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**“But the ‘old sores’ remain”
Trauma in Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* (1981)**

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the Requirement for a **Master Degree in English Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to

My beloved parents who sacrificed their time, energy and life to draw a smile on my face and ensure my relief, happiness and satisfaction

My mother, the kindest and warmest soul, the hidden soldier in my life who stayed up night to help me with my assignments.

My father, my backbone who does not refuse my request and takes care of us anytime and every time.

My siblings for their constant encouragement, love and support.

I dedicate this work to everyone who believed in me, encouraged me to keep going and stay strong no matter what.

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I would like to thank my first English teacher Mr. Boudjaoui Mohamed, my high school and university teachers.

Epigraph

What do I remember of the evacuation?
I remember my mother wrapping
A blanket around me and my
Pretending to fall asleep so she would be happy
Though I was so excited I couldn't sleep.
(I hear there were people herded
Into the Hastings Park like cattle
Families were made to move in two hours
Abandoning everything, leaving pets
And possessions at gun point.
I hear families were broken up
Men were forced to work. I heard
It whispered late at night
That there was suffering)
and I missed my dolls.

Joy Kogawa, What Do I Remember of the Evacuation

Abstract

Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* deals with the complex interplay of silence, language, identity, memory, and trauma in the lives of Japanese Canadians during World War II. This dissertation analyses how silence functions as both a coping mechanism for the characters and explores the impact of traumatic experiences on individuals as well as collective identities within a context of historical erasure and cultural displacement. The intricate relationship between memory and trauma is another focus of this dissertation. The study is based on the works of Dominick LaCapra and Cathy Caruth that explain historical trauma and its representation in our selected work and the different mechanisms to cope with traumatic experiences.

Key Words: trauma, silence, memory, identity, Japanese Canadian Literature.

Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgment.....	ii
Epigraph	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Table of Contents	v
1. General Introduction	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	2
1.3. Purpose of the Study:.....	3
1.4. Research Questions:.....	3
1.5. Significance of the Study	3
1.6. Organization of the Thesis	3
Chapter One: Review of Literature	5
Introduction.....	5
I-1. War in Literature	5
I-2. Japanese Canadian Literature	9
Conclusion	15
Chapter Two: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework.....	16
Introduction.....	16
II-1. Early References to Trauma.....	17
II-2. Trauma Theories Past and Present.....	18
II-3. The First Theorists: Charcot, Oppenheim, and Freud.....	20

II-4. LaCapra and Historical Trauma.....	22
II-5. Trauma, Memory, Identity and Transgenerational Trauma.....	23
II-6. Trauma, Absence and Loss	24
II-7. Silence and Trauma.....	24
II-8. Literary Representation of Trauma.....	25
Conclusion	27
Chapter Three: Trauma in <i>Obasan</i>	28
Introduction.....	28
III-1. Japanese Immigrants in Canada.....	28
III-2. The Impact of WWII on Japanese Canadians	29
III-3. The Policies of Internment and its Impact on Japanese Living in Canada.....	31
III-4. Trauma in <i>Obasan</i>	33
III-4.1 Silence in <i>Obasan</i>	33
III-4.2 Memory in <i>Obasan</i>	38
III-4.3 Memories of Internment in <i>Obasan</i>	40
III-4.4 Cultural Identity and Trauma in <i>Obasan</i>	44
Conclusion	53
General Conclusion.....	54
1. Summary of Findings.....	54
2. Contribution to Existing Scholarship.....	55
3. Limitations of Research	56
4. Implications for Further Research	57
Works Cited.....	58

Résumé	63
ملخص	64

General Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

During World War II, both the Canadian and American governments unjustly interned thousands of Japanese Canadians and Americans, fearing they might be a security risk. In the years following the war, these communities sought redress, or compensation and formal acknowledgment of the wrongs done to them during internment. This was a significant social and political movement aimed at recognizing and rectifying past injustices.

Joy Kogawa¹, a Japanese Canadian writer, published her novel *Obasan* during a time when Canadians were engaged in a national debate about racial discrimination and human rights. This period saw a heightened awareness and discussion of historical injustices, including the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II, which became a topic of political debate in both Canada and the USA. Additionally, the 1980s marked a significant period of activism against nuclear weapons and nuclear power in both Europe and North America.

Kogawa's novel resonated with these broader societal movements, as it not only shed light on the personal and familial impacts of internment but also spoke to larger themes of justice, identity, and the consequences of war and nuclear proliferation. Through her work,

¹Joy Kogawa is a Canadian writer and poet. She was born on June 6, 1935 in Vancouver, British Columbia. Joy Kogawa lived in Vancouver and grew up amidst a white middle class society. Joy Kogawa, at a very young age was forcibly removed with her family and sent to the internment camps in Canada during the second World war. She started first by writing poems such as *The Splintered Moon* (1968), *A Choice of Dreams* (1974), *Jericho Road* (1977), *Six Poems* (1978), etc. her literary narratives also take a remarkable place in literature. She wrote, *Itsuka* (1992), *The Rain Ascends* (1995), *Naomi's Road* (1996), etc. Joy Kogawa has received numerous awards throughout her life and career including: Books in Canada First Novel Award (1981), Canadian Authors Association Book of the Year Award (1982), Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award (1982), National Award, National Association of Japanese Canadians (2001), Lifetime Achievement Award, Association of American Studies (2001), etc.

Kogawa contributed to the ongoing dialogue surrounding these issues, prompting readers to confront uncomfortable truths about the past while advocating for a more just and peaceful future.

The novel *Obasan* follows the life of Naomi Nakane, a thirty six year old school teacher, who was raised by her Uncle and Obasan (aunt in Japanese) after her parents' separation due to World War II. Her mother is stranded in Nagasaki after Pearl Harbor, and her father is sent to a labor camp. Despite surviving the war, her mother dies from her injuries, and Naomi remains unaware of her fate due to Obasan's silence. As Naomi grows older, she grapples with feelings of betrayal, low self-esteem, and fear of the past. The novel begins with Uncle's death, an opportunity for Naomi to ask her aunt about her mother. She finally discovers the truth and the story of her fragmented life and family when her aunt shows her the letters from Japan that she exchanged with her family.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Trauma is a complex issue especially when it is related to history and historical events. The painful experiences have a huge impact on both individuals and communities and shakes their psychological well being. Joy Kogawa's literary narrative *Obasan* perfectly recounted the overwhelming experiences and the struggles of the Japanese Canadian people in the internment camps during the Second World War and the enduring effects of trauma on the lives of the characters and other generations. Nevertheless, little is known about the precise processes by which trauma manifests, and in what way it is related to speech, silence, identity and language in this novel.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The present thesis seeks to provide a deep analysis to the theme of war trauma in Joy Kogawa's novel *Obasan*, how it interacts with other themes presented in the story such as language and silence as well as the way in which traumatic historical events shape the characters' lives, personalities and cultural identities in the story. This dissertation will study the lasting effects of traumatic experiences on individuals and communities.

1.4. Research Questions

This research paper will answer the following questions. In what way does trauma of the internment camps during the Second World War affect the characters presented in the novel *Obasan*? What are the different reactions of the characters towards their traumatic experiences and the injustices they faced during the Second World War? How do traumatic memories shape the characters' lives and the lives of their offsprings? How can silence be both a way of healing and a source of trauma for the characters in the novel? What is the role of traumatic memories and experiences in shaping people's identities and sense of belonging?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study provides a deep analysis of the novel *Obasan* writer Joy Kogawa and explores its themes of war, trauma, memory, silence, language and identity, it also shed light on the traumatic experiences of the Japanese Canadian people in the internment camps during the Second World War and its enduring effects on them and other generations.

1.6. Organization of the Thesis

The present dissertation is divided into a general introduction, three chapters and a general conclusion. The first chapter entitled " Review of Literature " starts with an overview about

war literature and trauma with various literary narratives written by different writers about war, then offers a deep analysis for the Japanese Canadian literature, its significance and contribution. Additionally, this chapter examines the previous Studies on the novel *Obasan* by the Japanese Canadian writer Joy Kogawa. The second chapter entitled “Conceptual and Theoretical Framework”, offers a rich study and information about trauma, trauma theories as well as major works written by two of the most important scholars who contributed to the field of trauma studies: Dominick LaCapra and Cathy Caruth. The Third chapter, titled "Trauma in *Obasan*" starts with a historical background offering a deep analysis and information about the Second World War and the causes leading to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. It discusses its impact on Japanese Canadian people and the Canadian government’s policies against them, highlighting how these policies radically changed their lives. Then the chapter delves into a deep analysis of the novel *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa exploring its themes of silence, speech, memory, identity and trauma.

Chapter One: Review of Literature

Introduction

For many decades, War has been a central topic in many literary narratives. Therefore, the chapter's main objective is to analyze some works written about the first and the second world war, the Civil War, the American Revolutionary War, etc. Additionally, it shows how authors portray the experience of individuals, families and communities, during warfare and its enduring effects on them. Moreover, since Japanese Canadians hold a significant place in literature about war, this chapter analyzes some literary works and how writers depict the experiences of Japanese people in the internment camps in Canada, highlighting its contribution to the redress movements. In this chapter, we review some of the previous studies on the novel *Obasan* written by Joy Kogawa and the depiction of the theme of trauma and its effects on the characters particularly the protagonist Naomi Nakane.

I-1. War in Literature

War is a very recurrent theme in literature. Catharine Savage Brosman states, “Fiction, drama, and poetry concerning war tend toward recording not simply the causes and conduct of armed conflict or individual battles but the manner in which they are lived, felt, used, and transformed by participants” (85-86). Therefore, war narratives offer unique insights into the human experience amidst the tumult of war.

Since the beginning of time, even before the invention of writing, people used to recite their life stories during wartime and transmit their history from one generation to another through oral traditions such as: storytelling, songs, proverbs, epic poems, etc. The Trojan War, for instance, played a significant role in shaping ancient western literature and influenced many authors to write about war. According to Catharine Savage Brosman, “The role played by the

Trojan War in the whole of ancient Western literature is so central that it can be considered the single most important topic of the body of literature inherited from early Western civilization”(85). The Trojan war is considered as one of the most important yet legendary battles in Greek mythology that happened in the 12th or 13th century BC in the city of Troy. The war mainly started when Paris, a Trojan prince took Helen from her husband Menelaus, king of Sparta to be his own wife. The Paris act caused the ten year conflict between the Greek and the Trojans. King of Sparta allied with the Greek kings including his brother Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, Ajax, Nestor, Achilles and Odysseus and gathered his army in order to wage a war on Trojans and get back his wife Helen. The Greek army in order to enter and conquer the city of Troy constructed a big wooden horse full of Greek army inside of it, the battle ended when the Greeks won over the Trojans and took Helen back to Sparta.

Numerous epic poems have immortalized the legendary Trojan War, notably the renowned Iliad, written by the ancient Greek poet Homer around the 8th century BC. This timeless narrative vividly chronicles the exhaustive decade conflict, delving into pivotal moments such as the withdrawal of the formidable Greek hero Achilles from the battlefield.

English literature indeed boasts a rich tapestry of epic compositions, and among them, Beowulf stands as a monumental figure in the annals of ancient history. This epic saga unfurls the valorous deeds of Prince Beowulf as he courageously confronts monstrous foes, including dragons, in an unwavering mission to protect his people.

Moreover, the First World War stands as a poignant chapter in human history, marked by profound loss and sacrifice. Countless innocent lives, both civilians and soldiers, were tragically claimed in the crucible of battle. In response to this cataclysmic event, a multitude of writers and poets were compelled to capture the essence of the conflict, portraying the

experiences of individuals during that tumultuous era, the gallantry of soldiers, and the enduring scars left by the ravages of war.

All Quiet on the Western Front is a novel written by the German writer Erich Maria Remarque in 1928; it tells the story of Paul Braumer and his classmates who were fascinated by the idea of joining the army. However, everything changed once they found themselves fighting in the front lines in the first world war. Paul, the protagonist, and his friends faced many challenges and witnessed the harsh conditions of warfare as well as the death of their comrades. The novel portrays the effects of war on the lives of the soldiers. In 1929, the English writer and poet Robert Graves published his autobiographical work *Goodbye to All of That*. Through his work Graves described his life experience before, during, and after the first world war and he showed the physical and psychological effect of war on his life.

World War II also inspired several writers to portray the brutal realities of war. *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947) by the German author Anne Frank, also referred to as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, is one of the landmarks in the history of war literature. The book recites the life experience of Anne Frank and her family and their hard living conditions at that time.

In American literature, many writers have written about the topic. American writers have extensively written about the Civil War, the American Revolutionary War, for independence, the war in Vietnam, etc. Philip Freneau's "Song on Captain Barney's Over the Ship General Monk, April 1782," and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (1821) celebrate the American Revolutionary War. In addition, Ambrose Bierce's collection of short stories *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891) provides a haunting and provocative examination of the human cost of war and the complexities of the human condition. From Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) which depicts the psychological turmoil of a Civil War soldier, to Ellen Glasgow's *The Builders* (1919) which explores the

disillusionment of World War I, and Mary Roberts Rinehart's *Dangerous Days* (1919) which examines the upheaval caused by the war on the home front, each work offers a unique perspective on the human experience of conflict. John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers* (1921) and Willa Cather's *One of Ours* (1922) confront the disillusionment and search for meaning experienced by soldiers, while Thomas Boyd's *Points of Honor* (1925) provides a gritty portrayal of the brutality of World War I combat. Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" (1928) reflects on the lingering trauma of the American Civil War, while Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) depicts the societal upheaval and resilience in its aftermath. William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and *The Unvanquished* (1938) explore the enduring legacy of the Civil War in the American South, while Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) delves into the courage and sacrifice of those who fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War. Together, these works offer profound insights into the human cost of war and the enduring trauma it inflicts on individuals and society.²

Gwendolyn Brooks' poem, "Gay Chaps at the Bar," (1944) provides a poetic lens into the experiences of African American soldiers during World War II, while Chester Himes' first novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945) portray the racial tensions and psychological turmoil faced by African American workers on the home front. Randall Jarrell's *Little Friend, Little Friend* (1945) offers a poignant portrayal of the impact of war on children, while Karl Shapiro's "V-Letter and Other Poems" (1944) captures the complexities of soldiers' experiences through verse. The start of the Cold War era is reflected in John Hersey's *Hiroshima* (1946) which chronicles the devastation wrought by the atomic bomb, and James Michener's collection of

² For further information, see: Jennifer Haytock,, editor, *War and American Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

related short stories, *Tales of the South Pacific*, (1947) which offers a sweeping depiction of the Pacific theater of World War II. Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947) explores themes of guilt and responsibility in the aftermath of war, while James Gould Cozzens' *Guard of Honor* (1948) provides a detailed examination of military bureaucracy and the strains of wartime duty. Martha Gellhorn's *Point of No Return* (1989) offers a gripping portrayal of journalists covering the Spanish Civil War, and Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) describes the harrowing experiences of soldiers in the Pacific theater. Finally, Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions* (1948) explores the moral dilemmas faced by soldiers in World War II. Together, these works describe the enduring trauma it inflicts on individuals and society.

The themes of war and trauma are also common in Algerian literature. A good example is Mouloud Mammeri's *The Opium and the Stick* (1965) which provides a vivid portrayal of Algerian society amidst the turmoil of war, capturing the essence of daily life in a small village during this tumultuous era. The novel's widespread acclaim led to its translation into numerous languages, with Ahmed Rachdi later adapting it into a successful film in 1971.

War is always related to trauma. According to Michelle Balaev, "The term "trauma novel" refers to a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels" (150). Writers show the suffering, effects of war on people, and how this causes a physical and psychological wound on different people of all countries. The Japanese Canadian literature also takes a remarkable place in literature related to war trauma. Various Japanese Canadian writers wrote about the experiences of the Japanese Canadian people in Canada during the second world war.

I- 2. Japanese Canadian Literature

Japanese Canadian literature is a rich literature that portrays the lives of Japanese Canadian people in Canada more specifically in internment camps during World War II.

Through this literature Japanese Canadian authors such as Joy Kogawa, Ken Adashi, Shizuye Takashima, among others, explored the themes of trauma, resilience, identity, and shame to show sorrowful history and the traumatic experience of Japanese Canadians in Canada and demonstrate the physical and psychological effect of war on them and their descendants.

In her article titled, "The Japanese American Experience Through Literature: Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Mitsuye Yamada's Poetry" (2006), the researcher María Isabel Seguro Gómez examined the impact of racist policies on the lives of Japanese immigrants and their descendants. The writer asserted that the works of Joy Kogawa and Mitsuye Yamada complement each other effectively, providing insights into various aspects of the Japanese American experience during World War II and its aftermath (180). Through the analysis of literature, the researcher aimed to illuminate the complexities of identity, trauma, and resilience within the Japanese American community, highlighting the enduring legacy of discrimination and the importance of bearing witness to history.

The experiences of Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians during World War II exhibit remarkable similarities, despite occurring in different countries. In his article "Lives Interrupted: A Brief Look at Eight Novels Based on the Japanese-American Internment Experience" (2008), Bruce Degi focused on the Japanese American experience in America during this period, analyzing eight significant works authored by Japanese American writers. While the primary focus was on the American context, Degi acknowledged the resonance between the Japanese American and Japanese Canadian experiences.

Despite not being the primary focus, Degi argued that understanding the works of Japanese American writers can be enriched by considering Joy Kogawa's revelations about her parallel experiences in Canada. Kogawa's insights shed light on universal themes such as the tension between speech and silence, the struggle to reconcile personal grief with public history,

and the quest for resolution through the creative expression of fiction. By acknowledging these shared themes, Degi suggested that a deeper understanding of the Japanese American experience can be gained, drawing parallels with the Japanese Canadian narrative and enriching our appreciation of both.

In her article, “Diasporic Identity in the Face of Trauma — Diasporic Identity and the Second World War Trauma in Kerri Sakamoto’s *“The Electrical Field”*” (1998). The author, through the analysis of the significant novel by Kerri Makamoto, provided a deep insight on the traumatic experience of Japanese Canadians in the internment camps and its enduring effects on them and their diasporic identity. She argued that “diasporic identity shaped by the Second World War trauma seems to follow the dichotomy of separate spheres — while it is expressed through Japanese traditions, values, and customs in the private sphere, the public sphere is characterized by the attempts of hiding one’s Japaneseness” (73).

The Japanese Canadian writers not only show the suffering and the challenges the Japanese Canadian faced in the internment camps during the Second World War, but they were also a great tool to ask for rehabilitation, compensation, redress and justice. In his article, “Bittersweet Memories: Narratives of Japanese Canadian Children’s Experiences before the Second World War and the Politics of Redress” (2016), the writer Daniel Lachapelle Lemire showed how the Japanese Canadian literature had a great impact on the redress movement and helped in “the formation of a collective “redress identity”” (78). In his article, he points out to the great efforts committed by the Nikkei writers in order to make the Canadian government apologize for the injustices they committed on the Japanese Canadian, the second generation writers portray the suffering and the experiences of the Japanese Canadian in the internment during the Second World War and how it affected them as well as other generations. Through his article, Daniel Lachapelle Lemire, shed the light on the work of Ken Adachi, *The Enemy*

That Never Was (1976), Ann Gomer Sunahara's book *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War* (1981), *Within the Barbed Wire Fence* (1980) by Takeo Ujo Nakano and the book of Joy Kogawa *Obasan* (1981). He states, "the book's powerful depictions of the heroine's deep anger, suffering, and loneliness are meant to draw the reader's sympathy and, perhaps, outrage – reactions that could only help to raise awareness of and support for the redress movement" (77). Like Lemire, Guy Beauregard in his article "After *Obasan*: Kogawa Criticism and Its Futures" (2001) states that Joy Kogawa's novel is so important and "it played a key role in mobilizing support for the 1988 Redress Settlement, in which the federal government and the National Association of Japanese Canadians negotiated and signed an agreement providing a formal apology and compensation for Japanese Canadians for losses sustained in the 1940s" (5).

Joy Kogawa's book *Obasan* (1981) is one of the most significant pieces in Japanese Canadian literature, it is "a novel dealing with the experiences of Japanese Canadians during and after the Second World War" (Goellnicht 287). Trauma is a central topic in Joy Kogawa's novel and has shown the impact of the war on Japanese Canadian people and its enduring effects on individuals, families and community as a whole, therefore a considerable amount of literature has been published on the novel and its depiction of trauma.

Eva C. Karpinski, in her article "The Book as (Anti) National Heroine: Trauma and Witnessing in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*" (2006) shed the light on the deep significance and impact of joy kogawa's novel *Obasan* on Canadian literature, the writer claimed that "the novel has been credited with changing the Canadian literary canon" (46). She analyzed the books depicting the Japanese Canadian experience during war, and pointed out to the characters reactions to the past, the writer states that, "The narrative registers different attitudes to the past among members of the scarred community"(49). The writer showed that the traumatic event

that Naomi has experienced in her childhood including the sexual abuse by Old Man Gower and the internment, have highly affected her life as an adult she argued that, “for Naomi as trauma survivor, the reality of violence is still present, and the trauma of racism continues to affect her in the “present” as we see Naomi in the classroom, taunted by a white student named Sigmund” (61).

In her article, “The Double Wound: Shame and Trauma in Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*” (2011), Sinéad McDermott studied the exploration of shame, trauma as well as silence in the novel, she states that “Shame works in the novel to render certain events unspeakable, and to enforce silences which are ultimately seen as highly negative in the text” (143). The writer argued that analyzing *Obasan* through the lens of shame is a helpful approach to explore the novel’s themes of traumatic memory, forgetting, and the interrelationship between speech and silence (159).

In her paper, she studies the case of Naomi and her mother’s traumatic events that have led to the feeling of shame and silence. She showed Naomi’s traumatic experience from her childhood which was the sexual abuse she experienced from Old Man Gower made her ashamed and remains silent and this “have the effect of separating Naomi from her mother” (151). Naomi’s mother, due to the traumatic event she experienced in Japan, the atomic bombing in Nagasaki, has become disfigured, which made her ashamed of her body and she tried hard to hide herself and stay silent in order to hide the truth from her children. As a result, the writer states that, “the silence of Naomi’s mother – her failure to communicate with her children, or return from Japan – is the most powerful of the many silences in Kogawa’s novel” (157). Sinéad McDermott argued that the novel’s two incidents “both Naomi’s memories of Old Man Gower and the account of her mother’s experiences in Nagasaki, the close relationship between shame, trauma, and silencing” (160).

In her thesis, "International Storytelling and Transhistorical Trauma: Old Women in Contemporary Canadian Fiction" (2012), Jodie Lynne Salter examines and studies the articulation of traumatic experiences in the novel *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa. The writer analyzed and highlighted Naomi's aunts' different reactions to past traumatic experiences. Additionally, the writer points out narrative techniques used by the Japanese Canadian authors when writing about trauma in the case of *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa and *Odori* by Darcy Tamayose. Jodie Lynne explained that the novel *Obasan* belongs to the category of trauma fiction, therefore due to the complexities of trauma and its depiction "authors of trauma fiction utilize diverse narrative structures and strategies" (122). In order to fully transmit the feelings of their characters to the readers and make them understand these things more in the case of the novel *Obasan* the writer states that Kogawa's novel is constructed in a way to mimic the experiences and manifestations of trauma, portraying the gaps, repetitions, and temporal latency characteristic of traumatic memory. This structure which reflects the delayed nature of trauma allows the plot to develop in such a way that the story returns to the traumatic climax - that is, the release of the trauma appears at the end of the novel (123).

In her article, titled "The Juxtaposition of Dream and Reality: "Incurable" Trauma in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*" (2014), Hei Yuen White Pak, offered a deep analysis of the novel *Obasan* and studied Kogawa's use of certain techniques and ways such as speech and silence, dream and reality when writing the novel in order to portray trauma and its effects on the protagonist Naomi. However, the writer at the end points out Naomi's trail to face her trauma and her journey and her success of healing herself, she states, "Although dreams, reality, silence, and maternal power traumatize Naomi psychologically, she finally finds her own subjectivity and starts off a "new life." The "incurable" trauma is, therefore, healed" (9).

Through the examination of the existing literature, it is eminently clear that the book has not been studied in a profound way and from all its aspects. As a result, the following study focuses on the novel *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa, examining the connection between war, trauma, silence, language, identity and how all these elements shaped the characters' lives.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview about war literature, and its physical and psychological impacts on individuals, families and community as a whole. Furthermore, this chapter shed light on the Japanese Canadian literature, its role in depicting the suffering of the Japanese Canadian people during the second world war and the struggles and hardships they faced in the internment camps. Moreover, this chapter showed the profound and significant role of this literature in the redress movement. Additionally, this chapter highlights the poignant works *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa and review previous works conducted on this novel.

Chapter Two: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to give a theoretical background to our study. The chapter explains trauma theories with a particular emphasis on identity, silence, language, and memory. This chapter begins with an explanation of the concept according to many theorists. Because of our topic, we have chosen to combine the trauma theories of Caruth and LaCapra. Combining the insights of Dominick LaCapra's theory of war trauma and the effects of trauma on memory, identity and silence along with Cathy Caruth's perspectives on trauma memory and silence can provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between historical events, individual experiences, and collective memory. LaCapra's work emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the historical context and the ways in which traumatic events become integrated into collective memory. He suggests that traumatic events, such as those experienced during war, can have a profound impact on individuals and societies, shaping their identities and influencing their understanding of the past.

Caruth's insights into trauma, memory and silence further deepen this understanding by highlighting the ways in which traumatic experiences disrupt traditional narrative structures and linguistic expression. According to Caruth, trauma often eludes conscious understanding and representation, manifesting instead through fragmented memories, silences, and disruptions in language. She argues that these disruptions are not merely individual phenomena but also reflect broader societal struggles to articulate and comprehend traumatic events.

By combining both LaCapra's emphasis on historical context, collective memory identity and silence with Caruth's insights into trauma's effects on memory and silence we can

develop a nuanced understanding of how war trauma shapes both individual subjectivities and cultural narratives.

II- 1. Early References to Trauma

The concept of trauma and its effects on individuals have deep roots in human history, as evidenced by references in ancient texts and historical accounts. These references span across various cultures and epochs, highlighting the enduring relevance of trauma in human experience. In the ancient Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh, believed to date back to around 2000 BC Era, themes of loss, grief, and existential turmoil are prominent (Chidiac and Crocq 311). Chidiac and Crocq argued that the term trauma did not appear in the first narratives like The Epic of Gilgamesh and Homer's *Iliad* (311). Similarly, in Ancient Greek and Roman literature, there are many examples of accounts that resonate with modern understandings of trauma. According to Chidiac and Crocq, the story of Epizelos, an Athenian warrior who became blind during the Battle of Marathon, is a good example of "emotional hysteria"(311).

Always in the same study of the history of trauma and trauma theory, there are other ancient medical texts, such as Hippocrates' *On Dreams* (circa 400 BCE), and philosophical works like Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (1st century BCE), acknowledge the significance of traumatic experiences in shaping dreams and mental states (311). As civilization progressed into the medieval period, references to trauma continued to appear in literary works such as the Song of Roland (circa 1100 CE) and historical chronicles like Froissart's Chronicles (1388 CE). These texts depict scenes of battle, loss, and suffering, underscoring the enduring presence of trauma in the collective memory of societies throughout history. The recurrence of references to trauma in ancient texts and historical accounts underscores its universality as a human experience. From ancient epics to medieval chronicles, the documentation of traumatic events and their psychological aftermath reflects humanity's ongoing struggle to comprehend and cope

with the impact of adversity. The two researchers provided other examples of trauma like King Charles IX, who after witnessing the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572, suffered from terrifying hallucinations and nightmares; Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry IV*; and other studies and firsthand accounts that preceded the works of the founders of trauma theory: Charcot, Oppenheim, and Freud.³

II-2. Trauma Theories Past and Present

Before seeing trauma theories, it is important to give a definition of the word trauma. The word "trauma" comes from ancient Greek (trauma), where it meant "wound," and where the adjective *traumatikos* referred to what is related to the wound. Applied to surgical pathology, the word "traumatism" has retained its meaning of injury, sometimes in its abbreviated form "trauma"⁴ (Crocq). According to Ekatherina Zhukova, the definition of the word trauma as a medical term "first appeared in the 1650s in medical practice. The 1890s saw the emergence of trauma as a psychic wound, thus paving the way for psychology and psychiatry" (218).

The rise of trauma as a medical concept gained traction with the emergence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which was utilized to describe the experiences of individuals affected by the Vietnam War (1955-1975), encompassing both those who were victimized and those who perpetrated acts during the conflict (218).

Trauma, according to Ekatherina Zhukova, "has also been used to define a social norm. Several generations of African Americans in the United States have drawn attention to the

³ The study by Chadiac and Crocq is very interesting because it covers four periods in the history of trauma: the precursors; the founders; the upholders; the innovators. The scholars also made a distinction between stress and trauma.

⁴ In medicine, the term "trauma" specifically refers to injuries caused by external forces. These injuries can range from minor cuts and bruises to severe wounds that may require surgical intervention. For instance, "cranial traumas" involve injuries to the head, which can include skull fractures, brain contusions, or intracranial hemorrhages.

trauma of slavery as the collective memory of suffering in the public sphere” (218) to argue about the necessity to recognize the consequences of slavery, the violation of human rights, systemic racism, and injustice on both individuals and groups.

Other trauma definitions by different scholars agree that traumatic experiences affect people’s psyche and mental well being. In her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and history* (1996) Cathy Caruth provided various definitions of trauma. She points out that trauma affects humans’ minds more than their bodies, she said "the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (3).

In another definition, she states that, "trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (91). These painful events threaten the person's psychological well being as they keep occurring in forms of flashbacks and nightmares.

According to Cathy Caruth, “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). Therefore, traumatic experiences do not only stop in the moment when they just happen or stay in the past but rather the traumatic memories keep coming back to the person who experienced it and keep haunting them and make them relive the overwhelming experience in the present.

Michelle Balaev, defined trauma as “a severely disruptive experience that profoundly impacts the self’s emotional organization and perception of the external world” (360). In addition to this, in his article “Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" written in 2023, Balaev provided another definition of trauma, he said, "Trauma, in my analysis, refers to a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's

sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society" (150). Through this we understand that trauma is a very tough experience that causes troubles to individuals and shakes the way they see themselves and the world around them.

The study of trauma has become a vast and dynamic field, engaging a multitude of scholars, including theorists, philosophers, literary scholars, historians, and clinicians whose desire is to investigate collective historical traumas and their consequences. This recognition of trauma's prevalence in everyday life has spurred further exploration into its psychological, social, and cultural dimensions. As a result, scholars and practitioners alike are constantly engaged in unraveling the complexities of trauma, seeking to comprehend its effects on individuals and societies, and striving to develop effective interventions and support systems for those affected.

II- 3. The First Theorists: Charcot, Oppenheim, and Freud

Jean Martin Charcot, a French neurologist, is known as the father of neurology and the first researcher to investigate and write about psychic trauma. His work was based on his observations to understand the relationship between traumatic experiences and physical disorders at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris. Charcot concluded that psychological factors impact physical health (Chidiac and Crocq; 'Jean-Martin Charcot's Contributions to the Interface Between Neurology and Psychiatry').

Hermann Oppenheim, is a German neurologist. From 1884 onwards, Oppenheim devoted himself to the investigation of neurosis, and started a correspondence with Jean-Martin Charcot. It then took him two years to finish his habilitation thesis entitled "*Importance of Shock in Pathologies of the Nervous System*". It was during this time that he developed his theory of traumatic neurosis, based on patient observations accumulated over five years at the Charité, which gradually persuaded him of the psychological nature of many symptoms caused

by particular physical injuries (Pignol and Hirschelmann-Ambrosi 432). Hermann Oppenheim's work emerged at a critical juncture where the traditional mechanical model of trauma proves inadequate in explaining essential emotional phenomena, despite increasing recognition of their significance (Pignol and Hirschelmann-Ambrosi 432).⁵

Freud wrote about trauma and death in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and gave the example of Hans, a young boy, who developed a phobia of horses after witnessing a traumatic event. In his book *The Aetiology of Hysteria*, Freud postulated that the origins of trauma were always sexual, and in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) he explored the role of dreams in processing and expressing traumatic experiences. In *Psychoanalytic Theory*, he argued that traumatic events could shape personality development and psychopathology and proposed that unresolved traumas could lead to the formation of defense mechanisms and symptoms as a way of coping with distressing memories ('Freud et l'actualité du trauma').

Rubin Suleiman discussed Freud's original papers from the 1890s and Suleiman noted that Freud tended to impose his own interpretations on his patients' experiences rather than fully accepting their accounts of childhood abuse. This suggests that Freud did not completely abandon the idea of childhood abuse but shifted his focus away from a theory of repressed sexual abuse towards one centered on the Oedipus complex.

⁵ "Les travaux d'Oppenheim surviennent à un moment où le modèle mécanique du trauma a montré son incapacité à rendre véritablement compte de phénomènes émotionnels dont l'on perçoit pourtant de plus en plus clairement l'importance. Reste que si les auteurs ont beau évoquer le rôle de la peur, de l'effroi, des émotions violentes, rien en même temps ne permet de penser selon quelles modalités celles-ci peuvent agir sur les fonctions physiques normales. Il y a là, faute de modèle approprié, un impensable sur lequel viennent buter ces premiers constats. Quant à l'œuvre de Charcot, elle n'a fait que complexifier le schéma étiologique originel, mais pas véritablement les prémices sur lesquels il s'édifiait puisqu'elle demeurait dans le cadre d'une pensée anatomo-pathologique en quête d'une lésion explicative, fut-elle dynamique ; en outre, elle réintroduisait l'importance de l'hérédité, contre celle du traumatisme réduit tout au plus à un rôle de déclencheur. Il restait donc une place vacante pour une théorie qui mette en exergue la dimension proprement émotionnelle/traumatique de l'accident dont l'importance n'avait cessé d'être relevée par les auteurs. Mais il fallait pour cela littéralement inventer une pathologie nouvelle sur des bases épistémologiques sensiblement renouvelées. Il revient à Hermann Oppenheim d'avoir pensé cette entité, et c'est le modèle réflexe qui lui en inspirera les fondements". (Pignol and Hirschelmann-Ambrosi 432).

In his study, Suleiman referred to Mikel Borch-Jacobsen and Ian Hacking as prominent figures in the "anti-Freud" camp (279). They criticized Freud for imposing his own unjustified interpretations on his early hysteric patients and accused him of trying to cover up his supposed "crime" by inventing the Oedipus complex. Borch-Jacobsen, in particular, has authored books sharply critical of Freud and edited volumes like *Le livre noir de la psychanalyse*, drawing parallels between Freud's alleged actions and the crimes of Nazism and communism. However, Suleiman argues that while Freud may have imposed his own constructions on his patients, it doesn't necessarily invalidate all of his theories about the human psyche or imply criminal intent. This perspective acknowledges Freud's flaws while also recognizing the complexity and ongoing relevance of his contributions to psychology (279).

Freud's legacy is indisputable, for he has laid the ground for trauma studies but, according to many experts, his focus was the impact of traumatic childhood experiences on the individual. Numerous multidisciplinary studies, since the publication of Freud's papers, have been conducted to redefine trauma and study its different types and effects. We will refer in this chapter to the most relevant studies that are related to our topic.

II- 4. LaCapra and Historical Trauma

In his book, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* Dominick LaCapra stressed the immense importance of taking survivors testimonies into consideration when writing about history, LaCapra argued that testimonies gives an in depth insight of what happened in the past how people remember some experiences from a personal perspective that help us understand thing better, he argued that, "Testimonies are significant in the attempt to understand experience and its aftermath, including the role of memory and its lapses, in coming to terms with or denying and repressing-the past" (86-87). Similarly, in his article "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?" (2016) Dominick LaCapra, emphasizes the importance of testimonies of

victims who experienced bad events, arguing that they give a vivid image and a helpful insight about what really happened and how people went through specific tough events. Moreover, he points out the importance of memory or more specifically traumatic memory in history and historiography. He argues that historians only focus on written accounts when they want to study history and they don't relay or take the memories of people who experienced traumatic events like the holocaust into consideration because they think that they are not relevant. He points out that this doesn't mean that written accounts are wrong; however, LaCapra states that, "I shall indicate where histories based on standard written archives as well as works claiming historical status may, like memory itself, be problematic and usefully supplemented and even contested or corrected by an appeal to memory" (376). Lacapra states that we should rely on both oral and written records when studying history and trying to understand it.

II- 5. Trauma, Memory, Identity and Transgenerational Trauma

Dominick LaCapra in his article "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?" (2016), examines the relation between history, memory and identity. He said that, "memory, including traumatic memory, has a crucial role in the formation of individual and collective identities" (391). He claimed that traumatic memories related to history can shape the way we see ourselves.

LaCapra, shed light on the transgenerational transmission of trauma as well as the problem and feeling that comes with this kind of trauma such as "feelings of guilt and shame" (379). He points out that trauma does not only affect the ones who directly experience some overwhelming event; rather it also affects their descendants.

II- 6. Trauma, Absence and Loss

Dominick LaCapra, in his essay *Trauma, Absence, Loss* he presented two concepts related to trauma, which are Absence and loss. In his essay, he stressed the importance of making the difference between the two. LaCapra, emphasized the different ways of dealing and responding to historical traumatic losses; he introduced the process of acting out and working through.

According to LaCapra, acting out, is the repetition of the traumatic event where the person who has experienced an overwhelming experience in his life keeps reliving and coming back to that event, it's like being stuck in the same place or situation where this trauma keeps haunting the person from living the present or moving forward. However, working through, is quite the opposite, this process is like facing the trauma, understanding it and moving forward in your life. In addition, LaCapra argued that in some cases acting out is an important step for healing he said, “traumatic losses, acting-out may well be a necessary condition of working-through, at least for victims” (716-717).

LaCapra states that when it comes to absence “mourning might be seen as a form of working-through, and melancholia as a form of acting-out” (713). Therefore, mourning can be a coping mechanism to some absences and people directly interact with grief and move forward. However, melancholia is understood as delving in the deep sadness, pain and sorrow and being unable to progress in life.

II- 7. Silence and Trauma

Dominick LaCapra, in his article “Trauma, History, Memory, Identity, What Remains?” states that due to the profound effects of trauma, people who have been through very overwhelming experiences, find it very challenging and difficult to describe what happened and put these experiences into words. However, he claims that, “Yet silences may also speak in their own

way, having a performative dimension that is not devoid of objective significance and moral force” (377). In this context, we can understand that silence itself is an expressive language and can convey some specific messages. LaCapra also said that, “The very breaks or gaps in an account such as a testimony may attest to disruptive experiences and relate to a reliving of trauma that collapses the past into the present, making it seem or feel as if it were more "real" and "present" than contemporary circumstances” (377). Therefore, silence which is a response to trauma can be a form of acting out, where people feel like the past is happening again and they relive that horrific event all over again in the present.

Cathy Caruth's article “Parting Words: Trauma, Memory and Survival”, is based on Freudian ideas presented in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. She believes that his ideas are so important and of a high significance to understand things more. Cathy Caruth states, “Freud’s insight into trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, its new understanding of personal act and of collective history in the face of war, lies precisely in the striking and enigmatic leap that juxtaposes the nightmares of war to the child’s game” (22). In her article, she discusses the deep and complex relationships between trauma, memory and language.

Caruth states that silence holds a great importance when it comes to traumatic experiences. She argues that, due to the complexities of trauma and its profound impact on people, it can sometimes make it hard for them to speak and put these experiences into words. She believes that traumatic experiences can be overwhelming and painful in a way that the person who has been through cannot articulate these experiences as a result they stay silent.

II- 8. Literary Representation of Trauma

The depiction of trauma in literary narratives is a difficult task, especially when it's related to historical events, therefore writers face great challenges. Dominick LaCapra in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), explained that the representation of trauma in

historical writings is very challenging and complex, he said that the portrayal and writing of traumatic experiences provide particularly challenging issues for research as well as for any dialogic encounter with the past that acknowledges the claims it makes on individuals and connects it to the present and future (41).

In their article, "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novel" (2008), Stef Craps and Gert Buelen emphasize the importance of trauma studies in the analysis of postcolonial trauma novels and highlights their intersections.

They stated that trauma studies main objective is to study of all people's experiences from various cultures and how they cope with them. However, the writers argued that it is not the case because this field is biased and only focus on traumas experienced by white western people and they don't shed the light on the experiences of other non-western people and unfortunately this "maintain or widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world" (2). The writers argued with the importance of examining how trauma is represented in postcolonial literature of different countries. They state, "Examining a variety of issues surrounding the intersection of trauma, narrative, and the postcolonial, the contributors to this issue assess both the difficulties to be confronted and the benefits to be gained in "postcolonializing" trauma studies" (3).

In their article, the writers examine the way in which traumatic experiences are represented in postcolonial novels. They stated in studies about trauma "it has become all but axiomatic that traumatic experiences can only be adequately represented through the use of experimental, (post)modernist textual strategies" (5). However, the writers didn't agree with this idea arguing that authors use different narrative techniques to perfectly portray traumas related to colonialism. Stef Craps and Gert Buelen state that some authors use complex storytelling methods while others use realistic and indigenous writing techniques.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a rich overview of trauma and trauma theory. It started with a definition of trauma provided by numerous scholars and theorists, then it delves into the examination of early references to trauma in ancient texts and historical accounts, and shed the light on some prominent theorists such as Charcot, Oppenheim, and Freud and their contributions in the field of trauma theory. The chapter also discussed the works of Dominick LaCapra about the role and the importance of testimonies and traumatic memories in history and highlighted the way in which traumatic memories shape people's identities. Moreover, the chapter explained the two processes related to traumatic losses and absences presented by Dominick Lacapra and his ideas on silence and speech as well as Caruth's insights into trauma, memory, and silence. Finally, the chapter has shown the complexities of the representation of trauma in literary narratives.

Chapter Three: Analysis of the novel *Obasan*

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to study identity, silence, and trauma in our selected novel. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first shed light on the Japanese immigrant in Canada. Then it explains the historical background of the conflict including the causes leading to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and its impact on Japanese Canadians as well as the policies of internment and its effects on the Japanese living in Canada. The second part, however, analyzes trauma and identity in the text by referring to the work of LaCapra. The last part explores how trauma is related to silence.

III-1. Japanese Immigrants in Canada

The history of Japanese people in Canada can be traced back to 1877 with the Issei, first wave of immigrants, who travelled from Japan to different countries all over the world, to escape poverty and hardships of their life in Japan. Although before 1868 it was illegal for Japanese people to leave Japan. Then with the change in the government, they were encouraged to move abroad to make money and acquire skills that they might use back home (Hickman and Fukawa 14)

The first Japanese arrivals in Canada were young and literates, they worked hard to gain their living there. A minority immigrated from other regions of Japan, although the majority were from agricultural and fishing communities on the southern islands of Kyushu and Honshu. Many of them settled in the "Japan towns," or suburbs of Vancouver and Victoria, as well as in fishing villages, farms in the Fraser Valley, pulp mill towns along the Pacific coast, and fishing villages. A small number of them settled in Alberta's coal-mining communities and on farms close to Lethbridge and Edmonton. (Sunaraha)

The Japanese immigrants struggle due to their origin and the widespread of the anti-Asian feeling in Canada, they were never accepted nor welcomed as a result they faced numerous problems and difficulties, Hickman and Fukawa stated that, " Increased immigration from Asia was not welcomed by the very British majority. Japanese immigrants faced legislation racism, unfair living and working conditions, and a population and a population that wanted them gone" (18). Additionally, because they came from a highly stratified culture where deference to authority and obedience was valued highly, Japanese people were stereotyped as being modest and hardworking. The assumption that Asians, and Japanese in particular, seemed to require little to survive since they were cheap labour, served to further perpetuate the stereotype of Asians as inferior people. (Seguro Gómez 181). Due to the nature of Japanese society and its people were known for their high sense of responsibility and obedience as a result they were less paid than the white people

III- 2. The Impact of WWII on Japanese Canadians

The Second World War (1939-1945) stands as one of the most significant conflicts in history, pitting the world's most powerful nations against each other. Among its pivotal moments, the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, stands out as a defining event that reverberated not only in Japan but also among Japanese communities in the United States and Canada. To understand the impact of this event on Japanese Canadians, it is essential to delve into the underlying causes of the attack.

The seeds of the Pearl Harbor attack were sown years before its occurrence. In the 1930s, China emerged as a vital arena for the United States and Great Britain, who sought to exploit its vast resources and manpower. Against this backdrop, the USS Panay, vessels representing both nations, navigated the Yangtze River in China.

China, however, was beset by internal strife and faced the menace of Japanese expansionism. Japan had already seized control of parts of China and harbored ambitions to

further encroach upon territories like Manchuria. In 1937, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China, unleashing untold suffering and atrocities upon the Chinese populace. As Japanese forces advanced towards Nanking, home to a significant American presence, the United States dispatched the USS Panay to safeguard American interests. Despite displaying American flags, the vessel fell victim to Japanese airstrikes, further stoking American ire towards Japan.

Franklin Roosevelt, during his presidency, provided financial and military support for China against Japan. As a result, tensions escalated between Japan and America, and Roosevelt implemented severe sanctions and restrictions on Japan including trade restrictions and preventing the Japanese ships from passing through the Panama Canal. As a result, on December 7th, 1941, Japan launched a devastating surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. This infamous act not only catapulted the world into a new phase of the Second World War but also signified the official entry of the United States into the conflict. In response to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States swiftly declared war on Japan, thereby solidifying its commitment to the Allied cause and escalating the global conflict to unprecedented levels.

The Japanese Canadians living in Canada were profoundly impacted by this conflict. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, during World War II, the lives of Japanese Canadians underwent radical changes, creating significant challenges within Canada.

The Canadian government responded to the situation by taking severe measures against Japanese Canadians, citing national security concerns under the War Measures Act. As a result, “between March and September 1942, over 21,000 Japanese Canadians, more than half of whom were born in Canada and therefore Canadian citizens, were forcibly relocated.” (Goellnicht 288). This relocation marked a dark chapter in Canadian history, highlighting the injustices faced by Japanese Canadians during World War II.

III- 3. The Policies of Internment and its Impact on Japanese Living in Canada

The Canadian government's policies towards Japanese Canadians were indeed drastic and severe. They involved the confiscation of approximately 1800 fishing boats, as well as the seizure of farms and cars belonging to members of the Japanese Canadian community. Furthermore, their homes were confiscated, and they faced the imposition of strict restrictions. These measures included curfews, communication bans, and prohibitions on the possession of items such as radios and cameras. Additionally, the Canadian government closed all educational institutions and Japanese-language newspapers. Men were forcibly separated from their families and sent to work in farms.

The impact of these unjust policies on Japanese Canadians was profound and far-reaching. The forced relocation disrupted their lives in multiple ways, resulting in significant social, economic, and psychological hardships. Families were torn apart, and communities were fractured. Many Japanese Canadians lost their livelihoods as they were stripped of their jobs and properties. This included the destruction of their homes, fishing boats, and other assets, without any form of compensation. Amidst the tumultuous aftermath of the Pearl Harbor bombing on December 7, 1941, Japanese Canadians found themselves subjected to discriminatory measures:

After the bombing of Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, Japanese Canadian citizens and Japanese Nationals in Canada were subject to government curfews, personal interrogation, and ultimately job loss and severe economic hardship. All Japanese language newspapers were shut down, fishing boats were impounded, and the federal government liquidated businesses, and sold vehicles, houses, and personal belongings. The proceeds of the sales were used to pay auctioneers and realtors, as well as to cover the costs of the

internment. First interned were "alien" men, next Japanese Canadian men, and lastly all women and children of Japanese descent.(Sugiman 360)

In 1944, the Canadian government, under Mackenzie King, sought to resolve the "Japanese problem" by compelling 14,000 Japanese Canadians in British Columbia to either resettle east of the Rockies or face "repatriation" to Japan, a country most had never seen (Goellnicht 289). These policies achieved the government's goal: the disintegration of the cohesive Japanese Canadian community on the West Coast and their dispersal across the country, where they endeavored to assimilate quickly to avoid future discrimination.⁶

The consequences of these discriminatory actions continue to resonate within the Japanese Canadian community to this day, underscoring the lasting trauma inflicted by the Canadian government's policies. It is essential to acknowledge and remember these injustices as part of their collective history, and to work towards reconciliation and healing for those affected.

Following the end of the Second World War, there came a belated acknowledgment of the injustices inflicted upon Japanese Canadians. In 1988, the federal government issued an official apology for its treatment of Japanese Canadians, accompanied by a redress payment of \$21,000 to each survivor. Additionally, over \$12 million was allocated to a community fund and various human rights projects, aimed at addressing the legacy of discrimination and supporting affected communities in their journey towards healing and reconciliation (Robinson).

This acknowledgment and redress, while long overdue, represent important steps towards recognizing the past wrongs and working towards a more just and inclusive society. However, the scars left by the internment experience continue to shape the lives of Japanese

⁶ For further details on the historical context and themes related to Japanese Canadian internment, see "Minority History as Metafiction: Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*" by Donald C. Goellnicht. This article was published in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Autumn 1989, Volume 8, Issue 2, pages 287-306.

Canadians and serve as a poignant reminder of the importance of confronting and learning from the darker chapters of our history.

III- 4. Trauma in *Obasan*

III- 4.1 Silence in *Obasan*

Obasan is a novel about absence, trauma, sexual abuse, and more importantly speech and silence. In the epigraph, we read ‘There is a silence that cannot speak. There is a silence that will not speak’. The epigraph, in fact, frames the novel. Naomi, the narrator, has to live with the absence of her mother and grandmother and also the deafening silence of her family that does not want to talk about certain memories.

The study can help us understand silence, language, and trauma. The first character is Obasan who is described in many passages in the novel as a mute figure who refuses to tell the truth about the fate of the mother of Naomi and the pain her people had to go through during and after WWII. Obasan is a traditional Japanese woman who played the role of Naomi's and Stephen's foster mother. Obasan's silence is strategic because it helps to survive and cope with trauma. Her silence is also a symptom and a response to trauma. In chapter 3, the narrator says

Such an old woman she is. She opens her mouth to say more, but there is no further sound from her dry lips. The language of her grief is silence. She has learned it well, its idioms, its nuances. Over the years, silence within her small body has grown large and powerful (27-28).

For example, when the narrator asked Obasan if her marriage with Uncle Sam was arranged , she described her answers as “always *oblique* and the full story never emerges *in a direct line*” (emphasis added). Obasan speaks a language that is vague, indirect, and elusive. In one

particular passage, the narrator said that Obasan has always refused to talk about her two children who died after childbirth.

In another scene, in Chapter Five, after the death of Uncle Sam, there is a very short exchange between Obasan and the narrator:

"Please tell me about Mother," I would say as a child to Obasan. I was consumed by the question. Devoured alive. But Obasan gave me no answers. I did not have, I have never had, the key to the vault of her thoughts. Even now, I have no idea what urgency prompts her to explore this attic at midnight. "Is it enough, Obasan? Shall we go downstairs?" She turns to face me. Her glasses, thick as marbles, dangle from the chain around her neck. "Lost," she says. The light from the flashlight grazes her forehead as I sweep it in a final arc around the attic. Her hair is so fine that her scalp shows through, the texture of skin, hair, and net almost translucent. "What is lost?". (39-40)

In this passage, the narrator feels frustrated because she is unable to find a way to interpret her aunt's thoughts. She uses the word vault as a metaphor of Obasan's mind. A vault is an inaccessible and private storage place where people hide precious things and souvenirs. Just like a vault, Obasan's inner world is portrayed as being unreachable and shut off, inaccessible to the narrator. This imagery effectively conveys the sense of secrecy and isolation surrounding Obasan's thoughts and emotions regarding the narrator's mother. Obasan ended this short exchange with an artificial laughter and a cold remark: "Everything is forgetfulness" (40). For her, memories are very fragile, and forgetfulness is inevitable. The same words are echoed at the end of Chapter Six, "Everything is forgetfulness. The time of forgetting is now come" (44), meaning that it is time to make a shift or transition. It is very confusing that Obasan takes the decision to forget without mourning her husband. One possible explanation is that Obasan's

decision to forget could be interpreted as a defense mechanism to overcome loss and grief and protect herself from pain.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, according to Cathy Caruth, many individuals resort to silence because they are not capable of expressing their traumatic experiences. It is important to underline that the absence of language is a form of speech. Silence also speaks and should not be ignored. It is as expressive as language.

Aunt Emily is starkly different from Obasan. The contrast is sharply underscored by the narrator: "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. She's a crusader, a little old gray-haired Mighty Mouse, a Bachelor of Advanced Activists and General Practitioner of Just Causes" (46). Emily and Obasan have contrasting personalities and communication styles. Obasan is always silent about what happened in internment camps while Aunt Emily does not hesitate to speak her mind and talk about scapegoating, deportation, racism, and injustice toward Japanese Canadians. In Chapter Seven, for example, in a conversation, she explains:

The American Japanese were interned as we were in Canada, and sent off to concentration camps, but their property wasn't liquidated as ours was. And look how quickly the communities reestablished themselves in Los Angeles and San Francisco. We weren't allowed to return to the West Coast like that. We've never recovered from the dispersal policy. But of course that was the government's whole idea—to make sure we'd never be visible again. Official racism was blatant in Canada. The Americans have a Bill of Rights, right? We don't. (48)

Unlike Obasan, Emily has a project: writing about the history of her people because she feels qualified to speak about racism which was nurtured by stereotypes like the treacherous yellow

peril and refute the accusations made against the Nisei in Canada. She shows her manuscript titled THE STORY OF THE NISEI IN CANADA: A STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY.

During this heated debate between the Naomi and her aunt Emily, Obasan did not take part. She simply replied with "Arigatai. Gratitude only" (57). This reply is quite bewildering but very typical for someone like Obasan. The protagonist herself complies with silence in her life. In the beginning of Chapter Eleven, Naomi, the protagonist, describes herself when was a child, and states that in her house there is a delightful life, family and the means she needs to stay happy. However, she expressed her fear of the outside world and when she is far from her family and house's borders.

Naomi shares a deep relationship with her mother, she tells her everything and she does not hide anything from her. For Naomi, her mother represents love, protection and trust. However, all this changed and her relationship and closeness to her mother took a different turn, after her traumatic experience with their neighbor. Old Man Gower, who used to sexually abuse her. Naomi expressed her fear, weakness and discomfort when he was around. The man always warns her to keep silent and hide the truth from her mother: "Don't tell your mother," he whispers into my ear. This is what he always says" (83). Naomi's silence was out of shock, shame and fear. She was afraid of the man and terrified by the idea of losing her mother.

Naomi's mother also was silent. After the bombing attack on Nagasaki, Japan she was disfigured, she lost her nose and cheek. She sends a letter to her sister Emily asking her to keep the secret and to not tell Naomi and Stephen. The silence of Naomi's mother expressed her deep love and care towards her children, she doesn't want them to get hurt or affected by the truth behind her absence and silence.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, according to Dominick LaCapra, silence can say, express and reveal things more than words can do. Silence can convey some specific

messages. The silence of Naomi's mother expressed numerous things such as protection, love and fear.

In Chapter Thirty-Eight, the narrator Naomi mourns her mother with an evocative language and expressed her deep emotional sadness and grief towards her mother absence of speech and loss:

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? (284)

In this passage, Naomi is addressing her mother, and describing her as silent and she cut off all the means of communication with them, she stayed silent until she passed away. Naomi further told her mother that she could have confronted them with the truth and didn't stay in the silent world, she feels and understands her pain, suffering and struggles, she also asked her mother to not feel ashamed because of her wounds. The narrator expressed that their lack of communication was the reason behind their detachment and separation, she said: "Gentle Mother, we were lost together in our silences. Our wordlessness was our mutual destruction" (286). Both of them adopted silence as a coping mechanism for different reasons. Naomi out of fear of getting emotionally detached from her mother; whereas her mother she stayed silent to protect her children. However, the consequences of their silence had a profound impact on their lives.

Throughout the chapter, Naomi kept addressing her mother with a sorrowful language and profound feeling of pain and sadness. The passages convey a sense of melancholia and mourning. She expressed her feelings towards her traumatic loss and absence of her mother.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Dominick Lacapra, presented two processes related to traumatic losses and absences: acting out and working through. According to LaCapra, acting out when someone relieves the traumatic past experience and his inability of moving forward in life and working through is facing the trauma, understanding it and moving forward in life. He also points out that acting out is a substantial way of healing. However, he states that “mourning might be seen as a form of working-through, and melancholia as a form of acting-out” (713). Here in the case of Naomi, her profound feeling of sadness is a sign of acting out whereas her language and words expressing mourning could demonstrate her acceptance of fate and moving forward.

III- 4.2 Memory in *Obasan*

Not only is *Obasan* a novel of silence, but it is also a novel of memory. Throughout the story, memory and forgetfulness are repeated many times. In a furtive talk, the narrator "Some memories, too, might better be forgotten. Didn't *Obasan* once say, "It is better to forget?" (61). While *Obasan* stands for forgetfulness and denial, Aunt Emily stands for remembrance. When the narrator reflects on their house in Marpole and she confesses that she is not capable of finding anything worth remembering. Aunt Emily reminds her the duty to remember and embrace her history:

The house in which we live is in Marpole, a comfortable residential district of Vancouver. It is more splendid than any house I have lived in since. It does not bear remembering. None of this bears remembering. "You have to remember," Aunt Emily said. You are your history. If you cut any of it off you're an amputee. Don't deny the past. Remember everything. If you're bitter, be bitter. Cry it out! Scream! Denial is gangrene. Look at you, Nomi, shuffling

back and forth between Cecil and Granton, unable either to go or to stay in the world with even a semblance of grace or ease. (67)

This passage demonstrates the integral connection between personal identity and historical context, warning against the dangers of denying or cutting off one's past. Aunt Emily's insistence on confronting the past, even if it brings bitterness or sorrow, suggests that acknowledging and processing trauma is essential for healing and personal growth. The metaphor of amputation and gangrene reinforces the idea that denying or repressing traumatic experiences can have destructive consequences, akin to allowing an infection to spread unchecked. The narrator's inability to find peace or stability, as illustrated by their "shuffling back and forth," suggests the ongoing struggle caused by unresolved trauma and the internal conflict between facing painful truths and seeking refuge in forgetfulness.

Naomi, the narrator, decided to remember her childhood home and recount the smallest details and memories in a very nostalgic tone. The description of the house is meticulous and combines physical and sensory details. The memories are intact, evocative, and vivid, and this proves that our memories cannot be suppressed definitively. The collage of images mentioned by the narrator reinforces the idea that even if the memories are fragmented, they still do exist.

In chapter eleven, Naomi's traumatic memories and experience with Old Men Gower as a four year old girl, reoccur in the form of a dream. The dream was about three oriental women, who were lying and soldiers were pointing their rifles towards them. In order to protect themselves they tried to seduce the soldiers. The narrator states: "She was trying to use the only weapon she had—her desirability. This is what a punished dog feels—this abject longing, wretchedness, fear, and utter helplessness. She lay on the edge of nausea, stretched between hatred and lust" (80). The women were obliged to do that despite their unwillingness because their only means of protection and survival is seduction. The dream represents the past

traumatic experience of the young Naomi who was unable to speak, scream or oppose; she only had to obey and to submit to the oppressor's orders.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, according to Cathy Caruth, the overwhelming events threaten the person's psychological well-being as they keep occurring in forms of flashbacks and nightmares. Furthermore, according to her, people who have been through an overwhelming experience in their lives, these traumatic memories keep chasing them in the present and make them relive the traumatic experience over and over again. Here, the traumatic memory comes back to the protagonist in the form of a nightmare and makes her remember and relive the past horrible experience in the present.

III- 4.3 Memories of Internment in *Obasan*

The forced displacement of Japanese Canadians left a lasting and irreparable wound on their lives, one that continues to resonate deeply. The conditions within the internment camps were horrific, characterized by a lack of even the most basic necessities of life. In *Obasan*, there are numerous references to the internment of Japanese Canadians. For example, in Chapter Fourteen, Naomi described how they were treated like animal in concentration camps:

Sick Bay, I learned eventually, was not a beach at all. And the place they called the Pool was not a pool of water, but a prison at the exhibition grounds called Hastings Park in Vancouver. Men, women, and children outside Vancouver, from the "protected area"—a hundred-mile strip along the coast— were herded into the grounds and kept there like animals until they were shipped off to roadwork camps and concentration camps in the interior of the province. From our family, it was only Grandma and Grandpa Nakane who were imprisoned at the Pool. (98)

This passage perfectly captures the harsh reality in these camps. The language used to describe the reality of the internment camps is stark and evocative. The comparison of the treatment of Japanese Canadians to animals, kept in a confined space, illustrates the dehumanizing nature of the internment experience. This dehumanization is further emphasized by the use of terms like "prison" and "concentration camps," which evoke images of oppression and confinement. The narrator further says that the tension is still present everywhere and it is even more obvious today. Although the war is something of the past, racial hatred and fear have never disappeared.

In Chapter Fourteen, the author inserted letters, fragments from a diary, and files from the Public Archives of Canada. As it was argued before, *Obasan* is a historical novel. These documents stand as proof about the government policies and offer an honest and insightful look of the atrocities of war and how the Japanese Canadians felt and lived.

Aunt Emily, reported everything in her letters to her sister. Her fears, hopes, pain, disappointment, etc. she mentioned the discrimination, prejudices and the drastic policies taken against the Japanese Canadians including the blackout, the Japanese newspapers were closed down, the fishing licenses and boats were sized, many lost their jobs. The Japanese Canadians were forbidden to leave their houses, the radios and cameras were confiscated and they were sent to internment camps, men to labor, and children were drawn out of school.

That period was horrific and things became worse, everything was against the Japanese Canadian people and the Canadian government did not stop in the policies rather tried to get rid of anyone of a Japanese race at all cost, even the newspaper played a significant role in demonstrating them in an awful way.

Aunt Emily mentioned the shameful act of the media. Newspapers instead of reporting the condition of the Japanese Canadians it becomes a source of propaganda and manipulation. Moreover, she explained that it is no longer a question of protection but rather an ethnic

cleansing and oppression. She further states that, they are stuck in a confusing situation, no matter what they do or whatever decision they make or action they take, they are always misunderstood and seen as betraying or working against the Canadian government.

In her diary, Aunt Emily explained the amount of suffering that the Japanese Canadians had to endure because of the dehumanizing policies and the miserable state they had been through at that time. Nobody was excluded and all generations were affected, men, women, children and even babies:

Mothers are prostrate in nervous exhaustion —the babies crying endlessly—the fathers torn from them without farewell— everyone crammed into two buildings like so many pigchildren taken out of school with no provision for future education—more and more people pouring into the Park—forbidden to step outside the barbed-wire gates and fence—the men can't even leave the building—police guards around them—some of them fight their way out to come to town to see what they can do about their families. Babies and motherless children totally stranded—their fathers taken to camp. (113)

She states that these moments of detachment and separations of families are worse than the bombing, the families were torn apart with no chance and opportunity to see each other for the last time. They were treated like animals and were forbidden to move or escape.

As it was mentioned before, the internment camps were in a terrifying state; the Japanese Canadians lived under harsh conditions and faced tough struggles and challenges. Aunt Emily, visited one of the internment camps and described the traumatizing thing she witnessed:

The whole place is impregnated with the smell of ancient manure. Every other day it's swept with chloride of lime or something but you can't disguise horse smells, cow, sheep, pig, rabbit, and goat smells. And is it dusty! The toilets are just a sheet-metal trough and up till now they didn't have partitions or seats. The women complained, so they put in partitions and a terribly makeshift seat. Twelve year-old boys stay with the women too. The auto show building, where the Indian exhibits were, houses the new dining room and kitchens. Seats 3,000. Looks awfully permanent. Brick stoves—eight of them—shiny new mugs—very very barracky. As for the bunks, they were the most tragic things I saw there. (119-120)

From this passage, we can understand that the place was originally a farm for animals. The Canadian government saw no difference between them and animals. This shows the dehumanizing treatment the Japanese Canadians received. The smell is unbearable and nobody can live in such an uncomfortable place.

Aunt Emily further explained that women were trying hard to make that place livable but nothing would change, then she expressed her deep sadness when she saw grandmother Nakane among the interned people, she said:

Some of the women were making the best of things, housecleaning around their stalls. One was scrubbing and scrubbing trying to get rid of the smell, but that wasn't possible. And then, Nesan, and then, I found Grandma Nakane there sitting like a little troll in all that crowd, with her chin on her chest. At first I couldn't believe it. She didn't recognize me. She just stared and stared. Then when I knelt down in front of her, she broke down and clung to me and

cried and cried and said she'd rather have died than have come to such a place.
(120)

Seeing grandmother Nakane there shocked her, she is an old exhausted woman staying in the corner feeling sad, ashamed and in great pain she told that she wished she was dead rather than experiencing something like this at such an age. The fact that she wished death, demonstrates and emphasizes the intense impact of the evacuation and oppression on the lives of the Japanese Canadians during the second world war.

Chapter Fourteen is fundamental and Aunt Emily's letters, diary and testimony are crucial in the novel as they give an honest and a subjective picture and view of the cruelties of war and the Policies imposed on the minority groups in Canada. Aunt Emily, expressed the emotions and feelings of awe, fear, shame and sadness that the Japanese Canadian people experienced during the second world war.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Dominick LaCapra stressed the importance of testimonies and traumatic memories in history and historiography because they give a profound and an honest view about the past and how people felt and lived during warfare under some specific traumatizing circumstances.

III- 4.4 Cultural Identity and Trauma in *Obasan*

The question of identity in the novel is presented and portrayed in numerous chapters. The forced relocation of the Japanese Canadian people during the second world war, highly affected them and left a wound that will never heal. At the beginning of Chapter Fifteen, the narrator Naomi described the painful journey and experience she witnessed leaving her hometown. She also described the sorrowful weather and atmosphere which prevailed that day.

We are leaving the B.C. coast—rain, cloud, mist—an air overladen with weeping. Behind us lies a salty sea within which swim our drowning specks of memory—our small waterlogged eulogies. We are going down to the middle of the earth with pickaxe eyes, tunneling by train to the interior, carried along by the momentum of the expulsion into the waiting wilderness. (133)

In this passage, there is a sense of melancholia and sadness. The metaphoric sentences and the language used are extremely expressive, poignant and emotive. Naomi, expressed the heavy emotional, psychological and physical suffering of the forced displacement that the Japanese Canadians experienced in Canada. They were forcibly relocated and removed from their homes, lost their belongings and everything they worked hard to have they left behind. Naomi left behind the memories she created, and the life she had before and expressed her profound pain. In this case, the forced displacement and leaving everything behind represent a traumatic loss to the protagonist Naomi. She also explained that they were sent to unknown and unexplored places for the Japanese Canadians and they have no idea about life and things that are waiting for them there.

The Japanese Canadians during the Second World War were weak, oppressed and had no power to defend or protect themselves. Once the measures were announced, they didn't have the right to complain or to reject, they had no choice but obedience:

We are hammers and chisels in the hands of would-be sculptors, battering the spirit of the sleeping mountain. We are the chips and sand, the fragments of fragments that fly like arrows from the heart of the rock. We are the silences that speak from stone. We are the despised rendered voiceless, stripped of car, radio, camera, and every means of communication, a trainload of eyes covered with mud and spittle. (133)

Through this passage, the narrator expressed that their destiny as well as their present lives and future were sculptured and built by external forces; therefore, this affected their identity formation and the way they represent, define and identify themselves. Furthermore, they were stripped off all means of communication and cut from everything that could connect them to each other or to the outside world to prevent any action of rebellion. Additionally, a country holds a great importance in every human being's life, it symbolizes and represents peace, justice, protection, freedom, equality, etc. In the case of the Japanese Canadians, they were accused of being a threat and enemies just because of their origins. As a result, the feelings of shame, humiliation exhibited on their faces will follow them till the end.

The Japanese Canadians were treated equally, the measures were applied on all generations and no one was excluded.

We are the scholarly and the illiterate, the envied and the ugly, the fierce and the docile. 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 (134).

The narrator illustrates the different background of the Japanese Canadians and despite their sacrifices, dedication to serve the country, hard work and contributions in the prosperity of Canada, they were not praised for that, on the contrary they received harsh and dehumanizing treatment. The repetition of the pronoun "We" demonstrates the shared traumatic experience of the Japanese Canadians. This traumatic experience shaped their lives, changed their future and affected their identities. She states: "We are the Issei and the Nisei and the Sansei, the Japanese Canadians. We disappear into the future undemanding as dew" (134). The narrator predicted that there will be no trace of neither the Japanese identity nor their culture in the future and all generations will conform to the dominant culture and get along with the Canadian

society. She likened the Japanese Canadians to a “dew” that clings to the leaves of plants and falls disappearing with the first ray of light and the heat of the sun, announcing its inability to withstand.

The Japanese experience in the internment camps during the Second World War shook their identity and their sense of belonging. Naomi’s aunt Emily is an activist, she speaks on behalf of the Japanese Canadian people, she defends them, and claims that the Japanese government mistreated them and all what happened was just an excuse to get rid of the Japanese people, despite this, she rejects the idea that she is from a Japanese origin and represent and identifies herself as Canadian since she was little. In chapter seven the narrator mentioned that she read one of her aunt’s manuscripts where she said:

The exact moment when I first felt the stirrings of identification with this country occurred when I was twelve years old, memorizing a Canto of "The Lay of the Last Minstrel."

So many times after that, I repeated the lines: sadly, desperately, and bitterly.

But at first I was proud, knowing that I belonged.

This is my own, my native land. (55)

Despite Aunt Emily’s journey since the outbreak of the second world war and active involvement in the second generation Japanese Canadians groups to transmit the Japanese Canadian community’s struggles and challenges, she has witnessed every single detail, from fear, disappointment, shame and discrimination. Still, she is proud to be Canadian and she considers Canada as her native country. She added:

When war struck this country, when neither pride nor belligerence nor grief had availed us anything, when we were uprooted, and scattered to the four winds, I clung desperately to those immortal lines:

This is my own, my native land.

Later still, after our former homes had been sold over our vigorous protests, after having been re-registered, fingerprinted, card-indexed, roped and restricted, I cry out the question:

Is this my own, my native land?. (55-56)

Aunt Emily, despite all what happened in the past to the Japanese race, didn't change her stand point, the twelve year old girl who used to see Canada as her native land remains the same, she said: "The answer cannot be changed. Yes. It is. For better or worse, I am Canadian" (56). Aunt Emily insists that she is a Canadian no matter what happened or what will happen. Through the repetition of the expression "this is my own, my native land". Aunt Emily reinforced and stressed the idea and the fact that she is Canadian and expressed her connection and her profound pride in her Canadian identity.

In Chapter Ten, Naomi recalls her memories when she was very young, her mother and grandmother used to recite a well-known Japanese story in order to make her sleep. During her discussion with Aunt Emily about her attitudes as a child, she attributes that story to Canada she said: "Momotaro is a Canadian story. We're Canadian, aren't we? Everything a Canadian does is Canadian" (57).

Naomi's uncle also shares the same perspective as Aunt Emily. He thinks that Canada is a generous country and gave them necessary things that they need in order to live a good life and ensure their comfort, things that their country Japan didn't. Uncle Isamu is thankful for

Canada and all the things she offered them, "This country is the best. There is food. There is medicine. There is pension money. Gratitude. Gratitude" (58).

The Sansei generation also struggled with the double identity. During the Second World War, things completely changed and the Japanese Canadian situation and lives went worse as they were treated as enemies and a threat and the Canadian government had no mercy on anyone. In chapter Twelve the narrator said:

The girl with the long ringlets who sits in front of Stephen said to him, "All the Jap kids at school are going to be sent away and they're bad and you're a Jap."

And so, Stephen tells me, am I. "Are we?" I ask

Father. "No," Father says. "We're Canadian."

It is a riddle, Stephen tells me. We are both the enemy and not the enemy. (90)

The Sansei generation faced a real challenge, from one side they are Japanese because of their parents and ancestors. As a result, they are enemies in the government perspective and vision, on the other hand they are Canadian because they were born in Canada and they hold Canadian Citizenship. The expression "We are both the enemy and not the enemy" demonstrates that the Canadian government during the second world war shook the way the Japanese Canadian people see themselves and how others see them, therefore, they don't know how to identify themselves anymore.

In another scene, In Chapter Thirty-Three, Naomi's brother Stephen rejects, showing his anger when he heard his family started using the Japanese language in a public place. Uncle Sam said:

"Fubuki hodo, chika yori soe ba, atataka shi," Uncle responds in mock formality.

"Whazzat?" Stephen asks.

It's a haiku, a seventeen-syllable word picture.

Stephen rubs the sticky sugar of the doughnut off his stubbly chin and keeps rubbing in his nervous way. He is always uncomfortable when anything is "too Japanese". (257)

Stephen, 'Naomi's brother' because of his traumatic experience and memories he carries with him in the internment camps and that in the past people use to see them as enemy aliens and judge them just because of their Japanese origin, now that he gets old, he doesn't want anything to bring him back to the past and what happened in the past should stay in the past and now he represents himself as Canadian. Stephen rejects everything that has relation with Japan and he blurs his Japaneseness.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, according to Dominick Lacapra, Traumatic memories are so important in shaping the formation of people's identities. Stephen was highly affected by the past and he got traumatized every time there was something related to Japan.

In Chapter Twenty Two, Naomi presented a game called the Yellow Peril game. The game is basically about war and contains a map of Japan and some pictures of soldiers. It illustrates the efforts and the way the soldiers defend their land and stand strong in the face of enemies. Due to their origins, the Japanese Canadians were called the Yellow Peril as a form of racism. Naomi, described the yellow pawn one which symbolizes the Japanese people as weak and oppressed, "There are fifty small yellow pawns inside and three big blue checker kings. To be

yellow in the Yellow Peril game is to be weak and small. Yellow is to be chicken. I am not yellow” (182). The protagonist doesn’t want to be defined and identified as Japanese and she confirms that she does belong to this category. This marks the rejection of identity and the formation of a new one. Naomi strictly rejects her Japanese identity and embraces the Canadian one.

Even when the war is over, the Japanese Canadian people still struggle with the binary identity and the Canadian people couldn’t and didn’t embrace and accept them in their society. In Chapter Thirty Four, Naomi's Canadian neighbours come to her aunt’s house. However, they started asking her questions related to Japan, language, etc. The protagonist expressed her anger towards the Canadians' questions, curiosity and intrusion. Despite all what happened they still didn’t receive any recognition or empathy. She said:

Does it so much matter that these questions are always asked? Particularly by strangers? These are icebreaker questions that create an awareness of ice. Where do any of us come from in this cold country? Oh, Canada, whether it is admitted or not, we come from you we come from you ... We come from cemeteries full of skeletons with wild roses in their grinning teeth. We come from our untold tales that wait for their telling. We come from Canada, this land that is like every land, filled with the wise, the fearful, the compassionate, the corrupt. (266-267)

In this passage, Naomi insists and imposes the fact that she is Canadian and that it's high time for Canadian people to admit and accept this fact whether they want or they don't want. However, Naomi illustrated that their experience was horrific and underestimated, the Canadians and Canadian government burned them and transformed them into ashes.

In a moment of despair, loss and exhaustion. The protagonist expressed her feeling towards what happened, still happening in her life and her desire to be free from the past, she states:

And I am tired, I suppose, because I want to get away from all this. From the past and all these papers, from the present, from the memories, from the deaths, from Aunt Emily and her heap of words. I want to break loose from the heavy identity, the evidence of rejection, the unexpressed passion, the misunderstood politeness. I am tired of living between deaths and funerals, weighted with decorum, unable to shout or sing or dance, unable to scream or swear, unable to laugh, unable to breathe out loud. (218)

This passage demonstrates the psychological and emotional struggle that resulted from the long endurance of being through harsh circumstances in her life. Naomi's present life is always related and tied to her past and this has determined her future. Her past experience was not that profound. However, her family members, including her Aunt Emily, pushes her to remember the past, and Obasan's silence whose experiences were sharper, has exacerbated her suffering as she has always to return to the traumatic past unwillingly.

The protagonist is now seeking for peace, she wants to live in a way that does nothing that threatens her stability, inner peace and most importantly to live in a way that she doesn't have to tell anyone where she comes from, she wants to be free from the fact that she is not welcomed or wanted, she further expressed her fatigue that her good-naturedness is always understood as a sign of weakness and imposition of self on others so that to be accepted . Her life is always centred around the absence and loss of her loved ones, and this has impacted her life as she lives in enduring mourning and melancholia, incapable of moving forward in her life.

Silence, language, identity, memory, and trauma are all thin threads, like the strings of a marionette, sometimes fluctuating and sometimes stable. The characters of the novel live in a wave of hope, a ghost of fear roaming between the past, present and future. Some appear secure, others remain silent, and still others are forced by circumstances to act according to the whims of unseen hands. They may seem like soulless characters to the observer, but they carry a cultural heritage and indelible traumas that have forged a perplexing silence and a deep-seated memory that refuses to fade.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have demonstrated the first Japanese immigrants in Canada and their struggles amidst the Canadian society, then we have explained the conflict between the United States of America and Japan leading to the massive attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. This event has played a major role in changing the course of the life of the Japanese Canadians as they were directly accused of threatening the stability and unity of Canada. As a result, the Canadian government took drastic policies against them which had an enduring economic, social and psychological impact on their lives. Furthermore, the chapter delved into the analysis of the poignant novel *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa exploring its themes of silence, speech, memory and identity. Through the analysis, we have seen the interplay between silence and speech and how silence can express numerous things. The chapter shed light on Naomi's life and the way past traumatic experiences manifest in various ways. Additionally, traumatic memories play a significant role in identity formation.

General Conclusion

The Japanese Canadian experience in Canada stands as a remarkable event in history. They struggled with discrimination, prejudices and dehumanizing policies which affected their lives and led to drastic physical, emotional, psychological and economical losses. *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa is a poignant novel that sheds light on the history, the struggles and suffering of this minority group in the internment camps during WWII. Through the lens of the protagonist Naomi Nakane and other characters, the writer demonstrates the enduring effects of past traumatic experiences on their lives.

1. Summary of Findings

Using LaCapra's insight on trauma, memory, silence and identity combined with Caruth's ideas on trauma, memory and silence, the present dissertations has studied the ways past traumatic experiences shaped the character's present lives and future. The characters use different techniques to cope with their trauma, some choose silence, others rely on speech. Moreover, Naomi's silence is a sign of fear and shame. However, the silence of her mother represents protection and a form of a coping mechanism.

Through the analysis of the novel, we shed light on the interplay between silence and speech and it can be concluded that silence is an expressive language and a response to past traumas along with speech. The study also shed light on the miserable life of the protagonist, Naomi Nakane. she lost her mother, father, grandparents, she experienced sexual abuse and the internment camps at a young age. As she grows older, she found herself drowning deeply in the past. On one side, she tries to trig *Obasan* to speak, reveal the unknown and the missing links in her life. On the other side, her Aunt Emily who pushes her to read, open her eyes to reality, and learn about her history.

Aunt Emily's Testimonies, diaries played a fundamental role in the novel as she expresses her fears, hopes, emotions and perfectly portrays the harsh realities of war and the racist, dehumanizing treatment the Japanese people received leading to incurable wounds and a memory that refuses to fade.

Despite the passing of years of the forced displacement and internment of the Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, and though they tried hard to rebuild their lives amidst the Canadian society but the old sores remain, their experience during the Second World War left a wound that would never heal in their lives and it profoundly affected their identity formation and sense of belonging. The characters struggle with the rejection of Japanese identity and the embracement of the Canadian one while insisting, imposing their presence amidst the Canadian society and their pride of belonging to Canada.

2. Contribution to Existing Scholarship

This present study highlighted the historical background of the conflict between Japan and the United States of America and the event leading to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor during the Second World War, and how this further affected the lives of the Japanese living in Canada. It has also focused on the traumatic experiences of the Japanese Canadian people in the internment camps and its enduring effects on them.

This dissertation provided a comprehensive analysis of the novel *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa. The analysis has demonstrated the multiple roles of silence, serving as a response to past trauma, and as coping mechanisms to the characters, as well as being an expressive and a communicative language. It illustrated the contradictory reactions of the characters presented in the novel, where some use silence and others use speech, emphasizing the complexities of trauma and its effects on people. The research has also demonstrated the way traumatic experiences and memories can shape individual's lives, identity formation, sense of belonging

and threaten their psychological well being as they keep recurring in a form of nightmares making them relive the overwhelming event over again in the present.

The dissertation demonstrated the role of testimonies in literary narrative as demonstrated how they give a subjective, honest, real insight into the past and how people felt and lived under some traumatizing circumstances. The present dissertation helps readers to understand history, the complex interplay between historical trauma, memory, silence, language and cultural identity.

3. Limitations of Research

Writing about trauma is a difficult and challenging task, to be able to understand the suffering of people and analyze the different reactions of the characters of the novel towards overwhelming past experiences, where some rely on silence while others rely on speech. To understand the way some traumatic memories deeply affected them, I had to immerse myself in their perspectives by simplifying the examination in a way to allow the readers to understand and engage in the analysis.

The lack of some background knowledge about the lives and state of the Japanese Canadians during the Second World War and their experience in the internment camps have made me incapable of fully reposting some events. As a result, I had to read numerous articles and books related to history, trauma, and memory to fully provide the reader with the most necessary information

The works of the historian Dominick LaCapra are complex, his writing style, ideas and concepts related to war, trauma, history, memory, identity, silence, language, absence and loss presented a substantial challenge as I had to understand his ideas and take the most relevant and important ideas related to my topic and explain them in my own way and writing style. The

novel *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa also contains metaphoric sentences and a compound writing style that was hard to understand.

4. Implications for Further Research

Obasan is a relevant novel to learn about history and understand how traumatic memories sculpt and shape the lives of people and make them live in a lifelong trauma. The dissertation has studied the novel from a psychological perspective. However, further research can be conducted examining the novel from other angles. For instance, feminism, post colonialism and postmodernism can be good ways to study the novel, the literary techniques used by the writer to convey some feelings and perfectly depict the experience of the Japanese Canadians during World War II.

Obasan is a significant novel that can be analysed using different theories and scholars' ideas. The Japanese Canadians profoundly struggled and suffered because of the severe policies taken against them by the Canadian government during the Second World War. The discriminations and traumatic memories they carried with them due to their experiences left a scar on their lives, making them live in constant fear, shame and trauma.

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Résumé

L'ouvrage *Obasan* de Joy Kogawa traite de l'interaction complexe du silence, du langage, de l'identité, de la mémoire et des traumatismes dans la vie des Canadiens d'origine Japonaise durant la deuxième Guerre mondiale. Cette thèse analyse comment le silence fonctionne comme un mécanisme d'adaptation pour les personnages et explore l'impact des expériences traumatisantes sur les identités individuelles et collectives dans un contexte de rupture historique et de migration culturelle. Cette thèse examine la relation complexe entre la mémoire et le traumatisme. L'analyse est basée sur les travaux de Dominick LaCapra et Cathy Caruth qui expliquent le traumatisme historique et sa représentation dans l'ouvrage de Kogawa ainsi que les différents mécanismes permettant de faire face aux expériences traumatisantes.

Mots clés : traumatisme, silence, mémoire, identité, littérature Japonaise-Canadienne.

ملخص

تتناول رواية "أوبسان" للكاتبة لجوي كاغاوا التفاعل المعقد بين الصمت واللغة موازاة مع الهوية، الذاكرة والصدمة في حياة الكنديين اليابانيين خلال الحرب العالمية الثانية. تحلل هذه الأطروحة كيف يعمل الصمت كآلية للتكيف بالنسبة للشخصيات وتكشف تأثير التجارب الصادمة على الهويات الفردية والجماعية في سياق المحو التاريخي والنزوح الثقافي. تركز هذه الأطروحة أيضا على العلاقة المتشابكة بين الذاكرة والصدمة. تستند هذه الدراسة إلى أعمال كلا من دومينيك لاكابرا وكاثيري كاروت اللذان يشرحان الصدمات التاريخية وتمثيلها في العمل المختار وآليات التكيف المختلفة مع التجارب الصادمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة، الصمت، الذاكرة، الهوية، الأدب الكندي الياباني.