that there is no field of tension within the subjects in The Woman Warrior. I insist on recalling the censure of Kristeva's Orientalist gestures precisely because the arena of competing drives within the subject opened up by psychoanalytic discourse exposes the internal drama of doubt and conflict often ignored by critics. A consideration of the subject from a psychoanalytic perspective does not inherently preclude personal and political agency, but the failure to examine the interpretive habits embedded in literary writing and psychoanalytic theory may compromise the emancipatory value of these projects.

Orientalism creeps into The Woman Warrior through the daughter's process of self-invention and the imaginative narratives she projects onto her mother and her mother's culture. The mother presents instructive challenges to the daughter in the form of stories such

psychoanalytic readings also acknowledge the symbolic and non-mimetic nature of the author's representations.

In the context of racial and sexual representation, the framing of social texts and ideologies through the narratives of psychoanalysis offers a way out of unproductive and interminable questions of the text's faithfulness to its real life subject, a quandary that besieges autobiographical criticism. I have agreed with earlier criticism that considers Kristeva's social application of her psycholinguistic theory as a failure because of its Orientalism. But as long as the participating elements of a psycholinguistic process are not typed as whole cultures or genders, Kristeva's theory of poetic language can offer legitimate insights into European cultural beliefs about the creation of language and the subject.

Psych-analytic and poststructuralist approaches to the subject by Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault have been used by critics such as Leslie Rabine, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, and Lee Quinby to illuminate the way in which autobiographical narratives of individuation and maturation enforce the dominant constructions of selfhood. Despite its designation as autobiography by its original publisher, The Woman

as the No-Name Woman:

Whenever she had to warn us about life, my mother told stories that ran like this one, a story to grow up on. She tasted our strength to establish realities... (5)

When this function is grasped by the daughter, she reads into it a typological formation:

Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America. (5)

The daughter already segregates American and Chinese culture into presence and absence. Chinese experience is already invisible because it only exists through verbal accounts while America is the "solid" presence of daily lived experience.

Stories the mother tells about China are one of the very few ways that the daughter in America manages to gain access to her ancestral land: "when we were wide awake and lucid, my mother funnelled China into our ears" (The Woman Warrior 76). The child's relationship to China is highly dependent on the mother's subjective and selective accounts. The acquisition of Chinese identity is thus associated with the period of strong maternal ties in childhood and with mobile, contingent understandings of Chinese identity. China inevitably resembles the infantile realm of Kristeva's semiotic or chora; while "solid"



America grows in likeness to Kristeva's symbolic order.

Sidonie Smith's perceptive summary that The Woman Warrior consists of five episodic "confrontations with the fictions of self-representation and with the autobiographical possibilities embedded in cultural fictions" (151) allows us to analyze each section as an Orientalist projection of misplaced fantasies about China and its place in "solid America." The daughter's positive versions of herself as a legendary Chinese woman warrior in "White Tigers," and of her mother as a heroic Chinese exorcist and doctor in "Shaman," are rebutted with negative versions of her mother as a disastrously domineering sister in "At the Western Palace," and of the daughter as a cruel grade school bully in "A Song for the Barbarian Reed Pipe." All this is an attempt "to sort out what's just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living" (The Woman Warrior 205).

Edward Said has noticed the suggestion in Orientalist writing that the Orient is a well spring of "deep generative energies" (Said 188). Making Chinese American culture interesting to other American audiences requires the willingness to mine one's family and ethnicity as a cultural resource. The narrator of

forbidden secret, and is used by the mother as the subject of a moral fable of sexual instruction and prohibition for the daughter. The daughter is told that her aunt was a sinful woman who broke the laws of heaven and earth and whose suicide, while horrible, was a form of cosmic justice.

The aunt is not given a voice of her own; her character is defined and appropriated first by the mother, then by the daughter. The daughter's narration re-writes the mother's version of the aunt's tale with extravagance, fleshing out the bleak and horrifying facts of the mother's scare story with imagined details such as the aunt's beauty, sexuality, the texture of her daily life and the nature of her encounter with the father of her child. This is a way for the teenage American daughter who is coming into her sexual maturity to get back at her mother and overcome what the daughter would consider to be her mother's suffocating traditions and oppressive moralistic scare tactics. The daughter writes desire over death, sexuality over rape, speech over silence. However, the aunt still remains, inevitably since she is dead, silent. She is simply spoken for by someone who is sympathetic but who still has openly admitted internal motivations for recovering her story and life.

The Woman Warrior adopts the rhetoric of an encyclopedic quest for Chinese American cultural detail in her public address to Chinese Americans (6). If The Woman Warrior can be said to introduce new cultural and generic elements into the canon of American, British, and European autobiographical writing (Eakin, Smith, Rubenstein), a reverse influence (whereby dominant European and American cultural formations of Orientalism are absorbed by The Woman Warrior) should also be possible. The denial of this influence in favour of rosy visions of multicultural harmony prevents readings of how the subjects in The Woman Warrior respond to the enormous social pressures of assimilation and acculturation that they face as non-white Americans in the 1970s.

The story of the No Name Woman is the story of the narrator's aunt, her father's only sister. Villagers terrorize the No Name Woman and vandalize her family's home when it is discovered that she has become pregnant while her husband is away in America. After the attack, the No Name Woman gives birth to a baby which she destroys with herself by leaping into a well. Raising this subject in the family becomes strictly taboo. The nameless aunt becomes the family's dark,

Kingston and her narrator want it this way so that they can pour their own ways of telling into the No Name Woman. The narrator does not want to recover the name, and is not invested in the historical excavation of the facts of her aunt's existence. She simply wants the right to use the aunt as a symbol for her own purposes.

We recognize in the mother's activity what Nancy Chodorow calls the reproduction of mothering. The mother uses the No-Name Woman's example to tell a morality tale in order to get her daughter to assimilate the patriarchal ideology of the "good" mother and wife. This ideology ensures that women adhere to the proprietary laws and disciplines placed over their sexual and reproductive powers. At the cost of otherwise losing their own self-esteem, women are tasked with the surveillance of their own bodies. This ensures that the ownership and control of the woman's sexual and reproductive capacity is reserved for the exclusive use of her husband, her culturally sanctioned male master. The mother's story also functions as a vehicle for the transmission of cultural ideologies of Chinese identity. The daughter's subversion of her mother's tale also has additional thematic resonances: a modern American teenage daughter's rebellion against her overprotective Chinese mother's old ways, a

feminist rebellion against patriarchy, and the American daughter's advocacy of American principles of social justice based on individual freedom over Chinese codes of communal and familial conduct.

The daughter's transformation of her aunt, the No Name Woman, within the economy of the daughter's rebellion against her mother, is an enormously complex site of conflict between competing social ideologies. The body onto which these conflicts are written and projected is the dead body of the No Name Woman. The daughter, in an inquisitive and rebellious frame of mind, tears at the loose ends of the mother's simple, stern parable of the dangers of extra-marital sex (a parable which functions in this telling as the mother's warning to her daughter against pre-marital sex). The daughter finds serious gaps and silences in her mother's story and attempts to fill these in with her own imaginative interpretations. The daughter's curiosity is drawn to the issue of sex. Was her aunt, the No Name Woman, raped? Was she having an affair? The daughter reconstructs possible scenes of the aunt's encounter with the man who made her pregnant. The systematic way in which these accounts shift in their characterizations of the aunt and the man reveal the gradual refiguring of the No Name Woman's story from

resistance in the aunt's story. Both the mother's original version, and the interpretation that the aunt was murdered by patriarchy, fashion the aunt as a victim. The narrator decides to subvert this reading by infusing the aunt's actions with intention. She recasts her aunt as a self-determining subject who acts within her limited circumstances and resists becoming the passive object of uncontrollable external forces. The aunt's subversiveness hinges on her story being retold as a tale of sexual subjectivity.

In order to see the aunt as a subject with intention and will, it becomes necessary to rethink the aunt's transgression as the crime of being an individual in a rigidly communal society. The aunt is persecuted for her individuality, for using "a secret voice, a separate attentiveness" (*The Woman Warrior* 11). She is punished by the village "for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them" (13). By articulating what is fashioned as the aunt's feminist resistance within these oppositions, the narrator situates the feminist critique within a rhetorical system of oppositions somewhat reminiscent of American Cold War views of Chinese Communism. As the American narrator's "forerunner" (*The Woman Warrior* 8), the aunt undergoes a persecution by the village for

the mother's ideological use of it as a morality tale and a disciplinary tactic, to the daughter's appropriation of the No Name Woman as a symbol of resistance against the oppressive strictures of Chinese patriarchy embedded in the traditional laws of kinship and community.

The narrator's initial interpretation of the story's facts leads her to three conclusions: that her aunt was the victim of a rape (*The Woman Warrior* 6,7); that the rapist was "not a stranger" but a regular member of the village (6); and that the rapist's behaviour reflected standard attitudes within the village: "The other man was not, after all, much different from her husband. They both gave orders: she followed" (7). The narrator reaches the conclusion that the rapist organized the raid against the aunt. The narrator arrives at a feminist critique of patriarchy that implicates the entire village, the rapist being merely one of society's agents. While the narrator dwells on the theme of the society's ideological collusion with the rapist long enough to make the systemic critique of Chinese patriarchy apparent, she steers away from the idea that the aunt was murdered by patriarchy to develop another feminist position based on recovering embedded narratives of

her crime of individuality that is reminiscent of the Chinese Communist purge of Westernized intellectual dissidents. In any case, recovering the aunt's subversive agency is a process that maps a political ideological struggle over the process of the libidinal empowerment of the aunt (and the narrator) so that the release of sexual desire coincides with the "rare urge West" (*The Woman Warrior* 8) for an American-style identity based on the concept of individual freedom and liberty.

The effort to make an individual out of the aunt by stressing the intentionality of each of her actions makes her increasingly dependent on an androcentric patriarchal ideology. The narrator sympathetically scrutinizes the minutiae of her aunt's last moments for evidence of subject performances: she "may have gone to the pigsty as a last act of responsibility" (*The Woman Warrior* 15); "[c]arrying the baby to the well shows loving" (15). However, making the aunt's protection of the child's father's name a deliberate act forces the narrator to cast the aunt as even more complicitous in patriarchy than she was when she was a victim, when her silence could be interpreted as involuntary or as the result of censoring by the narrator's mother.

The narrator associates the aunt's maternal



impulses with sacrifice for patriarchy when she says that the aunt "would protect this child as she had protected its father" (*The Woman Warrior* 15). The aunt's protection of her inseminator's name has to be seen as heroic and sacrificial if we are seeking to empower the aunt on the assumption that her acts were individual and intentional:

She kept the man's name to herself throughout her labour and dying; she did not accuse him that he be punished with her. To save her inseminator's name she gave silent birth. (*The Woman Warrior* 11)

Caught between implicating patriarchy while leaving the aunt victimized, and making the aunt powerful but supportive of patriarchy, the narrator chooses the latter. By choosing to represent the aunt as the intentional protector of her inseminator's name, the narrator defuses the critique of systemic Chinese patriarchy that was begun when the narrator considered the man to be a rapist living under the immunity of the patriarchal society's norms. The inordinate concern with making the sexual encounter not a rape but a choice on her aunt's part leads to the legitimization of the man who commits "rapes" (*The Woman Warrior* 7) into, first, a neutral "inseminator" (11), and eventually a "father" (15). The naturalization and domestication of the rapist is realized without irony

that the mother possesses in distinction to her daughter's 'distortions' or 'fictions.' The daughter's narration as a whole constantly disrupts the establishment of clear boundaries between truth and fiction (or falsehood), reality and representation, autobiography and novel. Even if it was possible to reconstruct a supposedly accurate account of the aunt's life free of the mother's and the daughter's self-motivated biases, proving that the daughter misrepresents her aunt's life would only confirm what the narrator already confesses to, a love of twisting stories into designs and being a "knot-maker" (*The Woman Warrior* 163).

The "great power" of the narrator's mother "talking story" (*The Woman Warrior* 20) admits varieties of truth that complicate the stability of so-called objective facts (66). Even the mother's supposedly true telling of the events is arranged for an ideological purpose and serves a highly motivated subjective interest. Whether an actual woman in China was raped or not does not change the fact that the mother's story is a representation, and, as a representation, it is the site of an ideological struggle between two subjects. My analysis focuses on how the transformation of the aunt's story from a rape

by the narrator who needs to see the aunt as having been in control, even when it may appear more beneficial for a feminist practice to recognize the rape as rape and not to romanticize it as a seduction fantasy. The narrator is unable to deal with the rape and needs some way to contain its horror: "I want her fear to have lasted just as long as rape lasted so that the fear could have been contained. No drawn-out fear." (*The Woman Warrior* 7) Transforming the rape into a seduction is a matter not only of self-preservation but of self-invention. The narrator admits in this regard that her transformation of the aunt from rape victim to a desiring, willing, sexual explorer is a self-acknowledged construction: "Unless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help" (8). Given that the daughter is told this story because she has started to menstruate (5), we can understand the daughter's invention as a mental exercise in sexualizing a familiar (and familial) body as fantasy in preparation for inhabiting the space of her own, newly enabled, sexual body.

Representing a rape victim as desiring her rapist is a problematic gesture in any culture. I want to make it clear that my critique of this representation does not argue that there are such things as 'facts'

to a romanticized, consensual sexual encounter reflects the ideological forces involved in the struggle between mother and daughter, and signals the emergence of the new cultural and personal priorities of the daughter.

The daughter replaces violence with desire so that the story of a man's power over a woman can be read as the story of a woman's power over a man. This results in the sexualization of the victim and the domestication of the rapist. Over the course of the narration the man who "commanded her [the aunt] to lie with him and be his secret evil" (*The Woman Warrior* 6) becomes "her friend" (8), "her imminent lover" (10), and finally, "her lover-in-hiding" (13) who, instead of organizing the raid against her (7), now shares the role of victim with the aunt: "The villagers came to show my aunt and her lover-in-hiding a broken house" (13). Similarly, the aunt progresses from a victim, to lover, to seductress. At one point, the narrator experiments briefly with the image of her aunt as a "wild woman" who keeps "rollicking company" (8).

An important mechanism through which the aunt is brought into being as a sexual subject is the economy of the male heterosexual gaze. The narrator uses the perspective of male heterosexual interest to reconstitute the aunt's subjectivity out of an old

family photograph:

A bun could have been contrived to escape into black streamers blowing in the wind or in quiet wisps about her face, but only the older women in our picture album wear buns. (The Woman Warrior 9)

The narrator conceives the aunt's individuality through an encounter that resembles the mirror-stage in the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan: "At the mirror my aunt combed individuality into her bob." (8) The narrator empowers her aunt as an individual who, instead of being turned into an object by the male gaze, is able to actively absorb masculine sexual interest as a means of satisfying her own desires. Attracting men becomes the labour that she undertakes to confirm her existence as a subject:

To sustain her being in love, she often worked at herself in the mirror, guessing at the colors and shapes that would interest him, changing them frequently in order to hit on the right combination. She wanted him to look back. (9)

Adherence to this system creates a dependency on the masculine sexual gaze, with the narrator left hoping "that the man my aunt loved appreciated a smooth brow, that he wasn't just a tits-and-ass man" (9). Individuality in this case is defined as the successful internalization of aesthetic criteria determined by the sexual desires of men. The female subject gains power

characters who bear little resemblance to the sensual Oriental women of Flaubert's fiction except that in their positive strength, they still manage to confirm Said's observation that "the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire," and "deep generative energies" (Said 188). The Orientalist function of sexualizing the aunt by the narrator is achieved by placing her in a familial narrative of Occidental exploration, and by producing gendered binaries between the Orient (China) and the Occident (America). These desires are narrated within a heroic masculine narrative of the exploration and appropriation of material wealth from foreign lands. The aunt's rape is transformed into the aunt's desire by associating her with the spirit of capitalist adventure that inspires her brothers:

She was the only daughter; her four brothers went with her father, husband, and uncles "out on the road" and for some years became western men. When the goods were divided among the family, three of the brothers took land, and the youngest, my father, chose an education. After my grandparents gave their daughter away to her husband's family, they had dispensed all the adventure and all the property. They expected her alone to keep the traditional ways, which her brothers, now among the barbarians, could fumble without detection. The heavy, deep-rooted women were to maintain the past against the flood, safe for

only because she can absorb and manipulate the desire directed to her by men. In this case, a married woman living at home without her husband is not seen as effectively deploying her subjectivity but as wasting away in a state of narcissistic self-absorption. Without men the scenario is that she "may have been unusually beloved, the precious only daughter, spoiled and mirror gazing because of the affection the family lavished on her" (The Woman Warrior 10). The woman is not an individual until she circulates exogamously in the wider society as an object of masculine heterosexual interest and exchange. The narrator does not consider familial nurturing and recognition by one's own family as an acceptable life within the social symbolic order.

The daughter/narrator's sexual fantasy of the aunt's life in the "No-Name Woman" section of The Woman Warrior offers escape both for the daughter constrained by the mother's moral strictures and the aunt "caught in a slow life" (8) in China. A significant aspect of the Orientalism that Said elaborates in his famous thesis on Orientalism is the persistent association, at many intervals in French and British Orientalist writing, of the Orient "with the escapism of sexual fantasy" (Said 190).<sup>1</sup> Kingston's women are strong

returning. But the rare urge west had fixed upon our family, and so my aunt crossed boundaries not delineated in space. (The Woman Warrior 8)

The narrator thus sexualizes the aunt by placing her within masculine narratives of capitalist "westward" expansion:<sup>2</sup> exploration, discovery, and appropriation of wealth from the Gold Mountain (America) to China. As the only female among her siblings, she is narrated under the immigrant thematic of "the rare urge west" as having her own subjectivity, of crossing "boundaries not delineated in space." The No Name Woman is made into a desiring subject by placing her within the circuit of masculine desire for goods and property, wealth, the dream of riches in America (Gold Mountain). The narrator casts the No Name Woman here as a rebel against tradition, against the "heavy, deep-rooted women" who "maintain the past against the flood, safe for returning," who belong to the type idolized by Kristeva in About Chinese Women. Kingston's No Name Woman rebels by identifying with the West and with the men, and by developing heterosexual desire within the frame of the masculine lust for adventure and capital.

The daughter believes that sexualizing the aunt produces a transgressive identity for a Chinese woman and therefore produces a profoundly anti-Orientalist

identity. This identity that cannot be mapped according to the androcentric, gendered division of roles which places the lusty, dynamic, male explorers on one side, and the libidinally, spatially circumscribed, traditional Chinese women on the other. "Women in the old China did not choose" (The Woman Warrior 6), but the aunt chose sex and was punished, showing how radical and powerful she was to elicit the fear and violence of the whole community:

Even as her hair lured her imminent lover, many other men looked at her. Uncles, cousins, nephews, brothers would have looked, too, had they been home between journeys. Perhaps they had already been restraining their curiosity, and they left, fearful that their glances, like a field of nesting birds, might be startled and caught. Poverty hurt, and that was their first reason for leaving. But another, final reason for leaving the crowded house was the never-said. (The Woman Warrior 10)

Sexuality is the fundamental way in which the aunt is figured as transgressor who gives up family for indulgence in unexplored frontiers of experience (The Woman Warrior 8).

The power that the daughter recovers and celebrates in the No Name Woman is based on a sexuality, perhaps incestuous, that takes on the proportions of a revolutionary force, primarily figured through her act of birthing. With "each step a rushing

a private life, secret and apart from them. (The Woman Warrior 12-13)

The village structure, "balanced and held in equilibrium by time and land" (12) figures the aunt's "crime" of individual and sexual liberation not so much as a social act but as an act of nature that threatens the entire foundational fabric of their society. Strangely enough, the human being who flares up into violence, the person who makes the break in the "roundness" is not the inseminator but the aunt. In order for the narrator to affirm the aunt's subjectivity and individuality, she has to give her aunt the role of the agent over the scene such that the aunt's role as a victim of rape has to be denied in order to make the case that she was in control as the scene's actor. In the early phase, the narrator sees the aunt as being violated by the man who impregnates her. The narrator converts the agency of what the man does to her aunt by characterizing the aunt as the violator of the moral tranquillity of the community. Like the woman warrior Fa Mu Lan of the subsequent section, the aunt gains her power by assuming a male model of achievement, in this case as the sexual aggressor who injects moral chaos into her village.

While the narrator's own consciousness is raised

out into emptiness," the aunt runs to the pigsty where "[i]t was good to have a fence enclosing her, a tribal person alone" (The Woman Warrior 14). The aunt serves as an universal transcendent agent:

For hours she lay on the ground, alternately body and space. Sometimes a vision of normal comfort obliterated reality. . . . When these pictures burst, the stars drew yet further apart. Black space opened. (The Woman Warrior 14)

The aunt's labour in primal, elemental solitude expresses what Kristeva considers in her essay "Women's Time" the fundamental concern of a "symbolic denominator" in the problems of "reproduction, survival of the species, life and death, the body, sex and symbol" ("Women's Time" 189).

The daughter/narrator falls back into an Orientalist typology, not at the level of social portraiture which she has scrupulously avoided, but at a universal level, which establishes the Chinese woman as an independent order of discourse and as a transcendent singular alterity:

one human being flaring up into violence could open up a black hole, a maelstrom that pulled in the sky. The frightened villagers who depend on one another to maintain the real, went to my aunt to show her a personal, physical representation of the break she had made in the "roundness." Misalliating couples snapped off the future, which was to be embodied in true offspring. The villagers punished her for acting as if she could have

enough to become aware that her silence over the aunt's story participates in her continued punishment (The Woman Warrior 16) and that "[t]he real punishment was not the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family's deliberately forgetting her" (16), the narrator's project is not fundamentally that of recovery: "In the twenty years since I heard this story I have not asked for details nor said my aunt's name; I do not know it." (16) The narrator does this because she feels that "[p]eople who can comfort the dead can also chase after them to hurt them further--a reverse ancestor worship" (16). Eschewing the idolatry of fact, the narrator's investment in her aunt is solely for the aunt's capacity to signify in the present as symbol.

The aunt is deliberately written into a feminist genealogy to counter the oppressive gynophobic ideology of the narrator's family. To this end, the aunt is constructed as a "forerunner" (The Woman Warrior 8). The aunt represents the daughter's search for a symbolic matrilineage for her struggles in America. The daughter takes the mystery of the aunt's life and death as an interpretive, speculative and imaginative challenge to flesh out the bare bones of her story. Kingston ultimately places faith in the powers of

representation and artistic creation to illuminate facts and extend their validity and social force. While the daughter's social goals would not be inconsistent with the facts of the recovered incident of the raped, nameless woman, the daughter deliberately chooses to treat her aunt as a symbol and a discourse and not a living fact.

The new mapping of the social order that the reinvented perspective of the No Name Woman allows is a renewal of masculine ideologies, this time in America rather than in China. What appears in standard pedagogical feminist readings of The Woman Warrior as a feminist transformation in the passage from China to America, from oppression to liberation, is in fact a much more complex and ambivalent set of transformations. The benefits of American society for the immigrant Chinese woman and her American raised daughter are certainly substantial, but the narrator consistently tempers her energetic enthusiasm for America with careful reflections on the ambiguous and even negative results of living in America. The critique of life in America begins in The Woman Warrior with the second section of the book, entitled "White Tigers."

creation by literary critics, journalists, and even her own editor (Bonetti).<sup>3</sup> At the same time, many literary critics (often the same ones who see Fa Mu Lan as Kingston's persona and mouthpiece), argue that Kingston's text importantly subverts mythic identification. The Woman Warrior, they alternately argue, subverts stereotypes and idealizations of the woman and the Oriental by exposing the historical and cultural specificity of the Chinese American woman narrator's experiences of her "real" life.

These contradictory approaches are accommodated by declaring The Woman Warrior a "dialogic text" (Schueller 421), and a "postmodern work" (Smith 150) that is generously open to multiple, even all, interpretive possibilities. Quinby suggests that the author "promotes 'new forms of subjectivity' by refusing the totalizing individuality of the modern era" (Quinby 297). Smith advances the claim that The Woman Warrior "exemplifies the potential for works from the marginalized to challenge the ideology of individualism and with it the ideology of gender" (Smith 150). Schueller forwards the claim that the text "subverts singular definitions of racial and ethnic identity" (Schueller 421). While subtly aware that the process of forming the textual subject

Roberta Rubenstein's classification of the "White Tiger" episode in The Woman Warrior as "a fairy-tale epic" (176) aptly describes the Fa Mu Lan story, but it obscures the significance of the contextualizing role played by the anti-mythic narrative that follows. After the narrator comes down from her warrior fantasy in the first half of the section, her reflections turn to the ways in which American society is sexually, racially, and economically oppressive. The narrator's highly satisfying fantasy role as a "female avenger" contrasts sharply with the "disappointment" of her life in America (45) and the "confusing" news from China (50). Unlike the legend, the horrifying stories of Communist repression reported by her relatives in China do not allow the narrator to form a vision of the ancestral land that coheres meaningfully or positively with her narrative of self-realization.

The ideal that Fa Mu Lan is the literary manifestation of Kingston herself has nevertheless inspired many to associate Kingston, the author, with her fictional representation, Fa Mu Lan. This is done sympathetically as a way of celebrating the author's fighting spirit as a popular and critically successful autobiographer, writer, feminist, and multiculturalist. Kingston has been interpreted through her fictional

involves ambivalent, often contradictory forces, these feminist analyses are nevertheless drawn, perhaps by ideological sympathies hardened by the intense censure that feminism in academia has received from reactionary criticism in America, to present Kingston as a hero of contemporary feminism, postmodernism, and multiculturalism.

Schueller claims grandly that The Woman Warrior "subverts all forms that have the potential of providing cultural stability and unity" (433). Quinby's formulation of "ideographic selfhood," inspired by Foucault (Quinby 297), holds forth the dream that this practice, demonstrated by The Woman Warrior, is capable of "going beyond imposed limits" (Quinby 316) as they have "been constituted in the modern era in the West" (303). While I am not at odds with the emancipatory discourses of this American feminist criticism and literary theory, I feel that the desire to affirm Kingston's book, however politically useful and necessary, unreasonably tasks this single text with the redemption of the discursive institutions of an entire civilization's conceptual procedures. As time goes on, it becomes increasingly apparent that these genuinely felt critical narratives of feminist and multicultural affirmation reflect an effort to see

the continuing modernity of a literary work from the mid 1970s.

I do not deny that The Woman Warrior anticipates in many ways modes of feminist thought that were not widely circulating in American feminist literary and theoretical circles until years later, but the desire and the political need to see The Woman Warrior as a relentlessly current representation of postmodern feminist and multicultural practice effaces the ways in which Kingston's text also sits comfortably within conventional arrangements of sexual and racial identity. The awareness of the theoretical and cultural significance of The Woman Warrior suffers from its enshrinement as an always contemporary, always visionary document when it is in many ways a unique product of the 1970s when the militant rhetoric of the racial protest movements of the 1960s was in popular circulation among American feminists. American feminism of the 1980s and 1990s has benefitted rather than suffered from the critique of the predominantly white, liberal, middle class, heterosexual feminism of the 1970s. It stands to reason that readings of The Woman Warrior can be enriched by perspectives that evaluate the aspects of Kingston's text that make it specific to its time within the recent history of

the society of the narrator's time.<sup>4</sup> Smith, whose inquiry on this point is the most elaborate, is especially perceptive of the fact that the narrator's "fantasy of mythic identification" with Fa Mu Lan "enables her to enter the realm of heroic masculine pursuits" (157) at the cost of the erasure of her sexual identity (158). Fighting in a culture that executes women who disguise themselves as soldiers (The Woman Warrior 39), Fa Mu Lan is forced to obscure her pregnancy by wearing her armour so that she appears as a "powerful, big man" (39). Smith is motivated to observe that Fa Mu Lan's story works to "reproduce an androcentric paradigm of identity and selfhood" which allows her to "serve the symbolic order in 'perfect filiality'" (158-9). The desire to interpret The Woman Warrior within an idealist, utopian framework, however, sometimes overdetermines even Smith's conclusions. One of the sites in the text that has been closely read through this approach is the vision that the narrator, as Fa Mu Lan, has during the course of her training as a warrior:

I saw two people made of gold dancing the earth's dances. They turned so perfectly that together they were the axis of the earth's turning. They were light; they were molten, changing gold-Chinese lion dancers, African lion dancers in midstep.... I am watching the centuries pass in moments

American feminist theories of the female subject.

At the centre of this ambivalence and transition is the figure of the woman warrior. Kingston has reported in interview that she did not come up with the title of her book, and that The Woman Warrior was a title suggested by her editor. She describes her initial reaction to the suggestion that she as a writer is a warrior like Fa Mu Lan as "very negative" and repudiates the idea that she associates with Fa Mu Lan: "I don't feel that she's me. . . I wish I had not had a metaphor of a warrior person who uses weapons and goes to war" (Bonetti qtd. in Aubrey 80). Literary critics, however, still remain enamoured by the vision of an active and powerful literary politics that the military metaphor evokes and continue to describe her as a "word warrior" (Goellnicht 129) and a "writer-warrior" (Quinby 310).

Smith, Rubenstein, and Rabine suggest that "the image of the woman warrior reinforces traditional gender roles" (Rubenstein 172) and that Fa Mu Lan's empowerment is predicated on becoming "a social man" (Rabine 492). The fact that Fa Mu Lan has to pretend to be a man in order to be accepted as a warrior underscores the pervasiveness of the androcentric ideology of gender in Fa Mu Lan's society as well in

because suddenly I understand time, which is spinning and fixed like the North Star. And I understand how working and hoeing are dancing; how peasant clothes are golden, as king's clothes are golden; how one of the dancers is always a man and the other a woman. (27)

Kathryn VanSpanckeren in "The Asian Literary Background of The Woman Warrior" (1991) and Rabine have observed in the male and female dancers the Taoist symbolism of Yin, the masculine, and Yang, the feminine, from the I Ching (Rabine 476, VanSpanckeren 47). VanSpanckeren enlarges on this point to observe that "Kingston's works as a whole do justice to male and female principles" (VanSpanckeren 50). Schueller, however, feels differently about this passage:

Kingston here seems to attempt a move beyond gender difference to a higher "unity" beyond gender. But this vision is only an initial move in the attempt to question traditional definitions of gender and deny gender hierarchies. (Schueller 426)

Whatever might be said about Kingston's works as a whole or about the status of this scene relative to Kingston's overall aims in the book, it is clear that in this passage, as Rabine aptly observes, "[g]ender is as necessary as it is arbitrary" (476).

Schueller specifically observes how "Kingston here seems to attempt to move beyond gender difference to a higher 'unity' beyond gender." While the dancers do



indeed transform as "light" and then "molten, changing gold," they change only their ethnicities and their accompanying objects:

Chinese lion dancers, African lion dancers .  
 . . Javanese bells deepen in midring to  
 Indian bells, Hindu Indian, American Indian.  
 . . . Before my eyes, gold bells shredded  
 into gold tassles [sic]. . . (The Woman  
 Warrior 27).

Rabine also interprets the changing of the dancers to be a "changing into each other" and a commingling of genders:

This couple is reminiscent of the Tao in the I Ching where Yin, the masculine, and Yang, the feminine, are constantly in the process of changing into each other and where the changes engender chains of transformations similar to those Kingston here expresses in a poetic mode. (Rabine 476)

While the I Ching may describe such transformations, the transformation of gender is the one change that Kingston's dancers do not undergo. In fact, if one follows the vision into the following paragraph after Kingston describes "how one of the dancers is always a man and the other a woman" (The Woman Warrior 27), it becomes clear that Kingston intends specifically for the dancers to retain their gender as a continuity that endures all other transformations of race, culture, ethnicity, musical instrumentation, earthly mortality. In the continuation of the vision, the male and female

(VanSpanckeren 50).

Apart from the apparently compulsory heterosexuality of the dance ("one of the dancers is always a man and the other a woman"), the dancers and music ("Chinese lion dancers, African lion dancers," "Javanese bells", "Indian bells, Hindu Indian, American Indian") intentionally and strategically exclude European contributions. It is also difficult to argue that The Woman Warrior is an inclusive text when Kingston herself has repeated on separate occasions that The Woman Warrior represents only half of a project of creative cultural documentation that requires completion by looking at her subsequent book China Men.<sup>5</sup> I agree with VanSpanckeren, however, that "Kingston's works as a whole do justice to male and female principles" (50) in the sense that gender separation is a fairly consistent, if reluctantly maintained, organizing feature of Kingston's work. The Woman Warrior is centrally about women's lives; China Men and Tripmaster Monkey are centrally about men's lives. While another equally consistent feature of Kingston's work is the subversion of traditional concepts of gendered behaviour, and while she plays interestingly with the concept of gender transformation (the phallic woman warrior and the Chinese father who

figures grow in size and luminosity, transcend into "tall angels" with "high white wings on their backs" (but remain in "two rows"), and finally recede into mundane but still separate and gendered human beings, an "old brown man" and an "old gray woman" (The Woman Warrior 27). Read carefully, one realizes that this vision as a whole is not about changing into each other's genders or of moving to a unity beyond gender but inscribes the permanence of gendered binaries and its persistence across cultures and states of existence.

VanSpanckeren uses this moment to echo the interpretation of Fa Mu Lan as a character who is identified with the author:

While Fa Mu Lan overthrows the corrupt emperor as the popularly acclaimed leader of a peasant uprising, Kingston's book overthrows patriarchy, installing a discourse that merges women's lives into an enlightened, inclusive text, residing in the timeless moment of the cosmic dance. (VanSpanckeren 50)

While VanSpanckeren makes it clear that the episode draws on literary allusions to Buddhist enlightenment (VanSpanckeren 47), Kingston and her text do not make it entirely clear that the "timeless movement of the cosmic dance" embodies or intends to embody the discourse of "an enlightened, inclusive text"

loves daughters), she never divests from the concept of either of the two genders as an organizing human principle in the identity of her characters. Kingston actively opposes the concept of gender exclusivity, but she never explores a feasible symbolic or social practice for doing away with gendered binaries altogether. Whether her characters belong biologically to the gender that they perform, Kingston's innovation in this area generally remains at the level of celebrating gendered social identities by opening these roles to subjects of either biological gender. What Kingston does is pluralize access to both halves of the binary gender system rather than subvert gender as such, as Schueller argues (429). Like the cosmic dance, where "one of the dancers is always a man and the other a woman," a heterosexual arrangement remains in place in this passage and in The Woman Warrior's dominant narratives.

Kingston is well aware of the limits of the radical politics of both her and her narrator's time. The fact that The Woman Warrior does not completely transcend the largely liberal, activist, civil-rights-oriented feminism of her time should not be argued as a case against her. She manifests in frequent, extraordinary passages, directions that parallel

contemporary developments in philosophical and psychoanalytic feminism in France that were not widely circulating in American feminist literary circles until several years after The Woman Warrior's publication.

Still, Fa Mu Lan is a liberator only at a certain level. She does liberate a power that goes on to liberate women at a more fundamental and radical level, but Fa Mu Lan's relation to these initially "cowering, whimpering women" with "little bound feet" who "wandered away like ghosts" (The Woman Warrior 44) is not close or openly sympathetic. Of these women "who would not be good for anything," the narrator/Fa Mu Lan reports:

Later, it would be said, they turned into a band of swordswomen who were a mercenary army. They did not wear men's clothes like me, but rode as women in black and red dresses. They bought up girl babies so that many poor families welcomed their visitations. When slave girls and daughters-in-law ran away, people would say they joined these witch amazons. They killed men and boys. I myself never encountered such women and could not vouch for their reality. (The Woman Warrior 45)

Smith insists at this point that Kingston, "[b]y 'slaying' the stories of men and boys and phallic women warriors . . . allies herself with the true female avengers of her tale. Fa Mu Lan may have denied her identity with such women; Kingston does not" (Smith

writing/fighting as a social woman, is in this respect dissimilar from her fantasy heroine. (Rabine 492)

Both Smith and Rabine are compelled to withdraw from the open plurality of meaning promised by the postmodern project they endorse to defend certain social and political investments in coherent concepts of women's identity: the "real," "true," or "social" woman. While I generally endorse a politicization of the postmodern project and consider an absence of political grounding to be a weakness in any cultural project, the ends of Kingston's highly personalized politics of gender transformation and free ascription of gender roles is not served by restraining the analysis of her texts to a search for the coherent "social woman" behind it or for the appearance of "real" and "true" feminist projects within the many options Kingston presents.

Perhaps the most honest liberal feminist refusal to broach the integrity of gender comes from Amy Ling, who notes in a chapter entitled "The Chinese American Male Experience" that a disproportionate number of the women writers in her study assume a male perspective in their fiction (Ling 141). While acknowledging that the authors' choice to cross the gender barrier is "an interesting topic to pursue," Ling considers the matter

160). By now it should be clear that any discussion of what is "true" in Kingston's works is likely to backfire as an act more indicative of the critic's own motivations rather than anything that is definitely present in what, by Smith's own admission, is a "postmodern work" (150). To make this claim about the "true female avengers," Smith has to deviate from her own earlier position that "[t]he identities of woman warrior and of woman narrator interpenetrate until biography becomes autobiography, until Kingston and Fa Mu Lan are one" (157). Arguing Kingston's "witch amazons" as the "real female avengers" (Smith 159) is indeed a highly central argument for characters who are, after all, not nearly as central to the overall work or even the section in which they appear.

Rabine has to make a similar compromise in her argument that "[f]or a social woman to write in our social order, she has to be able to don, whether legitimately or illegitimately, male privilege" (Rabine 492). Having established the resemblances between Kingston and her Fa Mu Lan character (Rabine 491), Rabine concludes her essay by declaring this same resemblance,

both appropriate and inapplicable, for in writing The Woman Warrior Kingston has to a certain extent shed her male armor and,

to be "outside the boundaries" of her chapter (141). Apart from a brief explanation of why Kingston divides her female and male voices between The Woman Warrior and China Men, Ling has nothing to say on the matter of the frequent masculine ventriloquism of her female writers: "Of the motivation of the other authors, we have no information" (Ling 142). Considering that the representation of gender is probably the most controversial debate concerning The Woman Warrior and that, in some views, "the argument over The Woman Warrior is the most heated debate in Asian American studies circles" (Lee 52), it is important to develop modes of literary analysis that attend to the representations of gender that are beyond the author's specific biological gender.

Kingston's corpus to date, viewed as a whole, indicates that she is perhaps more interested in masculine identities. The understandable need for feminist criticism to claim Kingston as a woman is not incompatible with Kingston's project of envisioning the end of the biological imprisonment of the subject within monolithic social categories of woman and man. Kingston's anticipation of a more liberated environment where subjects can wear and perform gender in the same manner that one dons clothing or assumes a theatrical



role, does not necessarily defy the feminist agenda of establishing her identity as a woman. The Woman Warrior itself is a text in which a woman assumes a traditionally male role as a way to resist the rigidly defined gender roles of her patriarchal society.

To return to the specific production of The Woman Warrior: Kingston's ideals for feminism reveal, from the perspective of almost two decades, the optimism of American feminism in the 1970s that the new "superwoman" would be able to smoothly cope with traditionally masculine roles in the workplace, without giving up what is "essentially" female: "Marriage and childbirth strengthen the swordswoman, who is not a maid like Joan of Arc. Do the women's work; then do more work, which will become ours too" (The Woman Warrior 48). The narrator, however, remains firmly aware of social realities; the affirmative ethnic and feminist visions of the Fa Mu Lan fairy tale are always effective in the hard, material world. As Smith so aptly puts it, "[e]verywhere the legend is betrayed as a misleading fiction" (160). Events and identities that seem heroic in the tale translate into cheap and sordid events in everyday existence: "What fighting and killing I have seen have not been glorious but slum grubby" (The Woman Warrior 51). In the ordinary world,

never becomes possible for the narrator to feasibly fantasize herself as the "witch amazons," the ones who "kill men and boys" (The Woman Warrior 45). The narrator never believes to the degree that Smith does in what Smith would like to see as "real" avengers of the "White Tigers" episode.

The one thing we do know about the narrator is that she is basically a pragmatist and a realist. She needs to keep a job and it is not feasible for her to chop her employer's head off. Furthermore, the law that is inscribed in the dream of the woman warrior is the same law that restrains the dreamer in real life and which produces the repression that necessitates the dream. The fantasy at once helps the narrator escape from, and integrate into, her oppressive society. The 'encouragement' of the Fa Mu Lan story is that women can acquire power provided they are willing to work for and dream of power within conventional masculine idioms.

The other aspect about the narrator's complaint about unloving husbands is that the narrator ascribes this unfortunate state to China: "Even now China wraps double binds around my feet" (The Woman Warrior 48). Up until this remark she has been discussing and complaining about her prospects in America. The

visionaries look like cheap fortune-telling cranks who take offerings in return for mundane prophecies about "how to raise rent money, how to cure their coughs and skin diseases, how to find a job" (The Woman Warrior 52). The hero's martial arts do not serve glorious ends in the real world where they "are for unsure little boys kicking away under fluorescent lights" (The Woman Warrior 52).

As Fa Mu Lan's power is based on semiotic compliance to patriarchal codes of empowerment, the narrator who produces this fantasy is also bound within a system of dependency on men:

No husband of mine will say, "I could have been a drummer, but I had to think about the wife and kids. You know how it is." Nobody supports me at the expense of his own adventure. Then I get bitter: no one supports me; and I am not loved enough to be supported. That I am not a burden has to compensate for the sad envy when I look at women loved enough to be supported. Even now China wraps double binds around my feet. (The Woman Warrior 48)

The word that constantly comes up in relation to the husband is "support," which effectively means dependency. Since the man is the unquestioned centre of the order, even in the fantasy of feminist revenge, the lament over unloving men does not raise the issue of why dependency on them should be longingly pined for. Within the narrator's and text's ideology, it

"China" which "wraps double binds around her feet" is not a geographical political entity but the effect of what the narrator perceives as a residual patriarchal legacy from her ancestral culture that continues to plague her in America. Many critical articles on The Woman Warrior have taken Kingston's use of figures from Chinese legend as a cue to embark on scholarly projects of uncovering the connection between Kingston's re-creations and the original Chinese source material.<sup>6</sup> My own interest lies in observing the modern analogues of the Fa Mu Lan story as told by Kingston. In "White Tigers" Kingston deliberately highlights for the reader the impossibility of the task of recovering authentic Chinese material. The segments at the end of the Fa Mu Lan story, portraying the narrator's American disappointments and Chinese confusions, appear from a formalist or generic perspective as mere addenda to the epic story, but I think the narrator reports the comparison to underscore the irony that no real China exists for her. Her fairy tale stories are clear but not real, and the actual news from China is real but not clear.

From a classic psychoanalytic perspective, one could say that the narrator constructs the Chinese legend so that she can displace her frustration with

the experiences of sexual and racial oppression onto a fantasy of revenge. In other words, Kingston's Fa Mu Lan is an American legend, created from experiences in America to inspire an affirmative social struggle exclusive to America. As I have said, the female narrator's dream is the dream of a woman who empowers herself through patriarchal structures. The dreamer does not vouch for the realities of the women who kill men and boys because in the 1960s of the narrator and in the 1970s of the author that dream is less plausible than the achievements of a less radical, more practical and more moderate, liberal feminist activism.

The narrator uses the symbol of a bird to represent the distance between the American and Chinese realities and the imagined ideal she fantasizes about in her childhood stories. Unlike the Chinese story of a woman who empowers herself by learning a new form of martial art from a white crane (The Woman Warrior 20), the narrator's real life holds no such fortune: "no bird called me, no wise old people tutored me" (49). Desperate to make the story come true, she strains to see unusual birds in clouds, and mistakes a bird that is far away for an insect-sized bird: "My brain had momentarily lost its depth perception. I was that eager to find an unusual bird" (49). Outside of her

America is her only land. If the legend fits into any social reality at all, it is in the social reality of the narrator's present-day America.

Central events in China are peripheral, "confusing" (The Woman Warrior 50) ones in America that do not fit into the narrative of the immigrant trajectory. The narrator constructs her imaginary parentage in the face of stories of her real kin in contemporary Communist China under Mao's Cultural Revolution, who are getting executed, whose stories "are confusing" and "do not fit." The difference between the American and the Chinese reality is that the former merely disappoints the fantasy of ideal power while the latter has no place it in at all. The narrator considers her fantasy important only because it builds morale for her struggles to gain social justice and economic power in the United States. While some critics choose to see Kingston as the legendary Fa Mu Lan, it should be equally clear that Fa Mu Lan is also Kingston. Kingston's Fa Mu Lan character represents a bold and affirmative vision of women and people of colour characteristic of the feminist and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, but the character also typifies the boundaries of these movements within a mainly liberal and nationalist

house in America, no bird calls and no horse offers a glorious escape into heroic adventure (48). The birds in China also betray the dream. The narrator's Fourth Uncle is executed by Communists for catching a pair of doves to feed his family:

It is confusing that my family was not the poor to be championed. They were executed like the barons in the stories, when they were not barons. It is confusing that birds tricked us. (The Woman Warrior 51)

The narrator is puzzled by the failure of events to correspond with her legend of "perfect filiality" (The Woman Warrior 45).

Where the fairy tales do inform social reality more effectively is in modern America:

From the fairy tales, I've learned exactly who the enemy are. I easily recognize them--business-suited in their modern American executive guise, each boss two feet taller than I am and impossible to meet eye to eye. (The Woman Warrior 48)

The narrator's problem differs from that of Fa Mu Lan in that her problem is with racist bosses and not sexist warlords (The Woman Warrior 48). While it is true that for the narrator, "[i]t's not just the stupid racists that I have to do something about, but the tyrants who for whatever reason can deny my family food and work" (49), the fact is that the narrator's job is her only land (49). Since her job is in America,

agenda. While men may be seen as the problem, they still define the roles; as a woman warrior, Fa Mu Lan must conceal her pregnant female body. The American narrator's field of social comprehension includes the revolutionizing of a mythic, imagined China, but cannot grasp the contemporary political situation there.

In the third section, "Shaman," the daughter is forced by her struggle for an American identity to concoct grotesque Orientalist fantasies about her mother, even though her mother is a modern feminist who holds in harmony the seemingly binary oppositions of East and West--Brave Orchid is educated in both modern Western and traditional Chinese medicine. Brave Orchid essentially accomplishes and embodies all of the ideals that her daughter aspires to and will later, paradoxically and irrationally, invoke as the reason for breaking with her mother and what she represents. The daughter's crisis is that her mother's achievements in China already encompass what the daughter would have wanted to achieve in America as a sign of her difference from her mother and from "Chinese" aspects in general. "Shaman" begins with the story of one of the occasions (of what the daughter acutely knows is exactly four), on which the mother unrolls her medical

diploma as a display of the incontrovertible documentary fact that she was indeed a doctor and practising midwife in China. The daughter resents her mother's accomplishment because it represents what the daughter wanted to define as her own difference from what she imagines is her family's oppressive and obsolete Chinese traditions. As a result the daughter strikes out against the mother in what ways she can, reviling her mother's culinary practices, and blaming her for cramming her head with unspecified ancestral obligations (The Woman Warrior 108).

The narrative of "Shaman" gives two perspectives of the narrator. We see her as a rebellious daughter going through the agony of adolescence within the context of Chinese American ethnic acculturation. We also benefit from the perspective of a wiser, older narrator who puts the young daughter's rebellion into perspective by giving us a version of her mother's culture through which we can observe the contradictions within the daughter. This narrator describes "a modern woman" (The Woman Warrior 76) in China who enjoys the economic and feminist liberation of the Communist Revolution: "The Revolution put an end to prostitution by giving women what they wanted: a job and a room of their own" (62). Brave Orchid was the beneficiary of

footprints. (The Woman Warrior 76)

The new lines that are created deliberately do not rely on structures of kinship or ethnicity: "No blood bonded friend to friend" (75). The bonds created through "horizontal names of one generation" that are enacted within the modern institutional context of the medical college are fundamentally the same form of association outside of kinship that the daughter craves in her desire to "run for office at American school" and "get enough offices and clubs on my record to get into college" (202).

The narrative in retrospect, capable of narrating the mother's diasporic history and immigrant passage to America, contrasts sharply with the daughter's psychically necessary misconception of her mother and her mother culture as destitute. In China Brave Orchid keeps her maiden name (The Woman Warrior 77) and is privileged enough to dress in silk and ride in a sedan chair (76). The narrator's mother has already arrived into the bourgeois existence that the daughter envies as an aspiring 'radical' who is nevertheless addicted to conveniences of the affluent society such as plastics, t.v. dinners, and freeways (The Woman Warrior 204). The daughter's adolescent rebellion against the unbearable burden of having educated parents is

an even earlier period of Chinese modernization. The women's medical college that Brave Orchid attends teaches "modern medicine" and charges its students to "bring science to the villages" (63). Doctor Sun Yat-sen, to whose picture all the students bow, "was a western surgeon before he became a revolutionary" (63).

The modernizing influences of communism and Western science do not exclude the efficacy of ancient knowledges at Brave Orchid's medical college: "After they mastered the ancient cures that worked, they would be taught the most up-to-date western discoveries" (The Woman Warrior 63). The students of the school remain ready to "back up their science with magical spells" (74). Modernization also produces new social relations between the women of the To Keung School of Midwifery who "were new women, scientists who changed the rituals" (The Woman Warrior 75).

Instead of chanting the descent line to guide a person's spirit back home to the village, these new "outside" women locate their school as "home" and replace the old traditional patriarchal structures of kinship with their own names:

They called out their own names, women's pretty names, haphazard names, horizontal names of one generation. They pieced together new directions, and my mother's spirit followed them instead of the old

expressed in terms of negative stereotypes about the Chinese, such as their food. The daughter narrates with revulsion her mother's stories of eating live monkey brains; the daughter also tells of how her mother forced her to eat four- and five-day old leftovers (90). As a result, the daughter vows to "live on plastic" (The Woman Warrior 91-92) and to reject her Chinese past:

To make my waking life American-normal, I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams, which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories. (The Woman Warrior 87)

The daughter actively tries to repress what she considers are her Chinese deformities into her unconscious in order to keep her daily existence clear and American.

In a typical scene the daughter ruthlessly attempts to sever the mother's identification with China. When Brave Orchid reminisces nostalgically of how time goes slower in China (The Woman Warrior 105), the daughter insists coldly that "[t]ime is the same from place to place" and that "[t]here is only the eternal present and biology" (106). China looms significantly in the mother's memory as a land so stable and fixed that even time moves more slowly there

to accommodate its historical mass. In order to resist this inertial momentum, the daughter aggressively represses both history and China. Her complaint against her mother is that "[s]he pries open my head and my fists and crams into them responsibility for time, responsibility for intervening oceans" (The Woman Warrior 108). The violent rhetoric of the daughter's complaint surfaces in her fear of the Oriental cruelty that she thinks awaits her in China:

Whenever my parents said "home," they suspended America. They suspended enjoyment, but I did not want to go to China. In China my parents would sell my sisters and me. My father would marry two or three more wives, who would spatter cooking oil on our bare toes and lie that we were crying for naughtiness. (The Woman Warrior 99)

To avert this fate the daughter tries to educate her mother into a new globalist ideology of "home" to displace her mother's particularist attachment to China:

"We belong to the planet now, Mama. Does it make sense to you that if we're no longer attached to one piece of land, we belong to the planet? Wherever we happen to be standing, why, that spot belongs to us as much as any other spot." Can we spend the fare money on furniture and cars? Will American flowers smell good now? (The Woman Warrior 107)

The lines after the spoken words function as a subtext, betraying what the daughter is really thinking behind

the soothingly philosophical rhetoric of her new world order. The globalist pretension merely hides the fact that this is basically an argument for staying put in America.

Despite the fact that the mother has lived through some of the most devastating conflicts of the twentieth century, successfully traversed the Pacific Ocean, and managed to scrape a living for her family a hemisphere away from her birthplace, it is her daughter, who has never been out of California, or even Stockton, who assumes the right to lecture her about belonging to the planet. The daughter does not seriously intend to belong to the planet; her seemingly cosmopolitan willingness to belong to the land that she is standing on can be expressed freely because she has no intention of ever shifting ground. Like the internationalism of American economic policy, her internationalism is only theoretically global and its underlying agenda is dedicated to the pursuit of a high domestic standard of living: "Can we spend the fare money on furniture and cars?" While espousing the belief that one's country lies under the soles of one's feet, she actively resists the idea that those feet should ever find themselves treading on China.

The fourth section, "At the Western Palace," is the story of Brave Orchid's sister, Moon Orchid. Brave Orchid convinces her elderly sister to come to America and shortly after her arrival, forces to confront her husband who abandoned her almost thirty years ago and who is now living in Los Angeles. Moon Orchid is reluctant to pursue this plan but Brave Orchid is insistent. Brave Orchid imposes her own vision onto Moon Orchid, thereby casting the frail sister as a rescuer who has come to claim her wayward husband, lost in America, back into the stable fold of traditional Chinese family ways. Brave Orchid expounds in the form of a fable what she thinks Moon Orchid should do:

The Empress of the West would connive for power, but the Empress of the East was good and kind and full of light. You are the Empress of the East, and the Empress of the West has imprisoned the Earth's Emperor in the Western Palace. And you, the good Empress of the East, come out of the dawn to invade her land and free the Emperor. You must break the strong spell she has cast on him that has lost him the East. (The Woman Warrior 141)

Brave Orchid's desire for Moon Orchid to conform to the script of her fable unleashes disastrous consequences. Rubenstein describes this section as "[t]he true tragedy of the collision between two dissimilar cultures" (Rubenstein 176), but in significant ways it is also the story of victimization by the collusion of

two similar cultures. If we can get beyond the seduction of "East meets West" binaries, the section can be read as the story of an unsuccessful feminist siege against male power and institutions. The fixity of Brave Orchid's traditional Chinese views of women and marriage, and the maniacal egotism of Moon Orchid's husband, immersed as he is in a compulsively self-absorbed capitalist culture, do not so much oppose each other as they compound each other to create a stress that proves too much for Moon Orchid to bear.

Rubenstein claims that in forcing Moon Orchid to confront her husband, Brave Orchid is "still hostage to her old culture's views of matrimony and privilege" (Rubenstein 176). Smith says that "she seeks to preserve the old family constellation and, with it, the identity of woman" and that "from Brave Orchid's 'Chinese' perspective, her sister is a first wife, entitled to certain privileges and rights, even in America" (Smith 166). While these interpretations are certainly true, they fail to recognize that Brave Orchid is trying to get Moon Orchid to behave in a modern, self-interested manner, to assert herself and her individual rights and to make her husband accountable for his marriage to her. Indeed, Brave Orchid has found through experience that survival in

America demands this more aggressive approach to life.

Brave Orchid is a strong modern woman who has carved her space in America with her bare hands. She carries hundred pound bags of Texas rice up and down stairs, and works in the laundry from 6:30 in the morning until midnight while nursing a baby (The Woman Warrior 104). She is of the hardy immigrant nation-building stock that is enshrined in American nationalist 'rags-to-riches' narratives of immigrant mobility from Israel Zangwill to Mario Puzo. The regime of brutal honesty and confrontational justice that Brave Orchid imposes on Moon Orchid is certainly informed by Brave Orchid's views of matrimony, privilege, family, and woman as they are preserved from the old culture. However, Brave Orchid's views are backed up by muscles that have been developed in America. Brave Orchid's pragmatic assertiveness cannot be neatly attributed to a single cultural or national origin; her toughness and work ethic are not traits she simply brings with her from China, but are tendencies that are developed in interaction with the necessities of survival posed by harsh living and working conditions in America.

Brave Orchid notes that "Human beings don't work like this in China" (The Woman Warrior 105), and does

sister into a mental asylum and an early death.

The assertive attitude that Brave Orchid has acquired in America focuses upon what she defines as her sister's problem and cast's the Chinese Moon Orchid in an Orientalist relationship to the Chinese American Brave Orchid. Moon Orchid's character is a compendium of Orientalist stereotypes of the Chinese as effete, delicate, soft, and fatally, uselessly overcultivated. Brave Orchid is a rough-hewn frontier pragmatist whose children appear to Moon Orchid, in what could be called her "Occidental" gaze, as barbarous, savage wild animals (The Woman Warrior 133-35). Once Moon Orchid has been repulsed in America by the phallic power of her husband who is ensconced in his "Western Palace," a skyscraper in downtown Los Angeles (146), she retreats into the complete negativity of his effects of power.<sup>7</sup>

Moon Orchid retreats into the irrational, infantile space of a state mental asylum (The Woman Warrior 159-60). Moon Orchid's failure in America takes the form of a lapse into the semiotic, choric realm of madness; she creeps along the baseboards (155, 157) like the protagonist of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." In the asylum, Moon Orchid gains a measure of sanity according to the narrator's definition of it as the ability to tell new stories.

not recall ever having to hang up her own clothes there (104). She boasts to her daughter that "your father couldn't have supported you without me. I'm the one with the big muscles" (104). Her big muscles, and the confidence to boast about them in comparison to her husband's, are powers that were developed in response to the harsh life in America and are not 'Chinese' characteristics. Brave Orchid reports: "I didn't need muscles in China. I was small in China" (104). The size of the silk dresses she wore in China that she gives her daughter attest to this fact (The Woman Warrior 104). Brave Orchid's feminist, assertive designs on her sister can be attributed to her enthrallment to the old culture and the 'Chinese' perspective as Rubenstein and Smith suggest, but there is no case either critic presents that would suggest why it should be exclusively the traditional Chinese influence that informs Brave Orchid's behaviour. The self-confidence that Brave Orchid gains from her Western scientific education at the To Keung School of Midwifery as well as the blunt assertiveness she is forced to develop simply to survive in America are no less clearly parts of what must be a complex set of factors (not all of them cultural) that go into making Brave Orchid the coercive bully who drives her own

Moon Orchid achieves, in her own mind, the social elevation as "mother" to the other inmates and gains a linguistic compatibility with her peers that was not available to her in the outside world (160).

Moon Orchid's "Western Palace" is the realm of the insane that the narrator and her siblings determine to avoid by majoring in science and mathematics (The Woman Warrior 160). Moon Orchid's meek and timid dependency on patriarchy and Brave Orchid's attempted forceful liberation of her recall Fa Mu Lan's liberation of the evil sexist baron's "cowering, whimpering women" (44). The inability of the liberated women to escape on their "little bound feet" and Fa Mu Lan's brusque evaluation of them as "not...good for anything" (44) underscores the similarity between Fa Mu Lan's attitude to them and Brave Orchid's attitude towards Moon Orchid. Moon Orchid achieves the sanity of telling new stories but listlessly slips away, "not waking up one morning" (160).

Observing Moon Orchid's fate in America, the children clearly see that she has passed through the wrong institution and that Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid's husband have passed through the right ones. Their lesson, then, is not only one of ascribing to feminism but also of ascribing to the Western



scientific and mathematical education that has helped Brave Orchid adapt and survive and that has allowed Moon Orchid's husband to get rich in America. The children's conclusion therefore points to structural similarities between Moon Orchid's husband and Brave Orchid, who are both survivors of immigration to America. Both Moon Orchid and Brave Orchid's husband are doctors, both are highly educated people who are prepared in Western ways and who can cope one way or another with Western "ghosts" (*The Woman Warrior* 96-97). The concrete achievement that is valorized by the children is the disciplinary practice of their Westernization.

In *China Men*, Kingston's second book, the father tells the mother, Brave Orchid, that he will bring her to America under the one condition that she get "a Western education" at a "scientific school run by white people" (*China Men* 67). He reiterates several times what he considers the key words, "Western," "science," "scientific," "school," "education," "degree" (67). Intentionally or not, the father directs the mother to the rational institutional complex of the medical school, an example of a central ideological apparatus of Western rationality and modernity. Because Brave Orchid encounters the West in China as an inoculation

life,<sup>8</sup> develops into a complex misapprehension of the mother and mother culture.

This powerful act is all the more open to the daughter's speculative mistrust and exaggeration since she does not have an actual memory of the cutting and must rely on the mother's, perhaps biased, version of it. Since this inflicted act was introduced so early into her psyche by such a pervasive and ubiquitous external agent as to constitute, to a large degree, her very notion of who she is as a subject, she fears that she will never be able to repulse its effects on her. Firmly convinced that her mother's cutting of her frenum was a pre-subjective 'first strike' against her capacity for speech, and therefore her ability to assimilate into American culture, she absorbs in her later childhood a fear and dread of the cultural signifiers surrounding her mother. The daughter's struggles for independence in America therefore take the form of an attempted expulsion of every characteristic and trait that is symbolically or typically 'Chinese.'

Despite her mother's protestations to the contrary (*The Woman Warrior* 164, 202), the daughter blames her early inability to talk in school, and her subsequent grade of a zero IQ in kindergarten (165), on what she

before exposure to a completely Western environment in America, she knows how to cope once she lands. The grim lesson of love that the children learn, "never let men be unfaithful to them," is an entrenchment of an assertive principle for women that is part of the drive to stay sane in America, and to stay American. The failure to assimilate and to 'Occidentalize' is made all too clear in the story of Moon Orchid's trip to the Western Palace.

The fifth section, "A Song for the Barbarian Reed Pipe," begins with the account of what the daughter views as a central event in her early childhood: the mother cutting her frenum, the small flap of skin underneath the tongue. Although the daughter has no actual memory of this act and knows of it only through being told by her mother (*The Woman Warrior* 164), the daughter is nevertheless deeply affected by her mother's action:

I felt very proud that my mother committed such a powerful act on me. At other times I was terrified--the first thing my mother did when she saw me was to cut my tongue. (*The Woman Warrior* 164)

The fear that this act evokes in the daughter, of a powerful castrating mother overwhelming her at this most vulnerable and defenceless early stage in her

interprets as her mother's assault against her acquisition of speech. Some years afterwards, when the narrator has overcome her inability to speak in school, she projects this fear of being silenced onto a silent Chinese classmate. The narrator corners a Chinese girl who, because of her chronic silence, comes to represent what the narrator despises as typically Chinese. In a public school washroom and, under the same illusion that Brave Moon has of toughening Moon Orchid for the harsh realities of American life, the narrator attempts to bully the silent girl into talking (172). The narrator contrasts herself with the silent girl as the displaced figure of the narrator's former weak and infantile self, a self that the narrator desperately attempts to repel and deny: "Her skin was fleshy, like squid out of which the glassy blades of bones had been pulled. I wanted tough skin, hard brown skin" (*The Woman Warrior* 176). The narrator's perceived violation of her physical body in early childhood manifests itself as an obsession with the physical integrity and strength assured by adulthood: "I could see her tiny white teeth, baby teeth. I wanted to grow big strong yellow teeth" (178). The narrator casts the silent girl's deficiencies against what the narrator considers is an appropriate trajectory of American female

success: becoming a cheerleader, working, getting married, getting a date (The Woman Warrior 180-81). The silent girl's qualities, as opposed to this narrative, are attributed to her Chinese identity, which is perceived to be at the opposite end of this pole. An Orientalist trope thus emerges in which silence is associated with being Chinese and with being feminine: "The other Chinese girls did not talk either, so I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl" (The Woman Warrior 166). Since the silent girl must be insane not to want to talk and take part in the bounties of American life, silence is also associated with insanity: "I thought talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity" (The Woman Warrior 186). Insanity and the loss of control over one's life become inextricably linked in the narrator's mind with China as she mentally lists the crazy Chinese women she knows in her community (The Woman Warrior 186) and stays busy making herself unsalable as a slave in China "where anything happens" (The Woman Warrior 190).

The narrator enlarges her speculations on the possibly insane aspects of Chinese identity by speculating on her own potential as the "crazy woman" of her household (The Woman Warrior 189), and by

possession does not result, to the narrator's surprise, in his eviction from the premises. The narrator's mother remarks that he is "not too stupid to want to find out about women" and that "the old women talk about how he was stupid but very rich" (197).<sup>9</sup>

While the daughter is engaged in this intensifying critique of Chinese culture, the actual China becomes increasingly distant in the lives of her family members: "We don't belong anywhere since the Revolution. The old China has disappeared while we've been away" (The Woman Warrior 184). The production of a vividly enlarged picture of China as a seething locus of cruel Orientalist grotesqueries, combined with the uncommunicative silence of her parents on so many Chinese topics, strengthens her growing disbelief in the very existence of an actual Chinese culture. "How can Chinese keep any traditions at all?" (185) asks the narrator:

I don't see how they kept up a continuous culture for five thousand years. Maybe they didn't; maybe everyone makes it up as they go along. If we had to depend on being told, we'd have no religion, no babies, no menstruation (sex, of course, unspeakable), no death. (185)

The narrator's understanding of China is comprised largely of her own self-motivated fantasies; her response to real news from China is curiously detached

listing the repellent aspects of life in a Chinese American family. Her thoughts move over to the male realm where they dwell on the repulsiveness of patriarchal Chinese culture: her great-grandfather calling her and her sisters "maggots" (191), the sexism of Chinese operas (193-4), and the horrifying prospect of an arranged marriage to hopelessly unattractive "Fresh-off-the-Boat" immigrant males from China (193-4). The narrator also vents her frustration at the profoundly embedded nature of the traditional Chinese patriarchal ideology:

"Chinese smeared bad daughters-in-law with honey and tied them naked on top of ant nests," my father said. "A husband may kill a wife who disobeys him. Confucius said that." Confucius, the rational man. (The Woman Warrior 193)

As a member and victim of this culture, the narrator's sense of loathing turns inwards upon herself to her unmarriageable "pressed-duck voice" (The Woman Warrior 192) and expands further outward to focus on an intense hatred for a "mentally retarded boy" (194) whom she fears her mother might be setting up as a potential suitor. The boy is repeatedly called a "monster" (195-6), compared to "Frankenstein's monster" (195), and labelled as a "birth defect" and a "hulk" (195-6). The discovery of two cartons of pornography in his

and self-centred. She is secretly glad to hear of her relatives being tortured by the Communists in China: "As long as the aunts kept disappearing and the uncles dying after unspeakable tortures, my parents would prolong their Gold Mountain stay" (190).

As the narrator matures and outgrows these Orientalist fantasies, she gains the ability to balance her knowledge of Chinese Communist oppression with the knowledge of the progressive aspects of their modernization. The narrator finds out that Mao, who "himself had been matched to an older girl when he was a child . . . was freeing women from prisons, where they had been put for refusing the businessmen their parents had picked as husbands". She learns "that the Revolution (the Liberation) was against girl slavery and girl infanticide" and that "[g]irls would no longer have to kill themselves rather than get married" (The Woman Warrior 190-1). The adult narrator whose mind has grown large enough for paradoxes is able to commend the Communists for their feminist achievements here (191) and elsewhere (62), and observe that in China too, Mao was modernizing society in his own way by encouraging class solidarity over kinship ties (16).

The narrator's awareness of the limited nature of her earlier knowledge of Chinese society pervades the

narration of her primal act of rebellion, which, motivated by the perceived threat of the mother's acts to silence her and restrain her progress in American society, is appropriately staged as a volley of excessive and unrestrained speech. In her speech the daughter reveals her desire to go to college, but the narrator, in retrospect, is aware that this separatist speech act is itself the birth of a conceptual order of logic for the daughter. The mother's stories are frustratingly undifferentiated in their status within the rational world:

I don't want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories. You won't tell me a story and then say, "This is a true story," or "This is just a story." I can't tell the difference. I don't even know what your real names are. I can't tell what is real and what you make up. (The Woman Warrior 202)

Ironically, the daughter's accusation itself comes out as a muddled and irrational outburst. The mother points out that she too has been to college, and so deflates the daughter's rebellious desire to do something different. The daughter's illusion is that she is rebelling against her mother at a fundamental level, as an escape from the mother's undifferentiated choric space out into the daughter's logocentric symbolic order:

The narrator learns to differentiate childhood fantasy from ethnic identity, "Chinese-sight" from "child-sight," (205) and to reduce her monolithic understanding of her Chinese heritage into discrete elements that can be viewed calmly and rationally. In the process, she learns that she is no longer an insider in the culture that she took for granted as a child. She stops checking "bilingual" on job applications since she fails to understand any of the dialects an interviewer at China Airlines tries on her and fails in return to be understood by her interviewer (205).

The continuation of the narrator's sorting of "what's just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living" (The Woman Warrior 205) implies that the process is impossible to complete, but the emphasis is placed on the nobility of the effort. The narrator expresses a desire to go to China to determine facts, to "find out whose lying" (205) and "find out what's a cheat story and what's not" (206). This desire for verification is part of a desire to see differences as ideally settled so as to permit an unburdened commitment to one's own American lifestyle: "It would be good if the Communists were taking care of themselves; then I could buy a

I had to leave home in order to see the world logically, logic, the new way of seeing. I learned to think that mysteries are for explanation. I enjoy the simplicity. Concrete pours out of my mouth to cover the forests with freeways and sidewalks. Give me plastics, periodical tables, t.v. dinners with vegetables no more complex than peas mixed with diced carrots. Shine floodlights into dark corners: no ghosts. (The Woman Warrior 204)

The exorcism of the daughter's infantile mother-identified psychoanalytic Orientalism occurs in association with the process of Western technologies of order and efficiency. The Orientalist ideologies that infected her childhood are conquered by bypassing the Chinese subjects themselves (who are not cooperative or reliable) and referring instead for knowledge to the resources of rational archives: "I don't know any Chinese I can ask without getting myself scolded or teased, so I've been looking in books" (The Woman Warrior 204).

The knowledge in books helps to deflate the misunderstandings between parent and child that cause the narrator to develop Orientalist anxieties:

I like to look up a troublesome, shameful thing and then say "Oh, is that all?" The simple explanation makes it less scary to go home after yelling at your mother and father. It drives the fear away and makes it possible someday to visit China, where I know now they don't sell girls or kill each other for no reason. (The Woman Warrior 205)

color t.v." (206). However, the narrative does not take us to China to represent the contemporary workings of the society there. Instead the narrative enacts closure through the presentation of the two harmoniously intertwined and balanced stories of the mother and daughter. This strategy avoids the comparison of modern American and Chinese society in favour of having the two cultures symbolically represented by two Americans of Chinese descent.

The stories of the mother and the daughter illustrate a vision that argues for transformative, preservative, and redemptive power of the arts (theatre and music), to save communities (symbolically enacted by the community of mother and daughter) from violence and harm. The vision promotes the efficacy of translations across cultures in a procedure that departs from the narrator's previous idea of going on a fact-finding mission to China to "see those people and to find out what's a cheat story and what's not" (The Woman Warrior 206). This final faith in stories is not different in nature from the daughter's earlier symbolic, imaginative practice of Orientalism, but differs in the degree of security the narrator enjoys in her relationship with her mother.

This affirmative multicultural vision is achieved

by creating textual openings for the "matrilineal trace" in the genealogical record (Smith 173) that are based on stories that take their power from the mother's style of leaving unmade the distinction between fact and fiction. The "cross-cultural" unification of the Chinese American mother and the Chinese American daughter is not posited as having anything to do with material comparisons between America and China but with reconciliations between two Chinese Americans, one of whom is relatively more Chinese and the other, relatively more American. The reconciliation of two Chinese Americans substitutes symbolically for what has been taken by critics such as Ling and Rubenstein as a reconciliation between China and America in an absorptive strategy that summarizes in one gesture the reflex of new Orientalism within American ideologies of cultural diversity. Diversity under one language and one political system masquerades as an investment in global cultural difference. Chinese motherhood in *The Woman Warrior* exposes the bases from which the Chinese American narrator gains her power. The dynamics of this appropriation are at once exploitative and celebratory. The ambivalence of the daughter's use of her forerunners allows us to see her as a subject whose destiny in American culture is

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Said is referring in this particular case to the novels of Flaubert, but his observation about the persistent sexualization of the Orient and the Oriental woman in French and British writing about the East is made repeatedly throughout *Orientalism*.

<sup>2</sup> There is a certain irony in this case that the Chinese subjects must satisfy "the rare urge west" by travelling east.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Aubrey 80.

<sup>4</sup> The narrator is fully aware that the revolutions of her time have a long way to go:

I went away to college--Berkeley in the sixties--and I studied, and I marched to change the world, but I did not turn into a boy. I would have liked to bring myself back as a boy for my parents to welcome with chickens and pigs. That was for my brother, who returned alive from Vietnam. (*The Woman Warrior* 47)

Kingston has confessed to Elaine H. Kim in an interview that the unalterable ideology of gender in her time has prevented her from putting the women's experiences collected in *The Woman Warrior*, and the men's experiences collected in *China Men*, into a single book. Kingston comments that "given the present state of affairs, perhaps men's experiences and women's experiences have to be dealt with separately for now, until more auspicious times are with us" (Kim 207). Lori Kornblum in "Women Warriors in a Men's World: The Combat Exclusion" (1984) is fascinated by the fact that Fa Mu Lan must pass as a man before she can become a warrior and relates this to the attitudes held by the American military establishment on the exclusion of women soldiers from combat situations.

<sup>5</sup> See Kim 207, Kingston "Personal Statement" 23, and Ling *Between Worlds* 142.

<sup>6</sup> For instance see the essays by Wong and VanSpanckeren in *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's The Woman Warrior*, and Joseph S. M. Lau's essay "Kingston as Exorcist."

not rigidly constructed by the phobia against Orientalist narratives, but who understands the necessary compromises between complicity and resistance that ethnic minority subjects make in order to maintain a feasible existence in America.

<sup>7</sup> A telling index of Kingston's evaluation of the power of men over the power of women is found in the contrast between Moon Orchid and Brave Orchid. Neither woman is strong enough to "rescue" Moon's husband, nor is the narrator's brother in Vietnam, who in *China Men* fails to find his ancestral home. Despite having to endure considerable cultural contradictions as an Asian American member of an American imperialist occupation force in Asia, the brother does not go insane like Moon Orchid. The brother is young, strong, modern, and American, while Moon Orchid is old, weak, traditional, and Chinese. Kingston's ideology of Chinese American identity sometimes hints at the idea, here expressed negatively in the failure of Moon Orchid to cope in America, that Chinese Americans have a rare quality that distinguishes them from the Chinese who stay at home.

<sup>8</sup> See Smith 168.

<sup>9</sup> The mother, as a travelling doctor in China, encounters "a fantastic creature, half man and half ape, that a traveller to the West had captured and brought back to China in a cage" (*The Woman Warrior* 84). While the daughter in America locates monstrosity as Chinese, this identification is not inherently so but is simply a process of making alien certain selected cultural entities and regions. The attractiveness that Edward Said's concept of Orientalism has for Asian American scholars is that it is a discourse whose configurations are applicable to other cultural encounters within the compass of the European-based, global imperialism of the last five centuries: "Although Said focuses on French and British representations of the Middle East, many of his insights also apply to American perceptions of the Far East." (Cheung, "The Woman Warrior" 247).

In Joy Kogawa's Obasan, the narrator Naomi Nakane is supported by a tradition of discourse maintained by the women of her extended family. Grandma Kato, Aya Obasan, Aunt Emily, and Naomi preserve, write, and speak their experiences in a coherent practice that patiently resists the attitudes of shame and silence that have been deeply embedded in the family following the traumas of the atom bomb at Nagasaki and the internment of the Japanese Canadians. In each generation, the women in the novel foster the communicative links that help them to recover from the historical and personal violence in their lives. This women's discourse is a strategy of survival in response to oppressive circumstances and is thus dictated by need rather than choice, but, as Naomi's reflections make clear, the narrative is centrally concerned with ways in which women can gain knowledge and power that do not reproduce the repressions of the hegemonies they struggle to overcome. The novel's reconstruction of Japanese and Japanese Canadian tradition traces a matrilinear history of endurance and resistance under wartime oppression as the basis for re-establishing a Japanese Canadian cultural identity in a democratically

perspective of several other close critical readings of the text. The novel itself is capable of sustaining plural and even contradictory interpretations under the interpretive licence of the reader, but its openness as a text does not categorically exclude the presence of conventional Orientalist attitudes and reflexes even while the narrative is pursuing an affirmative discourse of racial and sexual identity for its Japanese Canadian characters.

The central Orientalist typology that emerges in Obasan is the construction of Japanese motherhood and the Japanese mother (Naomi's mother) as the absent cause of language. The novel represents the daughter's speech as a process enabled by an exploration of the mother's enigmatic silence. As a narrative of the daughter's emergence as a Japanese Canadian political subject, the novel maps the linguistic typology of the mother's silence and the daughter's speech onto a cultural typology. This cultural typology narrates the 'Japanese' pacifism and complicity of the earlier Japanese Canadian generation as the enabling precursor to the activism of the more liberated and more culturally 'Canadian' generation that follows. This mapping becomes Orientalist when these typologies of linguistic and cultural process are understood as

renewed Canadian society. While the novel commits itself to a progressive spirit of social renewal based on the redemptive power of the mother-daughter bond, the narrative at the same time expresses a strongly conservative desire to adhere to traditional structures of patriarchal authority, ethnic solidarity, and nationalism as part of its affirmative ethical vision.

In arguing that the narrative in Obasan supports conventional ideologies of sexual and racial identity, I also argue that the novel internalizes Orientalist narrative structures and attitudes which manifest themselves in the novel's account of the formation of Japanese Canadian female subjects. Accepting Said's description of Orientalism as a systematic discourse developed by the West to "manage" the East, Marilyn Russell Rose makes the connection between Obasan and Orientalism in what for this study is a central observation. According to Rose, the set of attitudes towards the East that Said describes,

is not only held by the West. Ironically, and perversely, it is also all too often held by the Oriental who lives in the West, where 'the electronic, postmodern world' has reinforced these centuries-old 'stereotypes' of the Oriental. . . . (Rose "Hawthorne's" 294)

In addition, Orientalist typologies form the base of significant critical readings of Obasan and shape the

typologies of linguistic and cultural progress in which the earlier, more culturally 'Japanese' phase is understood as a prototype for a more progressive, positive second stage of language and identity which is culturally more 'Canadian.'

An Orientalist assumption of the superiority of the West is inscribed even as the narrative affirms the historical anteriority or ontological priority of the East. However foundational and beloved the identities of the East may be, the Orientalist discourse sees the West as the destined social ground of the subject and her struggle. This Orientalist typology is also an implicit underlying structure in much of the critical scholarship on the novel. Throughout this study, I insist that this Orientalism is a matter of the structure of the novel both as a depiction of a historical circumstance and as a work that is produced within a historical circumstance for neither of which Kogawa as an author can be held personally responsible. I place my own critical emphasis on tracing internalized Orientalist typologies in literary and critical writing that supports an affirmative agenda for people of colour in North America. In Obasan this affirmative racial agenda is connected to the representation of vital and resourceful female



traditions as they are transmitted through the bond between mothers and daughters.

Obasan is a very subtle text regarding the different qualities of silence, as has been observed by Gayle K. Fujita and King-kok Cheung. I believe the text is equally discriminating in presenting the varieties of language. The contradiction always persists in the narrative that Naomi's mother's words are heard through Naomi's reconstructive speech. Just as Naomi's narrative refers to her mother's words, these words are actually Naomi's verbally reconstructed inferences of her mother's silence. Naomi's concept of "listening" is presented to us in pages where Naomi narrates her own words; listening is an active response that produces its own words and invites its own hearing. Naomi's mother does not often speak as a character and her words, especially the ones from Japan, are all mediated by interlocutors such as Naomi or Grandma Kato. The text always maintains an awareness of its inescapable proximity to the ways of the Grand Inquisitor. The Grand Inquisitor is the figure from Naomi's nightmare who represents the coercive potential of the search for knowledge: "The Grand Inquisitor was carnivorous and full of murder. His demand to know was both a judgement and a refusal

Naomi's mother apparently has no difficulty in going back to Japan and is able to identify with that country in a way that Naomi, born and firmly rooted in Canada, is not able to do. With some resentment, Naomi senses the aspect of her mother that is invested not so much in the role of a mother but in the role of a granddaughter who is overtaken by the urgency of her grandmother's plight. Naomi sees the possibility that her mother is a woman capable of other identities and that her motherly love is not a singular or absolute priority but a relative one.

The relative nature of Naomi's mother's personal commitment to Naomi and to Canada as a homeland becomes more apparent to Naomi when she learns that her mother declined the opportunity to return to Canada after the war. A letter from a Canadian immigration official shows that in 1950 Naomi's mother was eligible to return to Canada (Obasan 213). The same letter informs us that Naomi's mother had adopted her four-year-old niece, who was the only member of the immediate family except for Grandma Kato and Naomi's mother to survive the atom bomb at Nagasaki (Obasan 234). This child is the baby Chieko, who is Naomi's mother's niece and Grandma Kato's niece's daughter. Chieko resembles Naomi so much that Naomi's mother and great-grandmother

to hear" (Obasan 228). In principle, The Grand Inquisitor and Naomi always share the same space as subjects outside of the mother who must interpret messages from her. No matter how close or natural Naomi feels with her mother, she knows that like the Inquisitor, she is a distinct and separate subject who is playing the game of linguistic interpretation. Naomi knows that she speaks her mother's silence by speaking into her silence. Since Naomi does not demonstrate knowledge or interest in her mother's political beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies, there is always a possibility, one that Naomi is aware of, that she may be appropriating the voice of her mother.

Naomi's narrative about her mother provides details through which we can see the mother as a woman whose political and personal choices are substantially different from those of the adult daughter. While Naomi and her mother both have strongly motivated concerns for their mothers, this similarity works out as a conflict of interest from Naomi's perspective as a daughter who feels she was abandoned by her mother in favour of her grandmother:

My great-grandmother has need of my mother. Does my mother have need of me? In what market-place of the universe are the bargains made that have traded my need for my great-grandmother's? (Obasan 67)

find themselves calling her Naomi from time to time. Physical separation caused by the war leads to the development of psychological mother-daughter bonds as substitutes for the severed relation. Naomi's mother acquires a surrogate daughter in Japan in the same way that Naomi acquires surrogate parents in Canada. Naomi reports that she does not understand her mother's "total lack of communication with Stephen and me" after the war (Obasan 213), especially as she knows that, while for a period her mother was unable to come back to Canada, she later "chose not to come" (Obasan 241). The priority of the substitution on her mother's side in Japan is apparently strong enough to keep her there even after the borders are relaxed. Until Naomi learns of her mother's severe wounding, she can only assume that her mother did not want to return.

Naomi feels even in adulthood that she has been cheaply bartered away and this sense of betrayal is used to develop the fantasy that her mother knew about the pleasure she derived from Old Man Gower, Naomi's childhood abuser, and that she was envious of it. The understanding of Naomi's mother's departure as a punishment for Naomi's complicity in the sexual abuse implies that Naomi's mother has an investment in keeping Naomi from sex not out of a protective urge but

out of a competitive one. The mother's desire to punish the daughter instead of the daughter's abuser frames the mother as a person who is more concerned with keeping the daughter from reaching sexual experience than from preventing the abuser from invading her daughter's body. Naomi's belief in her own complicity in the sexual abuse is projected onto her relationship to her mother as one in which the daughter's will to sexual pleasure is opposed by the mother's repression of the daughter's will.

The emergence from such a highly internalized state of victimization, which is further reinforced by the culture of racial victimization, makes Naomi anxious about her ability to "hear" her mother through the thick layers of self-denial in which Naomi has willingly kept herself buried over the decades. Since this culture of oppression is integrated at the base of Naomi's conception of herself as a subject, the process of sexual decolonization has to engage in the reconstruction of the subject at the level of the formation of linguistic processes. This foundational overhaul of Naomi's subjectivity is represented in the literary language of the novel through the narrative's experimentation with genres. Finding new ways to think of the subject is coterminous, especially in the

Grandma Kato does not obey Naomi's mother's wish. Aunt Emily resists the silences that cripple her community and maintain the authority of official Canadian history. Naomi's mother was silenced by the atom bomb more than by any characteristic predilection to silence. Naomi matures by transgressing the mother's will to silence and symbolically repairing the trauma from which her mother was not able to recover.

Naomi's attendance turns the destructive and silencing effect of the bomb into a healing blast of love: "Martyr Mother, you pilot your powerful voicelessness over the ocean and across the mountain, straight as a missile to our hut on the edge of a sugar-beet field" (*Obasan* 242). The mother in this instance is displaced from her position as victim of the bomb to the pilot who drops the bombs and launches the missiles. This reversal of roles radically articulates the mother's redemptive power by subverting the rhetoric of male-dominated systems of social aggression. Naomi's archetypal rendering of her mother as "Silent Mother," "Young Mother at Nagasaki," and "Maypole Mother" (*Obasan* 242) produces a symbolic version of her identity, whose capacity to heal is defined in a directly inverse relation to the magnitude of the bomb's destruction.

context of socially systemic oppression, with finding new ways to relate to the languages and genres of social representation.

Goellnicht argues that *Obasan* is an example of "historiographic metafiction" ("Minority" 289-90) and Lim concurs that "poetic language in the novel re-orders the other genres of writing (and memory)" such as autobiography and fiction (Lim "Asian" 245). The novel's discourse of women is aware of the fallacies and contradictions involved in representing silence and absence through language and textual presence. This knowledge of the duplicity and ambivalence of language is the central feature of the novel's interplay between the discursive styles of different women. Learning about the inherent gaps and omissions of textual and verbal language is the linguistic corollary of learning the lesson of the mother's ambivalence. The mother is represented through paradoxes such as the "wordless word" and the presence in absence, but Naomi must also understand that her mother was not always a mother but that her mother's other obligations do not diminish the love she had for her.

The female discourse in Naomi's family is based on resistance and healing through words that transgress and oppose the silence of other female family members.

This trope of the conversion of destructive material power into redemptive spiritual power also describes the way in which Naomi's liberation from an oppressive, nearly total blanket of silence turns into a freedom in interpreting her mother as a symbol. Instead of reproducing the patterns of hegemony that have covered up the mother for so long, Naomi's articulation of her mother follows the pattern of the active and sympathetic speech that has been established by earlier generations of her family through Grandma Kato and Aunt Emily. By recovering the ground and context of her mother's injunction, Naomi gains a multi-faceted understanding of her mother within a family tradition of female speaking and writing. Also, Naomi forms a concept of herself as a free standing individual who is not constrained by the psychic blockage produced by the conflation of mother and Gower.

When Naomi recovers the context of her mother's request for silence, she discovers how her mother was also a victim of uncontrollable circumstances. Naomi discovers that her mother never intended for her or Stephen to be suffocated by their ignorance of the past and so the breaking of the silence by the reading of Grandma Kato's letters, while a literal breaking of

Naomi's mother's injunction, is a fulfilment of mothering at a level beyond denotative language. Naomi learns that Mother's request not to tell and Gower's "Don't tell" are worlds apart in intention.

The psychoanalytic or psycholinguistic Orientalist typology in *Obasan* is based on the political dimension of the female drama of recovering the mother through poetic language. In *Obasan* Naomi uses the spiritual freedom that she gains through the recognition of her mother's presence and voice to articulate a redemptive social ethos for a new and revived Canadian nationalism. While this vision is founded on the regenerative ethical power of the mother-daughter bond, the reverence and respect of the daughter extends to literal and symbolic male parents as well. Surprisingly, the sexual violence that Naomi suffers as a child under the paternalistic coercion of Old Man Gower does not prevent her from holding her powerful male rescuer Rough Lock Bill in awe or from retaining a deep affection for the paternal figures of Uncle Isamu and Father Nakayama. Indeed, Naomi uses the revolutionary power of the mother-daughter bond to revive the authority of conventionally patriarchal Canadian and Japanese Canadian identities. This act also indicates Naomi's willing complicity in

motility akin to Kristeva's concept of the chora.

The Orientalist cultural basis of *Obasan* as a literary work by a Japanese Canadian writer is a matter of some complexity that has analogues in the controversy over Kingston's alleged Orientalist representation in *The Woman Warrior*. In both cases I wish to make it clear that the Orientalist typologies that surface in the writing are not the fault of the writer. The movement to include traditionally marginalized groups within national literary canons in the United States and Canada characteristically proceeds by the method of legitimizing, in this case East Asian ethnic origin as a supplement that enriches the fabric of the national culture. This movement cannot be blamed for wanting to see the specific ethnicity in positive terms as a contribution to the national culture. However, the dominance of this model tends to obscure the corollary process that is occurring within the 'ethnic' subject at the same time, namely that the subject is seized upon as different at the moment when she is becoming more familiar. As the Japanese subject becomes Canadian--by losing some critical aspect of her culture such as her language--other Canadians come upon her for the first time; their response, however, is not to see her sameness as a

traditional cultural formations of patriarchy and nationalism. Naomi proudly uses Japanese maternal identity as a spiritual source from which to create a new social contract between the former oppressor and the former oppressed.

I am also interested in interpretations that relate the narrator's development as a speaking subject to her emergence as a vocal and active participant in Canadian historiography in the literary criticism of *Obasan*. In my reading of Kogawa's novel, I use the term Orientalist typology to describe linguistic myths of progress that implicitly associate the acquisition of speech with the process of becoming Western in a culturally nationalist sense. Moreover, I examine this formation as it is reinforced in certain critical readings of *Obasan* that adopt a psycholinguistic approach. The use of psycholinguistic theories of female language and identity, especially those of Julia Kristeva, in these readings of *Obasan* is the feature that links the Orientalism of the criticism to the unexamined Orientalist cultural basis of Kristeva's and other psycholinguistic theories. Powerful cultural assumptions of the femininity and silence of the Orient are also reflected by other psycholinguistic readings that figure Japanese language as a prelinguistic

person in Canada but to react first to her racial difference as a person from Japan. In *Obasan* this cultural loss is symbolized by the dead Japanese mother. Naomi's recollection of her long deceased mother is complicated by her experience of sexual abuse around the time of her mother's departure. Naomi finds it difficult in adult life to think of her mother without recalling the racial and sexual self-loathing that she has internalized from her childhood sexual abuse. The novel portrays Naomi's search back into the past as a search for language, the "freeing word" (prologue) of poetic articulation. Cultural stereotypes that adhere to her construction of the past are often reinforced by critical readings which embed these stereotypes into the linguistic account of the subject.

One such instance is Erika Gottlieb's claim in "The Riddle of Concentric Worlds in *Obasan*" that "in Naomi's narration one often has the feeling that the writer is virtually reinventing language" (39). Gottlieb is referring to Naomi's style as one that is "[u]nmistakably . . . the result of extensive Japanese Canadian speech patterns and their underlying sensibilities" (39). To elaborate upon what is meant by "underlying sensibilities," Gottlieb draws on a

point made in a book review of Obasan that observes that "the syntax of her [Kogawa's] characters expresses fatalism." The idea that fatalism is embedded in a culture at the level of syntax is a deeply essentialist assumption that ascribes a uniform emotional or philosophical characteristic to all users of the language. The figure of the fatal, usually female, 'Oriental' is a common Western stereotype about Japanese women presented most famously in Puccini's opera Madame Butterfly and critiqued in recent times by David Henry Hwang's play M. Butterfly (1988). The claim that Japanese Canadian speech forms "patterns" and "underlying sensibilities" over which Kogawa can virtually reinvent language places Japanese Canadian expressions as formations prior and subordinate to a fully intelligible human language. By indulging in the hyperbolic statement that "the writer is virtually reinventing language" rather than reinventing simply the English language, Gottlieb slips into an ethnocentrism that assumes the universality of English as synonymous with language in the universal sense. In relation to this universal English language, the Japanese language exists as an elusive supplement that exceeds precise linguistic determination:

The writer translates Japanese expressions,

that elevates the narrator as a bardic hero to the disparagement of the narrator's Japanese Canadian linguistic culture. The apparent Oriental inscrutability of Japanese elements in Kogawa's text does not pose an insurmountable obstacle since,

in the hands of the skilful narrator-recorder this elliptical, barren language reminds the reader of the poetic quality of the child's language, or of Shelley's definition of the language of the poet-maker: it is vitally metaphorical. (Gottlieb 39)

Japanese-inflected expressions that are not difficult to understand to Japanese Canadian readers become under Gottlieb's assumption a "barren language" that is only redeemed into "poetic quality" by the author's exceptional skill. Gottlieb does not elaborate upon why a postmodern novel written in the twentieth century by a woman in Canada can be relevantly compared to the language and style of a British male Romantic poet of the nineteenth century, although such a comparison is not inherently inappropriate. However, within the hierarchy of British literary canons the reciprocal suggestion that Shelley's poetry is worthy of Kogawa would not be taken as a compliment. As a form of cultural patronage, Gottlieb's praise is based on the ethnocentric view that Kogawa's poesis is strong enough to escape the linguistic barrenness of its origins in

often including the Japanese turn of thought. Occasionally she mixes English words with Japanese. . . . Yet none of these devices can explain the suggestive cadences of the dialogue. . . . (Gottlieb 39)

The relationship between languages here is one of assimilation; English is the full and complete linguistic system to which Japanese and Japanese Canadian speech is a broken collage of choric fragments. Kristeva's sympathetic but ethnocentric representation of China as an ageless and timeless realm of impenetrable passivity recurs in Gottlieb's description of the Japanese-inflected language of Obasan. The language, she observes, contains "a lot of passive constructions" (39):

And when old people refuse to give answers to Naomi's repeated questions, their evasions sound like age old proverbs . . . that have to be decoded, solved like a riddle to get to the true meaning. The truncated sentences have their own slow movement. . . . (Gottlieb 39)

This mystification of Japanese culture reflects the classic gestures of the long-established culture of the West's fascination for the so-called ancient wisdom of Japan: the passivity of Zen, the enigmatic brevity of haiku, the religious devotion to elders.

In spite of this apparent praise for Japanese sensibilities, Gottlieb relates Obasan to a system of literary valuation based on British poetic traditions

Japanese Canadian culture and to be placed in the company of literary greatness defined by standards set by British literary culture.

Patricia Merivale and A. Lynne Magnusson also adhere to the view that the presence of Japanese expressions in English speech is not the synthesis of two languages but the corruption of one. In "Framed Voices: The Polyphonic Elegies of Hébert and Kogawa" (1988), Merivale sees Japanese words and phrases as merely superficial in effect: "Kogawa uses a great deal of Japanese . . . for exoticism, to emphasize differences, for lyric effect, and indeed for realistic effect" (76). In Magnusson's "Language and Longing in Joy Kogawa's Obasan" (1988), the idea does not occur that Japanese English is a hybrid language that facilitates communication among Japanese Canadians. In the novel, Naomi and Stephen call margarine "Alberta" because it sounds like the phrase "the butter that there is" in the Japanese English that Naomi and Stephen speak at home (Obasan 13). Magnusson writes:

This confusion of tongues motivates, in part, Naomi's longing for a "living" or "freeing" or "wordless word," a purer language in which the broken mosaic of speech is repaired, just as the diversity and transience of human languages--the argument of Babel--have led most civilizations to imagine a primal and perfect language. (60)

Calling margarine 'Alberta' is not inherently more complicated or confusing than calling porcelain dishes and cups 'China.' Magnusson claims that Naomi suffers from a "confusion of tongues," but there is no evidence in Naomi's narration to support this claim. Naomi simply explains that in her family the word "Alberta" also meant margarine; it is not the first time that an English word has had more than one denotation. There is also little in the novel to suggest that Naomi is longing for "a purer language" on the grounds that the language she spoke as a child contained a mixture of Japanese and English words. Naomi's yearning for the "living," "freeing," "wordless word" is not motivated by the confusion of the domestic idioms of her Japanese Canadian household. The family in Naomi's early childhood memories is the site of a preverbal coherence and unity, as exemplified in the family bathing scene (*Obasan* 48-49), that is later shattered by the violence of external invasions such as the relocation order and the abuse by Old Man Gower. This violence is condensed in Naomi's psyche as a linguistic act, the Grand Inquisitor's brutally impatient questioning (*Obasan* 228). The "confusion of tongues" is primarily a confusion of external tongues; it is not so much the language of the family that alienates Naomi as the

language can define the women of her family, most particularly her mother, who died when Naomi was a child. Naomi's mother's absence is figured primarily as silence, but Naomi uses linguistic presence, specifically speech, as the central metaphor for the mother's presence:

Silent Mother, you do not speak or write.  
You do not reach through the night to enter  
morning, but remain in the voicelessness.  
From the extremity of much dying, the only  
sound that reaches me now is the sigh of your  
remembered breath, a wordless word. How  
shall I attend that speech, Mother, how shall  
I trace that wave? (241)

The acquisition of the mother through language is an integral part of Naomi's process of coming into being as a mature subject (Fujita 34, Lim "Japanese" 306) and is also part of Naomi's process of recovering her mother as a subject who has a place in the women's tradition of speech and writing in Naomi's family.

Gayle Fujita's concept of "attentive silence" and King-Kok Cheung's concept of "articulate silence" emphasize the paradoxical quality of a silence that manages to effect deeply communicative links between mother and daughter, and among members of the Japanese Canadian community. In addition, the daughter also has a conceptual need to recover her mother as a speaker. Much of this desire comes from Naomi's need to

languages of outsiders that obscures Naomi's access to the perfect understanding she once shared with her family.

The language of the home is thus not in any sense a "broken mosaic of speech"; all of Naomi's memories of her interaction with family members during her early childhood suggest an adequately functioning family, the lines of communication between Naomi and her mother being particularly strong. The concept of a "broken mosaic" resists the notion that an ideal language can operate through a gathering of fragmentary inscriptions and idioms in which meaning is produced through the play of difference. The mosaic of Japanese and English speech spoken at home actually works and accurately reflects the combined heritages of people of Japanese ancestry who live in Canada. The diversity of voices in her family and community are elements that Naomi seeks, cherishes, and lovingly portrays.

Contrary to the characterizations of Japanese language and expression by Gottlieb, Merivale, and Magnusson, the narrative of *Obasan* stresses the coherence of the narrator's ancestral language. The critics are more determined in seeing the uniqueness of the novel's Japanese cultural influence, but I argue that the narrator is more interested in how this

differentiate her mother from Old Man Gower who, in invoking prohibitions against speech following his sexual abuse of Naomi, has become associated in Naomi's mind with her mother's departure and silence. It is Grandma Kato's letters that report the independent context of Naomi's mother's request for silence. Naomi learns that her mother's will to silence is compelled by the experience of an almost incomprehensible violence and is the desire to protect her children from the knowledge of that violence. Recovering the speech act of her mother allows Naomi to recognize her mother as an active subject who contributes to and is recovered by the female tradition of active speech and writing.

Naomi revives her mother's symbolic presence with metaphors of language because she wants to recover her mother into a tradition of verbal and textual communication across the generations. The idiom of linguistic self-assertion recalls the self-assertive writing and speech of the female relatives of Naomi's maternal line. The first and most crucial example of this self-assertion is by Grandma Kato, who breaks the silence willed by her daughter and writes to her husband about the atom bombing so as to help "extricate herself from the grip of the past" (*Obasan* 236). Naomi



reveals to us Grandma Kato's explanation for embarking upon an active verbal process of healing that departs from the disciplinary practice of her daughter, Naomi's mother:

"If these matters are sent away in this letter, perhaps they will depart a little from our souls," she writes. "For the burden of these words, forgive me."

Mother, for her part, continued her vigil of silence. She spoke with no one about her torment. She specifically requested that Stephen and I be spared the truth. (*Obasan* 236)

Although surrounded by despair, Grandma Kato projects her pain to a world outside of the destruction in an act of self-healing that eventually has a reciprocal effect on her granddaughter Naomi who, before hearing the letters, lives enclosed in a world of lingering insecurity and doubt. Grandma Kato begins a practice of disclosure that eventually becomes the central cohesive principle of female community in the novel.

Donald C. Goellnicht, in "Minority History as Metafiction: Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*" (1989), observes that "the task of preserving the 'mother culture' (of Japan), seems to fall to the oral traditions of minority mothers" (268-89). In addition to the silent communication and the oral tradition, there is a strong, underground, and often repressed tradition of writing that is crucial to the flow of love and

boosts me up on the seat and I reach for the cord. We will be getting off soon. As I scramble down to the floor, I see a man sitting hunched forward, his elbows on his knees. He is looking around quizzically, one dark eyebrow higher than the other. When our eyes meet, he grins and winks. I turn away instantly, startled into discomfort again by eyes. My mother's eyes look obliquely to the floor, declaring that on the streets, at all times, in all public places, even a glance can be indiscreet. But a stare? Such lack of decorum, it is clear, is as unthinkable as nudity on the street. (*Obasan* 47-48)

The mother's visual propriety is presented in contrast to the stranger's invasive stare. The Japanese look is the look of discretion and modesty; the look of the stranger is the one that threatens.

The elevation of female non-verbal communication as an etiquette of gazing and looking is described in the novel as a particularly unique and defining operation of Japanese culture; this is where old codes of Orientalist interpretation are reinscribed. The novel itself provides inspiration for this Orientalist reinscription in various instances such as the passage in which Naomi learns to distinguish between the Japanese from Japan and the Japanese born in Canada:

Who is it who teaches me that in the language of eyes a stare is an invasion and a reproach? Grandma Kato? *Obasan*? Uncle? Mother? Each one, raised in Japan, speaks the same language; but Aunt Emily and Father, born and raised in Canada, are visually bilingual. I too learn the second language. (*Obasan* 47)

knowledge between the generations of Naomi's family. The most powerfully revealing documents in the package that arrives from Aunt Emily at the end of Chapter Six are not the bland, impersonal orders and letters penned presumably by male bureaucrats but the personal testimonies written by women: Aunt Emily's journal and Grandma Kato's "outpouring" (*Obasan* 234) in her second letter. The most significant contents of Aunt Emily's package are the writings of women who recorded their experiences and maintained a textual archive for Naomi to come into as the personal and political inheritance of her family and culture. By stressing the active accomplishments of the women in Naomi's family as preservers, writers, and speakers of memory, I explore the communicative practices of these women that are relatively obscured by the trend in criticism that valorizes their practice of communicative silence.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most powerful forms of this communicative silence is the gaze. The Japanese gaze that is shared by Grandma Kato, *Obasan*, Uncle, and Mother, and which effects the compact between the mother and daughter, is a gaze that shields and protects Naomi from victimization. This is illustrated in one of Naomi's stories about her mother:

My mother and I are on a streetcar. She

The narrative's attempt to mark Japanese difference as a visual practice comes close to offering an essentialized definition of an exclusive community. The protective "eyes of Japanese motherhood" that "do not invade and betray" are a part of a "language of eyes" that provides Naomi with a communal and maternal sanctuary from the invasive stares of non-Japanese Canadian outsiders (*Obasan* 47). Naomi is brought into the libidinal circuit of a gaze that specifically connects her with her mother; this gaze encloses and defines individuals marked by their sameness as women, kin, and Japanese.

Merivale's understanding of what is 'Japanese' expands upon but also distorts the novel's details of what constitutes Japanese visual etiquette. She touches on this subject in her comparative reading of voyeurism in Anne Hébert's *Les fous de Bassan* (1982) and *Obasan*:

There is something almost Japanese in this eroticism of the look, in these different "languages" of the look: Naomi's shame and sense of complicity at perhaps being "seen" in the garage corresponds to Nora's at being doubly "seen" (Percival seeing Nicholas seeing her) in the bathhouse, as does the repeated advice to girls not to "look up" at Stevens, for as with the Japanese, to look is to invite victimization. (Merivale 78)

Merivale defines the look as Japanese only because the

body that is objectified and eroticized by a European Canadian's gaze is a Japanese Canadian female child's body. The victim's body is further constructed as erotic by the victim's acceptance of the responsibility of being seen which produces shame and a sense of complicity. This shame is exoticized and eroticized in what is actually a complete inversion of the novel's description of the protectiveness and sanctuary of the "eyes of Japanese motherhood"; Merivale characterizes as "almost Japanese" a gaze that is cast by Old Man Gower, a white Canadian male.

I concede that both Merivale's analysis and Kogawa's narrative share the assumption that a certain kind of look can be meaningfully described as Japanese. As for the "eroticism" of this Japanese look, I do not deny the gaze between mother and daughter is libidinally charged. However, Merivale has no grounds in the text for describing as Japanese a look that is the opposite of how the Japanese visual etiquette is defined in the novel. Merivale's characterization of the Japanese look as one that is directed at the Japanese woman by the Western man is drawn from the culture of a sexually predatory masculine Orientalism.

Female discourse in Obasan exists in a complex

the daughter's contemporary political project of reconstructing the Japanese Canadian community and reintegrating it into Canadian society.

The "preoedipal language of the mother" that Goellnicht elaborates upon ("Minority" 298) and the "multiple presences" and "ambivalent stories" that Lim projects as the women's poetics in Obasan ("Japanese" 290) also include a symbolic, figurative discursive practice that traces a linear genealogical communication across the maternal generations from Grandma Kato to Naomi. The female tradition of writing and speaking embodied by Grandma Kato is historically prior to the tradition of "preoedipal silence" or "silent communication" (Goellnicht "Minority" 295, 298) that Naomi projects upon her mother (Obasan 59). Grandma Kato inaugurates a women's tradition of disclosing patriarchal systems of violence that is carried on by Aunt Emily and, finally, by Naomi as a task that is necessary in each generation to recover and preserve the redemptive potential of the silent healers of the family. The tradition of disclosure established by Grandma Kato frees Naomi's mother and Aya Obasan from the silences that they willed upon themselves. The eventual reconnection of the discursive tradition between Grandma Kato's writing and

relationship to its various forms, described in the opening prologue as the "silence that cannot speak," the "silence that will not speak," and the "speech that frees" (prologue). The text of Obasan is interested in strategies of resistance that are embedded in what appears to be, visually or verbally, simply a blank passivity on the part of the women. Shirley Geok-lin Lim has identified these different functions through individual characters in the novel: the first silence is Aya Obasan's amnesia and aphasia, the second is the silence of refusal that belongs to Naomi's mother, the third function is Naomi's liberatory poetic or speaking voice (Lim "Japanese" 303, 309; "Asian" 242). But the interactions of various forms of speech and silence are more complex than this simple typology of characters. Aya Obasan's silence is powerfully expressive, as King-kok Cheung points out (Cheung 149-150), and Naomi's mother's refusal to speak is itself a speech act that is narrated in Grandma Kato's letter: Naomi's mother specifically asks that the truth be withheld (Obasan 236). The knowledge of this negating speech is in itself part of freeing of words that enables Naomi to understand and to "hear" her mother. Alternatively, Naomi's liberation of her mother into language and knowledge expresses the mother's subjectivity within

Naomi's listening or attendance redresses the imbalance between female traditions of speech and silence that has caused the exclusivity of silent practices in the family to become oppressive.

In every generation in the novel we find that there are individuals who are willing to speak out against the spread of traumatized muteness; the distribution of this function does not suggest, as Goellnicht does, that silent, preoedipal language in the novel is characteristically maternal or that figurative, symbolic language in the novel is paternal (Goellnicht "Minority" 298, "Father Land" 124). The most significant wielders of textual and verbal language in the novel, Grandma Kato, Aunt Emily, and Naomi, are women. The more reticent women, Aya Obasan and Naomi's mother, are deeply communicative in other systems of communication. The men of the family are also "rendered voiceless, stripped of car, radio, camera and every means of communication" (Obasan 111) by the Internment; deprived of public voice, Stephen and his father become absorbed in music, an activity that Kristeva's theory of poetic language identifies as a non-verbal signifying system constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (Kristeva Revolution 24). I am not suggesting that discursive roles for women and

men in the novel's Japanese Canadian family are the reverse of the "mother tongue/culture" and "father land" opposition that Goellnicht establishes ("Minority" 298-299; "Father" 121-122), but I am suggesting that the novel's varied representations of the genders of speech and silence do not definitively type preoedipal and figurative communication as female and male.

Women in Obasan occupy a variety of relations to men and other women in an interplay of discursive concealment and exposure that is not based on distinctly gendered discursive roles: Naomi's Grandmother reveals what Naomi's mother wished to remain concealed; the conspiracy of silence among Obasan, Emily, and Isamu becomes the community of disclosure among Obasan, Emily, and Nakayama-sensei; Stephen's denial of heritage and history is countered by Naomi's discourse of recognition, acceptance, and affirmation. Female language in the novel is not wholly subsumed into nonfigurative or silent processes but is characterized by an ambivalence within symbolic language that both reveals and conceals psychic reservoirs of traumatic human experience. Grandma Kato discloses details of the destruction at Nagasaki to her husband in Canada, thus compromising her daughter's

physical and psychic results of war. The fracturing of the function of language into its poetic preoedipal and rational symbolic components does not clearly identify a language that is inherently maternal or female; the stress of material historical oppressions which affect both women and men in the novel also accounts for why many of the characters remain silent on many issues. In this typology of psycholinguistic functions, Naomi is the redeemer who is tasked with suturing the fractured speech/silence polarities of her maternal forbearers back together.

In "Moral--in Whose Sense? Joy Kogawa's Obasan and Julia Kristeva's Powers of Horror" (1990), Robin Potter's use of Kristeva's psycholinguistic theory in reading the mother in Obasan falls into tendencies similar to those of Lim and Goellnicht in denoting the discursive space of woman, mother, and Japan as belonging solely to the realm of the semiotic:

When attempting to contextualize the absence and sublimated presence of Naomi's mother, I am confronted with ambiguous associations. On the one hand, the mother is firmly rooted as a second generation Canadian to Canada and to her family in that country. On the other hand, she is drawn by love or a sense of tradition or obligation to the mother country, Japan, to take care of her own aging grandmother. This choice places her neither here nor there, since Naomi is constantly

request that Naomi and Stephen be spared the truth; but it is not made apparent to the reader that Grandma Kato reveals this breach to her daughter. Aunt Emily objects strongly to Uncle Isamu's and Aya Obasan's continued secrecy over the facts of Naomi's and Stephen's mother's death but does not contravene the decision of silence once it is made. Naomi gains release at the end of the novel by listening to the disclosure of her mother's final secrets, but we do not know whether there has been a reciprocal release by Naomi to her family members of the facts of her sexual abuse.

The novel covers events in the life of the narrator and her family that make it appear as if the functions of the semiotic motility and the symbolic order are split between characters so that Aunt Emily appears to represent speech while Aya Obasan and Naomi's mother appear to represent silence. In fact, these women live under exceptional historical circumstances of great psychic strain. Grandma Kato's letters and Aunt Emily's diaries are responses to the conditions of wartime oppression on either side of the Pacific; while Naomi's mother and Aya Obasan are characteristically quiet people, mother's death and Obasan's inability to discuss the past are the direct

calling forth her presence, and leads me to believe that the mother in this story belongs to what Kristeva would call the semiotic. (Potter 132)

In Kristeva's proper terms the mother in Kogawa's novel cannot ever wholly 'belong' to the semiotic.<sup>3</sup> In Kristeva's theory, traces of the semiotic are always already present in symbolic language. In the novel, Naomi's mother is a mature, articulate speaking subject, whose letters to Aunt Emily are fluent and coherent. While Naomi's distant childhood memories of her mother shroud her in an atmosphere of mystical silence, there is never a suggestion that the mother is completely absorbed into the semiotic or that she is not capable of audible, sensible, human language. Potter's consignment of the mother to the semiotic is plausible only if we accept 'nation' as the substitute for 'language' as the basis for the symbolic order. This arbitrary social typing of the symbolic order consigns the mother to the semiotic realm of absence, where her existence depends entirely upon her daughter's privilege within the symbolic order as the agent of the mother's recovery into language. Potter deems the mother fit for incarceration in the semiotic simply for her action of identifying with two countries at the same time, but clearly such people do not as a

result disappear from the social or symbolic order. The mother is caught between two national cultural loyalties, not two psychic states. The mother's status in the social and symbolic order may appear fundamentally to change in the daughter's eyes, but this is simply because the child's limited and narcissistic perspective can only relate to the mother's presence in Japan as her non-existence in Canada. Potter accepts the negative perspective of the child by declaring the mother "neither here nor there" when it is apparent that she does not disappear off the map but simply goes back to Japan to care for her ailing grandmother.

Critical readings of *Obasan* rely heavily on the secondary characters of Aya Obasan and Aunt Emily to enforce the distinctive characterization of the culture of the East as opposed to that of the West. Shirley Geok-lin Lim's interpretation of the female voice in *Obasan* is based on a poetic dialectic structure that presents Aya Obasan as a representative of the mode of "recessive silence" in contrast to Aunt Emily who is dedicated to "sociopolitical fact" (Lim "Japanese" 305). Lim does not valorize one mode over the other, observing that Naomi "does not privilege Aunt Emily as

voice. While Aya and Emily are both "negative mirrorings" to Naomi, "Aunt Emily appears to be the positivist occidental inscription to Obasan's negative oriental circumscription" (Lim "Japanese" 304). Emily's "limited and ineffectual mode" remains superior to Aya's "recessive silence" and shows that the ostensibly equitable multiculturalism of Naomi's finally achieved voice rests on a narrative of assimilationist progress. Emily, with her allegedly 'Canadian' habit of democratic self-assertion, is still higher up in the evolutionary ladder of the Japanese Canadian subject-in-process than Aya who, as the least assimilated Canadian, is the least progressive speaking subject.

The representation of Aunts Aya and Emily as paired cultural and discursive modalities representing the East and the West is sparked by a comparison Naomi makes early in the novel: "How different my two aunts are. One lives in sound, the other in stone. Obasan's language remains deeply underground but Aunt Emily, BA, MA, is a word warrior" (*Obasan* 32). This line evokes dualistic and profoundly embedded patterns of Orientalist interpretation invested in the racial and cultural impermeability of 'East' and 'West' as analytic categories. Erika Gottlieb believes that the

the affirmative answer to Obasan's negating silence," but argues instead that Naomi "ironically sees Aunt Emily's belief in documentation of fact as a limited and ineffectual mode" ("Japanese" 304). Nevertheless, Lim elsewhere in another article uses Aya and Emily to represent discursive methods which are plotted on a line marking the evolutionary progress of the Japanese Canadian female voice to the completed stage represented by Naomi, whose poetic language "encompasses the two negative mirrorings of aunts Aya and Emily and exceeds them" (Lim "Asian" 245). In Lim's analysis, Aya and Emily represent linguistic prototypes for Naomi's voice as the voice of the fully achieved Japanese Canadian female subject of *Obasan*. Indeed, Aya and Emily occupy specific positions in an evolutionary ladder within Lim's narrative of female discursive progress:

The novel encompasses and moves through the stages of muteness or aphasia (Obasan's character); logocentric documentation (Emily's character); and a speaking subject (the narrator's poetic voice). (Lim "Asian" 245)

The least articulate character, Aya Obasan, is the one most closely associated by Lim and other critics with the ancestral culture, Japan, and 'Oriental' tradition; Emily is the stridently vocal but unachieved 'Canadian'

contrasts between Aya Obasan and Aunt Emily "are fundamental to her [the narrator's] definition of her own identity in terms of Oriental and Western cultural, political, and psychological attitudes" (Gottlieb 53). In this argument Aya Obasan is part of a family bound by "the long oriental tradition of silence dictated by modesty, moderation, and stoicism," while Aunt Emily represents the "'Western' compulsion to speak up and bring justice" (Gottlieb 37). Sometimes the valence of the critic's sympathies are reversed so that Aya Obasan can be respected as the one who "unlike the insistently 'Canadian' Emily . . . resists assimilation" (Jones 227); likewise, Aunt Emily's verbal compulsions can be depreciated as "shamefully *occidental* in tenor" (Rose "Hawthorne's" 293). At some level, critics remain aware of the cultural convention of a polar and oppositional relationship between Japanese and Canadian identities that keeps the oppositions stable and distinct.

In typing Aya as Eastern silence and Emily as Western speech, the desire for racial and cultural stability represses the complex syntactic qualities of the subjectivities of the two aunts.<sup>4</sup> Lim's words for Aya Obasan are mildly aspersive; Obasan's "passive, suffering silence" contrasts with a more affirmative

tone for Aunt Emily who, "raised in Canada, is the activist keeper of memories" (Lim "Japanese" 304). Lim is also clear about her borders: Aya Obasan and Aunt Emily are symbolic representations of "the Eastern mode of silence and the Western mode of public speech" (Lim "Asian" 245). Within an interpretive frame dedicated to the racial and cultural segregation of 'Oriental' qualities from 'Occidental' qualities, Japanese Canadian subjects in their cultural hybridity are generally theorized as culturally split subjects, in Naomi's case doubly split (Goellnicht "Minority" 298). Interpretation thus turns into segregation and becomes the activity of ethnic and nationalist attribution, of determining which qualities are 'ours', which ones 'theirs'.

The limited interpretive potential of the two aunts as discursive and cultural typologies is an issue that critics escape by praising Kogawa's literary capacity to exceed and subvert these rigid binary formulas. Goellnicht and Rose explain how minority voices expose the cracks and fissures in the dominant culture's official version of the Japanese Canadian Internment (Goellnicht "Minority", Rose "Politics"); Lim is aware of the "limited and ineffectual" nature of Emily's logocentric practice. These ironies and

inversions within the opposed modes of speech and silence call into question the stability of the binary cultural logic that is associated with it, but instead of using the ambivalences in silence and speech to collapse the categories of East and West, Lim, Goellnicht, and Rose preserve the cultural opposition as the rhetoric for describing the duality of the linguistic process or of cultural identities in the novel. The East versus West binary does not disappear as a typology but remains a given for the purposes of interpretation even when the function of the novel, its poetics, is argued as radically displacing the stability of the linguistic and cultural typologies (some would say stereotypes) of speech/silence and East/West.

Examined in terms of function and effect rather than as a discursive mode, Aya Obasan and Aunt Emily display as many commonalities as differences. They both, along with Uncle Isamu, keep Naomi from the knowledge of how her mother died. They both keep records of the past: Aunt Emily through her diary and her documents, Aya Obasan through family photographs and an attic full of seemingly unsorted memorabilia. Aya Obasan, for instance, may be verbally reticent but, as Fujita and Cheung elaborate, silence in the novel is

deeply communicative.<sup>5</sup> Naomi describes Aya Obasan as "the bearer of keys to unknown doorways and to a network of astonishing tunnels" and as "the possessor or life's infinite personal details" (*Obasan* 15-16); as Goellnicht points out, "we are repeatedly told that she is the real keeper of the past, preserver of the heritage through oral tradition" ("Minority" 295).

Aya Obasan is silent only in the literal sense that she uses words sparingly. Her seemingly innocuous role as a housekeeper conceals her enormous accomplishment as a keeper of history. The house in which she resides is actually a prodigious domestic archive of carefully sorted memorabilia. With its innumerable personal artifacts, it is a living extension of her body and a carefully preserved institution of private memory:

The house is indeed old, as she is old. Every home-made piece of furniture, each pot holder and paper doily is a link in her lifeline. She has preserved in shelves, in cupboards, under beds--a box of marbles, half-filled colouring books, a red, white and blue rubber ball. The items are endless. Every short stub pencil, every cornflakes box stuffed with paper bags and old letters is of her ordering. They rest in corners like parts of her body, hair cells, skin tissues, tiny specks of memory. This house is now her blood and bones. (*Obasan* 15)

Naomi's documentary narrative relies on the archival sources found in this house until Emily's package

arrives at the end of Chapter Six. With the exception of Aunt Emily's package containing Emily's diary and Naomi's Grandmother's letters, Aya Obasan embodies and represents the most substantial archival resource in the novel. The invisibility of Aya Obasan's material achievements to criticism often occurs because she is set in contrast to the bustling political activism of Aunt Emily; Aya Obasan's work, when it is valorized, is seen as a more passive, mystical or spiritual accomplishment. The connotations of the silence that are ascribed to her are pervasive and lead Lim, Goellnicht, and Rose to characterize her as a woman whose power resides passively within her being. In analyses that emphasize verbal expression as the main performance of subjectivity, Aya's silence is equated with passivity, inactivity, and the absence of intention. While it is apparent that she is the keeper of her household, none of her efforts are seen as political in the way the Emily's work is described.

Lim, Goellnicht, and Rose overlook or deny the existence of ideological or political intentions in the way a home is maintained. The family photo that Aya Obasan keeps on the piano and the boxes of stored material in the attic help Naomi to draw herself out of the long slumber of indifference that has been



reinforced rather than eroded by Emily's insistent political speeches. Aya Obasan's urgent but inconclusive search through the attic in the middle of the night in Chapter Five compels Naomi's attention to the stored archive of the family past. One cannot deny the uncanny genius in Aya Obasan's apparently motiveless peregrinations and accumulations. In contrast to Emily's soapbox approach, Aya Obasan's indirect method awakens the first stirrings of Naomi's genuine interest in her past that are not contaminated by a sense of guilt or obligation.

Part of the prejudice that prevents Aya Obasan's activity from being seen as useful stems from the sense that her work, especially in comparison to Emily's, is not intentional or self-examined as a conscious political practice. Emily may seem more dedicated to openness, but she also knew about Grandma Kato's letters. Emily's collusion in keeping the secret of the mother's death from the children is as puzzling and problematic as Aya's or Isamu's. Unlike Aya Obasan, who is a very private person, Aunt Emily is committed to a struggle for full public disclosure of past injustice; her collusion in the parental pact of secrecy is not as fully resolved to herself as Aya Obasan's silence, which is at least consistent with her

and the real story of her mother. Fujita similarly belittles Aya Obasan's maternal love as leading to destruction. This hypothesis of Aya Obasan as an incompetent mother fails to account for the fact that the silence she keeps is kept also by Aunt Emily and Uncle Isamu. Although Isamu is Naomi's surrogate father, and Emily's discursive style belongs to what Goellnicht calls the figurative language of the father land ("Minority" 288-89), Goellnicht and Fujita prefer to type the disabling silence as a maternal flaw for which Aya Obasan alone is responsible.

To say that Aya Obasan has repressed all questions about Naomi's past, heritage, and mother (culture) is only accurate if we judge Aya Obasan's discourse by Aunt Emily's discursive standards. As Naomi's narrative establishes very early in the novel, Aya Obasan and Aunt Emily have different habits of communication. Answering questions is a verbal practice that does not characterize the way Aya Obasan transmits information; Naomi knows that she does not have, and has never had, "the key to the vault of her thoughts" (Obasan 26). Aya Obasan may not be forthcoming in words but she does provide and even stimulates access to central elements of Naomi's spiritual renewal. Emily is ostensibly more

character. By the end of the novel it is not entirely clear whether Emily's compulsive discursive performances were more a strategy of gradual exposure leading up to the revelation of Naomi's Grandmother's letters or whether the revelation represented the overthrow of years of activist energy devoted to sublimating the desire to expose the contents of the letter to Naomi and Stephen. Speech is not in itself a more reliable indicator of self-consciousness and intention than silence.

The view that Aya Obasan's work has no ideological motive draws its language from the intersecting prejudices of gender, race, and age. Goellnicht judges that Obasan

has made the mistake of attempting to keep Naomi in a state of childhood, to protect her through silence that turns to stone, a heavy and weary weight Naomi must carry throughout her life, in which she has repressed all the questions about her past, her heritage, her mother (culture). (Goellnicht "Minority" 297).

Fujita agrees that Aya Obasan's "steadfast love notwithstanding, she represents the inevitability of corrosion when silence means withheld knowledge" (Fujita 40). Goellnicht's accusation suggests that Aya Obasan is overly invested in the maternal role which represses the child's access to her Japanese heritage

forthcoming in words, but Naomi likens her approach at times to the futile scratching of a chicken's scaly claws (189) or the painful invasion of "a surgeon cutting at my scalp" (194). Naomi is not categorically opposed to Emily but she is often alienated by Emily's abrasive style.

Aya's evasions through sparing utterance communicate a lesson to Naomi that is not found in Emily's abrasive harangues and long trails of paper. Naomi has long since given up expecting answers from Aya Obasan about her mother: "After all these years, I find myself wondering, but with the dullness of expecting no response" (26). This impasse does not cause Naomi to accumulate any frustration or anger towards Aya Obasan; this fact is important because it reveals that despite the blockage and denial, Naomi learns a great deal from Aya about patience, endurance, and restraint: "My arms are suffused with an urge to hold, but a hug would startle her. I can only sit quietly beside her and wait for small signs of her return" (27). This lesson of passive trust is an extreme one but it becomes an important part of Naomi's ethic of humane inquiry whose expression cumulates in the cautionary tale of the Grand Inquisitor (228).

There is a fundamental ambivalence to Aya Obasan's

'repression' of the facts of Naomi's mother's death; Aya Obasan evades interrogation, offers enigmatic responses, and sometimes simply remains silent. Her presentation of unfilled spaces and her accumulation of unanswered questions gives Naomi a space for imagination and faith, elements that Naomi hungers for in addition to fact. The accretion of these silent efforts creates the aura of meaning; Naomi definitely gets the sense that there is something there to figure out. In this sense, Aya Obasan hints well in advance of the arrival of Emily's package that there is something yet to be understood about the past. The delay in informing Naomi and Stephen of the contents of Grandma Kato's letters is certainly repressive, yet a considerable ambivalence lies in the fact that the letters were preserved and not destroyed. Embedded in the secret that Aya Obasan, Aunt Emily, and Uncle Isamu kept from the children was an even deeper secret hope that the letters would be revealed someday.

Whether one chooses to describe the letters as having been repressed rather than preserved is a matter of how much intention one is willing to invest in the parental triad of Emily, Aya, and Isamu. Lim describes Aya Obasan's silence as "the silence that is powerless to break itself" (Lim "Asian" 242), yet Aya is there

in opposition to Aya Obasan's Eastern silence (Lim "Asian" 245). The implication here is that Japanese culture as a non-Western culture is lacking in the progressive 'Western' liberal institutions of free speech, justice, and democracy. This categorical assumption ignores the very point that the novel makes: that life in Western societies can be deeply silencing for its racial minorities and that these groups often have to turn to ancestral, communal resources to recover a self-assertive language.

Emily's activism against the Japanese Canadian Internment is attributed to her assimilation of 'Canadian' democratic habits despite the fact that the response to the Internment by most Canadians was at best one of tacit consent and blank indifference. The main groups to actively organize as a political force to secure economic redress for Japanese Canadians were Japanese Canadian. These people met considerable inertia and resistance from other Japanese Canadians and the wider Canadian society. The Japanese Canadian Redress Movement exemplified in the fiction by the character of Aunt Emily is a unique political indicator of the Japanese historical presence in Canada. In this sense, Canada as a society cannot legitimately lay claim to the progressive social labour of Aunt Emily;

that day reading the letters before the Barkers come to visit and is present when Father Nakayama arrives later to translate the letters aloud for Stephen and Naomi. Aya Obasan is fully aware of the contents of what she is keeping silent. Moreover, her presence on the day of disclosure is like a ceremonial conveyance of the matter that she and the others have kept hidden for almost thirty years, as the knowledge of the letters passes from a mark of shame to an emblem of love. Lim's understanding of Aya Obasan conflates the message with the messenger and refuses to understand that Aya Obasan can have an active relationship with the silences that she helps to keep for the day of telling.

Within the cultural discursive typology reinforced by critics, the silence that ostensibly makes Aya Obasan ineffectual also makes Japanese identity a regressive one; conversely, when Emily is seen as a positive agent critics are quick to credit this as her 'Western' or 'Canadian' quality. Gottlieb refers to Emily's "'Western' compulsion to speak up and bring justice" in contrast to Aya Obasan's "oriental traditions" (Gottlieb 47); Lim attributes her activism as a "keeper of memories" to her being "raised in Canada" (Lim "Japanese" 304) and elsewhere describes her as representing "the Western mode of public speech"

it is not accurate to dignify Canadian society as the origin of Emily's activist impulse when the characteristic Canadian behaviour during the Internment was one of mass racial hysteria and legislated racism. If Emily's actions can be seen as characteristic of any society, that society would be the Japanese in Canada; even at that, the assertion of Japanese Canadian civil rights by Japanese Canadians is only a recent phenomenon in Canadian history. Still, the naming of Aunt Emily's work as Canadian takes Emily's labour away from her as a Japanese Canadian, as a person who agitates for her Japanese specificity in Canada. It may be Western or Canadian to speak up against injustice, but it is not clearly a general Canadian trait to speak up for Japanese Canadian civil rights.<sup>6</sup>

Identifying the specific locus of Emily's activism in the Japanese community in Canada does not imply that she is modelling her behaviour on activist practice in Japan any more than the logic of calling her activism Western or Canadian implies that there is a wide community of non-Japanese Canadians working to educate the public about the Japanese Canadian Internment. What I am doing is calling attention to the logic through which the positive behaviour of an ethnic minority national subject is appropriated as a general

national quality. Calling a Japanese Canadian's civic activism solely Canadian or Western denies the possibility that civic achievements, especially those of ethnic national minorities, have cultural derivations in the complex interaction between their ancestry and their current social context in Canada. Emily's Japanese Canadian activism is the result of her Japanese Canadian impulse to speak up about the injustice against Japanese Canadians. She employs a Japanese Canadian mode of discourse characteristic of a phase of Japanese Canadian identity that is open to most of the events of the past but still hides certain facts that have not yet been dealt with. Her behaviour always grows out of being a Canadian of Japanese ancestry in Canada.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* delineates the hegemonic role played by the processes of archival collection and documentation during the French and British colonization of the Middle East in the nineteenth century. Aya Obasan and Aunt Emily are also archivists whose project is the documentation and recollection of their own lives: Obasan focuses on the objects and artifacts of the family experience, while Emily has a storehouse of public information that she keeps in constant circulation. In order to produce an archive

reflects, "it's become badly moth-eaten with time. We are now no more than a few tangled skeins--the remains of what might once have been a fisherman's net" (Obasan 21). Keeping Naomi ignorant of the nature of her mother's last days clearly does not improve the frayed state of family relations. Obasan, Emily, and Isamu, for their part, are not forthcoming on the content of the letters. To a large extent they are preoccupied with the effect of the Internment on their own self-esteem. In the symbolic language of the novel's opening prologue, only the desire of a "freeing speech" is capable of unlocking the silences that are held in stone.

Analyzing the family situation, Lim states that "Naomi remains trapped in the miasma of maternal deprivation . . . unsuccored by her two surrogate mother/aunts" (Lim "Asian" 242). Lim fails to acknowledge that for three people who were tasked with the rearing of two adopted children in politically turbulent times, they did not do such a terrible job. Though the children grew up with emotional sores that continued to fester in adulthood, one cannot say that the sisters and the brother-in-law failed altogether in covering for the mother who died and the father who disappeared. Naomi's surrogate parents are not

that does not have a hegemonic or coercive effect on the future generations for which it is intended, great care is devoted in the narrative to the discussion of the methods of acquiring knowledge and power.

Naomi is exceptionally preoccupied with the importance of having the right intellectual posture for humane knowledge. Her thoughts coalesce around a figure she calls the Grand Inquisitor whose violence upon the mother fails to procure any information from her. The Grand Inquisitor represents for Naomi a procedure of inquiry that needs to learn a fundamental lesson: "To hear my mother, to attend her speech, to attend the sound of stone, he must first become silent. Only when he enters her abandonment will he be released from his own" (Obasan 228). Obasan and Emily exercise this silence and abandonment so that they can hear Naomi's desire to learn about her mother. Unless Naomi comes forward on her own, she will not have the capacity to make use of the knowledge that Obasan, Emily, and Isamu have kept.

The family's practice of attentive but silent abandonment explains why so many crucial issues in the family remain unresolved. The family as a whole is, admittedly, deeply traumatized and fragmented by the dispersal: "If we were knit into a blanket once," Naomi

responsible for "maternal deprivation": Naomi was deprived of her mother by an American bomb.

Linking the deficiencies of Naomi's upbringing with the "surrogate mother/aunts" is a charge that introduces a critique of Emily and Obasan that judges them within the conventional roles and expectations of a patriarchal culture. Naomi is aware of the "crone-pone syndrome" that she shares with Aunt Emily (Obasan 8), but the insufficiencies of her two aunts is reinforced by the views of a patriarchal culture that characterizes the aunts as women who have failed to reproduce and who have failed to attract men. Aunt Emily's talent as a tireless advocate for political justice is disparaged by a logic tied solely to patriarchal ideologies about the role of women; as Rose observes, she "is assumed to be unmarried because she speaks too much, too loud, and incessantly" (Rose "Hawthorne's" 293). Obasan's embodiment of "a passive memory, muted, unvoiced, but enduring" is metaphorically associated with her womb; she is "the childless Japanese aunt, whose sufferings appear futile and unregenerative" (Lim "Asian" 245). According to Lim, Aunt Emily is also guilty of shirking her reproductive responsibilities: "Aunt Emily is also childless; in her own logocentric manner, she also has

failed the young Naomi" (Lim "Asian" 245). In "Speaking the Silence: Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*" (1987), Gary Willis views both of Naomi's aunts as failing to provide Naomi with "a satisfactory model of womanly fulfilment" (241); Obasan's marriage to Isamu "though devoted, is empty of touch and tenderness" (Willis 241), and Naomi is described as "thirty-six years old, unmarried, uncomfortable with her life, unhappy" (241). Fujita carries the argument of the damaging effect of nonreproductive women to the greatest length. She accounts for how the silence of the two aunts forms a barrier against Naomi's repeated inquiries:

Gradually she gives up, but her internal questioning persists and develops into a sense of betrayal, a lack of self esteem, a fear of the past, and a victim's acceptance of biological extinction, for Naomi is uncomfortable that both she and Aunt Emily are unmarried and that Obasan gave birth to two stillborn infants. (Fujita 33)

Obasan and Emily are blamed for Naomi's despair over the continuity of her race. Uncle Isamu and Naomi's father are not ascribed the same world-shattering consequences for their allegedly delinquent role as parents despite the fact that as men, they are also responsible for the process of human reproduction. None of the critics who disparage the sexual potential of the women apply their critiques in the same manner

female identity. Willis is right that Naomi is thirty-six years old and unmarried, but the narrative of her unhappy life as a single woman is also a critique of society's attitudes and expectations of unmarried woman. Naomi is capable of treating the subject with a wry sense of humour, describing herself and Aunt Emily as people who would make interesting subjects for scientific research (*Obasan* 8). Naomi takes a satirical stab at the culture's criminalization of female celibacy by suggesting she should have a card in her wallet that indicates her marital status as "Old Maid" (*Obasan* 7) for when she goes out on dates.

The evaluation of Emily, Obasan, and Naomi as barren is based on the assumptions of a culture that devalues old people and over-emphasizes the role of sexual activity as an index of human achievement and success, especially for women. Considering how much admiration Naomi shows for Aya Obasan as an elemental, ever-enduring old woman (*Obasan* 15-16), I do not perceive that Naomi regards aging as a negative process. Naomi's narrative perspective remains respectful of elders. Even Naomi's final judgement about her mother, "Gentle Mother, we were lost together in our silences" (*Obasan* 243), does not single her mother out for blame.

to the men despite metaphorical invitations to make such comparisons in the case of Uncle Isamu who is associated with baking. As a baker of hard, inedible stone bread his failure as a producer exists mostly as a mildly comic counterpoint to the more serious consequences of failure of literal reproduction for women. Women who cannot produce are regarded much more seriously as a problem and even a crisis for the future of the race. Emily and Obasan may not have any biological children but they do have involuntarily adopted ones. Critiques of their work as parents do not seem interested in distributing blame and responsibility to the biological or surrogate fathers.

Willis' remark about the sterility of Aya Obasan's marriage to Uncle Isamu is also a narrow interpretation. Uncle's question "What's ruv?" (6) does not necessarily imply that his marriage to Aya Obasan is "empty of touch or tenderness"; youthful or modern concepts of romance and love do not always adequately account for the nature of intimate human relationships across the whole span of a lifetime. Naomi is modest and self-deprecating, but she is far from being the failure that Willis describes. Such judgements of the insufficiency of the female characters is based on an impoverished concept of

Without the understanding that Aya Obasan and Aunt Emily are complex subjects who both exemplify varying forms of speech and silence within themselves, the two aunts become prey to theories that interpret them as incomplete and insufficient. Both women are certainly traumatized by the Internment, as are the rest of the members of the family, but the aunts are not simply paralysed and ineffectual halves of an oppositional dialectic that Naomi transcends through an evolutionary synthesis. The insistence that Aya Obasan represents a Japanese mode of silence that prefigures a relatively more progressive Canadian mode of speech exemplified by Aunt Emily grades the women in a reductive hierarchy of discursive competence and nationalist privilege. The view that the steadfast endurance of Aya Obasan and the resolute political conviction of Aunt Emily help Naomi towards the discovery of her unique voice provides a positive image of collective female effort. However, readings by Lim, Goellnicht, Fujita, and Rose that advance this view are still heavily invested in an Orientalist logic of partition between East and West. This logic reinforces a sexualized understanding of the East as passive and feminine, and the West as active and masculine, a logic that the novel itself invites to a large extent. As the novel's masculine woman, Emily

within this typology becomes the Canadian urban social man while Aya Obasan becomes an archetypal 'ethnic' village woman.

Like her foremothers before her, Naomi assumes her place in the discursive tradition through a sympathetic displacement or countering of the silences in her family. Naomi "hears" (*Obasan* 240) her silent mother through Grandma Kato's letter in Chapter Thirty Seven and follows with her empathetic response in Chapter Thirty Eight. Although one assumes that Naomi responds to the letter spontaneously as it is being read, a separate space in the narrative for Naomi's response is necessary to underscore the activity rather than the passivity of Naomi's hearing. Naomi's concept of attending her mother's speech is not simply a matter of being present at the reading but of confirming the internalization of the mother's mediated "word" with words of her own. Naomi's apprehension of her mother as a living, suffering subject requires that she perform her own subjectivity through words of attendance to her mother. The mothering that is being reproduced is the capacity for loving speech. While Naomi acknowledges the repressive silence of the mother in the past, the information in the letters allows her

indication either way as to whether she intended to keep her children in a permanent state of ignorance about the events or not. Since she does not survive her injuries, her future intentions cannot be determined.

The rigid endurance of Naomi's mother's prohibitive injunction develops as the cumulative effect of a number of events over which she has no control. Not only does she not live to tell, but her wishes fall onto the ears of her sister, her sister-in-law, and her brother-in-law who are themselves traumatized by wartime experiences on their side of the Pacific. Aya Obasan and Uncle Isamu would much prefer to leave the Japanese Canadian Internment behind in the past. Naomi's mother's horrible injury and death in Japan become part of the ugliness of the past that they wish to repress; the mother is absorbed within the general taboo about discussing the past that develops in Naomi's family. Naomi's mother's wish that the children be spared the details of her suffering at Nagasaki is not originally intended to be harmful or repressive, but it becomes so as Naomi's surrogate parents use this injunction to justify their avoidance of an event that they associate with the humiliation of their own internment.

to abandon this understanding for a new memory of a mother who worked to care for others in the rubble of Nagasaki. Understanding her mother's victimization helps Naomi to understand her own: "Gentle Mother, we were lost together in our silences. Our wordlessness was our mutual destruction" (*Obasan* 243). Naomi matures from an unquestioning and obedient daughter to a self-motivated subject who can contradict her mother's edict of silence in the knowledge that neither her love for her mother nor her mother's love for her are compromised.

Naomi's mother's silence of almost thirty years turns out not to be the result of the mother's wish alone. The repression is maintained by an accumulation of forces and motives. Unravelling the different layers of silence uncovers the effects of the oppression and victimization that Naomi's family has had to endure since the Second World War. The silence that Naomi's mother wishes to keep about her and her family's suffering in the atomic bombing of Nagasaki is intended to protect her children from unnecessary trauma. Naomi's mother's injunction is no doubt a form of self-protective denial as well, a survival instinct induced by the incomprehensible enormity of the violence and destruction around her. There is no

Furthermore, Grandma Kato's letters of outpouring to Grandpa Kato are not intended for Naomi or Stephen. The impulse to preserve Naomi's mother's secret becomes a pact of silence that lasts well into Naomi's adult life. Even Aunt Emily's vociferous objection, occasionally overheard by Naomi, ends in a grudging complicity to continued silence. Nevertheless, Aya Obasan, Aunt Emily, and Uncle Isamu preserve the letters for a future day of telling to the children. The intentions of the surrogate parents are at least ambivalent; they do not reveal the letters for several decades, but neither did they destroy them. The potential of future disclosure is preserved in the letters and so their concealment is also a safekeeping and, in light of the eventual reading, a delayed but completed communication.

I agree with Fujita and Cheung in differentiating the varieties of silence in *Obasan*. Naomi's mother is often identified with silence, but as Lim observes, Grandma Kato's second letter reveals the mother did speak, if only to indicate the desire for silence. This point is not a technicality, although the overall effect on Naomi is the same for many years. Just as the idiom of linguistic agency is central to Naomi's conception of her mother as a speaking subject, so the



distinction is important that Naomi's mother has the capacity of speech but denies it. Naomi's mother is not categorically silent or limited to modes of "pre-subjective" or "preoedipal" communication for any essential or characteristic reason but because she was silenced by the trauma of the atom bomb.

The effort by the surrogate parents to protect Naomi through silence backfires. The silence turns from protection into imprisonment and the prohibition is all the more effective because its origins are concealed. Naomi never finds out why her questions about her mother are not answered. Lacking any firm leads with which to form even an hypothesis, Naomi lives her whole life unconsciously denying the Internment in a grotesque extension of her mother's silent victimization by the bomb. Naomi lacks a knowledge of her mother on which to base a reactive process of healing and growth. She has not grown out of her identity as an abandoned daughter and so her life as a daughter is still wrapped up in her mother who is silent and dead. A part of Naomi's living identity remains in the past, silent and dead until the living traces of her mother are recuperated in language.

Naomi's own memory of her mother is shrouded in

feminist cultural and psychoanalytic theories such as those of Adrienne Rich and Julia Kristeva. The order of symbolic or figurative language in Goellnicht's analyses is related to patriarchy and the white majority in Canada ("Minority" 298), but in the novel there is a noticeable lack of actual male bodies or names with which to associate this monolithic power. Japanese Canadian men, victimized and silenced themselves as Goellnicht has noted ("Minority" 298), fall short as oppressors; the impersonal orders of the Government, while probably penned by men, contain no features of recognizable masculinity or even humanity. The orders are imperative but their authority draws not on the power of being embodied in men but in not being embodied at all. The ruling culture relies on the absence of the body, and in this case the male body, to project the ubiquity and omnipresence of its power.

Old Man Gower's use of his male body to sexually abuse Naomi represents an actual physical example of the oppression of white patriarchy. As a political allegory, Old Man Gower represents Canada and its actions against Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. Erika Gottlieb refers to the metaphor of rape as a political allegory (45), as does Marilyn Russell Rose who develops various metaphorical valences

shame and the desire for secrecy. For Naomi, the disappearance of her mother is associated with the trauma of early childhood sexual abuse by Old Man Gower. Naomi blames herself for what she feels is her complicity in the sexual abuse by Old Man Gower, and interprets her mother's disappearance shortly after these incidents as the punishment for cooperating with Gower. Previous to the abuse, Naomi lives in what Ila Goody calls a "romance of maternal unity" (Goody 161) in which Naomi does not perceive her physical separation from her mother: "Her blood is whispering through my veins. The shaft of her leg is the shaft of my body and I am her thoughts" (*Obasan* 64). Gower's abuse effects a traumatic separation from the mother: "in Gower's hands I become other--a parasite on her body, no longer of her mind" (*Obasan* 64). Gower's abuse instigates and enforces Naomi's sense of separation from her mother.

A. Lynne Magnusson notes the resemblance between Naomi's myth of separation from the mother and Jacques Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud's Oedipal myth, via Saussure and structural linguistics, in which "the crisis of separation from the mother's body coincides with entry into the symbolic order of language" (61-62). Lim and Goellnicht also pursue this theme through

of the term "rape" in her descriptions of the effect of the Internment on Japanese Canadians ("Politics" 222, 223, 224). Rose's characterization of the Internment as a "political and spiritual rape" ("Politics" 224) metaphorically links Gower's sexual abuse of Naomi to the Canadian government's abuse of Japanese Canadian civil and human rights during the Internment. Gower separates Naomi from her mother who, as Goellnicht observes, maintains connections with the "mother culture" in Japan where her own family still lives and where she returns to and eventually dies ("Minority" 298). Naomi remembers being told by Aya Obasan that "though Mother was born in Canada she was raised in Japan by her grandmother" (*Obasan* 67). Gower and Naomi's mother, allegorically framed as representing Canada and Japan, occupy an oppositional relationship to each other in Naomi's mind: "The chasm from the mother which opens with Old Man Gower becomes literally the Pacific Ocean" (Turner 92). The cultural dimension of Gower's abuse is that it assimilates Naomi into a state of obedient subordination by contaminating her connection to her mother and thus, in Naomi's understanding, to her Japanese cultural base.

The relationship Naomi imagines between her mother and Old Man Gower can be likened to that of a victim

and her murderer or rapist. Magnusson notes that the violence of Gower's abuse "seems to be played out obliquely in some of Naomi's nightmares" (66). Naomi's dream of the Grand Inquisitor is one such scene in which a male outsider always violates and murders Naomi's mother. The internalized experience of sexual abuse by Gower also resurfaces as Naomi's repeated nightmare of the naked Asian women who are forced into seductive gestures while being mutilated by soldiers (*Obasan* 61-62). In both of these cases Naomi transfers the violence by Gower into violence by nameless soldiers who represent more generally the role of aggression and violence that is sanctioned by society. In the context of the racial victimization of Naomi's community by the white Canadian majority and the Canadian government, race is a significant element of Naomi's personal feelings of oppression: the doctor that persecutes Naomi in one of her recurring childhood nightmares is "angry and British" (*Obasan* 158). Rose emphasizes "the sexual violation of oriental women by white men" as a political act that reflects "the abuse of Japanese-Canadians by white Canada" ("Politics" 222). The violation of Japanese Canadian civil rights by the government was broad and devastating; families were separated, lifetime fortunes were confiscated and

to identify herself as a separate entity from her mother. The experience of the abuse, at least in memory, constitutes Naomi's first experience as an individually distinct subject.

One could suggest in psycholinguistic terms that the little girl is separated from her mother's Imaginary or semiotic realm and brought into the symbolic order by the sexual violation of the old man as the Father's Law. This interpretation would conform to the gendering of the preoedipal and symbolic realms in the psycholinguistic theories of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva. The problem with this view is that while Gower inculcates Naomi into silence, the women in the novel are not alienated from symbolic language; they are in fact, by the example of Grandma Kato, Aunt Emily, and Naomi's narrative voice, the key and crucial linguistic actors of the novel. In an important rhetorical gesture, Naomi is not able to articulate herself as an empowered subject until she hears the words of her mother. Aya Obasan is one of the keepers of the letters that finally allow Naomi to hear these words. Magnusson is aware that Naomi's account of her violation and separation is "a highly subjective reconstruction" (65) and it is unlikely that Naomi's account of these scenes is not influenced by

sold, Japanese Canadians were forced to pay for their own internment and did not regain the right to vote until four years after the end of the war (*Justice* 2-3). The policy of the Canadian government and the consent of most Canadians during the Japanese Canadian Internment make Old Man Gower's actions as a white patriarch of the majority culture characteristically Canadian for that period.

Additionally, we recall that Gower's sexual abuse of Naomi takes place before Naomi's mother's departure. Magnusson has made the case that the abuse is the central moment of loss for Naomi rather than her mother's actual departure for Japan (65). The violence that Naomi is trying to displace through her desire to trace a direct connection to her mother motivates the tension that runs through Naomi's narration, which Magnusson sees as a struggle between

a story and a counter-story, or a preferred myth of origins and unassimilated story elements that pull against it: the consoling story of a pre-linguistic paradise in tension with a supplement that threatens the consolation of the story. (66)

The threatening supplement to Naomi's preferred myth of maternal origins is the symbolically paternal sexual violence of Gower. Gower's influence is hard to erase because the abuse is the very event that causes Naomi

investments of her own desire from an already linguistic and post-oedipal perspective. Naomi's relationship to her mother before Gower's abuse is not pre-linguistic in any way that we as listeners or readers can perceive; all the idyllic stories from the period of maternal unity are told to us in retrospect from the world of speech, writing, and self-consciousness after the abuse by Gower.

The ability to articulate a state before language itself relies on language to make its state of absence known. In terms of the psycholinguistic typology, the mother's recovery is dependent on Gower's ostensibly enabling abuse, which makes Japanese mothers dependent upon Canadian fathers for their preservation in word and memory. As a political allegory, one notes that the paternalism of the Canadian cultural policy of multiculturalism often makes the assumption that the economic and democratic largesse of the country enables its minorities to speak out and celebrate their ethnic cultures. The schizophrenia of the majority national culture's behaviour towards minorities is apparent from the perspective of the minority group which in one historical moment suffers the brunt of the nation's xenophobia and in the next moment is called upon to enrich the diversity of that same nation's cultural

fabric by narrating the history of the majority culture's racism as the minority culture's proud tale of pioneering endurance and struggle. The narrative of Obasan, like the title's character, "does not dance to the multi-cultural piper's tune or respond to the racist's slur" (Obasan 226). Instead it exposes the paternal speech of Canadian officialdom as the discourse of a political structure that silences Japanese Canadian voices.

Naomi's mother may symbolize silence and semiotic motility, but as a textual representation she exists in the symbolic order: she is what the narrator speaks. Silent modes and characters are all represented by language, which is how we come to know them as silent and without language. The cultural typology that determines Naomi's process of maturity as the progress from Japanese and maternal identification to Canadian and paternal identification (Goellnicht "Minority" 298) is based on a motility that has no linguistic shape or order until it ruptures the symbolic order. Typologically, the Japanese space in this construction does not exist until it is brought into the Canadian social order. There is no room in the model for the Japanese space to exist in itself because, according to the theory, its space is pre-subjective, pre-linguistic,

disturbing similarities of both Gower and Mother as parental figures who invoke repressive silences: Gower tells Naomi not to tell, and Naomi's mother tells Grandma Kato not to tell. Strangely enough, both Gower and Naomi's mother use silence to mask violence. Before Naomi hears Grandma Kato's letters, she is not able to distinguish between the silence of the oppressor and the silence of the oppressed.

During the period after the abuse and before the hearing of the letters, Naomi's mother is indistinguishable in her effects from Gower; the mother's departure and Gower's assault both appear to advance Naomi's process of maturation:

Even the communicative silence of absolute trust that Naomi shared with her Mother as a child "without words" (p. 59), in adulthood she sees as a false sense of security, shattered not only by external forces like Old Man Gower's sexual assault, but also by the child's growing independence from her parents, her assertion of self, which must issue in words. (Goellnicht "Minority" 296)

In this reading, the prelinguistic paradise of Naomi's infant attachment to her mother is an illusory refuge that must eventually be abandoned if Naomi is to mature and become articulate. Goellnicht's analysis does not imply that Gower's assault is in any way positive, but in structural terms his analysis does align Gower's assault with the general progress towards speech that

and pre-oedipal. In political terms this cultural psycholinguistic typology as a function in both the text and the criticism installs a logic of cultural assimilation and subordination.

As a victim who feels that she has complied and consented to the actions of her victimizer, Naomi cannot fully disassociate herself from an identification with the oppressor as well as the oppressed. Her anxieties about being party to an invasive practice of discursive violence in her search for her mother surfaces in the anxiety that she may be the Grand Inquisitor of her own mother: "How the Grand Inquisitor gnaws at my bones. At the age of questioning my mother disappeared" (Obasan 228). This sense of complicity with inquisitive violence is all the more disturbing to Naomi because of the similarities of the injunctions of Old Man Gower and her mother. In Naomi's life before the illumination provided by Grandma Kato's letters, Naomi cannot recover her mother as a loving memory because of her recollections about her mother are poisoned by the association of Old Man Gower. Gower's abuse exerts a gravitational influence on Naomi's thoughts such that Naomi thinks of her mother according to the model established by Gower. Naomi's mind works on the

includes the child's own self-assertion.

To a large extent the psycholinguistic typology naturalizes the abandonment by the mother as an event which colludes with the abuse by Gower; both are part of the process that leads Naomi towards discursive maturity. The violence of thetic articulation corresponds to sexual violation and defines speech as the rape of silence in terms similar to Naomi's description of her dream of the Grand Inquisitor. The psycholinguistic typing of Gower with speech and the mother with silence corresponds to Naomi's negative model of the Grand Inquisitor's relationship to Naomi's mother. The attendance that Naomi regards as necessary before the Grand Inquisitor can hear her mother's silence subverts both the linguistic typology of the psychoanalytic model and the cultural typology that is mounted over it, finally giving Naomi a version of her mother who is not secretly in league with Gower in punishing sexual sins.

Naomi's redemptive cultural vision at the end of the novel is not so much interested in developing a Japanese-based anti-war or anti-nuclear politics from the mother's death as it is in reinterpreting her as a symbolic figure whose reacquisition by the daughter allows the Canadian daughter to forge a new

sociopolitical subjectivity for herself in a morally renewable Canada of the post-Internment period. Naomi learns from Aunt Emily that a missionary found her mother's name in Japan on a plaque for the dead at the site of which stands a "Canadian maple tree" that "utters its scarlet voice in the air" (Obasan 241). This deliberate symbolic placement of a public national symbol of Canada over the name of the mother buried in Japan turns the mother into a nationalist icon whose voice, scarlet red like the maple leaf of the Canadian flag, serves the daughter's discourse of an affirmative and inclusive Canadian nationalism.

Goellnicht interprets the tree as indicating how Naomi's mother "still speaks as a Canadian, even from the grave, the red maple leaf signifying her identity, her linguistic reality, even as her body lies buried in Japanese soil" ("Minority" 301). The red of the Canadian maple tree is also that of "[p]rayers bleeding" and the "rustling leaves are fingers scratching an empty sky" (Obasan 241) in reference to Canada's violence and indifference to its Japanese Canadian minority. The Canadian maple tree symbolizes a suffering that is not answered through this Canadian symbol placed in memory of the Japanese dead. The plaque does not memorialize Naomi's mother

looks towards in its closing memorandum of the "Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians to the House and the Senate of Canada" resists the assimilative features of the "multi-cultural piper's tune" (Obasan 226) in favour of a more foundational association with Japanese figures as the source of a redeemed post-internment Canadian nationalism. Hence the novel is named after Aya Obasan, who retains more qualities of Japanese culture than Aunt Emily. Naomi is much more preoccupied over the course of the novel with her mother who died in Japan than with her uncle in Canada who has recently passed away. The daughter's liberated reconstruction of her mother's identity reorients Canadian culture so that it attends Japanese sites of national and cultural origin.

The emphasis that the novel places on the inclusion of Japanese Canadians into the existing political structure of Canada rather than the transformation of political boundaries and jurisdictions by Japanese Canadians along the model of aboriginal self-government or French Canadian separatism suggests that the novel's construction of an ideal ethnic community may also adhere to conventional notions of racial identity. Gayle Fujita assumes such a conventional attitude in the text in identifying a

specifically; she is one name among others and there is no date on the stone. Moreover, the reclamation of Naomi's mother as a Canadian through the symbolism of the Canadian maple tree is described in a paragraph in the novel that begins with Naomi's admission of Canada's belated reacceptance of her mother and her observation of her mother's choice not to return to Canada. Goellnicht writes that "Naomi finally recognizes that her Mother before her has negotiated a crossing between two cultures" ("Minority" 301), but it is clear that Naomi is aware that her mother ultimately crossed in one direction. To the extent that a Canadian maple tree is a foreign symbol in Japan, the case is more secure that the Canadian symbol is that which has negotiated the crossing between two cultures. The red Canadian maple is not an object specifically associated with Naomi's mother's personal life, but it is her mother's love that "flows through the roots of the trees by our graves" (Obasan 243). Canadian society draws redemptive energy from Naomi's mother just as the Canadian tree is infused with the mother's love. Through the metaphor of the tree, Naomi figures her mother's regenerative energy into a discourse of a new Canadian polity.

The promise of a better Canada that the novel

particular artistic style with Japanese North American immigrant culture. Fujita proposes

that the essence of Kogawa's "brilliant artistic tour de force," . . . is Naomi's nonverbal mode of apprehension summarized by the term "attendant." This sensibility, rooted in Naomi's *nikkei* inheritance and her before-the-war Vancouver home, is . . . not simply the novel's stylistic achievement but a form of Japanese Canadian and American culture. (Fujita 34)

By defining the central artistic process of the novel as a "nonverbal mode of apprehension" based on a "*nikkei* legacy" (Fujita 39),<sup>7</sup> Fujita directs our understanding to the artistic style of the novel as part of a process that is Japanese in origin, and which in turn defines those who articulate themselves within this process as certifiably of Japanese origin.

National or racial claims over artistic style may be legitimate, but they always expose a desire for stable cultural entities endemic to all systems of artistic categorization. When the cherished commodity is a nonverbal mode of apprehension, the declaration of cultural possession exists suddenly in a fundamental tension with the product itself, which, as a literary text, is necessarily verbal. By strangely inverting the definition of Japanese community as a collectivity of silence, speaking the *nikkei* legacy betrays its nonverbal integrity. As a performance then, Fujita's

concept of nikkei culture always exists in a self-negating or suicidal relation to itself. To come into existence as a form of Japanese Canadian or American culture, a literary text must exist as a written artifact. If the culturally defining feature of this textual artifact is nonverbal, Japanese Canadian and American art in this vein must always exist in contradiction to itself. The mode of attendance itself destabilizes the national and racial frames articulated to contain it.

It is important to identify essentialist and Orientalist conceptions in *Obasan* and in readings of *Obasan* because the text is open to such interpretations and yet, in other ways, also resists and subvert these approaches. While not invalidating the approaches of critics like Goellnicht who stress the postmodernity of *Obasan*, I see the novel as also a very conservative text, with very conservative intentions and themes. Kogawa's text is both open to Orientalist readings and resistant readings. My own critique of Orientalism in the literary criticism of Kogawa's *Obasan* should not be understood as an attack on non-Japanese Canadian literary criticism of *Obasan* or on non-Japanese Canadian literary critics themselves. Literary

The new Mrs. Barker is new indeed if she is suggesting that Obasan could go to the Sunnydale Lodge. Obasan would be as welcome there as a Zulu warrior. It's a white-walled, white-washed and totally white old folks' home. (224)

In this flash of anger, Naomi exposes the stark racial binaries and the sense of racial threat that dominate her thoughts. She is all too aware of her own racial abjection within the dominant culture: the whiteness of the Barkers contrasted against the "foreign odour" of Obasan's house with its "strong smell of miso and daicon and shoyu," and "all the dust Obasan and I are too short to see" (*Obasan* 224). Naomi deepens her portrait of Obasan as the opposite of Mrs. Barker by developing their encounter in the language of war and political conflict. Mrs. Barker "sits straight as a flagpole. Her flag represents the Barker kingdom, a tiny but confident country. But momentarily she is planted here on this soil beside Obasan's own dark flag" (224). At this moment Naomi defines Aya Obasan defensively in resistance to the invasive imperial threat of Mrs. Barker.

The parallelism of these national allegories in the living room does not hold for long as Naomi decides quickly to elevate Obasan in stature beyond the din of mortal struggle:

Obasan is moving about deaf and impassive,

Orientalism as inscription and interpretation does not require that the Orientalist agents be characteristically Western subjects by racial, national, or cultural origin, as Fujita's work suggests. Neither is the Japanese Canadian subject categorically exempt from the possibility of reproducing Orientalist discourses. Kogawa herself reinscribes problematic narratives by pitting some of her central Japanese Canadian characters in an oppositional, binary relationship to white Canadian characters.

In the scene after Uncle Isamu's funeral Aya Obasan is visited by the Barkers, who are occasional acquaintances. Mr. and Mrs. Barker function as types for the benevolent racist. Mrs. Barker is a particularly alien presence since she is Mr. Barker's second wife, and has only met Naomi once before this visit. Nevertheless, to Naomi "[s]he is remarkably like the other Mrs. Barker whom I was never able to approach" (*Obasan* 222). Within the first uncomfortable minute Naomi develops a clear dislike for Mrs. Barker: "We are dogs, she and I, sniffing for clues, our throats quivering with subliminal growls" (*Obasan* 224). Mrs. Barker's suggestion that Obasan is ready to be interned in a retirement home elicits an internal response in Naomi of active, barely contained rage:

unavailable for questioning or their ministrations. Her land is impenetrable, so thick that even the sound of mourning is swallowed up. In her steadfast silence, she remains inviolate. (225)

This protective interpretation positions Obasan above Mrs. Barker and describes Obasan as bounded within invincible physical as well as moral space, her silence alluding to a superior capacity for restraint. The means to this superiority is achieved by placing Obasan beyond the social order altogether. To vanquish the threat of Mrs. Barker's socially alien presence, Naomi determines that Obasan will outdo Mrs. Barker by becoming the absolute alien. Exceeding Mrs. Barker, and ordinary speaking subjects as a whole, Naomi alienates Obasan entirely from Canadian society: "She remains in a silent territory, defined by her serving hands" (*Obasan* 226). Willis' claim that "[t]o Naomi, Obasan has become an icon of Japanese womanhood" (Willis 240) expands upon the narrative's suggestion of an essential Japanese identity in the same way that Merivale interprets Naomi's mother's "eyes of Japanese motherhood" (Merivale 78, *Obasan* 47). Nevertheless, like most strategies of ultimate victory, the narrative's depiction of Naomi's resentment against Mrs. Barker risks as much harm to the Japanese female subjectivity that Naomi is defending as the white



Canadian subjectivity that she is attacking.

The main weakness of Naomi's oppositional strategy lies in the basis on which she founds Obasan's identity as an agent of resistance. In fashioning Obasan as the antithesis to Mrs. Barker, Naomi cannot escape defining Obasan in the logic of opposition as darkness and silence. Critics such as Goellnicht maintain that these marginalized spaces can be recovered and transformed into positive energy in a revolutionary politics of the self. Goellnicht tentatively suggests,

that when the daughter negotiates a balance between parental presences and between "mother culture" and "father land," . . . she can then juggle the positions of a multiple, shifting, fluid identity and utilize a multiplicity of discourses, including the semiotic . . . to critique the Law of patriarchy and the totalizing voice of dominant history. (Goellnicht "Minority" 299)<sup>8</sup>

This visionary program is reminiscent of the semiotic politics that Kristeva predicts as feminism's third wave in her essay "Women's Time." The only problem with Naomi's (and Kogawa's) semiotizing of Obasan is that Obasan is not only a symbol for an order of discourse in the novel but a full fledged fictional representation of a person living in the society portrayed by the novel. Having been considered all her life by white Canada as too inferior to be socially

(*Obasan* 111). Goellnicht's reading of *Obasan* as a partly documentary novel of the political silencing of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War adopts this metaphor, and, like Kogawa, arranges historical events in conformity around it: "Japanese Canadians were not given the vote, another expression of the word or voice, until 1949" (Goellnicht "Minority" 292).

The silence of the Japanese Canadians is a trope that has become exaggerated by an excessive reliance upon *Obasan* as a definitive text of the Japanese Canadian experience. While Kogawa's fictional account of the Japanese Canadian Internment and dispersal is the first novelistic account to be published, it is not the only account that exists. Japanese Canadians of this period were articulate and did in fact record their experience of the internment through letters, diaries, and newspaper articles for circulation within the camps. A notable example is the internment diary of Takeo Ujo Nakano, *Within the Barbed Wire Fence* (1980), which is interspersed with tanka verse. Additionally, the letters in Aunt Emily's journal in *Obasan* are based on actual letters written during the period of the dispersal by Muriel Kitagawa which were brought to Kogawa's attention by an archivist in the Public Archives of Canada (Martin, "The Haunting" E

Canadian, Kogawa, through Naomi, ostensibly restores Obasan's dignity by making her too superior to be socially Canadian. The latter gesture is made with the best intentions: the irony is that Obasan, who is a human character in the novel at the same level as Naomi and Aunt Emily, still is not granted full inclusion in Canadian society and must still hover, privileged now instead of ignored, on the margins.

The publication of *Obasan* in 1981 at a felicitous moment before the rise of the Japanese Canadian Redress Movement in the early 1980s ensured the novel's prominent place in the history of the Redress Movement and the history of Japanese Canadians (Goellnicht "Minority" 306, Davidson 14-15); the critical tendency to regard Naomi's mother culture as semiotic silence and Naomi's activity as the mother's recovery into 'symbolic' speech has affected the historiography of the Japanese Canadian Internment itself. Kogawa refers to the literal acts of repression effected under the Canadian government's wartime policy to place a historical ground beneath her literary use of linguistic and personal silence as a political metaphor: "We are the silences that speak from stone. We are the despised rendered voiceless, stripped of car, radio, camera and every means of communication"

16).

The trope of silence in *Obasan* is a literary strategy of representation that is not and does not pretend to be historically representative of the varied ways in which Japanese Canadians responded to the internment.<sup>9</sup> Finding instances that confirm Japanese Canadian political silence may make the fact of their silence in those cases true, but it does not necessarily indicate that silence is an ingrained feature of the collective personality of Japanese Canadians.<sup>10</sup>

The typological imbalance of power between Japanese and Canadian identities stems from a deeply embedded assimilationist ideology that is internalized by Kogawa's own view of her work. In an interview Kogawa has acknowledged the ubiquity of the interpretation that immigrant writers are between worlds. In *Ittsuka* (1992), Kogawa's sequel to *Obasan*, Aunt Emily tells Naomi:

Whether we like it or not, Nomi... all of us Japanese Canadians are oriental westerners. We're bridges. We span the gap. It's our fate and our calling--to be hyphens--to be diplomats. (85)<sup>11</sup>

The ambivalent function of the bridge as metaphor is that, while a bridge connects two cultural shores, it also marks the shores as separate and even opposing. Gary Willis can thus make the simplistic generalization

that "Japanese are restrained; Canadians, forceful" (239) from Naomi's account of "the fundamental difference in Japanese workmanship" revealed in how her grandfather works a plane by pulling it with control rather than pushing it with force (*Obasan* 24). Willis can then elaborate on this logic of opposition until, in terms of the bridge metaphor, the bridge becomes the base on which the two shores are grounded, as the definitive element which segregates and yet also sustains the existence of the two shores. The bridge as the object that relates one side to another becomes the fixed frame and the reference point for a dualistic relation that forms Willis' self-contained model of interpretation:

*Obasan* is a moving and original novel, expressive of a sensibility that wishes to define, in relation to each other, Japanese and Canadian ways of seeing, and even to combine these divergent perceptions in an integrated and distinctive vision. (Willis 239)

Ila Goody also relies on the dualistic logic of the culturally split subject: *Obasan* "stands exactly on the balancing point of two literatures" (Goody 145); and Kogawa "more than any other writer in English Canada today, is the true inheritor of both the European and Japanese traditions in fiction" (Goody 145).<sup>12</sup> Kogawa tries to make the most of the cross-cultural situation

writer, she has always written in Canada about Canadians. Even Goody, paradoxically in light of her own remarks, notes that "Kogawa insists, both within *Obasan* itself and in interviews, that her work is that of a Canadian writer uninfluenced by any specific knowledge of Japanese literature" (Goody 145). Cast as spanning the gap and being hyphenated between Canada and Japan, the role of a diplomat who is a Canadian is to represent Canada's interests in Japan.

Clearly, this is not the function that critics such as Willis and Goody celebrate in Kogawa. They celebrate her distinctively Japanese qualities and her capacity to integrate these into the Canadian context. In effect, they assume that she is a diplomat from Japan assigned to represent Japan to Canada. Kogawa tries to maintain a concept of marginal privilege through the metaphor of the diplomat, but this strategy merely rationalizes her reception by critics and audiences not so much as a Canadian writer but as a marginal writer. The subjects who stand "exactly on the balancing point" of two literatures or cultures can just as easily be denied full inclusion into either one.

*Obasan* is not an autobiography but partly because of its influence in the cultural politics of the

by suggesting the positive role Japanese Canadians can play as diplomats. The underlying fact nevertheless remains that the post of the diplomat is not a freely chosen occupation for the Japanese Canadians but one assigned by the dominant Canadian culture. To be assigned the role of diplomat by fate and as a calling is simply to put the best face on the fact that one is still being subtly coerced into the margins of Canadian culture.

Kogawa's metaphor of the Japanese Canadian as diplomat is also deceptive on other grounds. Diplomats are privileged members of a bureaucratic elite selected and paid for by the state to represent the state's economic and political interests in foreign countries. Japanese Canadians do not come from a history of being privileged by the state in Canada. The opposite fact has been more true, the subject matter of *Obasan* being a chief case in point. While diplomats mediate issues between countries, acting as "bridges" that "span the gap," they generally do not stand "exactly on the balancing point." The diplomat's real obligation is not disinterested mediation but the earnest representation and defense of the economic and political priorities of her home nation. Which nation, then, is Kogawa the diplomat of? Kogawa is a Canadian

author's racial identity, critics, reviewers, and interviewers often make the assumption that Kogawa's own childhood experience of the Japanese Canadian Internment forms a basis for the novel, especially in the character of Naomi. Kogawa acknowledges in the preface that the novel incorporates actual historical events and names of real people. There are similarities on several issues between the voice and opinion of Kogawa's narrator in *Obasan* and the stances that Kogawa herself assumes in interviews and articles. The case has been extensively made by critics such as Goellnicht, Rose, and Lim that *Obasan* offers a compelling commentary on issues of gender and race. I would like to argue that, while the novel has a political dimension, it also evades and represses a number of political issues.

One consistent view that Kogawa has maintained inside and outside of her novel is the identification of Japanese Canadians as a people with elemental links with the Canadian land. Her re-establishment of Japanese Canadians in *Obasan* recalls conventional nationalistic narratives of heroic nation-building:

We are those pioneers who cleared the bush and the forest with our hands, the gardeners tending and attending the soil with our tenderness, the fishermen who are flung from the sea to flounder in the dust of the

prairies. (112)<sup>13</sup>

Naomi describes her aunt in mythical terms as the old woman who "stands as the true and rightful owner of the earth" (*Obasan* 15-16) and her uncle as Sitting Bull (*Obasan* 2). B.A. St. Andrews notes that Naomi's description of her uncle connects him to "another man displaced by war and racial hatred" and shows how Kogawa unites "the red and yellow-skinned peoples of Canada through their mutual love of the land, their silence, and their will to survive" (St. Andrews "Reclaiming" 31). Kogawa's narrative articulates the permanence of the bond between Japanese Canadians and their nation.

A good deal of Kogawa's efforts to naturalize the Japanese Canadian presence in Canada involves making links to the indigenous people of Canada. Apart from the sexual abuse by Old Man Gower, Naomi's most memorable interaction with a non-Japanese Canadian is with native Canadian Rough Lock Bill, who rescues her from a drifting raft at the end of Chapter Twenty One. Willis describes Rough Lock Bill as "neither 'Western' nor 'Eastern' but somewhere between or outside these two categories" (246). While he may seem to be "the stereotypical primitive and legendary figure of the backwoods of Canada" (Potter 135), he is also the only

a form of extra-sensory perception that the narrator identifies as specific to Naomi's gender and race.

Kogawa defuses Redekop's suggestion that this concept of the silent community might be racially exclusive by referring to a character from *Itsuka*, the 1992 sequel to *Obasan*:

Father Cedric also refers to the native people. His grandmother was a native woman and he carries within him a sense of what the silence is. So it's not to say that it's a Japanese characteristic but I think there are cultures that are more silent, less verbal, that perhaps rely on intuition, that have a whole series of body language as animals do and so on. (Redekop 17)

Kogawa recuperates a concept that has hitherto been represented in *Obasan* exclusively through Japanese Canadian female characters. She describes Japanese Canadians as an almost telepathic community with intuitive bonds to nature and their own bodies in the manner of native people and animals. Japanese Canadians re-enter Canada in Kogawa's discourse by way of native culture as part of the postcolonial discourse that works to renew nationalism by revealing and exorcizing the nation's historical links to racism, imperialism, and colonization.

Kogawa balances her concept of original communities and communities of origin within the contemporary political climate. Sensitive to enduring

character in the novel who verbalizes an anti-racist ideology: "'Red skin, yellow skin, white skin, any skin.' He puts his brown leathery arm beside Kenji's pale one. 'Don't make sense, do it, all this fuss about skin?'" (145). Rough Lock Bill exists in opposition to Old Man Gower as a Canadian outside of the Japanese Canadian community who helps rather than harms Naomi.

Kogawa alludes to her sense of the culturally redemptive power of native culture in her response to Magdalene Redekop's concern that the writing in *Obasan* might be given to "a kind of nationalistic reading" which turns "the silence into something peculiarly, even mystically Japanese" (Redekop 17). The literary criticism on *Obasan* has already observed the so-called Japanese culture of silence that pervades characters like Aya Obasan, Uncle Isamu and Naomi's mother. Kogawa also states that she identifies as Japanese a "non-verbal culture" that she can read through "gestures and subtle intonation" and which operates through a "process of things going on internally which is never exposed" (Corbeil E1). A related concept in the novel is the intuitive community of Naomi's mother's and grandmother's "alert and accurate knowing" (*Obasan* 56) which attends to Naomi's every need through

Canadian suspicions about the ideologies of modern Japanese society, Kogawa describes to a reporter her feeling of connection upon visiting a dying aunt in Japan as "not Japanese in the nationalistic sense. It was more a feeling of touching something, being a part of a long, long, line of women" (Gibson M8). In an interview with Kogawa, Redekop brings up what she calls "Japanese fascism": the denial by the Japanese in school textbooks of the Rape of Nanking. In light of lingering political tensions and growing economic tensions between Japan and North America, Kogawa is careful to avoid the connotation that her evocation of Japanese culture in her novels implies a sympathy for modern Japanese political ideologies.

Kogawa recycles the modern Japanese subject through feminism, motherhood, and maternal genealogies, and advocates a new North American society that is willing to confront its imperialist and capitalist legacy "in relation to the Third World, in relation to the ecology and all of these things" (Redekop 16). Kogawa carefully deletes the political and economic aspects of modern Japan and valorizes Japanese culture for its spiritual qualities. These qualities of non-verbal expression and reverence for the aged are rendered though a novelistic discourse that brings a

depoliticized focus to discreet habits and rituals of Japanese culture; the Japanese do not represent an economic or political entity but a semiotic community and a mode of discourse. The narrator's vision of a Japanese Canadian community that supports Canadian nationalism reacts against ethnocentric versions of dominant cultural nationalism. The narrator's energy is devoted to strengthening symbolic ties to the mother in Japan, but in terms of actual living communities, the narrative works strongly to build bonds between Japanese Canadian women and men in Canada.

In her public life, Kogawa has distanced herself at times from certain forms of feminism<sup>4</sup> and has stood up on one occasion to publicly criticize the position of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women for their stance on the referendum of the Charlottetown Accord in 1992. In her comments against NAC she has said that "[r]acism is stronger than sexism for me and for those people who experience racism," (Gram A9) an observation she has made earlier in remarks that "[m]en within minority groups are oppressed as women are in the mainstream. In fact, middle-class women, bourgeois women, are oppressors of minority men" (Redekop 17). Kogawa makes these stands in order to defend the solidarity of political struggles by racial

Naomi's brother Stephen show that the effects of their oppression are comparable in many ways to that of the women of Naomi's family. Nakayama-sensei's reading of Grandma Kato's letters near the end of the novel may be interpreted as a male voice effacing the power and voice of Naomi's mother (Redekop 17), but Nakayama-sensei and other Japanese Canadian men are presented in the novel primarily as displaced and victimized subjects of the Internment. The Japanese Canadian men of Naomi's family are not as well connected by bonds of communication to each other as the Japanese Canadian women who have an active oral and textual tradition to bind them across nations and generations. The novel represents the racial oppression of the Internment as having to some extent inverted the traditional power relations between the genders in the Japanese Canadian community. Nakayama-sensei's conveyance of Naomi's mother's poetic presence is an opportunity for re-empowerment by a female group of a dispossessed clergyman whose congregation has been scattered by the postwar dispersal; the concept of female social nurturance in *Obasan* respects communal traditions and willingly recuperates the displaced Japanese Canadian Anglican patriarchy.

The degree of comfort that the novel has with the

communities. She is willing at times to subordinate the concerns of gender politics to the concerns of racial politics.

As we have seen, in *Obasan* Kogawa has also been willing to represent white and non-white women in racial antagonism against each other. Naomi projects precisely such an antinomy between Aya Obasan and the "new" Mrs. Barker, the new wife of the farmer that Naomi's family used to work for after the war. Strangely enough, Mr. Barker, the farmer for whom Naomi and Obasan had to work after the war, is also in the room. Despite the fact that he is the man who is more obviously Naomi and Aya Obasan's direct oppressor, his presence goes unnoticed. Kogawa gives an unflinching portrait of women in racial conflict that is placed significantly in the scene that immediately precedes the Japanese Canadian male presence of Nakayama-sensei, who comes to read Grandma Kato's letter aloud for Naomi and Stephen. The narrative in *Obasan* describes the limits of female community where racial boundaries are involved and also invests considerably in the possibilities of community across the genders where racial similarity is involved.

The silence, displacement, and self denial of characters such as Uncle Isamu, Naomi's father, and

patriarchal conventions of Christian theology is perhaps the least examined aspect of a text whose criticism has been largely influenced by feminist readings of the novel that focus on its female community, its central mother-daughter relationship, its invocation of a women's poetics or *l'écriture féminine*. Magdalene Redekop asks Kogawa if she sees "the voices of the spiritual fathers as in conflict with the voices of the 'real mothers'--that is, the people who mothered us" (Redekop 17). Kogawa acknowledges that "the maleness of the faith and the maleness of the speakers" (17) was and still is a problem for women, but also points to the oppression of minority men as analogous or "interchangeable" with women's roles as victims (17). Pressed to account for whether there is a "reconciliation" between "[w]hat Nakayama-sensei is saying and what the Gentle Mother represents to Naomi," Kogawa responds: "I wasn't aware that there was any need for reconciliation between Nakayama-sensei and Obasan or the silent mother, because they were in a sense the same unit" (17). Kogawa's ideal of Naomi's mother's poetically reconstituted voice does not rely on the exclusion of male participants as interlocutors. There is no indication in the text that Naomi, Aya Obasan, or Aunt

Emily consider the mother's power and voice as having been blocked or effaced by Nakayama-sensei's reading of the letters any more than they consider the mother's words distorted or misinterpreted by Grandma Kato's writing of the letters.

Nakayama-sensei announces his arrival in Aya Obasan's home for the reading of the letters in Chapter Thirty-Six in "a loud but gentle voice" (*Obasan* 230). There is nothing in the scene that follows to indicate that he is not fully welcomed by the women. The only person who is uncomfortable at the gathering is Stephen, the only other male present. Nakayama-sensei's calm and relaxing manner contrasts sharply to the brittle, subliminally hostile presence of Mrs. Barker, who was received in the same room earlier that afternoon. Naomi is neutral in her characterization of Sensei's reading, but there is no indication that she considers his voice an invasion or appropriation of her mother's voice. Nakayama-sensei concludes the reading with the Lord's Prayer, but Naomi does not even notice that it begins with "Our Father" (*Obasan* 240). Sensei's voice fades away to the sensation of being with Uncle, which in turn gives away to Naomi's mother in an illustrative example of how male voices and presences function as conduits to female voices and

this case does not make a great distinction in the gender of affirmative, caring speech. In other instances the male voice and presence is clearly invasive, as in Gower's sexual abuse of Naomi which blocks Naomi's psychic ability to identify with her mother for almost three decades. Rather than making generalizations along gender lines, clearly one has to define the impact of different men and of different kinds of men.

The narrator's relationships to different male characters in the novel represent a variety of possible relations between women and men. While the abuse by Gower is abhorrent, the experience does not disillusion Naomi from the positive potential of male authority. Rough Lock Bill is represented as a powerful masculine force who rescues Naomi from drowning (*Obasan* 149). Naomi's most satisfying relationships with men are with those figures she can revere as fathers: Uncle Isamu and Father Nakayama. Naomi accepts and idealizes the domestic and communal patriarchy that the Uncle and the Father represent and does not view these figures as hegemonic. On the contrary, Naomi shares a close bond with the uncle who raised her and his death evokes a fond memory of the last time they walked together in the prairie grass. Naomi's admiration for fathers is

presences (*Obasan* 240).

Naomi's narrative is organized around the voices and presences of the women in her family, but the men of her family and community are included and involved in the circuits and bonds of communication between women. Uncle Isamu's death brings the women together under one roof to share their experiences, memories, texts, and stories. The male link in the chain of female communication begins with Grandma Kato, whose letters are addressed to her husband but ultimately reach Naomi. Nakayama-sensei performs the corresponding function as a male link in the communicative chain from Naomi back to her mother through Grandma Kato.

Shortly after the arrival of Aunt Emily's package, Naomi's desire to read her aunt's diary right away is interrupted by the "absent voice" (*Obasan* 46) of her Uncle speaking from within her, telling her to take care of Obasan. One can read this as an internalized male prohibition against a woman's desire to connect textually with another woman, but the voice also calls for the care of yet another woman in the family. Just as Kogawa sees no need for reconciliation between Father Nakayama and the Gentle Mother who are "in a sense the same unit" (Redekop 17), the narrative in

part of the celebratory language she uses for the first-generation Japanese Canadian pioneers whom she exemplifies through the traditionally male activities of logging, farming, and fishing (*Obasan* 121). The attitude of reverence that Naomi has for Nakayama-sensei, which is shared by Aya Obasan and Aunt Emily, is also part of the culture of respect for elders, including men, which Naomi considers as one of the positive attributes of her Japanese cultural background. Indeed, Naomi sees them as foundations of a social order that she very much wants to revive. The inclusion of Japanese Canadian men is part of her a fundamental commitment to the renewal of the Japanese Canadian community.

Naomi's preference for the patriarchal authority inscribed in father-daughter arrangements comes with a complimentary discomfort with the potentially equal relationship of the brother or the lover. Naomi's relationship to her brother Stephen is strained as a child; he is unable to help Naomi when she is stranded on the raft at the lake near Slocan. Naomi is rescued instead by Rough Lock Bill, a much older and more able male figure. Stephen, distracted by the racism directed against him, is too preoccupied to be aware of Old Man Gower's abuse of Naomi. When Stephen grows up,



he fails to assume a role of leadership in the family or community and distances himself from his sister, his family, and his racial and economic background. As an adult, Stephen represents a Japanese Canadian man who has failed to become a strong father figure for the Japanese Canadian community. Naomi's self-confessed discomfort with heterosexual courtship and an absence of references to adult male friends suggests that she sees father-daughter relations as the most satisfying model of interaction with men. To the degree that father-daughter relationships have the male subordination of women inscribed in them, Naomi's idealization of this relationship indicates a willingness and desire in part for traditional arrangements within patriarchy.

The narrative in *Obasan* is in many ways strongly conservative and looks backward in time to trace the genealogy of the narrator's maternal and ethnic origins. The investment in the reconstruction of female discursive traditions aligns certain typologies in the narrative to patterns of female and racial identity that one could call patriarchal and Orientalist. The critical scholarship on *Obasan* is not fundamentally misguided in evoking this, but the assumption that the narrative voice speaks from a

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gottlieb cites her source in Edith Milton's review "Unnecessary Precautions." *The New York Times Book Review*, 15 September, 1982, p.8.

<sup>2</sup> The main practitioners of this line of criticism are Gayle Fujita-Sato and King-kok Cheung.

<sup>3</sup> I have argued earlier that Kristeva's own application of the chora in *About Chinese Women* is inconsistent with the definition of the chora and the semiotic in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. See page 44 of the Introduction.

<sup>4</sup> The logic of cultural opposition that draws from narratives of the contrast between 'East' and 'West,' between the 'Orient' and the 'Occident,' is often reinforced with other models of cultural opposition, but is itself often arbitrary. Harris highlights the generational difference between Obasan and Aunt Emily: "Uncle and Obasan are entirely oriented towards an idealized past, while Emily represents her generation's orientation towards a delayed future" (Harris 52). The generational difference is revealed as a difference in attitudes, Obasan's older generation representing "conventional acceptance," Emily's "the revolt against tradition" (Harris 52). Rose also describes the difference as generational but considers the generations as part of the same cultural continuum. Obasan's voice is the "voice of silent suffering and resignation" of the Issei (first generation Japanese Canadian); Aunt Emily's voice is the "strident one of revisionist history and political compensation" that belongs to the Nisei (second generation Japanese Canadian)" (Rose "Politics" 220). Lambertson also does not distinguish the two voices as different cultural modes but describes both as indicators of a "Japanese way of thinking" (94). Obasan's way is "a fatalistic attitude of acceptance, endurance, and stoicism"; Emily's way is "a sense of justice, honour, and fair play" (Lambertson 94). The typing of the two aunts does not require an 'East meets West' narrative to make them coherent as a pair. Nevertheless, there is a strong interpretive desire to see a grand narrative of cross-cultural encounter mirrored in the two characters.

position of a privileged racial and sexual unity of the subject masks the operation of patriarchal and Orientalist typologies at the level of the narrator's psychoanalytic process of linguistic self-invention. The female discursive legacy of the maternal forebearers that Naomi inherits and fulfils is a revolutionary force in Kristeva's poetic sense, but the contexts of Canadian nationalism and Japanese ethnic community-building in which this redemptive energy is placed do not necessarily translate poetic revolution into an overhaul of existing social structures. A denial of the Orientalism of *Obasan* also denies the deep hybridity of a text that both resists and deploys patriarchal and Orientalist narratives as an attentive social text of a historically specific moment in the cultural politics of race and gender in Canada.

<sup>5</sup> See Fujita's thesis on "attendance" (Fujita 34) and Cheung's thesis on "attentive silence" (Cheung, *Articulate* 128).

<sup>6</sup> I do not mean to devalue the contributions made by non-Japanese Canadians to the cause of Japanese Canadian civil rights. The work of the Canadian Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians in the 1940s and the support of the Japanese Canadian Redress Movement in the 1980s by dozens of ethnocultural and professional groups across the country has left an indelible impact on the quality of life that Japanese Canadians enjoy today. However, the main initiative for Japanese Canadian civil rights in this century has come from efforts within the Japanese Canadian community. A Japanese Canadian tradition of activism goes back at least to 1936 with the formation of the Japanese Canadian Citizen's League and extends into the 1940s with the advocacy of the Japanese Canadian Committee for Democracy and the National Japanese Canadian Citizen's Association (Adachi 160, 238, 250; Sunahara 154). The National Association of Japanese Canadians finally secured a redress settlement with the Canadian government in 1988, but for much of that decade and for most of the latter half of this century Japanese Canadians have consistently had to pursue their civil rights under the resistance or inertia of the greater part of Canadian society. For an insightful account of the recent struggle see Omatsu.

<sup>7</sup> Fujita glosses her use of the term "nikkei" as meaning "of Japanese ancestry" but adds: "Recently it has been used interchangeably with 'Japanese American' by the nikkei" (Fujita 41).

<sup>8</sup> See also Goellnicht "Father" 128.

<sup>9</sup> The Japanese Americans also did not take their internment silently. Elaine Kim notes: "Using internment documents declassified in recent years, Michi Weglyn (*Years of Infamy* [New York: William Morrow & Co., 1976]) reveals that there was much protest activity among Japanese Americans in internment camps. Some of this activity addressed the question of constitutional rights and some of it addressed the working and living conditions in the camps. (Kim 309)

<sup>10</sup> Other books that give evidence to the plurality of Japanese Canadian voices around and before the Internment are Gordon Nakayama's *Issei* (1983) and *Stone Voices* (1991). Interestingly enough, both books are prefaced by Joy Kogawa (Nakayama is Kogawa's father). After the publication of *Obasan* the letters of Muriel Kitagawa were published as *This is My Own: Letters to Wes and other Writings of Japanese Canadians, 1941-1948*. Japanese Canadians have a tradition of speaking which is now being supplemented with a new and growing tradition of being heard.

<sup>11</sup> Kogawa also brings this passage up in the interview with Magdalene Redekop (96).

<sup>12</sup> This is even more the case in the structure of Goody's essay which places Kogawa in between the Canadian O'Hagan and the Japanese Tanizaki.

<sup>13</sup> Kogawa replicates this rhetoric in her article "Is There a Just Cause":  
These are the pioneers who with their lives and limbs cleared Canadian forests and created farms, established mines, businesses, fishing industries, built churches, community halls and infused this land with their gentle dignity and their endurance. (21)

<sup>14</sup> Carole Corbeil in *The Globe and Mail* describes Kogawa as "relentless in her analysis of the moral discrepancies that popular, superficial feminism allows."

In this study I have argued the existence of psychoanalytic, or more properly speaking, psycholinguistic Orientalist typologies in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, in Kogawa's *Obasan*, and in the selected literary criticism of these works. The critical valence of the term Orientalism has been made familiar in the cultural theory of the last two decades as a result of Edward Said's work and has been used widely to describe systems of European-based domination in many cultural settings east of Europe. My own innovation has been to apply in a consistent manner the observation made by Marilyn Russell Rose that Orientalist views are "[i]ronically and perversely . . . all too often held by the Oriental who lives in the West" (Rose "Hawthorne's" 294). Rather than seeing this self-Orientalism or auto-Orientalism as an ironic or perverse act, my study insists that Orientalist representations are an inevitable outcome of the material circumstances under which writers like Kingston and Kogawa work. As North American writers of East Asian ancestry who are determined both to write about their ethnicity and race, and to make their work accessible to a wider North American English-language

readership, their narratives are inevitably recruited into the service of ethnic diplomacy to national cultures, whose membership is being transformed by demographic shifts in the racial background of its professional and intellectual classes.

Rather than decrying the selling out of such writers to a commercial American and Canadian literary mainstream, I analyze *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan* precisely because they have been so warmly embraced by critics and readers as visionary texts of a new multiculturalism within their respective national cultures. My study has largely elided the substantial differences between the multicultural ideologies at play in the United States and Canada because the narrative typologies that I have been concerned with have been matters of projection and articulation at the psychoanalytic and psycholinguistic level. I have justified this approach within the historical context contemporary to the texts, namely the reception of "French Feminist" cultural psychoanalysis by American feminist theorists of the mother-daughter relationship. In conclusion, I can offer the following observations on the place *The Woman Warrior* and *Obasan* have within the wider trends of their decades and national cultures.

Whether the author or the audience was fully aware, the United States was ready for *The Woman Warrior*. The book's massive popularity on national bestseller lists cannot be explained as an anomaly; American society was prepared to hear the stories of a spirited Chinese American female narrator and her eccentric family. The American President Richard Nixon's much-publicized visit to China in 1972 did a great deal to re-introduce China to the American cultural gaze. Moreover, American popular culture had already embraced the cinematic martial exploits of Chinese actor Bruce Lee. Episodes of the television show *Kung Fu*, popular throughout the 1970s, prepared American culture for Kingston's book whose title promised a female version of Chinese martial heroism. It was probably not without an attentiveness to the marketability of the Chinese 'kung fu expert' image that Kingston's publisher suggested 'The Woman Warrior' as the title for her collection of connected stories about Chinese and Chinese American women.<sup>1</sup> Despite Kingston's intentions the book likely filled, in a misplaced way, an American desire for knowledge about China as an emerging world superpower. As a result, *The Woman Warrior* is a heavily anthologized text (Lim *Approaches* 3), being a staple text of American

multiculturalism pedagogy on campuses across the United States.

Canadian audiences were also ready to accept the ethnic and historical subject matter of Kogawa's Obasan. By 1981 a generation had passed since the Canadian government's internment of Japanese Canadians. Furthermore, an official policy of state-endorsed multiculturalism had been in effect since 1971.<sup>2</sup> Many Canadians were willing to identify with the victims of the previous generation's excesses. The Canadian public image of the Japanese people as an orderly industrious nation, bolstered by Japan's postwar economic success, encouraged the perception of the Japanese in Canada as a blameless and unjustifiably wronged minority. The international respectability of Japan as an economic superpower no doubt contributed to the respectability of Japanese Canadians in the eyes of the wider Canadian society. For the Japanese Canadian Redress Movement, upon which Kogawa's novel had such a timely impact, this influence was palpable: Japanese Canadians were able to secure the largest human rights settlement in Canadian history. It was more than felicitous to the Canadian Government that the announcement of close to \$400 million dollars in compensation to the Japanese Canadians came just weeks

far from the conventional stereotype of Oriental female passivity and fatality but, relative to their daughter's struggles, their historical agency is subordinate to the value their experience has for the daughter's material historical struggle in 'modern' North America. The East Asian culture, as a culture more wholly associated with the mother and with the mother's generation, is part of the periphery of the daughter's narrative.

A point that I have mentioned earlier in this study and that is worth repeating is that I am not blaming Kingston for writing a story about a Chinese American woman in the 1960s and 1970s who recovers her mother's story of a China of the 1920s and 1930s. Nor am I blaming Kogawa for doing the same for her Japanese Canadian protagonist of the 1970s who reflects back to the Japanese Canadian and Japanese communities of the 1940s. Neither author can be blamed for a chronologically unbalanced representation of Asian and American societies, which is the result of the historical patterns of migration in both the author's and her character's experiences. On the other hand, because the authors cannot be held responsible for an Orientalism which evolves out of the historical structure of immigration does not mean that this

before a visit to Ottawa by the Japanese Prime Minister and the signing of a major economic agreement with Japan.

It is not entirely coincidental that a novel that represents Japan primarily as a defeated post-atomic wasteland should attract Canadian readers at a time when the Japanese exert a hitherto unprecedented economic influence in Canada. To some extent, the ability to pity a defeated Japan of the previous generation compensates for the uncertainty brought on by the economic challenge of the Japan of the present day. Similarly, China in The Woman Warrior is narrated from the perspective of a character who comes to realize in the process of telling her story that she has become inalienably acculturated to life in the United States. What appears to the reader as a narrative that goes back into to the East Asian ancestry is also for the narrator a release from the exclusivity of the racial heritage and an opening of that heritage to the admixture of the relatively new North American culture. Thus, Obasan and The Woman Warrior have an investment in representing East Asian characters as figures of the past in the de-politicized language reserved for folk tales and legends. The East Asian mothers and maternal figures in both texts are

structure does not exert a profound cultural influence on how the characters in the fiction relate to their cultures of ancestry. My interpretation of the multiple identities open to the characters in The Woman Warrior and Obasan includes the historical likelihood that certain identifications are made by characters which do not cleanly break with the racist Orientalist past, but which incorporate Orientalist stereotypes into new idioms of identity in a complex interplay of both complicity and resistance.

In mapping the subtleties of this terrain I have both relied upon and extensively criticized specific psychoanalytic discourses. Having uncovered the Orientalist typologies embedded in psychoanalytic strains of interpretation of The Woman Warrior and Obasan, my own investment in the psychoanalytic realm of investigation is also impelled by what I see as the potential of such an approach. I identify the central critique of Kristeva's About Chinese Woman by Spivak, Chow, and Lowe as Kristeva's practice of assigning a cultural identity, China, to a psycholinguistic function, the chora. The theoretical premise of this gesture is not explained by Kristeva in About Chinese Women or in Revolution in Poetic Language. Moreover, Kristeva noticeably recedes in her later works from

typing entire cultures as embodiments of a discrete element of a psychic process. Notwithstanding such ethnocentric gestures on her part and on the part of critics of The Woman Warrior and Obasan who employ her theory, I find that the psychoanalytic perspective enables a level of investigation that is useful in seeing how Orientalist and fundamentally racist ideologies are internalized in the very process by which Asian identity in North America comes into being. To the extent that psychoanalysis delves into pre-subjective phenomena, I find its discourse useful in exploring the discrete, inner, private processes of the racial subject in fiction.

In this study I have not found it useful to separate the Orientalism of the critics from the Orientalism of the texts. I have taken the view that the subject is what the subject does and if subjectivity in the literary texts obeys the same disciplinary structures of Asian North American identity that predetermine the criticism, there is no qualitative ground for distinguishing the difference in effect between literary Orientalism and critical Orientalism. The search for a permissible discourse of the East in North American writing is grounded in a similar false opposition between 'bad' Orientalist

## Notes

1. A 1986 audiotaped interview shows that Kingston was resistant to the idea because of its implied militarism (qtd. in Aubrey 80). In retrospect, one notices that the theme of the woman warrior only applies to one of the five sections in the book ("White Tigers") in which the words 'woman warrior' never arise; the activities of the strong women elsewhere in the book are not represented explicitly through metaphors of soldiering or warfare. In many ways the "White Tigers" section is a parody of martial arts films: the narrator expresses her contempt for actual martial arts which are for "unsure little boys kicking away under fluorescent lights" (The Woman Warrior 52).

2. In 1971 Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced an official multicultural policy for Canada in response to the recommendations of Book IV of the Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1970), subtitled "The Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups" (Kallen 165).

writing and 'good' anti-Orientalist writing. Rather than basing my study on an ethos of permission, where the critic regulates and inspects what is 'allowed' under the current ideology of affirmative racial identity, I have chosen to advocate an ethos of admission whereby one can confess the extent of complicity without the fear of censure. The trope of recovery is central to many interpretations of the daughter's relationship to her mother in The Woman Warrior and Obasan. Thus, my study contributes to an enlarged understanding of recovery that does not exclude the particular operation of racial self-defacement and the reinscription of Orientalist typologies as part of the empowering activity of writing by North Americans of Asian ancestry.

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