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## TRANSFORMATION OF THE SELF:

A Study of Submissiveness, Trauma, Guilt and Shame in Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002)

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# Abstract

**Title:** Transformation of the Self: a Study of Submissiveness, Trauma, Guilt and Shame in Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002)

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**Abstract:** The internment of Japanese-American civilians during the Second World War caused many of the interned traumatic experiences. This essay is a contribution to the discussion of trauma theory in literature. By applying multiple theories of oppression, racism, discrimination and intergenerational transmitted trauma to Otsuka's novel, the essay shows that the reimagined fictionalized trauma of past generations is illustrated in a psychologically realistic way. The focus of the argument is that the characters in *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002) have been transformed and that the damage done during the internment lasts and that the healing process will not result in integrated selves. Memories of guilt and shame are shaped by a geographically and socially constructed oppression and discrimination and the appropriated stereotypes of the "alien enemy" become embedded in their transformed identities.

**Keywords:** Julie Otsuka, *When the Emperor Was Divine*, Japanese American literature, Sansei generation, trauma, World War II internment, racism, oppression, discrimination

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Transformation of the Self: a Study of Trauma, Submissiveness,  
Guilt and Shame in Julie Otsuka's  
*When the Emperor was Divine*

## 1. Introduction

The internment of Japanese-Americans and Japanese-Canadians during World War Two has become a prominent topic in Asian-American literature, breaking the silence about the unjust decisions to incarcerate Japanese-Americans living along the Pacific coastline.

Autobiographies as well as fiction based on personal experiences from the camps made this shameful relocation known to the public very soon after the war. A substantial body of work by Nisei, second-generation Japanese immigrants, has since become a significant and celebrated component of Asian North American literature. The Nisei generation often writes about their family's lives in the relocation camps, mostly describing everyday occurrences chronologically and in detail. For instance, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) is situated in Canadian camps while Miné Okuba's *Citizen 13660* (1946), Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1953), John Okada's *No No Boy* (1957) and Yoshiko Uchida's *Desert Exile, The Uprooting of a Japanese American Family* (1982) are set in the internment camps in Idaho and Utah.

Without doubt individual characters in the Nisei generation of stories are described as suffering from frustration, loss, anger and traumatic experiences caused by their imprisonment without trial in spite of their American citizenship. Later on these traumatic events urged some of the Sansei (third generation) to voice their critique of the racial discrimination in 1941-1945 in ways that resonate with the stories told by many Nisei writers. But the third generation writers also open up the prose form to inquire into traumas previously not addressed in Asian North American literature, using sophisticated narrative strategies and literary tropes to retell this history in new ways and from multiple perspectives. Julie Otsuka wrote *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002), her first novel, after having found letters, sent from internment camps, when clearing out her grandmother's apartment in the mid-1990s. These letters from her grandfather were heavily censored and Otsuka, herself a Sansei, became inspired to fill in the void of this one-sided historical correspondence and put the legacy of family stories in print, especially since her grandparents spoke very little about the internment years and her mother was suffering from dementia (Shea 53). 'The generation after', which Otsuka belongs to, is very often affected by scattered, incomplete, and traumatic stories that are passed over generations without having been put in context. For example, in

*The Generation of Postmemory* (2012), Marianne Hirsch states: “To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors” (5). Therefore many descendants of victims try to fill in the void by reconstructing and studying their memories in its generational and historical context. These constructed “[p]ostmemor[ies] describ[e] the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective and cultural trauma of those who came before [...] Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment” (5) The second or third generation writers’ postmemories are often reimagined during a period when the generation of survivors is very old, which often urge the ‘generation after’ to document their ancestors’ experiences in time (18). Otsuka belongs to this group of third generation authors who expresses the need to reconstruct the story of the internment of her mother and grandparents. The novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* is an example of her “imaginative investment”, in line with Hirsch’s theory of postmemory.

The process of writing the novel was lengthy since Otsuka’s thorough research was time-consuming. She incorporates historic material with a fictionalized approach to retelling collective and individual memories of traumatic experiences, which is key to Hirsch’s postmemory theory. After eight years of research and writing, the novel was published in 2002 (Shea 53). The publication occurred long after the settlement of the Redress movement, and the Civil Liberty Act in 1988 was signed by Ronald Reagan. Key components of the Redress movement include compensation paid to Japanese-Americans followed by an official apology from the U.S. government for the wrong done during the war (Ronald Takaki 1998, 485). Even if the Issei and Nisei were compensated it became, for many Sansei writers, necessary to address the injustices to “help process [a] sense of difference caused by racialization and to raise awareness of contemporary issues, such as racial inequity and the erosion of civil rights” (E.H. Morishima 2010, viii). These concerns are documented in *When the Emperor Was Divine*. Otsuka articulates that her goal was to reach out universally in order to remind the public: “Still it is unacceptable to me that a government could deprive a people of their civil rights in the name of national security and then later say sorry, sorry, we were wrong, it was all a big mistake. It happened once but it should not happen again” (Bookbrowse.com 2002). The novel can thereby be understood as part of a larger public

history project that raises awareness of civil rights and discrimination against ethnic minorities.

Critics praised the novel for its subject matter, prose style and important message in the context of the aftermath of 9/11, when Homeland Security, terrorism, racism and alien enemies were topics of the highest priority on the national agenda, while many reviews also foreground the sophisticated prose style that makes the book a work of complex fiction. (Bookbrowse.com). Otsuka's second novel, *The Buddha in the Attic*, (2012) was similarly praised for integrating historical content in stories about the first female immigration from Japan, young women known as 'picture brides'. Soon both novels became mandatory on the reading lists in Asian American Studies in many American universities (Shea 53), which attests to their status as classics within contemporary American literature.

## **2. Thesis**

In this essay I address prominent topics, themes, and strategies in Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine* to illustrate the ways in which the novel reimagines the trauma of past generations. I argue that Otsuka illustrates the effects of structural racism and violence within a socio-political, historical and psychological framework, showing that trauma is geographically and socially constructed. Furthermore, I argue that the notion of 'Japaneseness' is crucial for the racialization processes that engender and perpetuate these traumas. I locate these aspects of the novel into the context of memory theory – as exemplified by Hirsch's notion of "postmemory" discussed above – and especially within twenty-first century trauma theory. Trauma theory is an interdisciplinary research area, combining such fields as psychological, political, and culture theory, ideology critique, and aesthetics. It has become significant for literary studies during the past decade. For instance, American literary critic Michelle Balaev argues in *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels* (2012) that multiple approaches to trauma analysis of fiction are necessary for understanding the complexity of trauma, and how it gets manifested in different representational forms (xiii, xiv). As a complex novel, the different perspectives, voices, time periods, and stylistic devices in *When the Emperor Was Divine* reflect the multiplicity of trauma that Balaev investigates. A varied set of approaches, as Balaev stipulates, has to be combined since trauma occurs in different contexts, times, and places and is individually experienced even within a collective. Similarly, a Foucauldian sociopolitical and psychology model as developed by Jenny Edkins (2003) offers important insights and will be applied to analyze how the novel reveals a

systematic oppression within the social order. This examination includes addressing the depiction of internalized oppression and racism. Moreover, I examine from a psychological point of view how the appropriation of the concept of the “alien enemy” affects the characters. Drawing on Donna K. Nagata and Wendy J.Y. Cheng (2003) and following Iris M. Young (2011) and Marianne Hirsch (2012), I investigate how the intergenerationally transmitted guilt, shame, and victimization operate in the novel. Finally, I aim to convey an understanding of the ideas of the prejudiced stereotypes of ‘Japaneseness’ and to show that these implications are crucial in their fictional context.

Particularly useful is Balaev’s definition of trauma as “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”, implying that trauma is built up in an ongoing process that not only refers to a specific memory (2008, 150). Balaev defines a trauma novel as

a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels. A defining feature of the trauma novel is the transformation of the self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and the world. The external event that elicits an extreme response from the protagonist is not necessarily bound to a human or collective disaster such as war or tsunamis (150).

The characters in Otsuka’s novel suffer from oppression on many levels and show symptoms of trauma even if they are not diagnosed as pathological. Indeed, they show temporal and spatial disorientation, submissiveness, fear, alienation, self-doubt, guilt, shame, loneliness and insecurity, which are indicators of traumatic experiences.

My aim is therefore to address how Otsuka, in the novel, pictures the forced Japanese-American relocation during the Second World War and how the trauma, that is geographically and socially constructed, is caused by the internment, and that the damage done during the internment lasts, and that the healing process will not result in integrated selves. I thereby integrate a study of the novel’s fictional characters with attention to historical documentation and events that align with and contextualize traumatic experiences of relocation and internment to demonstrate Otsuka’s interest in a public education and historiography project. These events are central to the Sansei generation of writers. At the same time, the methodology applied in this project, literary close reading, demonstrates that the novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* offers a rich and multi-faceted approach to the trauma experienced by victims of these events, which aligns with the multidisciplinary literary trauma criticism as defined by Michelle Balaev.



### 3. Trauma Theory and Previous Research

Scholars have interpreted Otsuka's novel from a wide range of historical, psychological, sociological, political and aesthetic perspectives. For example, Mary Ann Seliger (2008) compares the narrative in *When the Emperor was Divine* to a factual law case discussing the military necessity to relocate the Nisei from the Pacific coast. Abigail G.H. Manzella (2010) writes about migration and space theory from the Foucauldian perspective of self-disciplining, arguing that Otsuka's novel is an example of governmental politics aiming to alter or reeducate the Japanese by dislocation and indoctrination (14). According to Stephen Hong Sohn (2009), space plays an important part in Otsuka's novel; he explores the desert from a regional perspective, claiming that it is "pivotal to the process of American racial formation" since it "defamiliarizes narratives about the origin of national identity in the United States" (165, 167). Josephine Park (2013) concentrates on the transformation of the family as "alien enemies" and the lasting effects after their release (136). Most of the scholars mentioned above have, among other things, discussed the psychological effects of internment in their work, but little has been done from a trauma literary-critical point of view.

In the second half of the twentieth century, there has been an upsurge of research into memories of lived experiences in relation to history. These inquiries center on questions of representation, objectivity, subjectivity, and reliability. The horrifying witness accounts of the Holocaust have been crucial, raising these questions within the fields of psychology, neurology, literature, history, and Cultural Studies. The early trauma theories presented by Judith Herman (1992), Cathy Caruth (1996), and others are based on psychoanalytical theories which became the basis for the official diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D) in 1980, where trauma symptoms are described largely as dissociated memories stored in a separated part of the brain. Whether Freudian or Lacanian, these early trauma theories implicitly relate to war combat experiences. Kali Tal discusses, in *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996), the statement made by the American Psychiatric Association (A.P.A.) that "the trauma which causes P.T.S.D. is 'generally outside of the range of usual human experience'", pointing out that it is understood as "*white male* experience" (136, emphasis original). In line with Tal and Malcolm Bull, Claire Stocks (2007) suggests new approaches to trauma theory in literary analyses based on the idea of a fragmented, traumatized self that is not pathological and not gendered, but a result of memories from a specific cultural context: "*people's identities are formed on both sides of the structures of the*

*oppression*”, thus undermining ideas about healing as a process that leads to an integrated self (Stocks 87-89, emphasis original).

In the recent work *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (2014), Balaev presents a multidisciplinary model to “explore trauma as a subject that invites the study of the relationship between language, the psyche, and behavior without assuming the classic definition of trauma that asserts an unrepresentable and pathological universalism” (4). In the article “Trends in Literary Trauma Theory” (2008), Balaev states that a traumatized character in fiction is highly influenced by place, context, and not the least personal traits in the self-reformation process (149). Furthermore, trauma in fiction is not lived experience but represents individuals that suffer, although painted in such a way as to suggest that this protagonist is an ‘everyperson’ figure (155). In many ways, Otsuka’s fictionalized characters represent key aspects of trauma theory; for instance, they are anonymous and thus made to function as representatives of historical, named and registered, incarcerated Japanese-Americans.

There are corresponding events in many of the novels written about the internment by Japanese and Canadian North Americans after the war, which suggests that camp stories, autobiographical as well as fictional, were spread and retold in different contexts and put into a remembrance archive complementing the historical facts.

#### **4. Historical Background**

The mass incarceration of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War, the subject of *When the Emperor Was Divine*, follows upon a long history of the United States of discrimination and racialization of Japanese immigrants. For instance, it was not until 1952 that the Issei generation became eligible for citizenship, after having shown their loyalty to the United States during the war (Ronald Takaki 1998, xiii). From the first Japanese immigration wave at the end of nineteenth century, hostility and ethnic racism forced Japanese-Americans to live in ethnically segregated communities. In addition, those who worked for white employers often had to accept a double wage system which helped create antagonisms between different Asian ethnic groups (182). Economically, this underdog position was, however, for some Issei historians, compensated by regarding the Pacific Coast as a Japanese conquest of the West. Influenced by the Japanese imperialism during the 1930s, these historians promoted the traditional faith in Bushido (“The Way of the Warrior”), emphasizing pride, loyalty, courage, obedience, honor and sincerity. For many Americans,

these ideas were seen as nationalistic and evoked suspicion (Eichiri 2005, 97). Furthermore, the political tensions between the Japanese and the Americans, as well as tensions within the Asian groups increased especially after the Japanese attack on Korea (130, see also Takaki 364-365). This understanding of 'Japaneseness' has another point of origin in American culture. Published in 1899, Inazo Nitobe's book *Bushido, the Soul of Japan*, was originally written in English with the intention of answering questions about Japanese ideas and customs and to bond with the Americans. The book became a bestseller, read and appreciated by President Theodore Roosevelt (Preface to the 1905 edition). However, by the time of the mass incarceration, these virtues and qualities as part of Japanese identity were valued differently in light of changed geopolitics. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese-American loyalty was, without doubt, interpreted as loyalty towards the Japanese Emperor.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 of February 19, 1942, declared all immigrants of Japanese descent "alien enemies", deprived of equal rights and protection by the law. 120.000 Japanese, of whom 80.000, were U.S. citizens were interned (Takaki 15, 390-92). For Nisei who were American citizens, the trauma became even deeper after having been forced to respond to the questionnaire about loyalty to the U.S. in order to enlist Nisei for a combat force in 1943 (Takaki 397). Otsuka's novel illustrates the feeling of being trapped, the fear of being spied on and accused of being the Emperor's fan. This was considered to be the worst, since Japan, at that time, was the enemy of all the other Asian groups. Tensions within the Japanese community occur when the questionnaire is to be honestly answered. In this situation the Japanese-American internees are dependent on each other's loyalty, and at risk of being reported by informers who collaborated with the Americans.

Takizawa, people whispered, was a government informer. Possibly a Korean. Not to be trusted. *So be careful what you say.* Yamaguchi had close ties to the administration. Ishimoto had been attacked late one night behind the latrines by three masked men carrying lead pipes. *They say he was providing the FBI with the names of pro-Japan disloyals* (79, emphasis original).

*When the Emperor Was Divine* thereby represents the conflicted emotions and experiences of those Issei and Nisei who were incarcerated and how under American military control, these kinds of tensions within the Japanese community become grounds for traumatic experiences in the camp.

## **5. Bucolic Berkeley: The Family's Situation Before the Relocation.**

In the first part of the novel, Otsuka portrays an unnamed family in Berkeley, California, consisting of a mother, a daughter and a son, who later will be incarcerated in Camp Topaz in Utah, and a father who is deported and then moved to several other camps. The family is introduced in ways that distance the reader and avoids easy mechanisms of identification. For example, very often Otsuka uses free indirect speech, telling the story from a third person's distant viewpoint in the past tense, for example: "The woman did not close her eyes. She knew exactly where her husband was. He was sleeping on a cot [...] somewhere in a tent at Fort Sam Houston", or "[the boy] closed his eyes and imagined himself fighting with Hank and the Raiders down in the Solomon Islands (Otsuka 19, 80). By using this technique, the characters' inner thoughts, are mediated by a narrator that makes identification with the character more difficult. This process of alienation is later reflected in the escalation of the description of trauma experiences.

The different parts of the novel are told from different character perspectives, which become a narrative device to signal mental disintegration, a defining aspect of trauma and central to the formulation of trauma theory. The preparation for the evacuation is told from the mother's perspective while the family is still in Berkeley. The long train ride through Nevada takes the daughter's viewpoint while life in camp is seen from the boy's perspective. Chapter four is written with the voice of the children, in the first person plural, and is set in Berkeley after the homecoming. The last chapter called "Confession" is told by the father. The story is written in a minimalistic, psychologically realistic prose, although the chronology in the narrative is frequently broken, interrupted by memories in the form of flashbacks illustrating the family members' confusion and insecurity. For example, a short paragraph about the boy remembering the dust and the mother's constant sweeping in camp is followed by a passage about an even earlier memory of his father's tenderness, and yet another passage about the sister and the brother watching the sunset in the camp (64,65). The narrative techniques serve to emphasize the traumatic experiences.

In the first chapter Otsuka establishes the base-line family situation as a reference point for the characters' psychological transformation (Manzella 22). Otsuka portrays the mother's preparations for the move. Following her through the house, packing boxes with what will be stored; it is obvious that this base-line is not simplistically "Japanese" or "American". This family has lived within two cultures for a long time. The difference is that

this dual subject position is portrayed in the first part of the novel as voluntary and positive; in the subsequent parts of the novel it becomes fractioned, traumatic, and negatively coded. For instance, the mother is listening to Caruso singing “La donna è mobile” while eating Japanese rice balls stuffed with plums, then moving the Westminster chime clock to the cellar and the Bonsai tree to the garden, while the *Joe Palooka* Comic books and baseball glove are put on the son’s bed to be packed in his suitcase (7,9). The mother is portrayed as submissively obeying the Evacuation Order No 19, and in few words Otsuka shows her feeding the White Dog a good last meal, softly telling him to ‘play dead’ before killing him with a shovel and burying him in the garden, where she has hidden the silverware (11, 12, 113). When killing the dog emotions are not explicitly pronounced. The mother’s reaction is described as an effect of physically hard work and a comment on the tool used “The shovel had been the right choice. Better, she thought, than the hammer” (11). This first instance of violence in the novel indicates the beginning of an internalization of violence.

The talking Macaw is enticed by a sunflower seed, encouraged to fly out through the kitchen window; the chicken’s neck is snapped and later prepared for their last meal in the house, while the cat is given to the neighbors (19, 20, 9). Acting respectfully and with affection, she gets rid of the pets since they are not allowed in camps. The boy and the girl are coming home from school, chatting about trivial things, and the girl is listening to her favorite song, symbolically named in an act of foreshadowing, “Don’t Fence Me In” (13). The family is presented as an ordinary family; rationally thinking, cognitively, perceptively, and emotionally in balance and in control of their daily life with amiable relations to each other, the white neighbors and their friends.

### **6.1 Oppression by Racial Discrimination**

The targeted incarceration of Japanese was a political decision based on race. Neither German-Americans nor Italian-Americans were relocated; they were Caucasians (Takaki 15). Young’s analysis of internalized racism suggests that exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, systematic violence and cultural imperialism are the five cornerstones characterizing the conditions under which racism operates (48-65). These perspectives on cultural and sociopolitical contexts are in line with Balaev’s multiple theory on trauma experiences (2014, 32). Otsuka describes this structural racism and how it violates the victims in the novel, first by depriving them of possessions and bank accounts, secondly by isolation and incarceration, and thirdly by subjugating them to a military regime that systematically

violates their identities by indoctrination and re-education in order to make them loyal Americans.

The Japanese were exploited financially in camp, where the inmates are being paid poorly (Otsuka 66, 93). At the homecoming, the mother finds an underpaid job as a cleaning lady in a white family in Berkeley, when the twenty five dollars given to each of them upon release are used up (117, 118, 129). The sum equals what criminals at that time got when released from prison. This correlates with the fact that no Japanese were charged with any sort of crime but were treated as lawbreakers (CWRIC, see also Otsuka in “Society and Anger”).

In camp, all Japanese cultural and religious expressions are banned. This marginalization affects the older Issei generation the most, since most of them spoke very little English, the only language permitted. On several occasions Otsuka indirectly points to the language gap between the elderly people and the young, who cannot understand each other (28, 36). Japanese books, Shinto practice and the Emperor’s name are strictly forbidden (61). Chopsticks and other everyday utensils, for example, are prohibited, which means that marginalization, of what is considered ‘Japaneseness’, in this case meaning Japanese habits, is in play (50).

Dilemmas of personal, public and state allegiance are foregrounded in *When the Emperor was Divine*, reflecting historical practice. Inmates, for example, have to declare their allegiance either to the U.S. or the Emperor by forswearing one of them. For the Issei generation the dilemma is obvious: the Issei have to declare loyalty to the U.S., which means statelessness or repatriation (99). The mother feels that she has no power over the situation and she cannot do other than forswear her loyalty to Japan because the family means more to her than the nation. Reunion with her husband, and hope of a better life in America when the war is over, are her wishes: “Loyalty. Disloyalty. Allegiance. Obedience. ‘Words’, she said, it’s all just words” (99). In this moment, she officially breaks her ties with Japan and on the same time her distrust in the American society is obvious (95). The interpretation of her understanding of loyalty and disloyalty suggests an ironic undertone, since she has lived in America for twenty years and has been loyal to the U.S., but not been accepted as Japanese. She has experienced racism and relocation, forced by military necessity, and she does not really believe that the Pledge of Allegiance will change her status in the American society. According to Mary Aileen Seliger in “Unmasking the Myths of Democracy in the United States: Narratives of Minority Race and Rights in Twentieth Century Literature and

Jurisprudence” (2008), where she compares the novel with *Korematsu v. United States* (1983), she argues that Otsuka’s novel parodies the court’s language because there was evidence of concealed facts when the decision of relocation was made in 1943. The ‘military necessity’ was “words, just words” (Seliger 154,155.173, 174, see also Takaki 385-392 ).

The threat of violence present throughout the novel is represented by the enclosed area, the machine guns, the fences, the searchlights and the watch towers (Otsuka 52). Topaz is a concentration camp, though without any overt reference to the concentration camps of the Holocaust, but psychologically it functions as a place ripe for violent actions if rules are not obeyed: “Do not touch the barbed-wire fence [...] or talk to the guards in the towers. [---] And remember, never say the Emperor’s name out loud” (52). On one occasion there is a dramatic killing of an elderly man who was hard of hearing and thus unable to hear a guard’s warning, an event that spreads anxiety and fear (101).

The construction of social reality in the novel and how language becomes intertwined with traumatic experiences is demonstrated by the teaching in the camp school, where American history, geography, music, culture and language are in focus. The white majority’s hegemony rules: “*Here we say Dining Hall, not Mess Hall; Safety Council not Internal Police; Residents not Evacuees; and last but not least, Mental Climate not Morale*” (61, emphasis original). Lectures on “How to Behave in the Outside World” recommended the Japanese to speak only English, not gather in groups and not to draw any attention to themselves (122). The re-education of the Japanese is aimed not only at marginalizing the group but changing their identities. Otsuka’s project, writing a novel about these experiences, is part of reclaiming overlooked parts of history, and recreating the experience of having language, habits, religion and national allegiance denied. The characters in the novel appropriate the oppressors’ rules and adapt to them submissively.

Over time these rules become normalized, undermining the internees’ own ideas of moral justice equality and fairness. In a situation where society is experienced as morally incomprehensible, unstable, unreliable and inconsistent, insecurity, doubt and disorientation are common effects – these are known to correlate with trauma. Regarding trauma as an ongoing process that is built up from a sequence of different terrifying events, the discriminatory structures of power in the camp may be seen as the first step towards a trauma. The massive and complete change of habits in camp affects the characters’ self-trust and self-image, as do the violence and fear of being accused of split loyalty.

## 6.2 Betrayal and Confinement

There are other forces operating within the above mentioned cornerstones that are effective in the internalization process. One is betrayal within the social order, between ordinary people and anonymization. Edkins discusses violence and abuse from the political community's point of view, stating that these actions have an effect on the individual, causing either a feeling of victimhood or an urge to protest or anything else between those poles: "when our expectations of what community is, and what we are, are shown to be misplaced, then our view of ourselves has to be altered – or we have to fight for a political change, in other words a reformulation of community" (9). Moreover she emphasizes that events involving abuse within the social order are a betrayal and from this viewpoint a forced 'relocation' can cause trauma (10). Otsuka explicitly declares that she wrote the novel in order to evoke interest in the important role of politically motivated discrimination and oppression by describing a family's life in camp that represents lived experiences of an earlier generation (Bookbrowse.com).

Being uprooted from Berkeley and the 'white stucco house' close to the sea, first to Tanforan, south of San Francisco, and then by a two-day-long train ride to the desert camp in Utah, is a shocking experience. Not knowing the destination, not knowing when they will arrive and not being able to imagine under what circumstances the family is going to live and for how long, are experiences that cause trauma.

Another betrayal is uncovered when the mother realizes that the manager, a lawyer who should take care of everything in Berkeley during their absence, did not prevent thieves from ransacking the house but left it in a rundown condition while keeping the money. Even a respected lawyer known by name betrayed her: "strangers had been knocking on our door before. And what had happened. Nothing good. Nothing good [...] I was a fool" (Otsuka 110). Again, expectations of fair treatment fall short, trust is broken, and she blames herself.

In camp there is no place to hide. Walls are thin between the small rooms, the showers are without curtains and personal hygiene is maintained in the presence of others; wild rumors involuntarily heard are difficult to avoid getting involved in. To be reported as an Emperor's fan is said to bring severe consequences; sterilization or extradition to the Chinese according to the rumors (Otsuka 70).

Drawing on Foucault's interpretation of Jeremy Bentham's model of the prison 'Panopticon' and its surveillance mechanisms in a confined area, the internees, although not



locked up in separate cells, practice self-disciplined surveillance on top of the military's search lights, inducing in themselves an awareness of being permanently visible and continuously observed (Foucault 497, Manzella 29). When individuals become numbers living in barracks where sirens and bells signal the time to get up, the time to switch off the lights, the time to eat and the time for headcount, an environment favorable to reticence and loneliness is created (Otsuka 125). For example, after the homecoming, the mother is offered a job in a shop, where she had to hide in a room in the back not "to upset the other employees", but she declined: "I was afraid I might accidentally remember who I was and ...offend myself" (128, 129). The effects of imprisonment and dislocation last and make it difficult to keep a sense of one's identity.

The train ride represents another type of confinement within the social order. Here the passengers are locked up and isolated from the outer world. They are ordered to draw the shades down when passing more populated areas in daytime to protect them from enemies. The stone thrown into the coach clearly marks the Japanese enemies outside while they are themselves the alien enemies inside, guarded by soldiers (43, 46). The situation makes their dilemma clear; the Japanese are protected by those who represent the abuser. The same frustration prevails in the camp: they are imprisoned for their own good by the military (70). Later on, life behind the fence becomes a safe area and the men who return from having helped farmers to harvest report that they had been physically abused and that they find life inside the fence easier than outside (67). Hereby Otsuka shows that the authorities' claims and rules are appropriated by the characters.

When the sense of belonging to a society gets lost and the isolation within the confinement is characterized by fear of being violated, humiliated or falsely accused and when the characters depend on representatives of the abuser, it makes them insecure; becoming the completely lonely outsider physically, mentally and spatially can, depending on the individual's capability of resistance, cause trauma (Balaev 2014, 17,18, Edkins 4). Otsuka clearly points out that rebellion is not an option. Adaptation, submissiveness and perseverance are in this situation the chosen strategies to survive mentally in the camp as well as with the climate.

### **6.3 Spatial Representations of Trauma: the Desert Landscape**

The isolated desert in Utah plays an important role in the novel as it affects the characters psychologically as well as physically. Balaev argues that the "primacy of place in

representations of trauma anchors the individual experience within a larger cultural context, and, in fact, organizes the memory and meaning of trauma” (2008, 150). Thus Balaev indicates that trauma is spatially, culturally and temporally based and that it tells something about a specific moment in history (160). The description of the desert mirrors the characters’ physical and psychological status. The geographical environment that Otsuka lets the characters’ notice, comment on and react to are often conveyed metaphorically or symbolically, suggesting interpretations of the traumatic experiences.

The desert climate with its severe winters and extremely hot summers with merciless sunshine metaphorically illustrate the suffering of the family. The camp itself is barren, nothing will grow, and it is exposed to dust storms that demand continual sweeping. Sohn notices that the desert at first is pictured as a romantic place influenced by a touristic view of tropical deserts with an oasis juxtaposed to wide open spaces where cowboys and horses are free to roam. The mustangs of the ‘Wild West’ connect the girl and the boy with their recent living in horse stalls in Tanforan. Metaphorically the internees and the horses are aligned (179). But the interpretation, based on the girl’s reading of *National Geographic*, makes her see the desert not only as a barren landscape but also as a place to live in as the cultivated victory garden as the house ‘for sale’ indicates (Otsuka 24, 25). “The young girl’s visual helps illuminate the significance of the train’s passage into desert communities. This directionality inward operates in contradistinction to the internees’ exilic status, as the outsider to the American nation” (Sohn 168). Their first knowledge of the free spaces watched from the train makes clear that, with the shades down, there is no freedom. The discussion of the geology of Utah and the girl’s reading of the map where the Salt Lake is marked as intermittent, suggests that freedom is as intermittent as the lake (Otsuka 23, 29).

Otsuka describes the dust storms as violent, spreading the sand through gaps in the walls covering every surface. Sand covering up surfaces becomes a way to signal how memories and experiences are plastic, dynamic and fleeting, which relate to how trauma can be experienced as a set of unreliable memories, whose significance are painful and difficult or impossible to articulate. When the boy writes his name on the dusty table before sleep it is gone by the morning: “It was soft and white and chalky, like talcum powder. Only the alkaline made your skin burn. It made your nose bleed. It made your eyes sting. It took your voice away” (64). Metaphorically the boy’s identity is transformed into a nameless and voiceless being not able to defend him from the sand that penetrates and hurts the body, soul

and dreams. Drawing on Iris Young, Manzella points out that “the characters have been moved to the ‘edge’ of civilization to a desert wasteland, and start to see themselves as grotesque and culpable for their confinement” (38). The sand buries the past as it has done with the Indian’s arrowheads found in the camp, which suggests that a culture can be completely wiped out and that the desert is a place where it is likely to happen. The trauma of the Native Americans’, near eradication in the American West is thereby present as a historical subtext in the novel, yet one which is not directly discussed. The grit blasts and polishes away all irregularities; in the desert where nothing reminds them of their former life, identity can be reshaped and reformed. These metaphors invite an interpretation based on the idea of a tabula rasa on which the oppressors through the re-educational program can imprint new good American virtues.

The boy reacts to the suffering from the dryness and sand storms by dreaming of water and black ships with white sails sent by the Emperor or him living in a sea world swimming with fish with “the salt lake floating above the floor of the desert” (59). The fact that the lake during the Ice Age had covered all of Utah inspires his dream and gives the reader a picture of a self that is grounded in an environment including water and safety represented by the Emperor. Their former life in Berkeley, close to the sea comes up in his dreams and is related to the landscape. The underworld connotations suggest that camp life is the real underworld where life is not human.

The mother falls into apathy, sweeping the dust away and longing for her vacuum cleaner, daydreaming of her childhood by recalling her siblings and fishing for trout in Kagoshima. The river, the crickets and the red paper lanterns are images that Otsuka uses to define the mother’s picture of an ideal past and a self in harmony with nature (95). In Kagoshima there is water and a caring father, it is a place that symbolically represents the mother’s former identity as a happy, safe and free person before experiencing the stifling and traumatic experiences of the U.S. internment policy.

The daughter, however, dreams of being able to evade the desert and the sun. She talks about the nearest city, Delta, where there is shade, blond boys and cold drinks (58). She is worried about her looks and how to keep her skin as light as possible. She seems to be less affected by the desert and still able to find the green spots where she could find life enjoyable.

The absent father, incarcerated in the desert at Lordsburg, New Mexico, does not express any personal reactions to the landscape other than that “there are no trees” and that it

is warm (60). His heavily censored postcards symbolically indicate that he is abused, minimized and literally deprived of his voice. Otsuka makes use of the landscape in portraying the individual characters and how they are affected by the desert. Dreams become an important part of the characters' survival. Reality is too complex to understand and fully accept; they often turn to memories of the past and daydreams.

#### **6.4 Memories Located in Specific Places**

Traumatic experiences cause reactions that differ between individuals and are dependent on personal traits, context and place. Balaev states that traumatic events disrupt memory, self and the relation to others and are “mediated by cultural values and narrative forms rooted in a place that allow or disallow certain emotions to be expressed” (2012, 18). Otsuka rarely describes emotions; they are conveyed through the narrator's retelling of memories associated with a certain event or place. In conversations characters often come to think of something else than the actual topic and these thoughts or fantasies are most often kept as private reflections. The traumas are neither articulated nor shared. With this technique Otsuka conveys a silent distance between the family members indicating that they are seeking to spare each other from their own thoughts of worry and premonition. This practice also suggests a cultural norm, typical of the family; do not be loud, do not show anger and do not disturb others. Emotions are also transmitted through metaphors and symbols as well as in memories, dreams or wishful thinking, associated with an event and in connection to a specific place that plays an important role in conceiving and reforming the images of the self. Analyzing the traumatic experiences in relation not only to a cultural context, but also in relation to a specific location is according to Balaev essential “because a geographic place contains personal and cultural directives that influence the expression of loss, pain, belonging and healing“ (Balaev, 2012, 38). Furthermore, Balaev argues that trauma is built up in an ongoing process where many sources indicate what the memories represent and “if remembering is an imaginative reconstruction rather than a reduplicative action, then a person's traumatic memory is shaped as much by the present as it is by the past” (2012, 30).

The boy's memory of his loving father's departure haunts him since the father does not look back, “Not even once. Just to see if [I] was there” (Otsuka 91). The memory is closely connected to the neighborhood in Berkeley:

He had never seen his father leaving the house without his hat on before. That was what troubled him most. No hat. And those slippers: battered and faded, with the rubber sole curling up at the edges. If only they [FBI] had let him put his shoes on it all might have turned out differently. [...] *Into the car;*

*Papa-san.* [...] Later the boy remembered seeing lights on in the house next door, and faces pressed to the window. One of them was Elizabeth's, he was sure of that (74).

The boy has brought the father's Oxford shoes to the camp and sometimes he takes them out of the box to smell the leather, to dust them and to remember and be close to his father, knowing that he has done his best to rehabilitate his father's imagined reputation as a hobo (67, 91, 105). According to Donald Winnicott's psychological theories of separation and anxiety presented in *Playing and Reality* (1971), it is possible to argue that Otsuka lets the shoes function as a transitional object or a fetish that connect the boy emotionally and symbolically with the absent father and with Berkeley (9, 10). The boy remembers that one Japanese man had been caught with getas (wooden sandals) and that these objects humiliated the man even more because the footwear is old fashioned, traditional and typically Japanese (84). Emotionally, the boy now is connected to the despised and humiliated Japanese group, feeling obliged to defend his father by keeping the shoes in good condition, a means to fight his subconscious sense of a collective shame. His frustration is caused by the difference between his true knowledge of a loving father with personal traits and the stereotyped picture of an anonymous 'Jap'. The girl mentioned in this passage, is the only friend who writes letters and sends him gifts that are very dear to him; her watching the scene where his father is so exposed underscores the interpretation of an increased feeling of shame.

On arrival at the mess hall in Topaz, the boy looks for "Daddy, Papa, Father, Oto-san" everywhere when he discovers that all the men looked alike. "Black hair. Slanted eyes. High cheekbones. Thick glasses. Thin lips. Bad teeth. Unknowable. Inscrutable. That was him over there. The little yellow man" (49). The boy mistakes a man for his father, calls out, and gets an answer in Japanese meaning, "What is it?" (50). He sees the image of his father as the racialized and stereotyped Japanese who is unknowable, not even speaking English.

The memory is located in the mess hall because that is the place where all are gathered at mealtimes and this is the first time the mass of 'little yellow men' strikes him. As Park points out: "the progression of names from Daddy to Oto-san marks a complete metamorphosis: broken into fragments, his singularity is dissolved into a set of perilous traits" (142). The father has become one of the "alien enemies" that can be identified by his looks but on the other hand, the notion of the "alien enemy" may also suggest an interpretation as mysterious to the boy, causing him a feeling of alienation. He does not yet see himself as part of the racialized 'other'.

Later on, after having watched a cowboy film, he imagines his father as an American outlaw:

He pictured his father in cowboy boots and a black Stetson, riding a big beautiful horse named White Frost. Maybe he'd rustle some cattle, or robbed a bank, or held up a coach, or – like the Dalton brothers – even a whole entire train, and now he was doing his time with all of the other men (83).

This image shows that the boy accepts the father as a criminal, understanding that a felon can atone for his crime and be free. The free mustangs and the romantic view of a cowboys' life on the vast plains have now become a place where the father is a hero and not a powerless 'little yellow man'. The boy's fear that the father is a criminal is compensated by the fantasy. The name of the horse alludes to the 'White Dog' and the mix of fantasy and memory of a loved pet that he believes is still at home help him construct an image of a future where the father will be free and at home.

The transformation of his own identity is painfully illustrated when he tries on a far too big military coat from World War One and watches himself in a mirror with "narrowed eyes" and two front teeth sticking out saying "*I predge arregiance to the frag... Whatsomalla, Shorty? Solly, so Solly*" (87, emphasis original). Otsuka has marked the irony by describing the grimace; he now sees the racialized Japanese 'other' in the mirror in a military uniform showing loyalty to the U.S. The mocking scene suggests that he is aware of the stereotyped Japanese and has now become 'the other', but he is still capable of keeping these two identities apart. When he is "playing cops and robbers and war: *Kill the Nazis! Kill the Japs*" with other boys in camp he can switch between being the "alien enemy", Hirohito's follower, and General MacArthur's (53, 54, emphasis original).

The longing for the father is in one dream projected on to the Emperor whose picture is hidden behind doors impossible to open (73). The mightiest cannot help; the Emperor is divine and can only be worshipped at a distance and is, in the dream, locked in as is the father in Lordsburg. The father is important to the boy, but impossible to reach when needed. In camp the father's presence is represented only by his censored postcards and the Emperor by a name that is forbidden to pronounce (52).

In a previous dream where the outcome of the war was uncertain he dreamed about black ships with white sails sent by the Emperor approaching a shore (53). Later on he sees General MacArthur "wade up onto a shore and give him the Purple Heart. 'You did your best son' he'd say', and then they shake hands." (81). Images of the self shift from a racialized, detested Japanese into a hero of the American army. These examples show that what happens

in the world around the boy shapes the form of memories, dreams and imaginary and that these are located and linked to places of great importance to him: the sea and the Wild West.

The girl reacts to life in camp differently. She goes her own way to manage her life; she is active and social, occupied with her Nisei friends, her looks, music and dreams of boys (88). The picture of a twelve year old, soon a teenager, is credible in her oscillation between self-doubt and self-esteem: “Is there anything wrong with my face? [...] People were staring” (15), “Nobody will look at you if [...] your face is too dark” (58), “Don’t touch me [...] I want to be sick by myself” (26). As Manzella points out, she sometimes internalizes ‘others’ hatred, such as when she blames herself by saying “I am terrible. I don’t even deserve to hold the rope” instead of taking her anger out on her school mates (42).

Furthermore, the girl is shifting between romanticism and rationality; on the one hand she comments on a soldier on the train: “he touched his gun on his hip, lightly, with his right hand, [...] and she thought about how he had touched her shoulder the same way—lightly, and with the same hand—and she hoped he would come back again” (Otsuka 28). Another scene watched from the train pictures a man and a woman standing on a bridge. The girl interprets it as a token of infatuation: “*They were together*, she decided (27, emphasis original). On the other hand, while undressing asking her brother to turn away, she talks about “seasons and hibernation” and of the signs that will soon become a reality and a proof of her becoming a woman: “Any day now [I’d] be bleeding. It’ll be *red*” (81, emphasis original).

The girl roams about and discovers hitherto unknown secrets of adult life and of things happening in the dark, and she gets to know about other people’s difficulties and sorrows. As mentioned before she is able to find the camp in the desert livable because it offers lessons about the grownups’ life which interests her. She is pictured as having problems with her identity that are more related to her adolescence. Her memories are most often located in reality and her resistance towards oppression makes her able to approach some problems pragmatically.

In contrast to the daughter, the mother is severely affected by the restrictions, the climate and monotony in camp. She becomes over time silent, passive, staying in bed the whole day, interested neither in reading nor in food. “When the dinner bell rang she sat up with a start. ‘What is it?’ she asked. ‘Who’s there?’ In her mind there were always men at the door” (93). The moment when her husband was taken away comes up as a flashback and the perception of the world is split, the memory disrupted; she is dislocated and temporally

disorientated. When she notices that the sun has aged her and that her husband would not recognize her, she says, “Tell him... and then [she] drifted off, and she was somewhere far away” (63). The border between sleep and wakefulness is blurred and memories fade: “What day is it?” (56), “Did we *even* have a stove?” (80). The home is central to her and she keeps the key in a chain around her neck. Sometimes the children “saw her put it into her mouth and close her eyes with delight.” (107). This key functions as a transitional object and comforts her, helping her to keep the good memories of home alive while suffering from a trauma tightly connected to the place where she is imprisoned.

The mother’s and the son’s reactions to their many losses, sorrows and suffering show a disruptive and fragmented self, indicating a trauma. The mother lives all the more in the past, comforting herself with memories of safe places and a free life. The boy mixes fantasies with actual memories of the past to visualize a promising future. The girl romanticizes events and socializes with her friends in camp; she chooses togetherness in contrast to the mother’s and the boy’s self-isolation, thus deploying more resistance than the other two in developing symptoms of trauma. One partial explanation for these various reactions may be that the daughter in fact becomes the most “American of the three – her practices resonate with gendered teenage behavior common in U.S. popular culture, including assimilation into a heteronormative romance during adolescence. The mother’s resistance to assimilation generates trauma, but she sees the indoctrination process in camp as futile, and is convinced that she will never be fully accepted by the Americans in any way. The boy is young and has a strong bond to his missing father. He fills the void with fantasies about a happy homecoming. Otsuka has portrayed the characters with different personal traits as well; the girl is outgoing and socially skilled, while the mother and the son seem to be loners, a trait that becomes more accentuated by time.

### **6.5 Guilt and shame**

Not only are the racialized and stereotyped physical features of the Japanese American as the “alien enemy” appropriated by the family, the results of the oppression are internalized as well. In *Justice and Politics of Difference* (1990), I.M. Young states that structural and systematic oppression is dynamic; its causes “are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules” (41). Teomm Williams (2012) points out that most psychologists agree about the argument that self-hatred, guilt and shame are reactions to



internalized oppression and that the oppressors' stereotyped images become part of the target's identity, which in turn becomes shameful ( 87, 93, 94). Shame is here defined as an emotion that includes feelings of inferiority and of being inadequate and flawed (91). However, Williams does not take into account that there could be other definitions of guilt and shame than those embedded in Western culture. *When the Emperor Was Divine* exemplifies that cross- and intercultural clashes and the forced appropriation of Western norms generate a varied set of responses in the characters, and that these responses are related to the geopolitical reality they are part of as well as to being enemies of the state.

In "Cultural Models of Guilt and Shame", Ying Wong and Jeanne Tsai (2007) investigate shame and guilt from a cross-cultural perspective, showing that most contemporary empirical studies deal with shame and guilt from a Western or Euro-American perspective. In their detailed overview they establish that shame and guilt are defined differently in different cultures, but maintain that guilt is an internal feeling often implicitly demanding an amendment and that shame occurs when someone is exposed to or is negatively judged by others or by oneself (211). They divide cultures into two main groups: individualistic (for example American and Western cultures) and collectivistic (China and Japan, among others) (212). In line with many other researchers, they claim that shame in collectivistic cultures can be seen as induced by others and is not only an emotion that is individual and caused by oneself (216). Western conceptions of shame assume an independent and integrated self while East Asian conceptions of shame are based on an interdependent self (219).

The last chapter in *When the Emperor Was Divine*, suggests an interpretation of an East Asian collectivistic approach. Otsuka mentions that the confession is made in the voice of the father, giving the reader an image of the father's and many other internees' repressed anger (HoCoPoLitSo). By using short sentences, addressing the anonymous accusers, the father declares himself guilty of every possible crime against Americans, committed by a Japanese collective. The confession starts with actions like poisoning the food for sale in the market, spying on neighbors, touching the daughters, informing the enemies where to drop a bomb and telling who the traitor is (Otsuka 140,141). The speaker continues with accusations connected to personality and physiognomy: "*Too short, too dark, too ugly, too proud. Put it in writing —is nervous in conversation, always laughs loudly at the wrong time, never laughs at all— and I'll sign on the dotted line. Is treacherous and cunning, is ruthless, is cruel. I'm*

sorry [...] Now can I go?” (Otsuka 140-144, emphasis original). This anger is palpable, pronounced in a sarcastic and desperate tone that imitates the racist discourse in newspapers at the time. This outrage is a single man’s confession in the name of a racialized group. It shows, with its sarcasm, the feature of the prejudiced “alien enemy”. It also invites the reader to believe in innocence and, as Otsuka intended, to be engaged, to understand and react against systematic racialized discrimination and avoid transmitting these prejudices to further generations.

The father’s confession at the end of the novel is foreshadowed by descriptions of difficulties in managing a repressive and contradictory life in camp, including challenges in making sense of a situation where one is the racialized enemy, powerless, abused, oppressed, and threatened by violence. In that situation, it is likely that one either rebels or tries to stay as anonymous as possible. The boy, for example, who does not really understand the circumstances and why he has to submit to the many new rules, learns not to question, to be silent, behave, and be polite and patient. But when it does not really make sense that he is living behind fences, he turns to himself to find a logical answer: he must have done something “horribly terribly wrong” (Otsuka 57). He should have “tapped the hat rack three times when the postman passed” and he should not have plucked the green leaf of the sapling (85). Would letters from his father come “if he stopped biting his nails and remembered to do everything the first time he was told? And ate all his coleslaw even when it was touching the other food on his plate?” (102,103). As a parallel, the mother blames herself for not having handed her husband a glass of water on their last night together. She imagines him as constantly staying thirsty and she “should have put on the rice in time” (96).

Guilt and shame rule the family, especially after returning home, and Otsuka very clearly pictures how the characters have become altered. The imagined joy of seeing friends, neighbors and being together as a whole family is immediately turned into an illusion (126, 127). American soldiers return with horrible stories of torture in Japanese camps; friends and neighbors turn their heads away; “[w]e looked at ourselves in the mirror and did not like what we saw: black hair, yellow skin, slanted eyes. The cruel face of the enemy. We were guilty” (120). Otsuka describes the adaptation to ordinary life as a repeated process of incarceration by juxtaposing the room in the camp with the house, the fence with the unpruned hedge, the desert with the wild grown garden and the rock thrown into the train with the whisky bottle thrown into their house (118, 119, 124). They hide in the dark and sleep with clothes on for

fear of violence and to not get caught dead in their night clothes, which would have been shameful (113). “Without thinking, we had configured ourselves exactly as we had in the long narrow room during the war” (112). In a long passage Otsuka describes in anaphors memories from the incarceration as though they were part of the present: “We used to wake in the morning to the blast of a siren. We used to stand in line for our meals three times a day.[...] We used to try and imagine what it would be like when we finally returned home” (126). Camp life is not an ‘interruption’; it is part of their present lives as the memories of home were in Topaz.

The father finally arrives as a broken man, leaning on a cane, wrinkled, with new teeth, alienated and a stranger to his children and to the wife. He never goes back to work, is suspicious of everyone and eventually he stays on his bed, incapable of leaving the house (131-134). He has frequent nightmares and he is “trapped outside in the world, on the wrong side of the fence” (137). The fence in the dreams represents security, indicating that it is impossible for him to take up his life anew. According to the National Center for P.T.S.D., and its definitions of trauma indicators, the father displays several of these: sudden outbreaks, anger, nightmares, flashbacks, difficulties to concentrate, staying away from relationships and so forth (ptsd.va.gov, Otsuka 132, 134, 136, 137). His experiences have transformed his identity and his fragmented self indicates that he is suffering from a trauma that is pathological. These and other examples show, very clearly, that oppression is internalized and that the dominant group’s methods have had an impact on each of the family members’ identity. Williams emphasizes that experienced reality is in conflict with the reality constructed by the dominant group and that this duality forces subjugated individuals to reform their identities according to the dominant group and eventually perceive themselves as “the racialized other” (87). In other words, the family’s adaptation to the dominant demands of certain behavior supports the prevalent structural oppression.

Being obedient, silent and pleasing are the methods the family adapt to and the same advice is followed whether imprisoned or free: “*And remember; It’s better to bend than to break*”, “*Keep on walking. Hold your head up. Whatever you do don’t look back*” (78, 115, emphasis original). School mates and neighbors do not take any notice of the family’s return and in response the children try to make themselves invisible in society, in order to avoid any negative attention: “In class we sat in the back where we hoped we would not be noticed” (121). But after some months, by springtime a healing process begins. Otsuka juxtaposes the

magnolias blossoming, hyacinths and narcissus coming up in the garden with the children's opening up to their former friends, indicating that the feelings of shame and guilt are possible to overcome:

Strength was slowly returning. Speech was beginning to come back. In the school . On the street. They were calling out to us now. Not many of them. Just a few. At first we pretended not to hear them, but after a while we could no longer resist. We turned around and nodded, we smiled, then continued our way" (138).

Furthermore, Otsuka mentions that they "slept with the windows wide open", suggesting an opening to the world outside (138). Otsuka paints a lighter future for the children than for the father. The mother manages her life by submissive behavior and by trying to let go, leaving things behind and being friendly but she does not forget the injustices. She finds excuses for every person treating her as the racialized other: "*They're afraid*" (115, emphasis original). She manages her own fear by projecting it on 'the other'.

### **7. Intergenerational trauma**

In an investigation where former Nisei internees were interviewed, Donna Nakata and Wendy Cheng show in the article "Intergenerational Communication of Race-Related Trauma by Japanese American Former Internees" (2003) that the majority of the 450 participants reported that conversations about the incarceration between parents and children lasted about 15 minutes and not more than 10 to 15 times during their life time (274). Silence obviously played an important role for the survivors, and many declared that they wanted "to spare their children of the pain and anguish the parents themselves have suffered" (275, see also CWRIC 297). The findings in this study show, however, some general reactions that are applicable to the parents in *When the Emperor Was Divine*. "[E]ven though the internment was discussed and talked about as a central topic, lengthy and detailed conversations remained rare", making it comparable to the "conspiracy of silence", a notion often used in research on Holocaust survivors (274, 275). The parents in the novel neither mention the effects of trauma nor do they ask the children about their experiences of their reactions to life back home. Silence about what had happened to the father make the children doubt his loyalty: "was it true, what we heard? (*Disloyal...a traitor...a great fan of the Emperor*)" (116, emphasis original). The silence makes the children insecure and shameful. The feeling of guilt is imposed not only by their own experiences but also by the transmission of the parent's silence and the father's mental absence. He assumes hostility from neighbors and white Americans making clear that "*They just don't like us. That's the way it is. Never tell them more than you have to. And don't think, for a minute, that they're your friend*" (Otsuka 134, emphasis original). The mother's

strategy is avoidance and to keep their experiences within the family. All the family knows and feels the difficulties of starting anew and that life in camp was not an interruption. The mother speaks out loud in the middle of a trivial conversation about nylon stockings: “If I’d known I never would have bothered to come back” (117). The discussions at home are mostly about ordinary things, such as the weather and what has happened in school. The children never ask: “All we wanted to do, now when we were back in the world, was forget” (133). Obviously, avoidance to talk about the traumatic experiences force them to keep the conversations within safe areas.

The article, “Processing Cultural Trauma: Intergenerational Effects of the Japanese American Incarceration” by Nakata, Kim and Nguyen (2015), contextualizes parents’ avoidance of talking to their children about the personal long term effects of incarceration in more detail. Similarly, there is no doubt that shame and anger are driving the parents in the novel into a realm of silence, although for different reasons.

The mother actively participates to some extent in social life through her work, with the idea that forgetting is the best way to recover, while the severely traumatized father is incapable of forgetting and moving forward. Otsuka describes his horrifying nightmares of being outside the fence and eventually he never leaves the house, his handwriting gets “smaller and fainter and then disappear[s] from the page altogether” (Otsuka 137). He becomes imprisoned in his self.

Another long-term effect of the incarceration mentioned by Nakata, Kim and Nguyen is that some of the incarcerated distanced themselves from other Japanese-Americans to prove themselves Americans. They do so by hard work and striving for higher education in order to get a higher socioeconomic level and recognition not as Japanese but respected professionals (361). There are, however, significant differences between the Issei, Nisei and Sansei generations when it comes to the question of what it means to be Japanese in the American dominating culture. This will be discussed in the next section.

## **8. ‘Japaneseness’**

In my reading for this project I have noted that the term ‘Japaneseness’ has been used in a variety of meanings in different historical contexts. Sometimes it refers to ethnicity, another time to race and physiognomy, and yet other times to culture, ethics and morals. During the Second World War, in newspaper articles, the term was often used in a discriminatory way, expressing racism. One article, published in *Time Magazine* on 22 December 1941, is

interesting to mention because it resonates with the stereotypes depicted in "Confession", the last chapter in Otsuka's novel:

HOW TO TELL YOUR FRIENDS FROM THE JAP: Virtually all Japanese are short. Japanese are likely to be stockier and broader than short Chinese. Japanese are seldom fat; they often dry up and grow lean as they age. Although both have the typical epicanthic fold of the upper eyelid, Japanese eyes are usually set closer together. The Chinese expression is likely to be more placid, kindly, open; the Japanese more positive, dogmatic, arrogant. Japanese are hesitant, nervous in conversation, laugh loudly at the wrong time. Japanese walk stiffly, erect, hard heeled. Chinese more relaxed, have an easy gait, sometimes shuffle.

Otsuka's psychological realism reflects a fictional world that corresponds with reality. The biological traits are described and the generalizations about behavior, temperament and self-esteem are put together with the purpose of showing that everyone in the street should be able to discern the "alien enemy" from the foreigner. It is a remarkable text in the sense that it is published in a respected magazine. On the other hand it is easy to find similar racialized texts from other countries in Europe at this time, as many biologists were interested in eugenics (NE 1991). Interracial marriages between Japanese and Americans were not desirable in California. Between 1850 and 1948, whites who married Japanese lost their American citizenship as long as the marriage lasted (Takaki 406).

Another view of 'Japaneseness' in the novel is focused on the incarcerated Japanese parents' behavior and their unwillingness to discuss the experiences with their children. This perspective resonates with what scholars have identified as "Japanese cultural values encouraging emotional restraint, a fatalistic view on life that discourages dwelling on the past characterized by the phrase 'shikata ga nai' (It cannot be helped.), as well as an emphasis on 'gaman' (perseverance) and 'enryo' (self-restraint)" (CWRIC 297- 299, see also Nagata, Kim and Nguyen 361). Otsuka's novel reflects the cultural value of being taciturn in its literary style, marked by short sentences, avoidance of excessive description, occasionally elliptical language, and concise expressions.

The Nisei, furthermore, became in time a 'model minority' celebrated in newspapers, TV-programs, and magazines; *Time* published in 1987 a special issue on Immigrants with the headline "The changing Face of America" and CBS's *60 minutes* in 1987 praised the Asian Americans for their diligence and high achievements in academia as role models for Caucasians. The degrading racialized myth about Japanese from 1941 is now changed into another myth, one year before the redress settlement 1988 (Takaki 474-477).

The Japanese author Inazo Nitobé published an influential book in 1899 called *Bushido, The Soul of Japan* (1908), also known as *The Warrior's Way*. This book was written in

English with the purpose of describing what the Japanese themselves considered 'Japaneseness', especially morals and ethics. This context is significant for *When the Emperor Was Divine*, as the mother is 42 years old when the internment order comes in early spring 1942, indicating that she was born at the turn of the century when the ethics of Bushido was promoted by many Japanese associations (Eiichiri 130-132). Specifically, Nitobe argued that "the universal politeness [...] physical endurance, fortitude and bravery that 'the little Jap' possesses, [...] were sufficiently proved in the China-Japanese war. 'Is there any nation more loyal and patriotic? is a question asked by many; and for the proud answer, 'There is not', we must thank the Precepts of Knighthood" (59).

Furthermore, Nitobe states that "any infringement upon [one's name and] its integrity was felt as a shame and "the sense of shame seems to be the earliest indication of the moral consciousness of our race", that "honor [is] a prenatal influence, being closely bound up with strong family consciousness" (26) and that "[c]almness of behavior, composure of mind should not be disturbed by passion of any kind" (36). According to Eiichiri, these values were commonly known, so too the weaknesses of some traits, for example frankness, creativity and individuality (130). The examples mentioned from Nitobe's *Bushido, The Soul of Japan* mirror the qualities that Otsuka has incorporated in the description of the family's ideas of highly valued moral standards.

## **9. Conclusions**

In this essay I have, from different perspectives on trauma theory, investigated experiences in fiction that reimagines trauma of the past in *When the Emperor Was Divine* by Julie Otsuka, arguing that oppression, discrimination, racism, intergenerational transmitted trauma and feelings of guilt and shame are socially, geographically and psychologically constructed within the social order.

Otsuka has described how racial oppression and discrimination work by letting a family be exploited, culturally marginalized, violated and subjugated to a military regime. Otsuka questions the political decisions made in reality by closely following documented historical facts. In this respect her realism raises awareness about the wrong done to the interned Japanese during the war. Not only does she question the nation's decision, motivated by 'military necessity' to incarcerate Japanese civilians, but she also questions the methods used by the government. She points out that betrayal within the social order, objectification and confinement affected the self-image of Japanese people by describing the internalization

process of the “alien enemy” built up over more than three years, starting with submissive adaptation to the monotony of camp life routines, forswearing the loyalty to Japan and the insight and acceptance of being treated as a criminal.

Otsuka shows that identities are transformed by socially constructed oppression and discrimination. Furthermore, she emphasizes the importance of the racialized constructed stereotype of the ‘other’ as an important part of the process. The stereotype works mutually and reflects the contemporary discourse. ‘Japaneseness’ as well as ‘Americanness’ are essentialist notions and are mutually appropriated.

The social structures of the Japanese collective emphasize the irony of the reeducation of the Japanese in camp as being futile. Recommended American behavior does not change the situation; the racialized enemy is not only ethnically but also a biologically determined stereotype. The use of silence creates a distance suggesting that the difficulties of talking about the hard life of respect to each other connects to the parents ‘Japaneseness’ suggesting that being silent, forgiving, forgetting and polite are crucial methods for striving at inclusion in the American society.

Intergenerational transmitted trauma is discussed by Otsuka in several interviews and the novel is the result of her intention to emphasize the importance of breaking the silence of the internment and the wrongdoing. The trauma experienced by her own grandparents created a void that she felt obliged to fill in to make their story known, although fictionalized. Otsuka assumes that traumatic memories are remembered afterwards and in detail and not only achievable through flashbacks and that the characters’ identities have been transformed and that the healing process will not result in integrated selves. She suggests that trauma lasts and that the damage done is a memory of guilt and shame embedded in their transformed identities. With psychological realism Otsuka has conveyed a fictionalized story in a language that in large detail is credible as real. Short sentences, broken chronology, elliptical constructions, anaphora and images, metaphors and symbols tightly connected to the landscape show that Otsuka integrates the narrative strategy with the traumatic content. The novel contributes to the collective postmemory archives about the internment, thus mediating reimagined, not recalled trauma. As a key novel for contemporary Japanese-American literature, *When the Emperor Was Divine* inspires to further multi-layered investigations of contemporary literary trauma theories in combination with Hirsch’s postmemory theories, thereby contributing to important archives of stories that complement historical facts.



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