

SONGS OF RESISTANCE: TRANSFORMATIONS OF TRAUMA IN THE WRITING
OF MICHIYO FUKAYA

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
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In partial fulfillment of
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In

Sexuality Studies

by

Leah Chen Weinstein

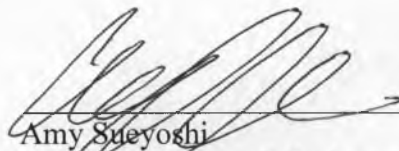
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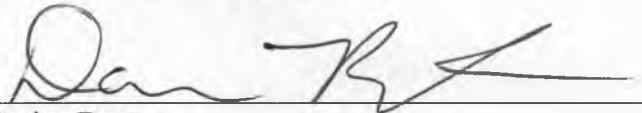
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Songs of Resistance: Transformations of Trauma in the Writing of Michiyo Fukaya* by Leah Chen Weinstein, and that in my opinion that this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: Master of Arts in Sexuality Studies at San Francisco State University.



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SONGS OF RESISTANCE: TRANSFORMATIONS OF TRAUMA IN THE WRITING
OF MICHIO FUKAYA

Leah Chen Weinstein
San Francisco, California
2016

This thesis examines Michio Fukaya's poetry and prose from the 1970s and 1980s in order to insert Fukaya's work into a genealogy of queer women of color literature. Michio Fukaya was a mixed heritage Japanese American lesbian writer and activist, born in Japan to her Japanese mother and her white father, a U.S. soldier, and raised predominantly in Burlington, Vermont. Although she wrote speeches, letters to editorials, journal articles, fiction, poetry, and short essays exploring Asian American politics, gay and lesbian rights, Eurasian identity, and lesbian desire, her work remains to be overlooked. Instead, the biographical literature surrounding Fukaya's life narrowly underscores her suicide to depict her as tragic woman who could not get past her suffering and rage. These perspectives have washed onto perceptions of her poetry and prose by trivializing her literary work as over-emotional. This thesis complicates the pathological framing of Fukaya's writing by emphasizing the role of negative affect and embodiment as important aesthetic and literary strategies for queer women of color writers. I specifically stress the role of autobiographical writing, affective processing, remembering and envisioning as practices of transformation, self-determination and healing from racial and sexual trauma.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.


Chair, Thesis Committee

Aug. 2, 2016
Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	7
Theoretical Framework.....	16
The Sources.....	19
Chapter Outline.....	20
Chapter 1: Negotiating and Transforming Pain in Poetic Memoir	24
Redefining Sexual Violence as Pain and Injustice	26
Responding to Sexual Abuse: A Narrative of Revenge	33
Sharing Sexual Victimization and Survivorhood: Building Connection	36
Chapter 2: Refashioning Shame in the Autobiographical Record.....	42
Remembering Shame on the Body and in Memory.....	43
Reclaiming Shame in the Memorial of War	52
Chapter 3: Restoring Connection and Self-Love through the Lesbian Narrative.....	61
Confronting Sexual Violence and Sexual Trauma.....	62
Imagining Erotic Desire as Kinship and Self-love	70
Love-Politics in the Lesbian Narrative	77
Conclusion	83
Bibliography	94

INTRODUCTION

Pain shapes my days
And horror my nights:
Muscles knotted tight,
Writhing, unable to sleep.
I will greet tomorrow
With heavy eyes,
But greet it I will.
A steady chorus
Beats in my brain:
I will not go under;
I will not give in.

-Michiyo Fukaya

On one ordinary day in Burlington, Vermont circa 1980, Michiyo Fukaya sat abruptly on her chair, suddenly feeling weighed down by the heaviness of her thoughts and quite aware of her depression. She couldn't help her mind as she felt it wander to the memory of her psychiatric hospitalization just months prior. Suddenly transported back to the psychiatric ward, Fukaya started to shiver and sweat. She could hear nurses barking loud orders for her to swallow pills, to undergo electroconvulsive shock therapy. An all too familiar bombarding terror, apprehension and throbbing pain began to grip her body. Although far from the hospital now, Fukaya noticed herself unbearably hot, sedated, and bloated. Meanwhile, her partial consciousness began to detect these bodily changes as a sign of a traumatic episode. Reflexively, she pulled out her notebook and pen and started to outline the physical sensations seizing her body and to verbalize a sense of powerlessness. She discovered words for her feelings, which worked with the diligent movement of her hand, like a machine, to deposit her somatic aches onto the page of her notebook. She wrote line-by-line, pinpointing the location of pain in her body and

transcribing her obscured sense of time. As she traced the weight of her pain onto the page, the tight command of panic on her body loosened and she began to feel her emotions spill out like the ink from her pen. A promising sense of renewal and calm pulsed through her veins. Whereas pain and sorrow had formerly preyed on her sense of well-being, she now felt the authority of those emotions fade and transform into a foundation of strength. Words became her inner compass. In fact, she was surprised to uncover new words to express a budding imagination of what could be better. Realizing now that these words had become a new poem, Fukaya finished her last verses with lyrical reminders that solidly reflected her affirmation of life and her will to persevere and to beat the odds.¹ In this moment, like many others in the next seven years of her life, Michiyo Fukaya would use writing as a resource for healing and as a tool to transform trauma.

Michiyo Fukaya was a mixed heritage Japanese American lesbian poet and writer whose writing not only tackled Asian American and lesbian politics in the 1970s and 1980s, but also bluntly addressed the painful experiences of her specific life of trauma. Her poetry and prose address how a long road of racial discrimination, sexual abuse, and economic hardship led to her hospitalization and subsequent diagnosis of schizophrenia at the Medical Center Hospital of Vermont. In the short essay, "ISOLATION," Fukaya states, "Supposedly, my admission to the Medical Center Hospital of Vermont was

¹ Michiyo Fukaya, "HOSPITALIZED," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 164.

voluntary, but it was a long road that took me there.”² Fukaya was born on April 25th, 1953, to her Japanese mother and white father, a U.S. soldier stationed in Japan. She would often write about how the U.S. militarist and imperialist context of her birth became an obstacle for her identity development.³ Fukaya was given the name Margaret Cornell, which she changed twice to reflect and reclaim her Japanese heritage. She first chose the name Michiyo Cornell before settling on Michiyo Fukaya, adopting her mother’s maiden name. Her family moved to Southern Vermont in 1956 to a predominantly white suburb and her mother died of cancer only two years later. The loss of her mother to cancer at the age of four added to her experience of isolation as a mixed race child living in what she described as a racist environment. She faced frequent racial harassment and taunting from classmates, teachers, and white family members who denied her pleas for support. Adding insult to injury, the absence of their mother subjected Fukaya and her siblings to a sexually and emotionally abusive household with their alcoholic father and sadistic stepmother.⁴ Fukaya also discusses the alienating experience of her “Eurasian identity and sense of alienation within both white and Asian cultures---including, for instance, the tension of being perceived as white by Asian Americans and Asian by whites at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where she

² Michiyo Fukaya, “ISOLATION,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 152.

³ Michiyo Fukaya, “MY MOTHER/DAUGHTER NEXUS,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 4-7.

⁴ Michiyo Fukaya, “ISOLATION,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 152.

graduated with a B.A. in English Literature in 1975.”⁵ Despite her degree, Fukaya cites that the conditions of poverty, mental illness, homophobia and racism hindered her from having a prosperous literary career.

In adulthood, Fukaya used writing to describe the trials of being a young pregnant and single woman with little resources. Unstable work and housing propelled her to find the Elizabeth Lund Home, a home for pregnant women and adolescents, separated by their parents or under custody of the state. In this shelter she gave birth to her mixed white, Japanese, and Black daughter, Mayumi. After eleven months of being a single mother caretaker, Fukaya suffered a nervous breakdown and checked into the Medical Center Hospital of Vermont. Following her discharge in the late 1970s, Fukaya came out as lesbian in a hostile homophobic environment, which effectively jeopardized her housing and job security. She found a predominantly white lesbian community in Vermont that helped her and her daughter find temporary housing as she slipped into a second nervous breakdown. In writing, Fukaya would attest that these trials, amongst others, did not stem from an isolated and individualized psychiatric condition. She wrote extensively in poetry, prose, fiction, letters and speeches to decry the conditions in her life that made it difficult to survive as a mixed Asian American lesbian and single mother in lily-white Vermont. Michiyo Fukaya eventually took her own life on July 9, 1987 by a self-inflicted gunshot to the head. She was only thirty-four years old. Fukaya did not

⁵ Alice Y. Hom, “Fukaya, Michiyo (Michiyo Cornell),” in *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in America*, ed. Marc Stein (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2004), 421.

leave a note; her lasting trace is instead found in her extensive poetry and prose, spanning the last ten years of her life.

It is no coincidence that most of Fukaya's writing dates from the late 1970s to mid 1980s as she became politicized and vocal about her marginalized identities.⁶ She wrote letters, editorials, poetry, and speeches addressing issues of rape, sexual assault, abortion, lesbian politics, and Asian American identity. She also participated in writing groups, delivered her poetry at open mics and marches, documented her participation in Asian American conferences, and archived her role in organizing Vermont's gay and lesbian pride parade. Thus, Fukaya's published writing should be read in the context of her politics. Her own mantra, that "Poetry and songs were meant to relate to everyday life,"⁷ reflects the sentiment and content of her writing. She harnessed a sharp critique of colonization, documented the isolation of her youth, and called out homophobia and nationalism in the Asian American community, as well as racism in white lesbian and gay culture. She pulled insight from her own experiences and feelings to wage a political analysis of systematic oppression. Additionally, Fukaya used poetry to fashion the type of visibility she wanted for herself. In a state of both hypervisibility and invisibility as a mixed Asian American lesbian in a racist and homophobic environment, she proudly

⁶ Though most of Fukaya's published writing is undated, Fukaya states "I have been writing, publishing and speaking in public for ten years now" in 1981 and is also identified as a freelance writer from 1977 to her death. See Gwen Shervington, "INTRODUCTION," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996).

⁷ Jo Schneiderman, a review of *Lesbian Lyrics* by Michiyo Fukaya, *Vermont Vanguard Press*, August 14, 1981, in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 79.

asserted, "I am a woman, a lesbian, an Asian American and I feel my life is being drained away by my struggles, but I am still trying."⁸ Writing was an outlet for Fukaya's political activism as much as it was a personal endeavor.

Fukaya adopted writing to recuperate a fractured and stigmatized identity by reconciling the past with the present. She employed poetry and prose to fiercely reclaim her multiple identities as a mixed race, Asian American, lesbian, survivor and single mother. Fukaya also wrote in order to simultaneously redress the pains of her abuse; she discovered language to contextualize her experiences as oppression and injustice rather than a personal deficiency. Despite the rich reservoir of her writing, Fukaya has not been acknowledged as an acclaimed writer mainly because the expression of pain and anger in Fukaya's writing has been interpreted as "songs of rage" and as a reflection of disconcerted suffering.⁹ The few sources that have addressed her work negligibly recognize her writing as important representation of a poor woman of color at best, and minimize and flatten her work through their preoccupation with her suffering at worst. These assessments fail to acknowledge that Fukaya used poetry to reclaim pain, hopelessness, shame, sadness, and insufferable loss as valid responses to oppression. Trauma researcher and psychiatrist Bessel Van der Kolk writes, "language gives us the power to change ourselves and others by communicating our experiences, helping us to

⁸ Michiyo Fukaya, "ISOLATION," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 153.

⁹ Jo Schneiderman, a review of *Lesbian Lyrics* by Michiyo Fukaya, *Vermont Vanguard Press*, August 14, 1981, in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 78.

define what we know, and finding a common sense of meaning.”¹⁰ Similarly, Fukaya wrote about her mixed race heritage, the loss of her mother, and her father’s sexual abuse to redefine such formative childhood traumatic experiences on her own terms.

I frame Fukaya’s writing as songs of resistance and argue that reiterating the details of dark memories and locating the corporeal placement of pain are both valuable and empowering processes of her poetry writing. Fukaya embellished words to restore connection, build community and to counter the isolation she experienced growing up. She used writing to connect to her deceased mother, her young daughter and to her deteriorating sense of self in an effort to restore personal well-being. In reference to most of his patients surviving trauma, Van der Kolk has written, “It is so much easier...to talk about what has been done...to tell a story of victimization and revenge than to notice, feel, and put into words the reality of their internal experience.”¹¹ Fukaya bravely drew introspection to the inner turmoil of her mind and body in ways that most writers never do.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Barely a shred of evidence bears witness to the existence of Michiyo Fukaya and her writing. Although Fukaya was a prolific writer, her literary work has received little attention. For example, only three reviews of her literary work have been published

¹⁰ Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (audiobook, 2014).

¹¹ Ibid.

dating back to the 1990s.¹² In addition to these dated reviews, various Asian American publications and LGBTQ encyclopedia entries allot only brief references to Fukaya's work.¹³ While Asian American scholars and LGBTQ historiographers note the historic impact of Fukaya's speeches delivered to Asian American and queer communities, there remains to be a lack attention to the transformative quality of her poetry.¹⁴ Moreover, many who write about Fukaya's poetry dismiss its literary value by characterizing her writing as over-embodied or too emotional. This literature fails to acknowledge the importance of deploying negative affect, such as stigma, shame, pain and anger, as productive forms of political transformation.

¹² See Ellen Kanner, review of *A Fire Is Burning It Is In Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, edited by Gwendolyn Shervington, Lambda Book Report, *GenderWatch*, September 1996, accessed March 11, 2016.; Peggy Luhrs, a review of *Lesbian Lyrics* by Michiyo Fukaya, *Commonwoman*, November 1981, in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 75-76; Jo Schneiderman, a review of *Lesbian Lyrics* by Michiyo Fukaya, *Vermont Vanguard Press*, August 14, 1981, in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 78.

¹³ See Alice Y. Hom, "Fukaya, Michiyo (Michiyo Cornell)," in *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in America*, ed. Marc Stein (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004), 421-422; Daniel C. Tsang, "Slicing Silence: Asian Progressives Come Out," in *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*, edited by Steven G. Louie and Glenn K. Omastu, (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press), 221; Melinda Cardozo, "Fukaya, Michiyo (1953-1987)," in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary LGBTQ Literature of The U.S.*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2009), 228-229; Mona Oikawa "My life is not imagined: Notes on writing as a Sansei lesbian feminist," in *All Names Spoken: Poetry and Prose* (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1992), 104-105.

¹⁴ Fukaya's historic speech, "Living in Asian America," was delivered during a rally on at the Washington Monument in 1969 and is cited by many as one of the first public statements to call attention to issues faced by Asian American lesbians that was heard by a large audience. See Alice Y. Hom, "Fukaya, Michiyo (Michiyo Cornell)," in *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in America*, ed. Marc Stein (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004), 421-422; Daniel C. Tsang, "Slicing Silence: Asian Progressives Come Out," in *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*, edited by Steven G. Louie and Glenn K. Omastu, (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press), 221.

The vast majority of cultural critics categorize Fukaya's traumatic testimony as literarily unproductive. These evaluations interpret the content of Fukaya's writing, which document her own experiences, as unfortunate truths that fail to translate into creative poetry or prose. Ellen Kanner evaluates Fukaya's work as lacking poetic finesse when she conveys, "though her writing is not literary nor even good, it serves as a powerful and honest account of her suffering."¹⁵ Here, Kanner expresses a view that documenting one's trauma is impactful, but not necessarily literary. She further writes, "In the manner of Anne Sexton's confessional style, Fukaya made sense of her own life experience, her own pain. But unlike Sexton who encoded the truth in metaphor, Fukaya wrote the truth as she knew it—stark, uncompromising, unsettling... To a large extent, she was also a victim of her own hate and rage... the fire burning within her eventually consumed her."¹⁶

Kanner minimizes the role of expressing pain in writing, even going so far as to characterize this pain as destructive and deadly. Many overlook the transformative value of documenting trauma, opting to comment on the content of her work as shocking, unproductive, and a presage of Fukaya's own eventual demise.

Reviews of Fukaya's writing surely hinge on the presentation of her work, which is most accessibly read in the anthology *A Fire is Burning*, a book published after her suicide. This book exhibits Fukaya's work alongside written recollections of her by the white lesbian feminist community in which Fukaya participated. The physical juxtaposition of Fukaya's essays, poems, speeches, letters and stories with these critical

¹⁵ Ellen Kanner, review of *A Fire Is Burning It Is In Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, edited by Gwendolyn Shervington, Lambda Book Report, *GenderWatch*, September 1996, accessed March 11, 2016.

¹⁶ Ibid.

recollections lends view to her work as an emotional diatribe. Attention to Fukaya's anger is so visceral in these recollections that in an encyclopedia entry authored by Melinda Cardozo reads,

The text [*A Fire is Burning*] indicates that Fukaya's lesbian feminist community was both vitally supportive and protectively critical of this woman who is variously described as angry, volatile, abusive, diffident, passionate, articulate, accessible, courageous and unlucky; however, *angry* [sic] is the most frequently used adjective.¹⁷

The pigeonholing of Fukaya's life as an expression of anger and tragedy by her "community" has certainly influenced published reviews of her work.

For example, in these recollections, Fukaya is depicted by "sadness/pain she lived" that "she couldn't get beyond."¹⁸ These recollections may have shaped Peggy Luhrs' review of Fukaya's poetry published in the journal *Commonwoman*. Luhrs observes, "These are clear and angry words about racism, rape, incest..."¹⁹ Fukaya's poetry has also been characterized as angry in Jo Scheiderman's review of her work, published in the Vermont Vanguard Press:

...Cornell describes the conflict, pain and anger she has experienced living as a working class Japanese/American in New England—first in Springfield, Mass., and now in

¹⁷ Melinda Cardozo, "Fukaya, Michiyo (1953-1987)," in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary LGBTQ Literature of The U.S.*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2009), 229.

¹⁸ Myra Lilliana Splitrock, "Remembrance," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 90.

¹⁹ Peggy Luhrs, a review of *Lesbian Lyrics* by Michiyo Fukaya, *Commonwoman*, November 1981, in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 75.

Burlington Vt. Her work emerges angry but not didactic, personal but not self-absorbed...Cornell's poems are songs of rage well worth listening to."²⁰

Many interpret the expression of pain and anger in Fukaya's writing as "songs of rage," without elaborating on the value of exploring and transcribing anger as a practice of negotiating trauma. What these assessments fail to recognize is that her "songs of rage," should also be read as songs of resistance. These reviews focus on the shock factor of Fukaya's writing, rather than contextualize the importance of reciting a history of sexual and racial trauma as healing:

Her poems recount experiences that are, unfortunately, frighteningly everyday—rape, incest, and racism. And although her subject matter may shock or embarrass some readers, Cornell defends the importance of making her experiences public."²¹

Many reviewers have dismissed the usefulness of employing anger as a literary and aesthetic strategy, because they view Fukaya's work in a vacuum, rather than read her work within the cannon of queer of color literature.

In fact, anger and melancholy have been understood as important and transformative registers of expression for queer women of color. Audre Lorde claims that anger is a valid response to racism and "means women responding to anger, the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and coopting."²² Lorde argues that although white women distort rage as useless and disruptive, anger can be waged to resist oppression,

²⁰ Jo Schneiderman, a review of *Lesbian Lyrics* by Michiyo Fukaya, *Vermont Vanguard Press*, August 14, 1981, in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 78.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 25, no. ½ (Summer 1997): 278, accessed October 16, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/400005441>.

and “can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change.”²³ Further, Lorde makes the point that it is not anger that will destroy women of color, “but our refusals to stand still, to listen to its rhythms, to learn within it, to move beyond the manner of presentation to the substance, to tap that anger as an important source of empowerment.”²⁴ Expressing anger in speech or writing as a response to racism and other forms of oppression repurposes this structure of feeling in the service of liberation.

It is also the work of José Esteban Muñoz to depathologize and revise readings of melancholia as a structure of feeling that is counterproductive. Muñoz proposes that melancholia for queers of color is not pathology, but an integral part of our daily lives. Like Lorde, Muñoz cites the hatefulness that surrounds the queer of color. Racism, homophobia, sexism and patriarchy are all forms of oppression, which seek to erase queer of color existence. In response, Muñoz states that mourning offers a “process of dealing with the catastrophes that occur in the lives of people of color, lesbians and gay men.” Additionally, Muñoz argues that mourning supplies a history of collective struggle, and is a practice of activism, rather than a “self-absorbed mood.” For mourning allows us to reconstruct identity “and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names--- and in our names.”²⁵ Both Lorde and Muñoz make important ideological distinctions about queer people of color who write and perform politics; literary value

²³ Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 25, no. ½ (Summer 1997): 280, accessed October 16, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/400005441>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 74.

and emotive affect are not mutually exclusive entities but intertwined modes of resistance.

The marginal attention paid to emotional affect in Fukaya's writing fails to read Fukaya's work within a genealogy of queer of color literature. For instance, cultural critic Melinda Cardozo points out, "Some of the work plays formally on truisms about nature and the female body...As a whole, the poetry strives for clarity while asserting an evocative intermingling of frustration and delight."²⁶ This assessment of Fukaya's work highlights her provocative approach to arouse a response from the reader. Schneiderman also emphasizes both the impact and direct quality of Fukaya's poetry; "She sings her bitter songs in a language we can all understand, but whose meanings hurt and provoke. Her images flow gracefully over highly polished, yet simple words."²⁷ Though these reviews underline the significant emotive impact of Fukaya's writing style, they focus on the emotional impact on the reader, rather than understanding her writing as a practice of transformation. Cardozo briefly underscores the political messaging of her work, citing not just "anger" as a tactic of addressing injustice, but also the "erotic, gentle, hopeful, searchingly autobiographical, provocative and funny" literary quality of her work.²⁸

²⁶ Melinda Cardozo, "Fukaya, Michiyo (1953-1987)," in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary LGBTQ Literature of The U.S.*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2009), 229.

²⁷ Jo Schneiderman, a review of *Lesbian Lyrics* by Michiyo Fukaya, *Vermont Vanguard Press*, August 14, 1981, in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 78-79.

²⁸ Melinda Cardozo, "Fukaya, Michiyo (1953-1987)," in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary LGBTQ Literature of The U.S.*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2009), 229.

However, Cardozo does not elaborate on how these stylistic tactics are pertinent choices that reflect Fukaya's status as a lesbian woman of color.

Despite readings of Fukaya's expression of trauma as counterproductive, few have considered Fukaya's writing as useful for inciting social transformation and recognize that the personal and the political cannot be divorced from one another. Myra Liliana Splitrock, a white lesbian feminist and friend of Fukaya, declares, "Michiyo's voice needs to be out in the world to give identification and courage to the many womyn of color fighting to survive. Michiyo's voice is important to remind us that it's important to work for a world of social justice."²⁹ Splitrock sees Fukaya's voice as vital representation for women of color, poor women, Asian lesbians and single mothers whose narratives remain invisible to a male and white dominated media. Additionally, this valorization of her work draws attention to the important visibility of her particular experience and struggle as a lesbian woman of color. However, although Splitrock recognizes her voice as a valuable resource for inspiring social justice, she does not go far enough to demonstrate how Fukaya's writing enables transformation and healing past mere representation.

The closest reading of Fukaya's work as political transformation is Mona Oikawa's reflections on the intersection between writing and resistance in the essay *My life is not imagined: Notes on writing as a Sansei lesbian feminist*. In this personal essay, Oikawa speaks about her own journey to writing as Sansei (third generation Japanese

²⁹ Myra Liliana Splitrock, "Remembrance" in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 179.

Canadian), lesbian and feminist.³⁰ Oikawa attests that she cannot separate her multiple identities from the process of writing, because sharing stories is a process of recovering one's personal history. Fukaya's poetry chapbook is referenced in two short paragraphs where Oikawa mourns the inability to communicate with Fukaya in face-to-face:

I have just read a book by Michiyo Cornell... It was given to me by an American writer and visual artist... She learned that Michiyo committed suicide in 1987. I have wept. I am angry. This precious discovery, a book by another Japanese North American lesbian writer, is clouded by the pain that our meeting is only possible through her text. How many women of Colour, lesbians of Colour, have we lost in our histories of forced relocation and colonization? Where are their writings, their stories?³¹

In weaving in Fukaya's story with her own, Oikawa makes the statement that writing is both a personal and political act of taking back the power of one's voice and articulating one's life with honesty and courage. Oikawa also notes other queer women of color writers and the seminal text, *This Bridge Called My back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, stating, "their powerful words have carved out deep paths in the forest of feminist literature, providing lesbians of Colour with safer routes by which to travel and move forward." Oikawa positions Fukaya's writing within this genealogy of queer women of color literature to affirm the role of charting of one's experiences in the text as resistance to "white male heterosexual history" and as a challenge to the silencing of Japanese

³⁰ To make this point, Oikawa describes how money gifted to her from her mother enables her to attend the writing retreat, which is the setting of the essay. The gifted sum was part of the Canadian government's monetary reparation, or "acknowledgement," to her mother (and other Japanese Canadians') relocation and interment during and after World War II. By sharing this story, Oikawa makes the point that writing is inextricably tied to recording and discovering her history, honoring the lives of her ancestors, naming her experiences, and resisting oppression. See Mona Oikawa "My life is not imagined: Notes on writing as a Sansei lesbian feminist," in *All Names Spoken: Poetry and Prose* (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1992), 104-105.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

lesbian narratives.³² This thesis expands on Oikawa's initial vision of situating Fukaya's words within a longstanding practice of queer women of color writers who write to reclaim voice and discover history. I examine the expression of stigma, shame, pain, and anger in Fukaya's writing as evidence of the ongoing effects of the traumas of racialization and sexualization and also the active remodeling of these traumas.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My thesis builds on the critical theoretical insights of decolonial feminists of color such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Mitsuye Yamada, Merele Woo, Nellie Wong, and M. Jacqui Alexander who frame writing as a source of power and resistance.³³ Their work stresses the practice of writing as a transformative praxis that reclaims voice and visibility for (lesbian) women of color in a racist, sexist, and homophobic white supremacist U.S. society. My thesis is indebted to their work, because they demonstrate how transformation and change operates within consciousness and is practiced through collective vision. They show that writing can be used to process the inner workings of the mind and to speak from the flesh in a public political act that in turn shapes culture.

³² Mona Oikawa "My life is not imagined: Notes on writing as a Sansei lesbian feminist," in *All Names Spoken: Poetry and Prose* (Toronto: Sister Vision, 1992), 106.

³³ Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: SUNY Press, 2015); M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and The Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Nellie Wong, "Glow from the Dark of Monsters and Demons: Notes on Writing," in *3 Asian American Writers Speak Out on Feminism*, ed. Helen Gilbert (WA: Radical Women Publications, 2003); Mitsuye Yamada, "Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian American Woman," in *3 Asian American Writers Speak Out on Feminism*, ed. Helen Gilbert (WA: Radical Women Publications, 2003); Merle Woo, "Some Basic Ingredients for Home Movies," in *3 Asian American Writers Speak Out on Feminism*, ed. Helen Gilbert (WA: Radical Women Publications, 2003).

For example, Wong describes writing from one's experiences as a woman of color as, sharing "the pulse and heartbeat of our lives."³⁴ Alexander underlines the serviceable function of writing to create imagination, or a "lesbian feminist woman of color consciousness," when she calls for us to use our "flesh-and-blood experiences to concretize a vision."³⁵ Anzaldúa writes that "speaking in tongues" allows one to discover one's innermost fears, to fight and act on it.³⁶ I draw from their theoretical insights to study Fukaya's poems and prose as a process of metamorphosis that is both deeply personal and reflective of her vision of a transformed society.

My thesis also benefits from the theoretical contribution of queer affect theorists such as Sara Ahmed, Tina Takemoto, and Ann Cvetkovich who emphasize that emotion and trauma is embedded in social and historical contexts and enacted and lived through the body. Tina Takemoto's study of melancholia shapes my understanding of pain and trauma as a wound that finds placement in in-between worlds, between the body and the mind.³⁷ I also utilize Ahmed's call to acknowledge the interlocking relationship between emotions and bodies in order to substantiate Fukaya's narration of trauma as located on

³⁴ Nellie Wong, "Glows from the Dark of Monsters and Demons: Notes on Writing," in *3 Asian American Writers Speak Out on Feminism*, ed. Helen Gilbert (WA: Radical Women Publications, 2003), 18.

³⁵ M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and The Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 260, 262.

³⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: SUNY Press, 2015).

³⁷ Tina Takemoto, "Open wounds," in *Thinking Through the Skin*, ed. Jackie Stacey and Sara Ahmed (New York: Routledge, 2001), 118.

her body and in memory.³⁸ Further, Ahmed's analysis of shame and pain as both psychic and embodied manifestations supports my examination of Fukaya's testimony of humiliation, loss and alienation as an effort to expose the psychic and bodily pains of interlocking racism, homophobia and sexism. Ann Cvetkovich's concept of trauma as invoked in everyday cultural practices, when emotion is made public in various everyday performances, helps me read Fukaya's traumatic disclosures as cultural resistance.³⁹ Cvetkovich and Ahmed's claim that emotions and trauma serves an important function in nourishing collective relationships is also pertinent to my study. I draw from affect and queer theory's redefinition of trauma to demonstrate how Fukaya mobilizes her emotion and documents her bodily pain in an effort to politicize her identities, substantiate connections to others, and restore agency.

Finally, insights from Critical Mixed Race Studies offer me the capacity to study Fukaya's reclamation of stigmatized identities in the context of mixed Asian American history. Research in this field includes author and psychologist Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu's assertion that stories function to create community, which is especially vital for the mixed race subject whose authenticity, sense of belonging and homeland is in constant flux.⁴⁰ Anthologist and author Carol Camper also helps me frame Fukaya's use of writing as identity discovery and formation, when she attests that documenting and sharing ambiguous and isolating experiences as a mixed race woman of color is a tactic

³⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 104.

³⁹ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 94.

⁴⁰ Murphy-Shigematsu, Stephen, *When Half is Whole: Multiethnic Asian American identities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), v.

of ending alienation.⁴¹ Finally, Asian American Studies scholars and artists, Wei Ming Dariotis and Laura Kina, define Critical Mixed Race Studies as an interdisciplinary body of work that both considers “transnational flows of identity and history” and resists pathologizing discourse about mixed race people and miscegenation within the approach of resistance and antiracist struggle.⁴² Critical Mixed Race Studies offers me a platform to study Fukaya’s written exploration of her mixed race identity as one that is branded by war, imperialism, and diaspora. These theoretical developments scaffold my analysis of Fukaya’s writing as redress to the trauma, specifically the trauma of separation, migration and shame. Critical Mixed Race Studies guides my analysis of Fukaya’s written reclamation of an ambiguous, fractured, and fluid history as a form of cultural production and historical reenactment.

THE SOURCES

For this thesis, I study two main texts. The first source I examine is Fukaya’s only self-published poetry chapbook, *Lesbian Lyrics*, published in 1981. This poetry compilation runs twenty-two pages and includes a short introduction and photograph of Fukaya. I also examine Fukaya’s body of written work displayed in the anthology named after one of Fukaya’s poems, *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, which was published in 1996. This collection showcases over one hundred pages of Fukaya’s writing, including poetry, speeches, letters, short essays, and

⁴¹ Camper, Carol, *Miscegenation blues: Voices of Mixed-Race Women* (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1994), xv-xxi.

⁴² Laura Kina, and Wei Ming Dariotis, *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2013), xiv.

published articles. Notably, articles are exhibited from the two periodicals Fukaya's wrote under-- *Azaelea: A Magazine by Third World Lesbians*, a quarterly periodical for Black, Latina, Asian, and Native lesbians and *Commonwoman*, a feminist periodical. I study Fukaya's writing from both primary and secondary sources to analyze the significance of narrating racial and sexual trauma as a resistance strategy. I scanned Fukaya's poetry and prose in both texts for affective themes related to trauma and healing. The three most common affective themes that I found were pain, shame and love. I study the expression of these affects in Fukaya's poetry to analyze how she chronicles somatic expressions in story, memory, autobiography, and future visions.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In chapter one, I explore Fukaya's narration of her child and adult sexual abuse as a form of deep-seated pain. In poetry, Fukaya documents in detail the narrative of her sexual assaults and rapes and also creates imaginative scenes of revenge. I analyze how Fukaya uses story to narrate these assaults as a form of sexual injustice and racialized violation. For example, I study how Fukaya figures the trauma of these sexual intrusions as bone breaking and blood rattling. I argue that Fukaya alludes to blood, bones, and internal pain as responses to sexual violence and as a practice of restoring agency to her body that has been violated. Additionally, I examine how Fukaya's poems substantiate her position as a survivor of childhood incest by her white father. In poems, Fukaya both frames him as an assailant with racist sexualized motives, and also plots her revenge against him. In an imaginative revenge scene, Fukaya castrates her abuser,

disempowering him by bodily mutilation, and flips the narrative of victimization. I also study how Fukaya uses words to connect with her mother within the context of this stigmatized abuse. Fukaya writes poetry in the form of confessional letters to her mother about the impact of incest on her and her siblings in an effort to foster healthy familial connection and substantiate her experiences.

In chapter two, I argue that Fukaya's poetry and prose recounts childhood memories and events of shame and humiliation to redefine a stigmatized racial identity and impoverished background. I examine Fukaya's poems that document events where she was shamed and bullied for being Japanese, mixed race, and poor. Fukaya documents these moments to validate her experiences of confusion and isolation. She writes these poems and short essays to unravel the context of racism and classism and to understand her experiences. Fukaya also denaturalizes a classist and racist social climate by holding her classmates responsible for ridiculing her attire and teaching her to be ashamed of poverty and her Japanese identity. Additionally, Fukaya uses writing to construct a narrative of her mother's life and choices in the context of Japan, post-World War II. In writing, Fukaya reshapes a narrative of shame and humiliation perpetrated by war and her mother's decision to marry a white American soldier, as both narratives of survival and preservation. Writing a history of her mother cultivates a sense of belonging and also retorts to her own racialized harassment for being mixed race and Asian American.

Finally, Chapter 3 will explore poetry in which Fukaya depicts her lesbian sexuality and desire as a form of healing and self-love. Fukaya writes about her lesbian

sexuality as a source of self-discovery, nourishment, and liberation, rather than an identity category. For example, I investigate how Fukaya depicts her sexuality as a vehicle of self-love and connection that is as self-gratifying as it is altruistic. Fukaya also writes about the power of the erotic in reimagining kinship bonds between her and other women as a valid confrontation and transformation of sexual violence, including incest, homophobia, and heteropatriarchal violence. Additionally, Fukaya uses desire to reimagine intimate bonds with her mother and daughter in the form of a matrilineal kinship line that is culturally significant and spiritual. I detail how Fukaya affirms her connection to other women of color by authoring poems that envision the collective liberation of women of color. Fukaya's poetry enacts the practice of loving and supporting women of color as a vision of freedom. I study Fukaya's writing about love and intimacy for women as an extension of her lesbian identity and also as a process of healing and denouncement of homophobia, heteropatriarchy, and racism.

Reading Fukaya's poetry and prose as affective processing, remembering and envisioning underlines her use of writing as a vehicle to transform racial and sexual trauma. I argue that Fukaya uses writing to corporeally locate the productivity of pain, shame and love in order to validate her experiences, respond to a racist, homophobic and sexist society, and build with other marginalized people through her visions of a collectively transformed society. Those who have written about Fukaya and her work have long overlooked the role of writing in waging cultural resistance. In paying close attention to the context, content, style, narrative form, and themes of Fukaya's literary

poetry and prose, we can start to unlock the potential critique, consciousness, and imagination that Fukaya's work offers to us. We can find value in the importance of narrating the experiences and critiques of the person who holds multiple stigmatized identities--- the lesbian of color, the mixed race Asian American woman, the single poor mother, and the incest survivor. By studying her poetry and prose, we can harness a sharper understanding of the society we live in and also understand how it needs to be changed.

CHAPTER ONE

Negotiating and Transforming Pain in Poetic Memoir

Fiction and memoir may offer more subtle and bolder representations of sexual trauma than therapy can imagine.

-Ann Cvetkovich

We did not violate anyone, the rapist did.

-Michiyo Fukaya

On September 13, 1984 Fukaya wrote to the editor of *Nichibei*, a U.S. Japanese journal, in response to a published article entitled "Do Not Speak About Rape."⁴³ Fukaya readily shared her intention in writing: "I'm writing because I was raped a few years back and wanted to share with you some difficulties I had adjusting after that." Fukaya had been traveling to a political meeting when she was forced to hitchhike due to lack of funds. On the last leg of her journey she was raped. Fukaya recounts how this traumatic event triggered the memory of her childhood sexual trauma; it reawakened the visceral experience of her father's incest at the age of nine years old. In addition, she admits,

It was hard for me. I felt too ashamed to share the experience with more than a few people at first. I was startled that a woman I considered a close friend told me not to be 'angry' about it, that I was 'violent,' etc., but I had to go through the anger to heal. The anger helped me deal with the fear and make decisions about how I would and would not change my lifestyle and ways of being because of the rape.⁴⁴

⁴³ Michiyo Fukaya, "LETTER TO THE EDITOR," in *A Fire Is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 122.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

In this passage, Fukaya reflects on the obstacles of sharing one's narrative of sexual violence within rape culture. Rape culture, or the normalization of rape and other forms of sexual violence, thrives through silence, dismissal and the repression of survivor narratives. Fukaya counters her friend's dismissal by reclaiming rage as a valid response to sexual violence and as a practice of healing. Although this letter calls attention to the significance of using anger to resist fear and for healing, Fukaya's poetry about sexual violence more generally refers to pain rather than anger. This chapter turns to the topic of documenting sexual trauma, specifically analyzing the value of locating somatic pain in traumatic testimony as a justifiable response to trauma and one precondition for healing.

This chapter explores how Fukaya mobilizes poetry to transform her sexual trauma by locating and affirming her sexual abuse as a formative pain with both psychic and bodily scars. Namely, Fukaya uses poetry to narrate, document, disclose, and visualize her sexual traumas as deep-seated pain. In discovering and validating the ramifications of sexual abuse on her body by speaking through poetry, Fukaya shatters the silence around her abuse. These poems range in style from confessional address, straightforward descriptions of her violations, and an imaginative revenge narrative. I argue that Fukaya uses multiple poetic forms to heal through self-discovery and to interrupt and reverse the narrative of herself as a victim to that of a survivor.

I analyze Fukaya's poetry as a form of counter-narrative that provides opportunity to: (1) speak directly to the perpetrators of her assaults and her childhood self to contextualize and validate the impact of sexual abuse as pain, (2) respond to her abusers

through the narrative of revenge and (3) communicate with her deceased mother to build a nourishing connection of protection and a shared understanding of her sexual abuse.

Redefining Sexual Violence as Pain and Injustice

Several of Fukaya's poems testify to the experiences of sexual abuse in the form of explicit and detailed disclosures of abuse. Whereas popularized literature on incest often divorces the emotional impact of abuse from the acts of violence themselves by avoiding discussion of such acts, Fukaya bluntly details the "event(s)" of sexual abuse. Displaying sexual violence in these poetic scenes can be read as a public display of pain in the service of healing. For example, Ann Cvetkovich observes that working through trauma by reenacting scenes of violence, otherwise known as repetition, can be a practice of psychic resolution.⁴⁵ In other words, working through traumatic memory through the reenactment of acts of violation can offer a mechanism for healing, rather than solely reinvoke a traumatizing experience. This concept applies to Fukaya's poetry where pain is eternalized in scenes of victimization that blur the lines between fiction and nonfiction. Constructing her own survivor narrative by naming and reframing acts of sexual violence is a practice of attaining "self-referentiality," or "the grounding of experiences in one's own desire rather than external messages."⁴⁶ Although Fukaya's poems about sexual abuse are direct and straightforward, these poems should be read as a performative staging of traumatic memory through storytelling, rather than a representation of sexual violence itself.

⁴⁵ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 113.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

Poems reframe sexual abuse as a form of bodily pain and violation to denounce incest. In the poem "JOHN," presumably titled after her father's name, the speaker/poet writes to her father to reveal the evidence of their violent relationship and also to allude to the consequential pain located inside her body. Fukaya writes,

Lying rigid on the top bunk
 Above my sister
 When you came to visit me
 In the dark of the night
 A vampire
 Come to drink my blood.⁴⁷

By using the image of her father as a vampire, the speaker/poet pictures her father's premeditated motives to assault her and frames him as a violent assailant. The metaphor of the vampire, a predator that feeds on its victims by consuming their flesh, emphasizes the pain that is awaiting her. While her father is pictured as a dangerous intruder, Fukaya describes herself stuck in rigid anticipation ready for her blood to be drawn. The anticipation signals to the repetition of the offense and the vision of her "lying rigid" mirrors the resistance of the body. The image of the vampire also elicits an erotic image, one that is repulsive and alluring, dangerous and pleasurable. The speaker/poet underscores the erotic figure of the vampire to demonstrate how the erotic is used against her; sexual acts turn the body rigid and invade the body. We also become witnesses to her sister's exposure from the bottom bunk. Perhaps Fukaya is conveying the painful impact of witnessing in the rendering of her traumatic memory. Rather than provoke a

⁴⁷ Michiyo Fukaya, "JOHN," in *A Fire Is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 11.

voyeuristic view, however, we are invited to bear and share the witnessing of pain on the body.

The importance of portraying pain on the body is the visualization of the trauma in order to transform it. According to Tina Takemoto, pain can attach itself to the surface of the body, demonstrating that trauma is embodied both physically and mentally.⁴⁸ Because the body is one site of trauma, healing can be thought of as a process that engages the body. Fukaya discovers violation on and within her body to condemn her abuse and find the placement of her pain. She writes,

You reamed your fingers
And tongue in my vagina,
Caused a turgid soreness
That I hated.⁴⁹

The word “reamed” gives the image of a body being bored into. In words directed to her father, the speaker/poet underscores “turgid soreness,” not as an erotic response, but as a painful bodily counteraction. The “turgid,” or swollen, body can also be read as a defensive maneuver. For the body inflamed is a body that is actively trying to heal itself. These horrific images testify to the trauma both worn on and refuted by the body.

Soreness also represents pain and makes the violence of sexual violence explicit when she recounts a separate incident of adulthood rape:

I was forced to give in;
He raped me.
Afterwards he said,

⁴⁸ Tina Takemoto, “Open wounds,” in *Thinking Through the Skin*, ed. Jackie Stacey and Sara Ahmed (New York: Routledge, 2001), 118.

⁴⁹ Michiyo Fukaya, “JOHN,” in *A Fire Is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 11.

"I was nice, wasn't I"
 "If a woman wants sex,
 her vagina lubricates:
 I am sore."
 But my sarcasm was lost
 On his male ego.⁵⁰

In both poems, Fukaya uses the soreness of the body to utilize displeasure as a renouncement to sexual violence. The lack of lubrication, which precedes the soreness of her vagina, symbolizes the pain of her trauma. Whether in expressing her hate for these incidents in an explicit address to her father or using sarcasm to ridicule her abuser, pain is represented as a somatic experience.

Pain on the body is also marked by a hypersexualization of the body. At the end of the poem "JOHN," Fukaya details her father's attempted rape:

You must have been real excited
 Because when I said yes
 (you weren't really inside me.)
 You orgasmed.
 How ignorant you were
 Of a woman-child's body!⁵¹

Importantly, Fukaya calls attention to the hypersexualized state of her body by denoting her own body as one of a 'woman-child.' The word "woman" in this description of her body is utilized to modify the word "child," rather than stand alone as "woman."

Fukaya's narrative voice exhibits her position as an adult reflecting on her childhood self.

The poem, therefore, becomes a medium in which Fukaya not only confronts her abuser,

⁵⁰ Michiyo Fukaya, "MY RAPE," (August 15, 1980) in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 18.

⁵¹ Michiyo Fukaya, "JOHN," in *A Fire Is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 12.

but also acknowledges her younger self the right to protection by demarcating the boundaries that have been violated. The “woman-child’s body” comes to represent her father’s sexual will as the denial of her rightful claim to childhood innocence and the disavowal of her ability to be the subject of her own sexuality over the object of his. Drawing attention to the hypersexualized state of her body enables Fukaya to validate the stakes of this assault as a necessary step to redressing well-being on the body.

Incest is also indexed as diasporic trauma where the hypersexualization of the body is haunted by a history of racialization. Poems explore incest as a form of racial injustice to denounce sexual violations and to reclaim the narrative of sexual abuse. For instance, Fukaya alludes to the connection between the access of her body with larger structures of racism and hypersexualization in the poem “Vow.” Fukaya conveys incest as the racialized pain of sexual violence:

my father tried to rape me,
it’s that intimate.
racism/sexism.⁵²

Here, Fukaya may be referring to the access of her body as being representative of the histories of empire and patriarchy that render her mixed race body as *already* available to her father. Therefore, racism/sexism, or the structures of white supremacy which frame Asian women’s bodies as always consenting, is a deeply intimate component of the pain. As she emphasizes how her body is sexualized and racialized in the violation of incest, Fukaya problematizes the notion of consent and claiming victimhood under historical

⁵² Michiyo Fukaya, “VOW,” in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 8.

conditions, which disallow her from claiming innocence. It is in this crux that we can read incest as a form of diasporic trauma. Framing sexual violence as racialized in writing becomes both a reclamation of her suffering and a critique of her abuse.

Fukaya also writes about the racialized nature of her subsequent trauma from sexual violence. Again, in the poem "JOHN," Fukaya enlists the haunting figure of whiteness, or predatory racism, to express her desire to reject it. She writes,

Even now,
When I see a man
That looks like you
A red alcoholic nose.
Really bald.
I want to scream out,
And tear the male flesh.⁵³

The perpetrator who is her father takes form in his red, male flesh and his alcoholic nose. His redness is in part from his alcoholism, but is also may be a signification of his whiteness. Framing the boundaries of his physical stature as a haunting and triggering memory makes tangible sexual and racial trauma in the flesh. Centering her desire to "scream out" and to respond to sexual violence in poetic address becomes the fuel for her imaginative poem, "THE RAPIST," which envisions the dismantling of her abusers racial and sexual power through literal castration.

Using the body to visualize pain also becomes an active response to the memory of sexual trauma. Indeed, the skin can act as a biographical memory, not only physically through scars and visible disease, but also metaphorically through the re-signification of

⁵³ "JOHN," in *A Fire Is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 11.

life histories, according to Jay Prosser.⁵⁴ In this example, Fukaya incriminates her father's foolishness in mistaking her "women-child's body." Pain on the body is reckoned as the hypersexualization of her body. However, Fukaya not only attributes her father's immaturity and ignorance to his irresponsibility as an adult, but also cleverly uses his ignorance to avoid further sexual violence. While the pain may be conceived as the perverse hypersexualization of Fukaya's young body, Fukaya also stages her resistance to the violence of penetrative rape by using this painful objectification.

Fukaya also repurposes pain as a valuable counternarrative to attempted sexual assault. In the poem "JOHN," Fukaya details the memory of her father's friend's attempted sexual assault. While the poem "JOHN" is arguably addressed to her father, this stanza speaks directly to her father's friend:

You came back
 To get your mail,
 Cornered me in the kitchen
 Speaking soft words, hateful words
 To let you touch me again.
 I didn't cry out;
 I just pulled silently away
 Trying to break my right wrist
 From your fist.⁵⁵

In this account, Fukaya translates her perpetrator's violation into the physicality of actions and touch. Fukaya's response relies on transforming the physical dimensions of her body. She expresses an effort to pull away and break her own bones. This scene

⁵⁴ Jay Prosser, "Skin memories," in *Thinking Through the Skin*, ed. Jackie Stacey and Sara Ahmed (New York: Routledge, 2001), 52.

⁵⁵ "JOHN," in *A Fire Is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 12.

signals to the corporeal and physical embodiment of pain as both a placement of trauma and as a salvageable source of resistance. Naming the perpetration of being cornered and classifying his words as “hateful” grants Fukaya the capacity to retain a sense of power in a disempowering situation. Fukaya reconstructs the space and memory of trauma as painful embodiment to locate herself as an agent, rather than a victim.

Responding to Sexual Abuse: A Narrative of Revenge

Fukaya creates scenes of revenge, staging the performance of retaliation in an act of reclaiming complete self-control. The poem “THE RAPIST” pinnacles this imaginative schema wherein Fukaya responds to her rapist. In this poem, Fukaya plots and envisions the bloody castration of her abuser, the ultimate disempowering act. Castration comes to represent the power to emasculate as Fukaya imagines stripping the rapist’s access to masculinity and whiteness. Unlike the poem “JOHN,” which is directed toward the speaker/poet’s father, the identity of the rapist in “THE RAPIST” is left anonymous. Perhaps, the rapist is one of her abusers, all of them, or the representation of sexual trauma itself. Regardless, composing the scene of revenge makes practical the space for healing and transformation through use of imagination and performance.

In “THE RAPIST,” Fukaya rehearses the castration of her rapist, calculating and predicting the painful impact of her counterinsurgency. Playing out the details of her retaliation and authoring the rapist’s response flips a narrative of victimization and arguably restores a sense of control. She writes,

You will not know
The fate I decided for you

Until I start hacking
 At your balls
 With the knife.
 Your white face will go whiter
 As you try to suppress the scream⁵⁶

The assailant is pictured in a helpless state of fear and panic, where his body is in her full control. Fukaya reclaims control over his “fate,” disempowering the by castration. Her prediction is two-fold; she outlines the details of this castration and conceives her abuser's pain. In this poem, Fukaya has full oversight over how his body is conducted. Writing a revenge narrative stages both the recovery of control and the transference of pain from her body to his.

The violence of the castration can also be read metaphorically as the disempowerment of her abuser. Fear and pain are weapons waged in resistance to misogyny and white supremacy. In doing so, Fukaya denounces and responds to the racialized violence of her sexual abuse. For instance, Fukaya locates the “balls” as the visual and externalized representation of her abuser's manhood, and aims her attack accordingly. Additionally, Fukaya also imagines herself castrating his whiteness by predicting, “Your white face will go whiter.” She also writes,

And then you scream,
 Blue eyes wide with horror
 And pain...
 You will never know
 The price of raping a woman
 And your manhood may begin or die.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Michiyo Fukaya, “THE RAPIST,” in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 20-21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

The association of his blue eyes with horror is another way for Fukaya to twist the narrative of power away from his whiteness and manhood and restore justice to her violations.

Imagining the ability to prevent her abuser from raping anyone else, signified by his manhood dying, also enables Fukaya to terminate the original trauma from being perpetuated. Indeed, the castration narrative authorizes the possibility to end further sexual crimes from repeating and to address the ongoing nature of trauma. The earlier scene of abuse is not only replaced through a reversed victimization, but also closed off. Cvetkovich comments on the ongoing nature of trauma, which may be elicited in the process of “coming out” as an incest survivor or by triggering flashbacks.⁵⁸ Thinking about trauma as an ongoing condition, rather than a singular event, is particularly significant given Fukaya’s imaginative desire to castrate her abuser. Castration, therefore, represents a negotiation to end her sexual trauma from repeating.

The externalization of her trauma through this imaginative revenge also enables Fukaya to mitigate the coexistence of her pain and anger. “THE RAPIST” begins with,

A fire is burning;
It is in me.
A fire is burning;
It is in me.
A fire is burning;
It is in me.
I will pound four stakes
Into the ground,
Set so your arms and legs

⁵⁸ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 94.

Are spread wide.
 Helpless you will watch me
 Sharpen the knife
 That will castrate you.⁵⁹

The fire that is burning represents the ethical rage Fukaya experiences as a result to her assault. In contrast to pain and fear, Fukaya adopts her anger as a powerful source of strength. Reclaiming anger as a proper response to her sexual abuse empowers Fukaya to re-write her experiences of sexual assault, which place her as the victim. Through fantasizing revenge, Fukaya shifts the narrative of subordination and the boundaries of pain to reclaim anger as an ethical response to sexual and racial violence.

Sharing Sexual Victimization and Survivorhood: Building Connection

Sharing the pain of abuse with her mother through poetry also becomes a point of connection and healing. In poems directed to her mother, the speaker/poet discloses the embedded connection between her feelings of loss and pain in response to her mother's death and subsequent sexual violence at the hands of her father. In "MOTHER," Fukaya is standing at the gravesite of her mother reconstituting memories, processing feelings, and offering disclosure:

Mother I stand at your grave
 And
 Remember you
 Down thru the.
 I can't say
 The sorrow, the pain
 Of those years.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Michiyo Fukaya, "THE RAPIST," in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 20.

⁶⁰ Michiyo Fukaya, "MOTHER," in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 1.

Fukaya summons the metaphor of the “aching years” to express how pain never fully evacuates as one heals. Perhaps, “the aching years” also represent years of sexual abuse. Fukaya highlights the role of remembering as both necessary to deal with the origin of one’s pain, but also a constant reminder of the coexisting traumas of her mother’s absence and sexual abuse. Sharing the ephemeral and timeless nature of pain and sorrow is an important disclosure that reshapes the wound.

Laying bare the pain of sexual abuse with her mother also resists a record of forgetting that would only deepen the wound. Indeed, “forgetting instills another fetishization of the wound.”⁶¹ Fukaya expresses the pain of silence when she writes,

Maybe it wouldn’t
 Have festered inside
 And driven me crazy
 If I had been able
 To talk about it.⁶²

Because of the deepening impact of silence is drawing trauma inward into the body, making the violence explicit in conversation with her mother creates the opportunity to let pain go. Fukaya vocalizes to her mother,

The husband you loved
 Tried to rape me.⁶³

Writing to her mother collapses the boundary of silence between them. Further, in casting her father as the husband her mother loved, Fukaya visualizes her father’s dual betrayal. By outlining the impact of her father’s sexual violence as a shared betrayal and pain

⁶¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 103.

⁶² Michiyo Fukaya, “JOHN,” in *A Fire Is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 11.

⁶³ Michiyo Fukaya, “MOTHER,” in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 1.

between both herself and her mother, Fukaya draws connection to her mother and creates space for their mutual healing.

Moreover, Fukaya resolves the absence of her mother during the abuse to restore their connection, which has been severed by her loss. She writes,

But you didn't know
I would be raped, beaten, isolated⁶⁴

Expressing her mother's unknowingness to such abuse secures her mother's innocence. While this passage reflects Fukaya's disclosure of abuse and the substantiation of her pain, it also serves as an invitation for her mother to share her pain. This important disclosure not only addresses the pain of Fukaya's abuse by securing a safer attachment to her mother, but also visualizes incest as a problem with communal ramifications.

For example, Fukaya complicates incest as a familial issue that also had major impacts on her siblings. Fukaya updates her mother on the adversity of her three siblings:

Ron lay with Linda.
Brother/sister incest?
I never knew.
Suzy, the youngest
Was molested
By a family friend.
She married a blue-eyed man
Who forbade her
To learn Kung fu
When she got pregnant.⁶⁵

There is limited commentary on Fukaya's three siblings besides this poem. One other essay discusses the effects of internalized racism in her sibling's lives, but does not

⁶⁴ Michiyo Fukaya, "MOTHER," in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

ruminate on sexual abuse.⁶⁶ In effect, we do not know if her siblings are direct victims of incest. Instead, this update exposes the disastrous effects of sexual abuse on the entire family and complicates incest as a familial problem that resists easy definitions. The problems are profound and uneasy to categorize, symbolized by the internalized racism of her sister's choice to wed a white man. Tracing the trickling effects of incest on the family holds her father accountable for his actions on the entire family, rather framing his abuse as a private sexual matter.

In "ROOTS," Fukaya also writes a counternarrative to incest by expressing the desire to be touched and closer to her mother. She writes,

I cry sometimes
Longing for her touch.⁶⁷

In contrast to the trauma of her father's abuse, Fukaya associates her mother's touch with sanctuary and safety. Similar to pain, the desire to be loved and protected is expressed through the body. Although her mother's absence reinforces the trauma of being unprotected, her memory is also a form of comfort within this impossibility of forgetting pain. As a result, re-creating memories of her mother serves the purpose of transforming and facing the trauma of her sexual abuse.

⁶⁶ Michiyo Fukaya, "GROWING UP EURASIAN IN VERMONT," in *A Fire Is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 37.

⁶⁷ Michiyo Fukaya, "ROOTS," in *A Fire Is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 10.

Imagining and creating the image of her mother, who is absent in the conditions of her early death, fortifies a parental bond of protection that has been maimed by incest.

Fukaya expresses the fiery desire to know her mother as a source of strength:

I invented herstories
 Linked to clothes
 And dishes she left behind.
 So often I gazed at her picture
 Longing to know
 The beautiful woman
 Who was my mother.⁶⁸

Fukaya bridges the importance of memory and touch as a counternarrative to incestual sexual abuse. Whereas, pain is expressed as the violent bodily impact of sexual assault, feeling the closeness of touch in tangible memory becomes a source of integration.

Fukaya repurposes the imagination of her mother to express the desire to be touched with consent, protection and love. Expressing this imagination and desire practices the ability to be vulnerable and safe within the bounds of the body.

Fukaya mobilizes poetry to imagine sexual abuse as pain and to re-write a narrative of sexual victimization. These poems shatter the binary between victim and survivor that often become static representations in narratives of rape and sexual violence. For instance, Fukaya doesn't necessarily offer a version of herself as fully healed or evacuated from pain. Pain remains a stark and looming figure in her poetry, as much as the evidence of her will to transform it. We can read Fukaya narratives of sexual abuse and incest as counternarratives. Sometimes she pictures herself as a "victim" and

⁶⁸ Michiyo Fukaya, "ROOTS," in *A Fire Is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 10.

sees her young body as it is unjustly sexualized and racialized. Other poems depict ethical rage and the desire for (and enaction of) revenge as valid responses to abuse. Overall, these poems grant Fukaya the space to explore sensations and feelings associated with abusive events and to construct change. Rather than merely represent literal incidents, Fukaya's poetry can be read as a performative negotiation of sexual trauma. In engaging and locating the pain on her body, staging an imaginative castration, and crafting the narrative of abuse as an emotional event that embodies both love and hate, Fukaya enacts somatic and psychic transformation. Trauma becomes imprinted on the body, supplanted in emotional predisposition, and relived in memory. The poetic narrative stages trauma in memory, conversation, and imagination to both announce and efface it.

CHAPTER TWO

Refashioning Shame in The Autobiographical Record

The tragic Amerasian/Eurasian trope derives from this racial-gender dynamic, in which the result/child of such a “tragic” narrative must have a tragic identity.

-Laura Kina and Wei Ming Dariotis

It wasn't hard
To figure out that Jap was me.

-Michiyo Fukaya

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, shame is defined as “a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety.”⁶⁹ The exploration of shame in Fukaya’s writing expands this definition by animating shame as a dynamic feature and movable figure of both memory and identity development. Rather than portraying shame as a mere emotion, for instance, Fukaya narrates shame as something that is constructed, taught, enforced, embodied, and remembered. Additionally, shame is remembered as the embodiment of self-negation, personified through negative racial and classed stereotypes, and repurposed as a tool of perseverance. Fukaya combats racist and classist images of herself by recounting memories of childhood harassment and by re-writing a “herstory” of her ancestral roots. In many poems and essays, Fukaya enlists the term “herstory” to refer to a history and memory that encompasses the experiences and perspectives of underrepresented communities. I

⁶⁹ “Shame,” *Merriam-Webster*, accessed March 31, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shame>.

extend Fukaya's use of "herstory" to represent the exploration and subsequent redefinition of her own origin story and heritage. In this chapter I argue that Fukaya uses writing to reconcile her childhood experiences of shame, to re-contextualize her memories of humiliation, and to redefine a stigmatized family history.

Fukaya uses writing to alleviate her trauma by turning to and externalizing shame in the style of autobiographical memoir. I first examine passages from Fukaya's short essays and poetry to explore Fukaya's accounts of childhood harassment and bullying. In these poems and short essays, Fukaya contextualizes isolation, racism, classism, and the loss of her mother as cause and conditions for her shame. I then turn to short passages where Fukaya builds a "herstory," or a strong connection and imagined protection to her mother, to acknowledge and respond the roots of her trauma. Fukaya constructs a story of her mother's life to redefine the contours of shame, and to restore a healthy image to her mother, and in turn herself. I also read her writing as a response to the tragic Eurasian trope, the idea that the mixed heritage Asian American is branded by the tragedy of war and U.S. imperialism, to demonstrate how Fukaya redefines and reimagines a mixed race history that is both complicated and valid. By rewriting the memory of her mother within the context of Postwar Japan, Fukaya redefines shame as a byproduct of intergenerational trauma and simultaneously reclaims and shifts its hold.

Remembering Shame on the Body and in Memory

To make shame tangible, Fukaya turns to storytelling to describe and locate the negative impact of racist and classist harassment. Both poetry and prose present Fukaya

in the scenes of her childhood memory. In some essays, Fukaya recalls incidents where classmates and/or family members ridicule and stigmatize her Japanese-ness and her working class background. Other poetic scenes present Fukaya as the child and narrate the moment of harassment in the present tense. In both types of narrative and storytelling, Fukaya authors these experiences as inward-inducing, alienating, and isolating processes. Fukaya discovers and contextualizes the origin of shame by re-writing these memories in an effort to restore agency to her childhood self.

One way that Fukaya stirs the memory of shame is by picturing the failure of her body to conform to her family's expectation of whiteness. In the essay "GROWING UP EURASIAN IN VERMONT," Fukaya reflects on the racialized gaze of her white relatives when she writes,

My father's family was a hindrance in the process of growing up. They loved me in their fashion, but I was pressed to call myself White. At the same time, the relatives referred to my brother, sisters and me as the "Japanese kids;" not once did I hear my cousins whose mother was German, referred to as the "German kids. This gave me the feeling that I should be ashamed of my Japanese blood. Somehow, it was unacceptable to be what I was."⁷⁰

In this narrative, shame is packaged in the label assigned to her and her siblings -- "the Japanese kids" -- which is used to differentiate them as the outgroup. This is significant because Fukaya pictures her body as the direct sign of failure. That is, she invites the viewer to see shame on the body, and within it, as part and parcel of the experience of racialization and the stigma attached as to her "Japanese blood."

⁷⁰ Michiyo Fukaya, "GROWING UP EURASIAN IN VERMONT," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 37.

We can read Fukaya's embodied failure as the direct result of her family's racializing gaze. Validating the effect of the white gaze on her body contextualizes the origin of shame as outside of herself, even while finding its impact deep inside. Locating shame within the blood narrates the disastrous impact of self-negation. Shame "impresses itself on the skin...as an intense feeling of the subject being against itself," according to Sara Ahmed.⁷¹ While possessing tainted blood alludes to the inherent "badness" of one's body, naming shame as an effect of her racialization enables Fukaya to deconstruct it. For feeling ashamed is not by her own doing; Fukaya contextualizes the lessons learned in shame to her family's racism. As Fukaya recounts feeling ashamed of her own blood as if it is tainted, she witnesses how "shame is bound up in self-recognition" and on the level of the flesh. Fukaya remembers her shame in the form of racial embodiment that is self-negating and in effect contextualizes shame on and against the body.

While Fukaya writes about the embodiment of self-negation, she also beholds shame in physical space. The connection between racialization and self-recognition is explored in the poem "A WORD TO THE WISE..." when Fukaya recounts:

I should have listened
 To my girlfriends,
 But I didn't understand
 Why I should not
 Walk them home.
 Not until I saw the spray-painted,
 Tarred hill behind the medical center:

"Jap and Tony, Jap and Eddie,
 Jap and..." just about

⁷¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 104.

Every boy in our class.

It wasn't hard
To figure out Jap was me.

There was no one else
Japanese
In our class.⁷²

Fukaya remembers this incident of racial harassment as a public shaming wherein she is ridiculed by and in front of her classmates. The tarred hill becomes the sign of shame, where the spray-painted words constitute a part of public knowledge. In narrating the incident as her own mistake, the mistake of avoiding her girlfriends' advice, Fukaya echoes that "to be witnessed in one's failure is to be ashamed: to have one's shame witnessed is even more shaming." As Fukaya recreates this incident, she emphasizes not only the public exposure of such words, but also reveals the isolation caused by such humiliation. The fact that "There was no one else/Japanese/In our class" illuminates how this racial harassment is directed to her alone. While the racial epithet, and the knowledge of its presence, is manifested outwardly, and collectively shared by her classmates, she holds its singular burden.

Fukaya's sense of isolation and alienation is also remembered in the moments as a child that she is taught that she should be ashamed for being poor. Again, in poetry Fukaya remembers how this prescribed stigmatized status is also caused by exposure to other children who mock her. She writes,

⁷² Michiyo Fukaya, "A WORD TO THE WISE," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 15.

Lack of money
Means so many things.⁷³

...

It meant not being in style
Clothes that didn't fit quite right.
I wore a bright wool skirt
To school one day,
A boy laughed and asked me
If it came from a rag bag
What could I say?
He wasn't far from wrong.⁷⁴

Similar to other incidents of public humiliation, these shaming comments leave Fukaya with little room to respond. She cannot refuse her own identities or the fact that her clothes are tattered. The perceived truth of these comments reinforce that the stigma will run deeper and that there is little room to nudge this negative belief. If she cannot challenge the perception that she is poor, and if being poor is associated with indignity, Fukaya is left with very little control over her own narrative. She continues:

It meant
(After six years after? school)
Being invited
To Lucille's house
Only to find
That she wanted
To give me clothes.
An object of charity.
Instead of a friend.⁷⁵

⁷³ Michiyo Fukaya, "MARCIA'S POEM," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 139.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Michiyo Fukaya, "MARCIA'S POEM," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 140.

Fukaya uses this story to demonstrate how class status restricted her ability to build positive relationships with other children. Similar to other childhood memories of public shame and exposure, Fukaya frames her experiences of shame as directed from other children on the basis of racial and classed characterizations of stigma. At an early age, relationships in her life are skewed based on the perception of her as a racial oddity and “An object of charity.” These passages reflect Fukaya’s understanding of her shame as being a product of her racist and classist environment.

Fukaya also counters shame in memory by naming her self-ascribed pride as a form of resistance. This is developed in her response to racial harassment; “I spent four years, from sixth grade to ninth grade, in almost total isolation, taunted as ‘Jap.’ Pride and silence were the main weapons I had.”⁷⁶ Pride and silence are the tools that she uses to refute and resist her stigmatization. Despite the racist treatment of her white family members and classmates towards her, Fukaya declares that she felt proud of being Asian as a child:

I was called “White” by Black kids and “Jap” by White kids. While I always thought of myself as Asian American or more specifically, Japanese American, I was proud of my mother and my Japanese heritage: the exact opposite of what society told me I should do. I should try to be White; I should make fun of my own people.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Michiyo Fukaya, “GROWING UP EURASIAN IN VERMONT,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 37.

⁷⁷ Michiyo Fukaya, “ISOLATION,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 152.

While driven to isolation and “taunted as ‘Jap,’” Fukaya is also faced with the contradictory pressures from various communities that pinned her racial and ethnic identity in contradiction to her strong self-prescribed Asian American and Japanese American identity. Although she felt a strong sense of pride, she had no one to positively support her Asian identity. Instead, Fukaya writes of the world that mocked her by racializing and othering her Asian-ness, while sometimes calling it into question.

Indeed, Fukaya traces the roots of her internalized shame to the constraints of her childhood environment. Shame is taught and enforced despite attempts to challenge it.

Depicting this environment as neglectful to her needs Fukaya writes,

Sometimes I yelled names back; many times I fought to defend myself from physical attacks. I tried talking to my teachers, my father, my step-mother, and my guidance counselors. With the exception of one guidance counselor who was overruled by the principal, everyone evaded the issue. They implied it was my fault for not learning to ignore them.⁷⁸

In characterizing the silence and evasion of adults in her life who failed to protect her against these racist violations, Fukaya is able to make sense of her response to shame. She emphasizes how her own self-defense is thwarted from many directions. However, despite framing her lack of protection as an inhibitor to her sense of self-worth, she is still unable to control the movement of shame; “badness gets directed inward to the self” as her verbal and physical acts of self-defense are met with silence and neglect.⁷⁹ Not having to overcome shame can also be read as Fukaya’s attempt to validate its powerful impact.

⁷⁸ Carol Camper, *Miscegenation blues: Voices of Mixed-Race Women* (Toronto: Sister Vision Press: 1994), 37.

⁷⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 104.

For example, after many attempts to protect herself as a child against incessant harassment, Fukaya verbalizes how she could not shift the domains of shame and instead embodied the brunt of shame's impact. She writes, "Finally, I became sullen, withdrawn and ready to explode into fits of rage or self-pity. Such scenes were rare since I learned a relentless self-discipline to protect my vulnerability."⁸⁰ Here, Fukaya expresses that her only option to address her feelings of disempowerment are in the shape of "rage or self-pity," reflecting how "In shame, the subject may have nowhere else to turn."⁸¹ The internalization of shame becomes profoundly embodied as her friends and the adult figures are complicit in her harassment, intensified as people perceive her racial identity incongruently, and enhanced as people fail to acknowledge the role of her own voice to naming her experiences.

Yet, placing incidents in memory reveals that shame can be both powerfully embodied and also capable of shifting. Fukaya also uses memory to reshape shame's reach,

I am stronger now
But the memory
Still flashes on me.

Suddenly, I am
That bewildered girl
Who protested
Through proper channels

"Jap, dirty fucking Jap,

⁸⁰ Michiyo Fukaya, "GROWING UP EURASIAN IN VERMONT," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 37.

⁸¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 104.

You bombed Pearl Harbor.”

Guilty by reason of race.⁸²

In memory, Fukaya attends to her childhood self to address her wounds. The memory that still flashes like a bomb can be read as traumatic flashbacks. While trauma lives in the body through violent resurrections of memory, Fukaya also reacts to the haunting. She becomes again the girl who is “bewildered,” hurt, and maimed by racialization. However, in embracing her childhood self, she also metamorphosizes shame by justifying her own protests to abuse.

Additionally, Fukaya integrates these memories as a way of mitigating the memory of racial and classist abuse. She invites us to read poems that recant shame-producing scenes of her childhood as ones that are burrow deep in the memory and body, but are also capable of transforming. For example, in “BARRIER TO THE SELF,” Fukaya frames the scars of trauma as necessary to acknowledge, while also prioritizing the opportunity for transformation in the present.

There are childhood moments
 (My life had many.)
 Where someone is cruel, neglectful
 Of our needs.
 Such things are part of us
 And leave their scars.
 But I know such complaints
 Can be crutches/
 Barriers to the self
 If I allow past complaints

⁸² Michiyo Fukaya, “UNTITLED,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 20.

To become present excuse.⁸³

Fukaya's poems and reflective prose can therefore be interpreted as an active negotiation and effort to transform shame through memory and the body. Encountering memories through writing enables Fukaya to reclaim her mixed race Japanese and working class identity and own the self-negation of shame, while also discovering it, re-writing it, and denouncing it.

Reclaiming Shame in The Memorial of War

Fukaya self-identifies as "Eurasian" and "half breed" in several poems, essays and speeches as a proclamation of her mixed race status and as a reclamation of its shameful connotation. The negative association of her mixed race origin may be explained by the tragic Eurasian trope, also phrased as the "war baby," a circulating stereotype about mixed race Asian American identity that exists in the dominant U.S. imagination.⁸⁴ Laura Kina and Wei Ming Dariotis define this stereotype when they write, "Amerasians are the most recent 'war babies,' who continue to be seen and represented as children of war, at war with themselves, forever infantilized by their public image as the children of U.S.

⁸³ Michiyo Fukaya, "BARRIER TO THE SELF," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 16.

⁸⁴ The "war baby" trope was born out of U.S. sponsored wars, and remains to be perpetuated by the presence of U.S. military bases, in East Asia and the Pacific and wars in West Asia. The trope is symbolized by policies such as the Vietnamese Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1988 and the definition of "Amerasian" adopted by Public Law 97-359, both of which grants immigrant rights to children of U.S. citizens born in Vietnam, whereas the latter extends rights to children born in Korea, Laos, Kampuchea, or Thailand after December 31, 1950 and before October 22, 1982. Significantly, these policies bar Filipino, Japanese, Okinawan, Guamanian/Chamorro, and Samoan Amerasians from citizenship rights. See Laura Kina, and Wei Ming Dariotis, *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2013), 12.

soldiers and hypersexualized Asian and Pacific Islander women...‘War babies’ symbolize the subjugation of Asian people to U.S. and European power...”⁸⁵ The “war baby,” thus, does not only represent the tragic vagabond, but more specifically the diasporic mixed heritage Asian child who is left behind by their presumably white U.S. soldier father in a social landscape in which they do not fully belong.⁸⁶ In the U.S. dominant imagination, the idea of the “war baby” justifies racist ideas about Asian and Pacific Islander women to serve a mandate of U.S. imperialism.

Fukaya negotiates the context of her mother’s shame by constructing the memory of her mother in post-war Japan as a precondition for her own life. The most brutal and symbolic representation of her mother’s vulnerability is her mysterious and premature death to cancer, which Fukaya speculates is a direct result to Atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Fukaya considers that, “My mother may have been a victim of the atomic bomb; she was sixteen when the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. More likely, I think, her cancer was induced by the stress of World War II.”⁸⁷

She continues:

My mother had suffered much and lost a fairly secure way of life to American bombings. I believe she was looking for a more secure lifestyle than she had after leaving her family

⁸⁵ Laura Kina, and Wei Ming Dariotis, *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2013), 12.

⁸⁶ Although interracial unions occurred between Asian women and U.S. soldiers from various ethnic and racial backgrounds, the stereotype was born out of film and media narratives which more often depict white and Asian pairings. See Laura Kina, and Wei Ming Dariotis, *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2013), 12.

⁸⁷ Michiyo Fukaya, “MY MOTHER/DAUGHTER NEXUS,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 7.

at eighteen or nineteen. Up to World War II, my mother's life was a traditional life; with the bombing and loss of her father's home furnishings factory, my mother must have felt keenly the humiliation of working in a factory, which according to her marriage papers is what she did.⁸⁸

Fukaya cannot ignore the impact of the U.S. bombings during World War II, which decimated her grandfather's business and left her mother with a completely new world to navigate. The impact of war and imperialism to her mother's life is further reflected in Fukaya's understanding of her mother's choices to marry her father - a white American soldier - in the context of postwar Japan.

Fukaya's "herstory," or the construction of her mother's memory in writing, problematizes the "war baby" trope. Rather than writing about her mother's choice in partnership as revolutionary or through the frame of tragedy, Fukaya reflects on the insecurity of war in shaping her mother's experiences. Moreover, Fukaya writes a counternarrative to the tragic "war baby" prototype by framing her mother's interracial marriage as an act of survival and sacrifice. She writes,

My mother, for her part, was left little choice but to marry my father. Her culture, her way of life was destroyed by war and she turned to a foreigner, one of the conquerors, for security. She was saddled with two half-breed children—illegitimate by American legal standards. Marriage to a Japanese man would have been almost impossible. According to Japanese law, we children were Americans and it is/was difficult to become a naturalized citizen of Japan. My mother had three options: marry my father for security for herself and us, abandon him, and us or try to make a life for the three of us by herself. Also, some Japanese thought my mother below them for betraying Japan and Japanese pride by being with my father. She chose to marry my father.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Michiyo Fukaya, "MY MOTHER/DAUGHTER NEXUS," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

Fukaya does not elide the role of shame in the narrative of her mother. To the contrary, she points to the conditions of war for creating insecurity and humiliation in her mother's life. Shame also haunts the memory of herself as a half-breed child "illegitimate by American legal standards." She invokes shame by both depicting her mother's choice embrace her as an "illegitimate" child and make sacrificial decisions to secure protection for both of them in spite of external stigma.

Highlighting the destruction of culture and life as a byproduct of war decries U.S. imperialism and centers the agency of her mother. Accounts of her parent's union center her mother's experiences and viewpoint, rather than reflect on her father's position at all. Representing her father as a sign of security for her mother importantly shifts the narrative away from the dominant "war baby" genre, and towards a critique of imperialism. In one short essay, Fukaya enlists academic literature to create a complex image of her mother in Postwar Japan in the years following World War II:

In an article entitled "Casework with Japanese and Korean Wives of Americans" in *Social Casework*: May 1972, Bok-Lim C. Kim describes fairly accurately what my mother may have gone through...My mother adopted "...the American way of life as represented by occupational troops and Hollywood movies...as an expression of dissatisfaction with and revolt against the older generation who had caused destruction and suffering, and in the case of Japan, the humiliation of defeat"... Then came my father and, according to *Casework* "...Handicapped by a language barrier, by an ignorance of American culture and by limited social experiences, these women failed to view the men in realistic terms; they considered them (the men) masculine and potential security-giving mates."⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Michiyo Fukaya, "MY MOTHER/DAUGHTER NEXUS," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 5.

Fukaya applies an analysis that considers war, gender, and American culture to situate her mother's vision of her father as unrealistic and a source of security, while also considering her mother's motives to "revolt" out of "dissatisfaction." Fukaya denaturalizes her parent's interracial love narrative and insists that her mother's choices are both shaped by socio-political factors and as resistance to the world that was falling apart around her. Using an analysis of racism and imperialism to comprehend her mother's disempowering position allows Fukaya to see how these social forces have also shaped her own life. This narrative ultimately revises her mother's stigmatized "herstory," and in turn, her own.

For example, Fukaya draws connections between the conditions of her mother's choices made in self-preservation and her own ability to survive racial harassment. Specifically she reflects the role of constructing her mother's memory to combat harassment as a mixed race child:

Once, I wrote to a friend and in the process of writing I discovered my ambivalent feelings about being Eurasian in Vermont...With hardly any transition at all, I found myself writing about my mother. How lovely--yet alien—Vermont must have seemed to her. As a traditional war bride, she expected to be more of a servant to her in-laws than to her husband...I do not know how this image of my mother as a lonely frightened alien stayed with me since she died when I was four. However, I have questioned my relatives and confirmed that picture I held as a child which is almost too dim to be called a memory. Yet that portrait helped protect me as a Eurasian-or more accurately- a half breed growing up in a White world. I could try to be White (knowing I would never be fully accepted); I could try to be invisible or I could be Third World."⁹¹

⁹¹ Michiyo Fukaya, "GROWING UP EURASIAN IN VERMONT," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 36.

While writing about her mother's experiences, Fukaya constructs meaning to her mixed race upbringing in the absence of her mother. She evokes her mother's memory to efface this absence and to also affirm her Japanese identity. Because the loss of memory inflicts a scar that endures through its effacement of the past, Fukaya self-authors a "herstory" of her mother to face, rather than deny, shame's reach. The image of her mother as a "lonely frightened alien" in Vermont serves as a symbol of strength, because she can identify with her mother's isolation of living in a "White world." To see her mother survive as an Asian immigrant in a white family and a white supremacist world offers Fukaya solace to her own struggles. Although these struggles are different, the memory of her mother protects her as a woman of color to proudly claim a Third World identity and to make the choice to resist invisibility.⁹² Using the characterizations of "alien," "warbride" and "halfbreed," are therefore reclamations of stigmatized statuses in the service of survival.

Fukaya heals intergenerational trauma by reconstructing shame in the narrative of her mother's isolation as an immigrant. Fukaya describes her mother's ability to navigate a new world plagued with the loneliness of separation from culture and community:

My mother was a wife who was separated from her culture and friends, who experienced an acute sense of loss which was further enhanced by the different linguistic, physical and behavior responses of her new environment. My father was not there for my mother more in the USA than he had been in Japan. Seemingly simple tasks such as shopping, use of public transportation, telephoning, banking, and visiting with neighbors become

⁹² Third World was a term coined in the radical social movements of the late 1960s, and adopted by organizations such as the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), to emphasize solidarity among people of color struggling against colonization and imperialism and to identify "parallel colonial and racial experiences of minorities throughout US history." See "Asian American Movement 1968," Third World Student Strikes at SFSU & UCB 1968-1969, last modified January 17, 2008, accessed June 15, 2016, <http://aam1968.blogspot.com/2008/01/third-world-student-strikes-at-sfsu-ucb.html>.

major undertakings. My mother was a resourceful woman and I'm sure her knowledge of English-limited though it was-helped her some. She was, at times, overwhelmed by loneliness and fear but her adjustment to American life would have been successful if she had not died of cancer.⁹³

In this account of her mother, Fukaya writes a counternarrative to her mother's stigmatized status by portraying her mother's tenacity even as she was stripped from a sense of home and belonging. The depiction of her mother's perseverance under isolation and lack of support represents how her mother's memory serves as protection to her own stigmatization. Underscoring her mother's resourcefulness under difficult odds mends her own loneliness of growing up mixed race and offers a model of embracing ambiguity.

Building a "herstory" of her mother's perseverance helps Fukaya to embrace ambiguity as a response to the shame of her "halfbreed" status. For instance, Fukaya expresses the isolating features of her childhood when she writes,

I was born to a Japanese woman and a White man which meant that I was neither White, Black, Brown or Yellow. I was simply myself and I didn't fit any boxes, which in some ways made me freer than most other kids I knew, but it also made me lonelier.⁹⁴

Similar to the treatment of her mother's "herstory," Fukaya finds belonging in ambiguity and contradiction inherent to the position of not fitting in. For example, in this and other passages Fukaya discloses the shame of not belonging to monoracial boxes, not feeling authentic enough, and embodying the failure to be white. While acknowledging the lonely status of such positions, she also claims its freedom. Fukaya redefines her mixed race status in her multidimensional claim to her Japanese identity, "halfbreed" status, and

⁹³ Michiyo Fukaya, "MY MOTHER/DAUGHTER NEXUS," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 7.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

to the isolation of her youth. Shattering the notion of the mixed race body as a bifurcation of two essentialized races, Fukaya emerges from the narrative of failure more whole.

More specifically, her mother's memory helps Fukaya resist the stigmatized tropes of her own mixed race status and assert a proud holistic sense of being. In attesting to her self-identified claims to "half breed" as well as "Eurasian," Fukaya displays her awareness that the tropes of mixed blood and tragedy surround her. The trope of the "war baby," is negotiated in Fukaya's writing when reconstructing the "herstory" of her mother's stigmatized status as a Japanese "war bride." Instead of shying away from the tragic war narrative, Fukaya actively negotiates the larger histories of war, migration, and colonization to find placement for both her mother and herself. To repair and recuperate from her experiences of shame that are constitutive to her fractured identity, Fukaya arguably builds a "herstory" to locate herself as an active agent, restore belonging, and transform her origin story from one of shame into a foundation of pride. This "herstory" is connected to locating and finding protection in her mother's memory as a practice and act of resisting internalized shame. Resisting a history of silence and absence through writing, therefore, becomes a pertinent action to repurpose this intergenerational trauma.

Fukaya remediates the shame of her past by recalling incidents of racial and classist discrimination to locate and process the lessons of shame. Sara Ahmed defines shame as the process of the body turning against itself.⁹⁵ Shame can also be described as the embodiment of self-negation, an affect that is first catalyzed by stigmatization from

⁹⁵ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 103.

the outside world, but which becomes deeply internalized and believable. Fukaya denaturalizes traumatic events in her childhood where she is ridiculed and harassed for her racial identity and class status by contextualizing the racist and classist conditions that caused her to be ashamed. Fukaya also builds a “herstory” that resurrects and reconciles the mangled memory of her Japanese mother in the context of premature death and the backdrop of war. Fukaya replays childhood incidents of harassment as shame-producing in poetry, and revises the shameful conditions of her parents interracial union in prose, to affirm and validate her psychic and bodily injuries. Both narratives enable the space to discredit racist and classist depictions of both Fukaya and her mother in the realm of memory. Through contextualization and fictive imagination, Fukaya locates, unsettles, and remodels shame’s traumatic impact.

CHAPTER THREE

Restoring Connection and Self-Love Through The Lesbian Narrative

The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge. For the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic--the sensual--those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings.

-Audre Lorde

Movement, sound, touch:
O love me
Burning, I'm burning for you
Woman.

-Michiyo Fukaya

Rarely highlighted in either mainstream or activist culture is the role of the erotic, love, and relationships to propel healing and change. Fukaya's biography reads in a similar fashion. Even accounts which emphasize the significant role of Fukaya's gay and lesbian activism fail to honor the sentimental, the sexual, and the intimate labor, which was a large part of both her literary and social justice work. Although Fukaya's activism is well documented in references to her speeches and organizing efforts around gay and lesbian issues, little attention has been paid to the erotic life and vision of love that she wrote about.⁹⁶ This chapter turns to the theme of love and intimacy in Fukaya's poetry. In poems, Fukaya writes about her lesbian sexuality as a form of self-love, rather than an

⁹⁶ Daniel C. Tsang, "Slicing Silence: Asian Progressives Come Out," in *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*, edited by Steven G. Louie and Glenn K. Omastu, (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press), 221.

identity category. Additionally, Fukaya extensively frames her love for women as erotic power, kinship, reciprocal connectedness, freedom, and transformation. I argue that in writing about her lesbian sexuality as altruistic self-love, Fukaya reshapes to the trauma of homophobia and sexual violence. We can witness Fukaya's use of erotic language as the practice of creating and envisioning freedom and healing, because recovering access to love, vulnerability, connection and self-worth are also acts of liberation.

First, I closely read Fukaya's poetry about her lesbian sexuality as a form of self-love that enables the confrontation of sexual traumas, including incest, homophobia, and colonization. Secondly, I examine various poems where Fukaya emphasizes the power of the erotic to redefine kinship through mutually supportive lesbian desire and resistance to heteropatriarchal modes of domination. I then survey Fukaya's poetry about love between herself and other women of color as cultivating freedom. By narrating her lesbian sexuality as both altruistic and self-loving, I argue that Fukaya reclaims dignity, builds connections, and envisions political freedom.

Confronting Sexual Violence and Sexual Trauma

We can read Fukaya's poetry as revising a history of homophobia and sexual violence by situating her poems about her desire and love within the larger body of her writing. This work includes essays, speeches and letters sent to editors of local news journals where Fukaya documents the obstacles of homophobia in Vermont. Fukaya addresses issues and material conditions that impact the gay and lesbian community, including exclusionary politics in race based organizing, circulating stereotypes in the

media, silencing, housing and job security and citizenship rights.⁹⁷ Additionally, these speeches, letters and interviews adamantly proclaim her lesbian identity and the right to love women as resistance to a culture of sexual stigma and homophobic silencing. For example, in a speech given at a gay and lesbian pride rally, Fukaya states,

...I claim the right to be proud of myself and the way I choose to live my life, including my right to love my body and the bodies of other women. And that is a reason to celebrate; this is, in fact, what I choose to celebrate by being here, the right to say "yes" to myself and my love for other women.⁹⁸

The "pride" of loving her own and other women's bodies is a reclamation of her sexuality and rejection of the sexual values of dominant culture. Reading Fukaya's poetry in the context of her speeches illuminates that reclaiming pride and mobilizing the erotic are tools of resistance against homophobia and heteronormativity. Like these speeches, Fukaya's poetry also demonstrates the pronouncement of lesbian sexuality as a mode of loving rather than solely an identity category.

Even though Fukaya claims a lesbian identity, her narration of "lesbian" underscores the feelings and practices of loving, self-love, longing, erotic desire, and building connection. More than an identity with specific political boundaries, "lesbian" in the narrative is evoked as praxis.⁹⁹ For Fukaya, the embrace of lesbian erotic desire is

⁹⁷ "Michiyo Fukaya, "RADIO EDITORIAL: Aired on Vermont Public Radio, June, 19, 1985," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 94-94.

⁹⁸ Michiyo Fukaya, "SAYING YES TO OURSELVES: Speech given at Gay Pride Rally, June 16, 1984," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 100.

⁹⁹ Many queer theorists critique identity politics and the notion of the "gay and lesbian community" as one cohesive group by underscoring differences across race and power. Rejecting the generalization of the identity category "gay," these theorists adopt the term "queer" to express

an undertaking of self-love and self-affirmation. Fukaya performs this task in the poem

“SOFTNESS,” when she recites:

An orchid, a vulva
In shades of blue,
Orange, purple, black.

A lingering, feminine softness
With the wisdom
Of the orgasm
I long for.¹⁰⁰

Fukaya uses the imagery of colors and softness to depict vulnerability and longing. Her deepest desires are expressed in erotic imagery, such as the vulva, which is compared to a colorful and vibrant flower. Additionally, juxtaposing “the orgasm/I long for” with a “lingering, feminine softness,” symbolizes the erotic connection between intimacy and love. The orgasm may also represent the ultimate act of reclaiming selfhood and desire. Namely, there is ambiguity in the poem to whether this intimate longing is attached to the self or other women. Leaving the sexual object choice loosely ambiguous blurs the lines between desire for other women and the desire to actualize her internal desire. Fukaya’s poetic lesbian narrative lends itself to healing through the erotic. The erotic is not confined to sexual pleasure, but symbolizes reclamation of the self.

non-normative practices or the measure of distance from normative modes of power. See Michael, “Introduction,” in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), vii-xxxii.; Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?,” *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (Spring, 1997): 437-465.

¹⁰⁰ Michiyo Fukaya, “SOFTNESS,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 101.

Embracing “lesbian,” as a claim to the erotic also becomes a resistance to the sexual traumas of familial incest and racialized trauma. In “MOTHER,” Fukaya uses embodiment and desire to portray incest and heteropatriarchal colonial violence as forms of individual and collective sexual traumas. Fukaya first lists the racialized repercussions of incest on her and her siblings, which include her sister, “...married to a blue-eyed man/Who forbade her/To learn Kung Fu.”¹⁰¹ In this poem, Fukaya describes incest as a racist form of submission and violence that has long-lasting and collective consequences on her family. The following line reads,

Mother, is it any wonder
I reject men, love women
And ache thru the mourning years
For you.¹⁰²

The “ache” represents the erotic power of centering lesbian desire as a confrontation to sexual trauma. Because the stanza is addressed to her mother, who she characterizes as a “war bride” in other essays, we can also witness Fukaya narrate her sexuality as a redress to U.S. imperialism and colonialism.¹⁰³ In this sense, perhaps the context of male-inflicted sexual violence, or incest, involves her sister’s husband, her father and U.S. empire. Cherokee scholar and poet Qwo-Li Driskill argues that for indigenous communities, “healing our sexualities” is part of the project of “ongoing processes of decolonization.”¹⁰⁴ Driskill states, “...my own resistance to colonization as a Cherokee

¹⁰¹ Michiyo Fukaya, “MOTHER,” in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 1.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ See chapter 2 for analysis of the use of “war bride” in Fukaya’s poetry.

¹⁰⁴ Qwo-Li Driskill, “Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic,” *SAIL* 16, no. 2 (2004), 51-52.

Two-Spirit individual is intimately connected to my continuing efforts to heal from sexual assault and the manifestation of oppressive overculture on my erotic life.”¹⁰⁵ This poem similarly conveys the embeddedness of sexual assault and homophobia within a history of colonization. If colonization is a process of “stealing the body,” as much as it is also land theft, decolonization entails the acknowledgement of sexual assault as “an explicit act of colonization that has enormous impacts on both person and national identities...and can be understood as a colonial form of violence and oppression.”¹⁰⁶ We may read the speaker/poet’s “love for women,” “ache,” and “mourning years,” as desires, wounds, and longings that index both a history of and resistance to diasporic dispossession, separation and removal brought about by U.S. imperialism. In this sense, validating love for women can be read as retaliation against sexual heteropatriarchal forms of violence and a redress to the effects of this violence on herself, her mother and her sister.

Embracing a dynamic and fluid version of her sexuality also reshapes the narrative of incest as a sexual stigma. The connection between sexual trauma and lesbianism is generally underdiscussed and understudied in queer literature, according to Ann Cvetkovich. That is, due to the stigma attached to lesbian sexualities, which are already branded as perverse in the dominant heteronormative culture, embracing a causal link between incest and lesbianism is mainly understood as an exacerbation of this

¹⁰⁵ Qwo-Li Driskill, “Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic,” *SAIL* 16, no. 2 (2004), 51.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

stigma.¹⁰⁷ Cvetkovich draws connections between sexual abuse and queer sexuality in her consideration of desire as a source of healing:

As someone who would go so far as to claim lesbianism as one of the *welcome* effects of sexual abuse, I am happy to contemplate the therapeutic process by which sexual abuse turns girls queer. I introduce the word *queer* to suggest the unpredictable connections between sexual abuse and its effects, to name a connection while refusing determination or causality. Queerness militates against the neatness of a heterosexual/homosexual binarism that might, for instance, indicate that a change of object choice could heal the trauma of sexual abuse.¹⁰⁸

Cvetkovich suggests that claiming lesbianism as an incest survivor may be a valid confrontation to the trauma of incest and living with its stigmatized status. Perhaps Fukaya explores the “unpredictable connections between sexual abuse and its effects” in poetry to holistically integrate her sexual experiences. These “unpredictable connections” are reflected in Fukaya’s words, which unsettle the connections between stigma, incest and lesbian desire. While, the “ache” may represent lesbian desire, it also stands in for the longing for her mother who is absent in death. The “mourning years,” also indicates the years of sexual abuse, which may or may not have been avowed in the absence of her mother. Resisting causality, Fukaya uses the expression of lesbian desire to reclaim the feelings of loss and sexual violation as a valid negotiation and confrontation with her trauma of incest.

Reading the text through this queer framework rejects the assumption that lesbian practices are solely a byproduct of trauma. At the same time a queer framework opens possibility for envisioning desire as a therapeutic response to trauma. Fukaya’s refusal to

¹⁰⁷ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 90.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

separate her sexual traumas in her address to her mother both reveals her effort to integrate her varied identities and experiences, and also challenges the reader to consider sexuality as intersectional to all aspects of our life. Loving women is therefore not merely a reaction to sexual trauma, or to men, as much as it is an approach to healing. Reading lesbian desire as a rejection of men is also a heteronormative narrative and a homophobic trauma for which Fukaya must negotiate. For example, in the poem “FOR MEN WHO WANT TO KNOW,” Fukaya refuses to follow heteronormative proscriptions as a standard for living and healing:

Hating men is not the point
 Loving women is
 The full circle
 Of my life.¹⁰⁹

Fukaya rejects the heterosexual/homosexual binary when she states, “Hating men is not the point.” Rather, loving women is not bound to identity categories, but to an ongoing “full circle” and practice of love. Additionally, Fukaya distinguishes between her choice of centering women and rejecting men. Fukaya counters the heteronormative reduction of lesbian desire as rejection of men or as a response to male-inflicted sexual violence. Instead, the circle of love and healing doesn’t need a male focal point; she centers love for women an erotic mode of survival. Constructing love for women as a source of healing in the poem challenges the violent narrative of proscribed heteronormativity for a more self-fulfilling image of connection.

¹⁰⁹ Michiyo Fukaya, “FOR MEN WHO WANT TO KNOW,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 83.

Fukaya also mediates on her own desire for women as a reflection of self-love to process her trauma as a form of healing. In contrast to speaking about her sexuality through the frame of identity politics, she narrates her sexuality as a source of power, connection, and a vehicle of self-love. In the poem "MOTHER," Fukaya discloses this interpretation of her erotic life to her mother:

A teenage girl asked me
 Why I became a lesbian;
 I said I fell in love
 With a woman
 And that woman
 Is myself, mother, mostly myself.¹¹⁰

In this poem, Fukaya confronts the logic of the reader who might assume that being lesbian equates to desire for another woman. Instead, she frames her sexuality as a self-serving form of love. We can therefore read the poet/speaker in this poem reimagining the self through a new reflection. Rather than ruminating on the gaze of white supremacy or heteronormativity, mirroring self-love through her own gaze becomes an act of unsettling embodied stigma. Fukaya claims her value and worth past white supremacist, sexist and homophobic meanings mapped onto her body. Therefore, claiming lesbian desire an act of self-reclamation constructs a buffer to sexual and racial traumas.

Offering the explanation of lesbianism as self-love also authorizes Fukaya to confront her mother in the face of her father's sexual, racial, and homophobic abuse. This is particularly evident when Fukaya asks her mother how she will respond her disclosure of her lesbian identity. She inquires,

¹¹⁰ Michiyo Fukaya, "MOTHER," in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 2.

And mother is it true
 You would have beaten me
 If I told you as I told Dad
 That I am, in deed,
 In word, in love
 A lesbian?¹¹¹

In a sense, by posing the disclosure of her sexuality as a question, Fukaya anticipates her mother's rejection. Fukaya frames her sexuality through a purview of "love," simultaneously challenging her father's abuse and her mother's potential response. This love is a form of self-love, enacted and practiced "in deed" and "In word" through the poem. Fukaya responds to the questioning, shaming and violence brought against her sexual identity by representing her desire as a loving relationship with her self. Her liberation is self-fulfilling and comes in part by her separation from heteronormative kinship ties. Instead, Fukaya uses poetry to envision and reimagine kinship ties born out of her desire to resist colonial trauma and reclaim love.

Imagining Erotic Desire as Kinship and Self-love

Rather than reduce love and desire to sexual experience, Fukaya broadens the expression of her sexuality to a powerful source of self-reclamation and transformation. Audre Lorde defines the erotic as "a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings."¹¹² Lorde claims that the erotic can be harnessed to express our truest nonrational feelings and to unlock a powerful source of self-respect

¹¹¹Michiyo Fukaya, "MOTHER," in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 2.

¹¹² Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *The lesbian and gay studies reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M., Halperin (New York: Routledge Inc., 1993), 340.

and information, which can be used to guide our destinies.¹¹³ Therefore, the erotic is not confined to sexual actions, but is rather defined by the satisfaction and the fullness we feel in the act of addressing “the psychic and emotional components of” our needs.¹¹⁴ Redressing the erotic, therefore, reclaims one’s innermost needs in the service of healing. Poems that explore her lesbian sexuality, either in describing intimate encounters with other women or expressing lesbian desire, utilize the erotic to represent Fukaya’s sexuality as a vulnerable longing and deep connection to the self.

While Fukaya writes of her sexuality as a form of connection, she also restores a nourishing connection to intimacy by framing her intense same-sex desires for other women as self-serving. These poems reflect how intimacy is not only a unidirectional practice, but also a dynamic process of loving herself. She writes,

When we made love,
 I tested myself
 For hatred
 Of self as Third World woman,
 Of you as Third World woman
 And it wasn’t there.
 We loved each other
 As Lesbians do
 With warmth and gentleness,
 Companions to each other’s solitude.¹¹⁵

Fukaya finds comfort in this lover and also the opportunity to challenge any potential self-hatred. Evaluating her own “hatred,” or internalized racism, is two-fold process,

¹¹³ Audre Lorde, “The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” in *The lesbian and gay studies reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M., Halperin (New York: Routledge Inc., 1993), 340.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Michiyo Fukaya, “NO WILDFIRE,” in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 16.

mirrored in the assessment of her companion, which becomes a reflection of herself. This dialectical relationship represents how love for another Third World woman is as much self-reflective as it is altruistic. The hatred “wasn’t there,” and instead its opposite – love – prevailed. Thus, making love with another woman, or loving with “warmth and gentleness” opens the possibility of nourishing self-worth, fostering political coalitions across difference, and reconciling racial trauma.

This poem also explores the role of love for another mixed woman of color as fostering connection within an isolated state of being. In offering love “As Lesbians do,” they become “Companions to each other’s solitude,” signaling that isolation doesn’t end, but can be mended by company with another who has shared experiences. She writes,

Making love with you
 Didn’t send me off
 To write burst of lyric passion,
 But it did teach me
 That I am not alone
 With the contradictions of a “halfbreed,”
 Not the only one
 With siblings who want to be white¹¹⁶

Indeed “Making love” is an act that forecloses on feelings of remoteness for her as a mixed race woman of color, rather than being solely a sexual experience. Fukaya identifies the stigma of her mixed race heritage with the epithet “halfbreed.” The corresponding paradoxes, or “contradictions” of “halfbreed” denote the psychic conflicts and isolating features of her experiences as a mixed race person. Loving another mixed race woman of color lessens the stigma of her “halfbreed” status, because she is able to

¹¹⁶ Michiyo Fukaya, “NO WILDFIRE,” in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981), 16.

see her own experiences echoed by her lover who she, in turn, embraces with vulnerability. Rather than accepting the belief of her mixed race self as inferior, implied by her description of her “siblings who want to be white,” Fukaya draws connection and openness to another woman who does not reflect this internalized self-hatred. While their shared experiences include being mixed race and Third World, they also share their rejection of white supremacy. “Making love” is hence an act of resistance to white supremacy and a powerful claim to pride.

Fukaya also addresses historical traumas by locating her connection to a strong feminine force. For example, in her self-published chapbook *Lesbian Lyrics*, Fukaya redefines the concept of lineage as self-love and as an introduction to herself:

Legend has it that the Sun Goddess dipped her spear into the ocean and that where She touched, land appeared: Nihon, or as it came to be known, Japan: Land of the Rising Sun. The dialectic of Japanese and American history produced me: a Lesbian Poet, victim and survivor of America’s most vicious sickness which is racism.¹¹⁷

When Fukaya identifies as a “Lesbian Poet and survivor of America’s most vicious sickness which is racism,” she reimagines racism as a site of national trauma.

Additionally, as she introduces her poetry, she foreshadows how the record of love and desire cannot be shielded from its scars, instead vouching for redefining love within the survival of aching pain and racism. This introduction to her poetry “chapbook” can be read as a biomythography, where the creation of myth remedies her painful claim to ancestry, one that is compromised by a loss of memory in the context of post-WWII U.S. occupation of Japan. “The dialectic of Japanese and American history” which produces

¹¹⁷ Michiyo Fukaya, “LESBIAN LYRICS,” in *Lesbian Lyrics* (Burlington, VT: 1981).

her not only indicates her effort to restore integrity to her fractured mixed Asian origin, but also decenters a patriarchal interpretation of her birth. Rather than being polarized by two lands, represented by “Nihon” and its Westernized capitulated title of “Japan: Land of the Rising Sun,” Fukaya understands these lands as dialectically produced by her ancestor, the “Sun Goddess.” Fukaya embraces every one of her fractured identities by deriving herself from one origin, that of an empowering and feminine source. She also uses this story to reclaim a positive association with the land of her birth, one that is sacred. A coming home, or finding herself in the narration of her own origin story, is not only based in ethnic claims, but also supported by the power of the erotic and her sexuality.¹¹⁸

Fukaya also embraces and affirms her racial identity to counteract a history of patriarchal and racist violence and underscore kinship connections to her mother and daughter. This kinship is imagined in the realm of desire, rather than within the abusive heteronormativity, which classified her own family abuse. Fukaya uses the poem to underscore and imagine the strength of cultural connection and intergenerational bonds between herself and the women in her family:

I am my best friend, love,
The only one

¹¹⁸ Lorde and Anzaldúa write about the importance of reclaiming homeland (Grenada and Atzlan, respectively) in the realm of myth and memory. See Audre Lorde, *Zami, A New Spelling of My Name*, (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1982).; Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

Who will always be with me.
 I am Issei
 The first generation.
 My daughter is Nisei
 The second generation.¹¹⁹
 Even if she has no children,
 My grandchildren
 Will be born of my desire
 And will cherish me.
 I am daughter
 Of Michiko,
 My daughter is Mayumi.
 We are daughters
 Of the sea, moon and sun.¹²⁰

In addressing the connection between her mother, her daughter, herself and potential grandchildren, Fukaya aligns herself with an intergenerational lineage of women. She defines herself as a “best friend” and the only one that will stay with her. She also discovers her own “desire” in the act of imagining her family “cherishing her.” In one sense, Fukaya is building her own concept of family against the heteronormative confines of a male/female dichotomy and a patrilineal household. In its place, the generations of women before and after her secure her sense of affiliation and love. Defining this female lineage is also inherently tied to her Japanese identity. She proudly declares that she is Issei, or first-generation Japanese, and identifies her daughter as Nisei, or second-generation Japanese, to affirm their Japanese identities in the face of racial and sexual traumas and to find history and placement for them.

¹¹⁹ It is important to note that although Fukaya claims to be Issei, or first generation Japanese American, under standard definitions Fukaya would be identified as Nisei, or second generation Japanese American.

¹²⁰ Michiyo Fukaya, “PROPHECY,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 57.

Her love for women, therefore, not only encompasses lovers, but also her family as an extension of herself. We can characterize Fukaya's expressed desire for symbiotic and interconnected female-centered kinship relationships as an expression of lesbian sexuality if we expand our perspective and conceptualization of desire and love. Catrióna Esquibel expands the definition of "lesbian" literature by analyzing desire in Chicana girlhood fiction narratives.¹²¹ In critically analyzing the expression of sexuality in Chicana literature, Esquibel adopts a looser definition of lesbian to also encompass feminist and women-identified writing. Further, Esquibel considers the intense desire between women and strong female bonds as potential locations of lesbian literature¹²² While Esquibel cautions that opening up the definition of lesbian to any strong female characters who show affiliation for each other may not enhance an understanding of lesbian fiction, she asserts that the troubling of male/female heterosexual bonds and the critique of marriage presented by these relationships exposes feminist and lesbian ideals. Fukaya's poetry, which documents her kinship to women in her life, such as family members, fits into this category of "lesbian" and feminist. Underlining her connection to other women, by grouping her mother, herself and her daughter as "daughters/Of the sea, moon and sun" strengthens her to claim to a nurturing childhood and kinship through a natural and positive connectivity, which defies heteronormative models of family. We can understand Fukaya's writing to women as a lesbian narrative not only because she is

¹²¹ Catrióna Rueda Esquibel, "Memories of Girlhood: Chicana Lesbian Fictions," *Signs* 23, no. 3 (Spring, 1998): 645, accessed November 12, 2015, <http://0-www.jstor.org.opac.sfsu.edu/stable/3175305>.

¹²² *Ibid.*

lesbian, but also because of the characterization of her love for women is built upon the principles of desire, longing, and altruism.

Love-Politics in The Lesbian Narrative

Adopting a love-politic fits into a lesbian narrative which prioritizes desire and longing as a practice of survival. Although the two poems "PLEASE TELL ME" and "BALANCING ACT" do not address women specifically, they can be read within the context of her other poems, which proclaim love for women as self-love. In "PLEASE TELL ME," Fukaya declares,

If you love me,
Please tell me.

We need each other
To survive.¹²³

In "BALANCING ACT," Fukaya realizes that connectedness is mutually supported by a sense of self-determination, autonomy and independence:

Lest I forget, my love
Remind me
I am the edge I stand on.¹²⁴

Reminding herself that "I am the edge I stand on," reflects the importance of autonomy and that self-love must be projected from within. However, this reminder is dependent on "my love," demonstrating that self-love is also supported by loving connection. Both poems arguably serve as an extension of Fukaya to other women in a commitment to

¹²³ Michiyo Fukaya, "PLEASE TELL ME," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 72.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

mutual support and practice of survival. In these, and other poems, Fukaya explores her sexuality through the frame of self-love and love for other women to recuperate a self-serving sense of integrity and wholeness in the face of her racial and sexual traumas.

Fukaya's writing embraces a love-politic that is a practice of cherishing the self for a vision of collective liberation. Poems addressed to women thematically call on the properties of love and solidarity as a foundation of resistance, survival and self-love. In poetry, which reads like dialogue, Fukaya exposes sexism as form of pain that can be alleviated and transformed through love. Her love for other women is articulated in a call for freedom in the poem "ON READING ATROCITY BULLETINS," where she discusses violence against women on a global scale. She writes,

Every month
I wade through more reports
Of atrocities
Women's bodies broken
In El Salvador,
In Chile,
In the USA.¹²⁵

Later in the poem she also recalls,

An imprisoned Haitian woman
Was forcibly aborted
I am told
And I look at her swollen
Painfilled face.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Michiyo Fukaya, "ON READING ATROCITY BULLETINS," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 113.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Fukaya witnesses the injustice that is inflicted on women across the globe by narrating the pain evidenced on their bodies. Perhaps Fukaya validates their “flesh-and-blood experiences to concretize a vision.”¹²⁷ This vision may be read through her effort to reveal the collective and widespread impact of misogyny and to encourage collective healing by underlining the connection between different struggles.

The call for healing in her address to women can be read as an embrace constructed out of love. Fukaya practices her vision in words; she resists the typical disavowal of their pain by opening her arms with love,

I turn to you, love,
 Watch the fire in your eyes
 Your fierce determination
 To end all this.¹²⁸

Acknowledging the “fire” and “fierce determination” of other women represents her validation of their dignity and self-determination – their fight and struggle- in the face of injustice. In writing, she also carves a cartography of solidarity by paralleling the shared experiences of women in the U.S.A., Chile, and El Salvador. Rather than universalizing their experiences, Fukaya calls for a politics of solidarity, which recognizes interconnectedness and support as an approach to freedom:

I turn away

What can love be
 In the face of such pain?

¹²⁷ M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and The Sacred*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 262.

¹²⁸ Michiyo Fukaya, “ON READING ATROCITY BULLETINS,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 113.

Your arm around me
 And I lean crying
 Against your shoulder.

We will work to free her.
 We will work to free ourselves.
 This is what our love means.¹²⁹

Fukaya sees her own life in the experiences other women, arguably women of color, by holding space for the deep recognition of pain and exchange of care. Sharing comfort eases the impossible recuperation of such pains, and sheds light on the transformative power of harnessing vulnerability and connection. Fukaya invokes her vision of a freedom based in love and solidarity, one in which women of color find love and support one another.

Expressing love as liberation falls in line with Fukaya's conception of lesbian as self-love and a reclamation of desire. This feminist vision is echoed in M. Jacqui Alexander's assertion that "We *become* women of color... We cannot afford to cease yearning for each others' company."¹³⁰ Fukaya displays this longing in her desire to address the pains of other women by witnessing their pain and committing to a collective effort that is self-actualizing. Fukaya comprehends her own freedom as interconnected with other women's freedom and writes about the atrocities of racism on women of color

¹²⁹ Michiyo Fukaya, "ON READING ATROCITY BULLETINS," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 113.

¹³⁰ M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and The Sacred*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 275.

as a call for mutuality and love, as well as one of self-preservation. Recognizing the suffering of other women through the poem becomes a mutual act of healing.

Writing about love is both a mode of centering trauma and a practice of resistance to trauma. In poetry, Fukaya narrates and expresses her lesbian sexuality as self-love, female-identified kinship relations, lesbian sexual desire and a love-politic. Writing about this female-identified love and desire in the space of trauma allows her to imagine newer connections built in trust and commitment, and to rediscover herself. Furthermore, integrating these intimate woman-identified connections as part of a process of self-love can be read as a strategy of healing. The mobilization of a feminist love politic through art, or more specifically poetry, is a transformation of both collective and individual embodiments of trauma. For example, Fukaya troubles the association between incest, heteropatriarchal forms of violence and stigma to confront both individual and collective forms of trauma. Fukaya also embraces the erotic as a method of survival, a space for addressing isolation and alienation, and a source of mending broken kinship bonds when she writes about “making love” to another mixed race Third World woman and envisioning the intergenerational ties between the women in her family of origin. Further, Fukaya pictures trauma as a both collectively and personally enacted when she depicts the wide-reaching pain of violence against women of color and the isolation of homophobic disavowal. Fukaya frames these issues as communal concerns that require solidarity and family intervention, respectively. In this way, Fukaya counters pain and shame by centering love and the erotic as a powerful act of reclaiming vulnerability, love,

and self/communal preservation. Her poems bolster a vision of the erotic, which reclaim the psychic and emotional components of its value as a mechanism of healing and transformation. Mobilizing poetry enables Fukaya to softly address her wounds in an effort to recover access to self-determination and extend healing connections to others.

CONCLUSION

And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives.

-Audre Lorde

My anger is the cry
Of a soul too long dying
for lack of love.
Now, my soul stirs to life
Beneath the soiled bandages
Of discarded defense
And cries too tender to touch.

That cry, you say is my anger
But it is my pain.

-Michiyo Fukaya

Approaching the third month of being 34 years old, Michiyo Fukaya took her own life. According to her comrade Gwen Shervington, on that fateful day, July 9th 1987, "She didn't use a regular bullet; she used buckshot which shattered and fragmented upon impact and caused considerably more damage to her skull than a single bullet hole would have. Michiyo wanted to die."¹³¹ In the periphery of her bedroom where the self-inflicted violence took place, one piece of evidence stood out. A note found on her bureau defied the tragedy of the scene; it read simple and kind reminders. Fukaya's last imprint read, "Everything will be okay. I can handle things in my life. Keep it simple. Worrying does

¹³¹ Gwen Shervington, "Remembrance," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 173.

not help.”¹³² This note remains as a symbolic tribute to Fukaya’s use of writing as a transformative practice, even within the tragic scene of her suicide. Resisting the fetishization of suicide, we might look to Fukaya’s writing as evidence of her effort to use pain, shame, and love to productively to control her fate, envision a more loving and liberating future, and fuel self-preservation. Rather than ruminate on her suicide as a sign of failure to survive, we may turn to her writing which testified to her willful and fierce desire to preserve, heal, and to transform trauma as the active negotiation and effort of change and transformation.

Although turned away from us in the conditions of her tragic death and eulogized through a narrow interpretation of her trauma, Fukaya’s writing offers a window, an offering, into the gates of her personal efforts to reconcile her past. Fukaya’s determination to alleviate the pains of her past and balance the visions of her future can be read as a painstaking labor to thrive and persist under excruciating odds. Her writing can be read as a tool of survival, self-preservation and cultural resistance as a woman of color. Whether by narrating the pain of sexual violence on her body and sense of well-being, re-writing a past of stigma and shame by claiming pride in her Japanese mixed race origin, or claiming love for other women through kinship, care and self-love, Fukaya used poetry to actively resist and remodel her trauma.

In the first chapter I explored how Fukaya uses poetry to narrate her incest and sexual violence in the form of a pain that is embodied. Fukaya documents her incest and

¹³² “Text of note found on Michiyo’s bureau the day of her suicide,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 170.

subsequent rapes on her own terms to process these childhood violations; she validates her pain by interrupting and reversing the narrative of herself as a victim to that of a survivor. To claim her status as a survivor, Fukaya breaks the silence around violent acts and exposes the complicity of her abusers and members of her family who did not protect her. Importantly, through poetry, Fukaya writes to her mother to confess her history of sexual violence, and finds solace and connection with her mother as a form of validation. While building connection and addressing the gravity of her abuses, she also aims a metaphorical revenge on her father. In describing a revenge plot, Fukaya delineates the racialized motives behind his power as a white male abuser. In these imaginative counter-narratives, Fukaya acknowledges the hypersexualized intrusions on her body, claims her right to protection as a child, and answers back by castrating the power that has hurt her. This act of castration is also analyzed as a form of self-defense, empowering Fukaya to contextualize the harms done to her body as a form of injustice and a means to restore integrity between her body and mind.

As chapter two showed, Fukaya writes poems about her childhood experiences of shame to process her memories of humiliation and to redefine a stigmatized family history. I analyzed how Fukaya's poems re-enter the dark places of her childhood trauma to transfigure the memory of traumatic episodes. For instance, Fukaya writes about the indoctrination of shame from her racist white family members, classmates and teachers at an early age. I analyze how the act of remembering enables Fukaya to recite incidents in her childhood where she was publically shamed for being Japanese, mixed race, and

poor. While making space in writing to digest the disastrous impact of shame on her body and sense of worth, Fukaya also translates these sources of shame into points of pride. For instance, she authors a narrative of her mother's life, a cultural "herstory," to combat the limited information and silencing of her mother's importance and the tragic Eurasian narrative. In building a loving connection to her Japanese mother she simultaneously refashions the shame of her mixed race Asian origins by framing her mother's experiences and choices as a post-World War II survivor who persevered. Restoring dignity to her mother's stigmatized memory is explored as reclamation of belonging that is safe and protected.

The role of writing in building self-fulfilling connections is developed in chapter three, which framed Fukaya's writing about sexuality and love for women as a practice of self-love. For instance, the exploration of Fukaya's lesbian sexuality is consistently relayed as her own source of self-discovery and self-gratification. Additionally, the theme of lesbian love and women-centered care is metaphorically reckoned as a symbiotic relationship; she expresses care for other women, opens herself to receiving love and relishes that the most important loving relationship is with oneself. Reclaiming the erotic to access to love, connection and self-worth was also read as a valid denouncement and transformation of the sexual traumas of homophobia, heteropatriarchal violence, and incest. I read Fukaya's writing about erotic desire and altruistic relationships to other women of color as efforts to create safer spaces to embrace vulnerability within an environment of trauma. Lastly, Fukaya's affirmation of kinship relations with other

women and tender allegiance to women of color was analyzed as a tool of cultivating freedom. I reflected on these narratives of love, desire and care as forms of resistance to a history of racial and sexual trauma.

Studying Fukaya's poetry as a tool of healing and struggle starkly contrasts with other interpretations of her work, which are preoccupied with the angry tone of her poetry. Michiyo Fukaya's remaining record is fragmented and scarred with the tragedy of her suicide. The preponderance of biographical material about Fukaya, collected and anthologized by Gwen Shervington after Fukaya's death, are short anecdotes and eulogies written by Fukaya's community – majority white lesbian women whose racial privilege obscured their understanding of Fukaya's specific needs and trauma. These passages written by "White women's community" in remembrance of Fukaya's life fixate on Fukaya's anger as a threatening. A community member admits the influence of racial privilege on the perception of Fukaya's insufferable anger when she writes, "Seems to me that the white middle class finds confrontation painful, can't bear the truth of pain and labels it by calling the hurting woman 'too intense.'"¹³³

Labeling Fukaya's pain as overbearing reflects more the defensive response of women with white privilege, than a reflection of her trauma. For instance, Lynn Vera confesses, "I never did reach a comfort level with Michiyo's pain. It reared up, often unexpectedly, in bursts of rage or frustration. Other times it leaked out through her craft,

¹³³ Myra Lilliana Splitrock, "Remembrance," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 133.

in a poem so perfect that I had to catch my breath.”¹³⁴ Vera classifies Fukaya’s pain as uncontainable and therefore hazardous. Further, Vera prioritizes her comfort level when she claims that Fukaya’s pain is more palatable when confined to the form of her poetry. In another “remembrance,” Glo Daly examines Fukaya’s “rage” as a threatening expression of pain when she reflects, “She was quite shy, but eventually we ‘dated’ a few times. This proved to be too much for me. Spending alone time with her, I felt the full brunt of her anger. I found that I was not strong enough to simply listen to her tell and retell her painful stories of growing up with horrible abuse.”¹³⁵ Both of these women narrate Fukaya’s pain as an affliction on their safety rather than an expression of Fukaya’s traumatic experiences. Fukaya’s anger has been pinned as destructive and unserviceable. Ironically, the portrayals of Fukaya’s anger misconstrue her expression of her pain as destructive while fueling the source of her oppression in the same stroke. The hypervisibility of Fukaya’s anger as harmful rather than a valid response to oppression prioritizes the comfort of white women and obscures the productive value of affect in Fukaya’s work.

Other depictions of Fukaya’s anger as shocking, unexpected, and educational isolate her experiences as a personal liability and can be read more as commentary on the racialization of Fukaya by the community around her. For example, Fukaya’s work is

¹³⁴ Lynn Vera, “Remembrance,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 163.

¹³⁵ Glo Daly, “Remembrance,” in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 102.

remembered through a vacuum of otherness rather than cultural resistance when Pat writes,

I was pretty oblivious to cultural richness and here she was weaving this into her work. I think this was the first time I got close to a woman of color who wrote about her life, which says a lot about my limited life, my limited exposure to women of color in my own little insulated white world.¹³⁶

Additionally, the consistent reference to Fukaya's anger as instructive and surprisingly articulate can also be read as the expectation of Fukaya to carry the brunt of emotional labor. Her anger and experience of racial abuse is conceptualized as her own dealing, one that is only useful as a learning tool. Portraying Fukaya's experience as educational alleviates the responsibility and role of white women in addressing racism when Vicki Smith writes,

I remember her strength and anger and my feelings were moved by her emotion... Michiyo was so poor, but educated and driven to succeed. She was educating all of us, very often around her racial abuse and how we as a community –we white women –did not share this with her.¹³⁷

The inability to move past Fukaya's anger and emotional state as instructive is also a racist response to her work. For example, in many accounts of Fukaya's poetry readings her anger is read as otherness and she is pigeonholed her to a one-dimensional aspect of her pain:

My fondest memory is of being in writing group with her and the first time she read her poetry. I was really touched. First of all, I was really shocked. I don't think I ever heard somebody read so clearly and be so angry. She was so passionate about her anger and so

¹³⁶ Pat, "Remembrance," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 70.

¹³⁷ Vicki Smith, "Remembrance," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 52-53.

clear... When she thanked me, it sort of softened something between us. I think it was in those moments that I realized she was a lot more than her anger. I think that's only what people saw. I don't think she was able to be more than her pain though.¹³⁸

Reading Fukaya's anger as surprising and unexpected trivializes anger as a valid response to sexual and racial abuse. Further, the "White women's community" recollections perseverate on their own inability to compute Fukaya's anger, distancing their relationship to her experience rather than contextualizing Fukaya's work within structures of oppression. The analysis of Fukaya's anger is colored by the impressions of her white audience, rather than understood a symptom of systematic racist heteropatriarchy.

Paradoxically, Fukaya's conflict with community members or co-workers is seen as a problem of her own articulation of social issues, rather than an issue with the world. Because Fukaya's work and character has been couched in invalidating accounts of her anger as surprising, destructive, polarizing and personalized by a predominantly white audience grieving the aftermath of her suicide, it is ever more pertinent to frame her writing as a tool of resistance. In response to perceptions of her anger, Fukaya herself wrote,

I get angry in a meeting and put it out bluntly, to the point, with the accumulated anger that any Third World woman has.... Then of course, the white lesbian chimes in with this feeling: she feels personally attacked; she refuses to take my anger in but she wants to talk more, to smooth the blow. The message that I get over and over is don't be so clearly focused on your anger, especially if it's directed to me... and I sometimes find myself putting up, shutting up, drumming my fingers, generally disowning my feelings. This is a forced dishonesty, a subtle force, but still forced.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Pat, "Remembrance," in *A Fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 70-71.

¹³⁹ Michiyo Fukaya, "CLASS RACE AND SEX," in *A fire is Burning It Is in Me: The Life and Writing of Michiyo Fukaya*, ed. Gwendolyn L. Shervington (Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996), 31.

While anger is a powerful and productive countercultural tool, in my own reading of Fukaya's writings, anger is only evoked in response to perceptions of her anger as hostility. Instead, Fukaya's prose and poetry more commonly explores pain, shame and access to love to contextualize a history of trauma, validate a range of emotional responses to pain, and reclaim connection to a positive self.

This thesis has left much of Fukaya's writing unexplored. Fukaya writes extensively about the intersection of her poor/working class status, and experience as a lesbian single mother, survivor of sexual and racial violence, and dwindling mental health as a formative resource to her identity and activism. The relationship between Fukaya and her daughter and their respective mixed heritage origins, as evidenced by Fukaya's poetry to her daughter, has also yet to be studied. Fukaya was also an outspoken Asian American lesbian and feminist activist who wrote articles for journals, penned short essays, gave speeches, read poetry and wrote letters to editorials. In other words, the delivery of her writing extended widely past the written poetry and prose chosen as a focus for this thesis. Furthermore, the "remembrances" and Fukaya's essays on the lesbian community in which she participated also comprise a queer archive that reveals the problematic issues around race and politics within lesbian culture in Vermont during the late 1970s to mid 1980s that is yet to be thoroughly analyzed. Thinking about Fukaya's poetry and prose as a record of negotiating trauma builds upon the work of queer affect theorists and queers of color who conceptualize affect as an important

resource of cultural resistance.¹⁴⁰ This reading is an important initial intervention, especially in the context of biographical readings of Fukaya's emotional health as a hazard rather than a resource.

The method of analyzing poetry as a site of transformation and resistance is significant because it allows a complicated consideration of marginalized and stigmatized narratives. This method is especially vital for the lesbian of color who is flattened by tragic stereotypes steeped in racialization, sexism, classism, homophobia and suicide. More importantly, it gives voice to the survivor who is silenced by pathologized interpretations of their trauma. To consider the productive value of trauma is not to fetishize pain, but to acknowledge that suffering can be transformed and remodeled in an act of self-determination. Of this practice, Gloria Anzaldúa has stated, "I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories other have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit."¹⁴¹ Studying Fukaya's written work as self-transformation, thus, considers the value of her critique, imagination, and vision on both personal and collective fronts. Framing writing as a practice of recuperating power and transformation authorizes us to

¹⁴⁰ See Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁴¹ Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: SUNY Press, 2015).167.

resist classism, racism, homophobia, and sexism's reach on the narratives of lesbian women of color. This task is a paramount and necessary one to dismantle systems of oppression and to harness the fruits of emotional and political labor, courageously practiced and offered by those who came before us.

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