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A History of Contested Narratives: The National Film Board of Canada's Evolving Cinematic Treatment (1945–2018) of the Internment of Japanese Canadians during World War Two

Abstract: The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) is world-renown for its documentaries and animations. This article examines how the NFB dealt with one specific topic – the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War Two. By analyzing the films produced by the NFB between 1945 and 2018, this study seeks to understand how and why its narratives of the internment changed dramatically over three-quarters of a century. The study deals with six NFB films: *Of Japanese Descent* (1945), *Enemy Alien* (1975), *Minoru: Memory of Exile* (1992), *Freedom Has a Price* (1994), *Sleeping Tigers: The Asahi Baseball Story* (2003), and *East of the Rockies* (2018). Drawing on the postcolonial concepts of the colonizing gaze and hegemony, as well as poststructuralist concepts of the trace and discourses of power, it probes the evolution of the NFB's cinematic culture and concludes that the NFB's film legacy parallels a changing public discourse in Canada on this traumatic historical violation of human rights.

Keywords: Japanese Canadian internment, redress, historic memory, state apologies for past wrongdoing, racism and race-related trauma, discrimination, human rights, social justice

1. Introduction

Controversial historical events portrayed in cinema reflect the socio-political attitudes of the time in which they were made. This study covers the seventy-three-year history of the cinematic treatment of the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. There is not an extensive literature on the films dealing with this specific topic, but there are some scholarly treatments

of the overall topic of internment that set the stage for this current discussion. Christopher E. Gittings' *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference and Representation* (2002) introduces concepts such as the "colonizing gaze" and focuses on the racist dimensions of settler ideology in cinema. What he terms "a white, Anglo-Protestant or Anglo-Saxon, male camera eye that projects itself as the normative 'we' of the imagined community Canada" installed itself in the early treatment of the internment, which was subverted and replaced later by a counter-narrative developed by Japanese Canadians (8). Another valuable concept is "film as utterance" which creates a bridge between ideology, narrative voice, and constructed identities in cinema (Druick 12). Who speaks, who speaks for whom, and who speaks with an authoritative voice are all part of utterance, especially in the documentary mode. This study also makes use of general rhetorical concepts such as Derrida's "the trace," which involves both elements of presence and absence and of continuity and discontinuity, as well as Foucault's emphasis on the relationship between discourse and power. Together – the colonizing gaze, utterance, trace and the discourses of power – are key tools in dissecting the evolution of cinematic narratives of this internment.

Since most of the films about the internment were made after the internment ended, memory and memorialization play a vital role, especially when Japanese Canadians finally were able to tell their stories directly. Because cinema of the internment can be considered "the public performance of acceptable memory," what the films remember, what they forget, and the silences left by the unsaid are crucial to our understanding of these narratives (Oikawa xi). Mona Oikawa argues that the public memory of the internment has resulted in "the homogenization of the subjectivities" of the survivors, which, in turn, reproduce "hegemonic notions" of what meaning was ascribed to being Japanese Canadian (xii). How the films in this study contribute to homogenization and hegemonic notions of who is a Canadian constitutes the key question.

The issue of memory and its narration of past traumas has both public and personal dimensions. In the documentary mode the intermingling of editorial narrative, personal narrative, and visual documentation engenders a public discourse woven out of diverse experiences in front of and behind the screen. According to Pamela Sugiman memories of the internment reflect "what we need to remember, what is safe to remember" (364). The acceptability/safety of the message arises from the narrator's perception of the audience. When memories of trauma are offered to the public they are politicized (Sugiman 364). While a public remembering may empower a narrator's sense of agency, that remembering is constrained by various parameters internalized by the storyteller. Japanese Canadian memories of internment cover a lengthy post-internment context in which the survivors sought to promote cultural assimilation for their children as a defense against racism (Sugiman 361). As a counterpoint to this assimilationist strategy, their narratives can contain a certain nostalgia for the pre-internment era,

which is idealized because it was free of the community disruption, dispossession, transportation, and post-incarceration dispersal caused by the internment.

Finally, this study takes into account the scholarship on trauma and its narration. Among the key concepts that characterize this internment trauma are racialization, dispossession, removal from home and the familiar, family separation, incarceration and movement control, post-internment injustice in the search for reparation, and the continuance of the trauma in an inter-generational history.

2. The National Film Board of Canada and the Internment

The focus of this study is the National Film Board of Canada's contribution to the topic over seventy years. The Film Board was launched in 1939 by the Scottish filmmaker John Grierson, who quickly turned the agency's focus to war propaganda. In a 1970 television interview Grierson stated that "the Film Board [...] was there to bring Canada alive to itself and to the rest of the world [...]. It was there to invoke the strengths of Canadians, the imagination of Canadians in respect of creating their present and future" (Evans 4). What Grierson was unaware of when he offered this definition of the NFB was that what constituted "the imagination of Canadians" would change.

The NFB made much of the sacrifice and nobility of Canadians during the war but it preferred to leave unstoried the less noble side of wartime events, such as the internment of Japanese Canadians, at least until the matter could be approached in a positive light. While the term "internment" is defined in international law as the detention of prisoners of war, it has been widely applied to non-military personnel. Since the majority of the civilians "interned" were either Canadian citizens or Canadian-born, terms such as "incarceration, expulsion, detention and dispersal" could be more appropriate but also unwieldy (Robinson). However, I will continue to use the term because of its common usage in regard to this event and its strong association with the concept of prison camps, both military and civilian, and their historical role in 20th century conflicts.

3. *Of Japanese Descent* (1945): The Cinema of Propaganda

The removal and internment of Japanese Canadians was authorized by the Liberal government of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King in February 1942. The following month Japanese Canadians living in British Columbia were brought to Hastings Park in Vancouver, housed in the Livestock Building, and then forcibly relocated away from the coast with nothing but a few personal possessions they could carry. Most were either Canadian citizens or held immigrant status. Eventually over 20,000 were taken from their homes and their property confiscated

and later sold. The Canadian public was told that this was being done in the name of national security and that Japanese Canadians now constituted a threat in a time of war. What was not referenced was the long history of anti-Asian racism that had characterized British Columbia beginning with its days as a colony and ending with riots in the early 20th century that targeted both Chinese and Japanese Canadians. While a small minority of those interned were imprisoned and some of the men were used in construction in central Canada, the vast majority were moved to the interior of British Columbia to live in isolated camps for the duration of the war. There was a precedent from the First World War when the Canadian government interned over 8,000 “enemy aliens” who were immigrants from what had been the territory of Germany and Austro-Hungary. What was new this time around was that whole families and communities were moved and interned. The earlier internment included only men. The reasons for the removal of Japanese Canadians should be sought in the motivations of various political players, and these have been debated for some time. One historian even claims that “the federal government ordered the evacuation [...] to prevent a greater evil, hysterical attacks on Japanese residents” (Roy 17). Whatever the reason, this forcible relocation of thousands of men, women and children to camps in the mountainous interior of British Columbia or even further afield was traumatic for those involved.

In 1945 the NFB released a film titled *Of Japanese Descent* (dir. D.C. Burritt 1945) that it made for the Canadian Department of Labour. The film had been originally commissioned by the British Columbia Security Commission, an entity that oversaw the round-up and forcible removal of Japanese Canadians. This twenty-two-minute color documentary portrayed the process of internment, the lives of the internees, and the actions of the authorities, followed by a post-war solution. Rob Aitken has termed the film “a project of erasure” (4). By erasure he means that “much of the violence unleashed during the process of forcible removal, detention and dispersal” was made invisible to the film’s audience (12). In its place there is a narrative of social integration and humane treatment which should be considered nothing less than propaganda.

The film project was initiated in late 1943 and involved various bureaucracies in the federal government negotiating its terms and conditions. In the end the NFB decided on a vocabulary of “social security and social integration” for the film, rather than one that demonized the internees as a security risk (Aitken 4). Opposition politicians of the day and church-based human rights organizations had condemned the policy of internment, so NFB officials viewed the film as an “insurance against criticism when this is all over” (Aitken 11). The film’s final message was the need for the internees to remain east of the Rockies after the war ended in order to foster their assimilation. There were to be no more ethnic enclaves like the fishing village of Steveston, south of Vancouver. No doubt this proposal appealed to the white racists in British Columbia, who were glad not to have Japanese Canadians return home. By spreading out across the country and

surrendering their former livelihoods and residences, the film claimed Japanese Canadians would experience an improved integration and social cohesion within the dominant society. The subtext of this claim was the elimination of a threat to white dominance through dispersal into geographically separated small family units.

Stylistically, the film itself is highly reminiscent of *socialist realism* films of the Soviet era because of the way it portrays industrious workers building homes and happy children going to school. The film shows traditional costumes and celebrations in a faux ethnographic tone. The film is subtitled as “An Interim Report,” which harks back to its government origins, the concept of a report card, and the idea of reporting (the way a journalist might) to the public. So what does the film convey? It shows that the accommodations the internees had to build are better than their previous housing, that they are receiving better medical treatment for tuberculosis than they had before, and that the children are receiving a proper Canadian education. The film consciously benefitted from the use of color to build its message by offering two aesthetic values – color’s innate projection of itself as ‘true to life’ and its association with a vibrant present. Black and white films were typical of the documentary mode of the day and associated with news clips in cinemas and educational shorts. The NFB did not want an ‘issues’ orientation for this film. Instead it used the more expensive color mode to facilitate its positive narrative.

The authoritative voice-over of the white male narrator describes the internees as having “left the west coast” when it “was decided” to relocate them. The narrator tells viewers that the camps “supply wartime needs” such as “30,000 cords of wood” for Vancouver. The narrator specifically claims that the internees are “not living in internment camps” with barbed wire and armed guards – they can travel freely within the settlements, and they do need permits to go outside the area. The innocuous term “relocation” is presented as an ordinary move that anyone might make. That this “relocation” constituted a deportation is never mentioned. The film concludes that “the problem they [Japanese Canadians] represent has been solved only temporarily by the war.” The film implies that, simply by being of Japanese descent, one was a “problem” for Canada and that this “problem” was historical and not just contemporary. Hence, the message is that Canada did nothing wrong by imposing the internment. Why the presence of Japanese Canadians should be considered controversial is not discussed. The only option Japanese Canadians were given when the war ended was dispersal across the country or removal to Japan after the war.¹ Of course, since their livelihoods and homes had been confiscated there was little to return to. A minority reluctantly went to Japan, while the majority spread across the country.

Since internment was viewed by the authorities as a preventative measure, the internees were not categorized as criminals. The film built on this lack of criminality to create a narrative of eventual peace and hope for assimilation. The

human rights violations involved in the deportation that we now would consider a form of *ethnic cleansing* were ignored, as was the dire economic penalty imposed on the internees when their homes and enterprises were taken away from them and sold.² Even as the film began circulating among the public, Japanese Canadians began speaking out over what had happened to them. In 1945 Muriel Kitagawa delivered a speech calling for reparations in which she said that “through bitterness we learned cynicism, and through frustration we gained new strength to fight for our rights” (286). The fight for these rights would continue for decades and part of that struggle was the cinematic reframing of the deportation as an unjust act.

This 1945 narrative used Gittings’ “white, Anglo-Protestant or Anglo-Saxon, male camera eye that projects itself as the normative ‘we’ of the imagined community Canada” in its voice-over, whose ‘utterance’ was completely silent about the transgressions and violations the internment involved. This silence constituted an integral part of the film’s visual content in which the internees are shown but not heard. They are literally a silent movie. Finally, the intended audience for the film is a white nation with the power to accept or reject the former internees, whether as families or individuals. The film affirms the dominant society’s power through its discourse. It casts the Japanese Canadians as ‘Others,’ thereby Canadians thereby affirming the grand narrative of Canadian identity as Caucasian and Anglo-European. The film should be considered as complicit in the long history of racism in Canada.

When *Of Japanese Descent* was released for Canadian audiences, the NFB was deeply into its war-propaganda phase. The war had served as an accelerant of its institutional growth. By 1945, the six-year old NFB was producing 300 films per year, making it “the largest and best co-ordinated government film operation in the world” (Ellis 126). With a staff of over 700, the NFB was producing films that reached four million Canadian viewers or one-third of the population (Ellis 126). Thirty years later, when the next film on the internment, *Enemy Alien*, was released, the NFB was in a completely different phase. Television was now the prime mode of visual communication in Canada. A new norm of social criticism had invaded the agency, reflecting a new radicalism, driven in part by the anti-Vietnam War and Civil Rights movements in the United States, a new left-wing nationalism in Canada, the rise of second-wave feminism, which made women filmmakers more prominent, and the recognition of the independence movement in Québec. The NFB now began producing provocative series such as the 200-film *Challenge for Change* series, which would become a platform for activist documentary-making.

Corporately, the links between the government and its film arm had lengthened considerably by the 1970s. The National Film Act of 1950 gave the organization a freer mandate (no direct government administration), which led to its office moving to Montréal, and eventual regionalization and decentralization. In terms of media and communication policy, the federal government’s focus moved to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and its public television arm. The NFB’s public

profile was diminished, which added yet another dimension of independence. And documentary films themselves had evolved. Rather than use the traditional voice-over narrator in its documentaries, the NFB embraced new documentary styles like *cinema verité* and *cinema direct* (The Candid Eye series) and engaged independent filmmakers. In the late 1960s it even began making feature films. The audiences for NFB films were no longer in movie theatres or traveling exhibitions as it had been in the 1940s. The NFB produced educationally-oriented material by adopting the new technology of videotape. Videotapes revolutionized film distribution in the 1970s and 1980s because they could be played on a home television set via a videotape player. *Enemy Alien* (1975) by Jeanette Lerman was typical of this new phase of engaged filmmaking intended to provoke discussion and debate.

4. *Enemy Alien* (1975) and Revisionist History

By the time that *Enemy Alien* (Jeanette Lerman, 1975) was made, the newsreel-style editorial voice-over, that was the essential driver of meaning for *Of Japanese Descent*, had been replaced with the narrative voices of the film's participants. The subjects of the documentary got to tell their stories, instead of having the authoritative broadcaster speak for them. The move to having ordinary people narrate their experiences was a fundamental break from the Griersonian approach, which tended to be top-down, telling people what to do or think. Unfortunately, this change did not happen in *Enemy Alien*. The film interpreted the personal trauma of detention, dispossession, dispersal, deportation, and finally internment, through the traditional voice-over of Stanley Jackson, a non-Japanese Canadian. This is a film made by a non-Japanese filmmaker using a non-Japanese narrator. However, the fact that the filmmaker is a woman is not insignificant. During this period, women were in the process of articulating their disadvantages, objecting to the discrimination they faced, and voicing the need for legal equality. This social reality translated into a new narrative about the internment. The story is told visually through archival newsreel footage, newspaper clippings from that time, and film footage of the remnants of the camps thirty years later. But the highlight of the visual narrative is the inclusion of the scrapbooks of the internees. In this way the film provides a silent testimonial to the lives of the internees. The film gives the Japanese Canadians a human face but not yet a human voice.

To be fair to the filmmaker, the film credits include Michiko Sakata, Roy Shin, and David Suzuki as consultants. However, the absence of Japanese Canadian voices in the film itself suggests that in the 1970s the NFB felt that a revisionist history of the internment had to be told by members of the dominant society in order for the audience to accept what the film was saying. Why Japanese Canadians were not interviewed for the film on camera is a subject itself worthy exploring. Was it a decision of the filmmaker? Did Japanese Canadians not want to be on

camera and for the record at this stage? And if so, why? While these questions are regrettably beyond the scope of this paper, they raise an issue around the status of this particular film in the NFB's oeuvre on the subject. For example, why does an important history of the NFB by Zoë Druick, which discusses films in the *Challenge for Change* series and the rise of women filmmakers in the Studio D program, not mention or discuss this film, nor did an earlier book that covered the period from 1949 to 1989 in great detail?³ Nor has it been mentioned in personal memoirs by Japanese Canadians or works on the redress movement authored by them, such as David Suzuki in his autobiography or Roy Miki in his lauded history of the redress movement.⁴ Clearly the film's historic role of initiating a new narrative about the internment has not received full recognition, perhaps because of the issues mentioned above. However, at the time of the film's making, former internees were already reaching out to the Canadian public. Ken Adachi's groundbreaking book, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of Japanese Canadians* (1976) created an emerging new narrative.

Enemy Alien is a work of revisionism, highly critical of the government's deeds, but it lacks the authenticity of internee voices. When the film came out, it was reviewed in *Cinema Canada*. Ronald Blumer termed the internment "a black stain on the Canadian psyche, a record of cruel injustice" (47). His review reflected a new era in public consciousness about the internment and how it would come to be taught in Canadian schools. Likewise, the film broached themes that would ultimately become central to the redress movement that sought acknowledgement, apology, and compensation for what the government had done. For example, Roy Miki describes the violation of the citizenship rights of Japanese Canadians as composed of forced removal, dispossession, confiscation, dispersal (forced movement), loss of *habeas corpus*, and the inability to seek redress (2). While not every one of these facets of the internment experience is raised by the film, they clearly align with how the redress movement wanted to be acknowledged.

Enemy Alien begins with a somber-voiced narrator telling the viewer that the film was made in the summer of 1974 by crossing the country to collect the stories of the internees. The credits at the end list a large number of Japanese Canadians whom the filmmakers thank. The narrator uses archival footage from the 1940s to explain the perceived threat that Japanese Canadians held for the Canadian authorities, which is heightened by an intense and dramatic music score. Practically all the images are of Japanese Canadians but the narrator is not. This visual-oral dissonance reflects its 1945 predecessor in seeking to explain the internment to non-Japanese Canadians, who were conceived to be the prime audience. The film provides a brief history of Japanese migration to Canada and the discrimination and racism the Japanese faced along with the Chinese. However, the word 'racism' is never used. The tone of the narrator is ironic when he says, "they felt unwelcome except by their exploiters [those Canadians who hired them at half wages]." The

audience is informed about the Japanese Canadians who served in World War One on behalf of Canada but were denied the right to vote until there were only a few veterans left. The film's narrative is very much about an ongoing denial of citizenship. It is sympathetic to the internees, posing the question: "ask why are they doing this to us?" The film states that internment meant "humiliation, the dream had been shattered. They were displaced people in their own country." While thirty years earlier the NFB had lauded the "benefits" of internment, this film concludes with the narrator saying that "it is important that this story of frustration and injustice, mistrust and hate be remembered." Clearly, it was now safe to remember in a way that better reflected what had really happened.

The film was not made by a Japanese Canadian director and it lacks narratives by survivors. Another drawback is the film's disembodied narrator who turns the film into a history lesson, an effort to educate the audience 'about' a topic. The archival material, both public and personal, which dominates the visual experience, is primarily monochromatic, signifying its 'historical' nature. Talking about history is a way of objectivizing the subject – Japanese Canadian internees, who continue to be under the hegemonic practice of having others seemingly more qualified to speak for them. The film occupies a space that is half-way between the propaganda of 1945 and the films to come. It should be read as a partial step that could not fully satisfy the desire of the Japanese Canadian community to tell their story in their own voices. Since the voice of the film is that of the dominant white society, its utterance is both accusatory of the state and confessional, acknowledging Canadian society's sin and guilt for the injustice.

In *Cartographies of Violence*, Mona Oikawa has a whole chapter titled "The Silencing Continues: 'Speaking For' Japanese Canadian Subjects of the Internment" in which she condemns the binary construction of "the silent Internment survivor and the speaking Canadianized subject" (58). This binary is exemplified in the film, which continues to present Japanese Canadians as 'the Other' and not fully Canadian. In this way it retains traces of the narrative of its 1945 forerunner. Despite naming the injustices that were perpetrated, its revisionary character is unsatisfactory. It was not until the publication of several key books on the internment in the early 1980s, and the adoption of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, that Japanese Canadians began a concerted campaign for redress of the wrongs that had been imposed on them. Among the most influential works were Joy Kogawa's moving novel, *Obasan* (1981), Takeo Ujo Nakano's memoir *Within the Barbed Wire Fence* (1980), and Ann Sunahara's study *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians in the Second World War* (1981). In September 1988 (a month after the Americans provided their own redress), Prime Minister Brian Mulroney acknowledged the wrongdoing and offered compensation. Once this occurred, the Japanese Canadians could finally tell their stories within the cinematic mode.

5. *Minoru: Memory of Exile* (1992) and the Re-appropriation of Voice

The first Japanese Canadian-controlled NFB film was an eighteen-minute animated documentary titled *Minoru: Memory of Exile* by Michael Fukushima. The use of a Japanese name in the title is indicative of the new post-redress era. The most important intellectual and cultural context for the making of *Minoru* was post-colonialism, an ideology that rejected cultural appropriation by cultural workers from the dominant society and insisted on the validity of the formerly silenced voices of subjected minorities. For example, Roy Miki, a leader in the redress movement and a prominent writer, organized the “Writing Thru Race” conference in 1994 at which non-minority writers were not allowed.⁵ Of course, such public discourse had an impact on the NFB. In *Projecting Canada*, Druick argues that at the NFB in the 1980s and 1990s “the emphasis on aboriginal, queer, and minority filmmakers” promoted “a cultural diversity mandate” (178). *Minoru* was clearly a product of this new trend.

Michael Fukushima was in his late twenties when he joined the NFB to work on *Minoru*, which went on to win the Toronto International Film Festival’s Hot Docs Best Short Documentary award. He stayed with the NFB, eventually becoming executive producer of the NFB’s Animation Studio in 2013. He himself had not experienced internment or exile, but his father, who had been born in Canada, had been repatriated to Japan after internment. *Minoru* is his father’s name and story. Fukushima’s film established a new baseline at the National Film Board that continues to be the Japanese Canadian narrative of the internment. The film is structured with a voice-over narrative, but rather than presenting what Monika Kin Gagnon terms “the so-called objective narrator’s voice” of the two earlier films, Fukushima created a refreshing and much needed “first-person oral testimony” (2007, 280).

He also added animation to his telling of the story. In the previous two films the white-male voice-over was authoritative and hegemonic. In both cases the visual record was subordinated to oral power. The voice-over served as a directive discourse that suggested its interpretation. In *Minoru*, the voice-over remains powerful, but it is fused more closely with the visual, which is no longer simply illustrative. And more importantly, the voice is that of Fukushima himself. The film’s animation sequences move the film beyond simply a historical record. Since animation is associated with children’s cinema, its use in this biographical/autobiographical short film signifies the innocence of childhood perceptions. There is also a fable-like quality which animation imparts to the documentary mode, lifting it into a psycho-mythical realm of heroes, villains, and monsters. In the documentaries prior to *Minoru*, the audience was watching a documented moment in time involving a collectivity, while in *Minoru* the historical record is personally experienced by the filmmaker’s father, first as a child in Canada, and then as a teenager in Japan. In an academic study of *Minoru*, Kirsten McAllister provides a

thoughtful critique of its discursive techniques. Her article identifies the limitations of the “realist” (legal-political) representations of the past that depend on historical data, which is what *Of Japanese Descent* and *Enemy Alien* represent, and she welcomes Fukushima’s use of animation and biography in presenting the impact of the internment on one person (79–103).

Simultaneously, another Japanese Canadian, Linda Ohama, made an independent documentary titled *The Last Harvest* about her family’s struggle to turn themselves into farmers after relocation east of the Rockies (1992). Since the film is not a NFB production it is not discussed in this article. However, a decade later she did go on to make a full-length NFB documentary with a significant internment component. *Obāchan’s Garden* (2001) is a tribute to her centenarian grandmother’s epic life journey from Japan to Canada. It is discussed later in this article. I mention her earlier film, released in the same year as Fukushima’s, because it confirms the shift from objectification to subjectification right after the apology and the redress settlement. *Minoru* was made with the financial participation of the Japanese Canadian Redress Secretariat, which serves as the film’s seal of approval.

Michael Fukushima, like his father Canadian-born, begins the narration in his own voice: “In the fall of 1987 I asked my father about his childhood.” Michael would have been twenty-six at that time. He then moves to an imitation of his late father’s voice so that the two voices are distinct. Technically, the film uses archival footage colorized by the author, and short animation clips, either superimposed over archival images or free-standing presentations of situations. The animated images and drawings are childlike in keeping with the spirit of the narration.

The message of the film is complex. It refers to the “hatred and oppression” of “long-standing anti-Japanese sentiments” [read: racism] that his father had to face and overcome. His father was one of those internees who went to Japan after the war. He only returned to Canada after serving in the Canadian army during the Korean War (1950–1953). In short he had to risk his life in order to return to Canada from what he terms his “exile” in Japan. The racism faced by Japanese Canadians in Canada forced on them an identity of ‘Otherness,’ of not belonging. Minoru says in the film that “Canada saw me as Japanese. I saw myself as a Canadian.” The labelling based on race gave Minoru a non-Canadian nationality, which becomes the basis of his internment narrative of how Canada took from him his Canadian nationality and identity. His son Michael, who was born in Canada, states at the end of the film that “my Canadianness is complete, totally natural, immutable,” which his father’s was not. At the end of the film Fukushima states that his grandparents, whose property was confiscated and lost to them, died before the redress settlement of 1988 and so never received compensation. This becomes one of the lingering resentments that form an integral part of “[his] other heritage.”

The issue of conflicted identity in the face of racial bias and discrimination is fundamental to the film’s narrative. However, McAllister argues that “*Minoru* is still stricken by the linear narrative that inserts Japanese Canadians into the linear

narrative of the modern Canadian nation” (101). By this she means that a story centering on the progress toward becoming fully Canadian ends up undermining the specificity of their racial oppression or the systemic racism that permeated and continues to permeate Canadian society. Because the stories of Minoru and Michael Fukushima focus on overcoming and creating a successful life for themselves in Canada, their narrative of eventual inclusivity shaping Canadian national identity is one that McAllister questions.

Something that has not been mentioned in previous studies of either the individual documentaries or the body of work on the internment as a whole are the curious similarities between the 1945 propaganda film *Of Japanese Descent* and the 1992 redemptive film *Minoru*. Three points of convergence need to be considered. First, the theme of erasure can be applied to both. In the earlier propaganda film the erasure is the whitewashing of the internment experience and its emphasis on the ‘benefits’ of internment to the internees. In the 1992 film the erasure is more subtle because it involves the eventual removal of the stigma of ‘Otherness’ through the heroic struggle of individuals and the collective. Second, the earlier film was a “public relations” film made for the Department of Labour. It was commissioned by a body outside the NFB. Likewise *Minoru* had the financial support and blessing of the Japanese Canadian Redress Secretariat, which made the film ‘official’ in the same sense that *Of Japanese Descent* was ‘official.’ Both films were directly or indirectly state-funded and they ended up as “legal-political” narratives, to use McAllister’s term. They are opposed to each other, yet they serve similar purposes by offering official interpretations. This brings up the third aspect – the role of history and the authoritative voice-over technique. Not just these two, but all three films discussed thus far, use the voice-over method to convey their message, which is both a hallmark and a limitation of the documentary genre. Yet in each case the voice-over is different. Fukushima’s is the first Japanese Canadian voice to narrate a personal Japanese Canadian story so it has the quality of a first-person narrative. This re-appropriation of voice is central to its validity, but equally important is the tone of that voice and its delivery. It is a slow, measured, non-combative voice filled with lengthy pauses, especially in the case of Michael Fukushima’s voice. One does not feel driven or rushed from one point to another. The voice calls for reflection and its tone is one of elegiac sadness, not accusation. The voice-over of *Of Japanese Descent* lacks any personal dimension, losing itself in a false socio-historical ‘objectivity.’ The revelatory voice-over of *Enemy Alien* continues the silencing of its subject even as it confesses the wrongs perpetrated on innocent Japanese Canadians. It is only with the affirmative overcoming voiced by a third-generation Japanese Canadian in *Minoru* that Canadian cinema received a subjective and personal narrative. There are several aspects of the film that herald it as a turning-point as a “film of utterance.” First, it is an auteur work that signals the re-appropriation of the Japanese Canadian voice. Second, it establishes a role for multi-genres in internment cinema story-telling. The combination of

the documentary and animation genres signals this new duality, which itself suggests that only by mixing modes of discourse can the story be told with a fuller authenticity. Third, it announces the central role that the third-generation Japanese Canadians came to have in articulating the internment. From this point forward there emerged new ground rules for any future films beginning with Linda Ohama's full-length (94 min) documentary/docu-drama titled *Obāchan's Garden*, which has a section on the internment. This film offered the original use of a female voice and a move away from the political-legal approach influenced earlier by the redress movement.

6. *Obāchan's Garden* (2001) and the Female Voice

Minoru's narrative is tied closely to the political narrative as viewed by the redress movement. One can summarize this approach as emphasizing abuses of citizenship, human rights, and social justice.⁶ In contrast, *Obāchan's Garden* tells her grandmother's story of migration to and life in Canada in which political-legal arguments are less important. The story is much more holistic in that it discusses a whole life – pre-internment, internment, and post-internment. The introduction of a female voice and a female protagonist moves the narrative to a new arena and to a new interpretative orientation. The subject of the film, Asayo Murakami (1898–2002) was a “picture bride” who came to Canada in 1924. She rejected her sponsoring Canadian Japanese fiancé and had to work in a cannery to repay the cost of her travel. She married another Japanese Canadian man and lived in Steveston, a Japanese Canadian fishing enclave. She and her family ended up working on a sugar beet farm in Manitoba during the war and, after the war, settled on a farm in Alberta. This part of her story was documented in Ohama's 1992 documentary *The Last Harvest*.

Apparently Ohama's grandmother was an avid flower gardener, and the garden becomes a metaphor for her resilience and her values. Monika Kin Gagnon cites the garden as an example of “tending, tender gestures” (2006, 216). She considers the flower garden as a “refuge” and a place of caring from which gifts of seeds can and were made to other women (2006, 222). It is the feminism of the film that disrupts the political-legal stance and orients the audience toward a life story rather than a socio-political event. Sheena Wilson claims that “the telling of mother stories [...] [can be] an act of resistance” (25). In fact, she interprets the film as an act of reclaiming, resisting, and retracing the herstory of a racialized woman (25). This makes the film a “subversive act” by giving its female protagonist agency and making the mother figure the center of the story (Wilson 34, 45). Her determination to live by her own life choices undermines ‘the good mother’ stereotypes of patriarchal-constructed femininity. She is presented as a feminist hero.

Ohama's representation of the internment episode in the film and the language used to describe it is the main concern of this essay. How much does it deviate from that the political-legal language of *Enemy Alien* and *Minoru*? Instead of focusing on citizenship, human rights, and social justice, the film expresses the experience of internment in much more personal tones – of childhood memories, separation from friends, family needs and relations, and all the day-to-day worries that the expulsion and the work on the sugar beet farm forced the family to endure. There is no condemnation of the government's actions, simply the acceptance of the situation. The film highlights stories and scenes told by surviving family members. It dramatizes certain episodes including actors in period costumes and it uses the family home in Steveston, the only surviving Japanese Canadian home, as a focal point of the tragedy. It is also the first film on the internment to use archival footage of the bombing of Hiroshima, in the district where Murakami was born. The news of the bombing brings about Murakami's dramatic lamentation because of her concern for two daughters from a first marriage that she left behind, a fact unbeknownst to anyone in Canada.

There is a great deal of sorrow and sadness in the film, but it does not center on compensation for confiscated property or other abuses. In short, it deals with historical issues in a deeply personalized and an emotionally evocative way. The filmmaker is able to elevate these feelings and memories to a universal level that surpasses the political-legal language and concerns of the previous films. By universal I mean that anyone could have the same feelings in a similar situation. The metaphor of a garden, the role of flowers, and the final reconciliation of an aged mother with her long lost daughter makes filial and maternal love the centerpiece of the story.

While *Minoru* and *Obāchan's Garden* were both made by *Sansei* (third-generation) Japanese Canadians, the personalization in Ohama's film goes far beyond Fukushima's, and results in a more impactful statement. Murakami's life is told in a fuller, more multi-dimensional manner than Minoru's life in the short film by Fukushima. In *Minoru* the audience is made aware of the injustices in Canadian history, but this awareness potentially allows for an affective distancing for the viewers through a sense of 'Otherness' imposed by the framing historical narrative. Past events normally communicate something that happened to a 'them' and not to 'us.' This is not the case in Ohama's film. Her film touches a raw nerve in the viewer and does not allow for any distance from the protagonist. The intimacy of the story creates an impact on the viewer that effectively erases differences between 'us' and the cinematic subject. This is evidenced by the film's winning numerous "audience favourite" awards at film festivals. The filmmaker shows an exceptional ability to blend dramatization, family members' first-person narratives, archival footage, and her own voice-over narration in a way that captures the fullness of a human life at an emotional level. Ohama's film raises the story of internment to a different level than the historical political-legal dimension by questioning the

idea of ‘Otherness.’ Two years later another film about the internment appeared. It moved away from the intensely personal narrative of Ohama’s film, avoiding also the legal-historical focus of Fukushima’s film.

7. *Sleeping Tigers: The Asahi Baseball Story* (2003) and the Symbolic Power of Sports

While not as generously awarded as *Obāchan’s Garden*, *Sleeping Tigers* represents a novel way of representing the internment because it deals with a small-group identity rather than that of an individual or the larger collectivity. The Japanese Canadian Asahi baseball team of Vancouver was formed in 1914, became well-known, and won various baseball championships before being disbanded due to the the expulsion in 1942. Some sixty years after it was disbanded, the team was inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and a historic plaque was installed in Vancouver to commemorate its achievements. A Japanese-made feature film about the team set in the 1930s titled *The Vancouver Asahi (Bankūbā no Asahi)* premiered at the 2014 Vancouver International Film Festival, where it won the People’s Choice award, mirroring the popular response to *Obāchan’s Garden*.⁷

The curator of a 2006 exhibit about the team spoke of its role as an “example” and an “important symbol” for the Japanese Canadian community (Johnston n.p.) during its decades-long struggle for respect and equality. The Asahi baseball team was one of the community’s pre-war public relations triumphs and a source of immense pride. This film explores the impact that achieving sports prominence can have on a racialized community. The director Jari Osborne, being of Chinese Canadian background, was only too well aware of the historic anti-Asian racism in British Columbia that had been also aimed at her forbearers. In 1999 she made a film titled *Unwanted Soldiers* about her Chinese Canadian father, a war veteran, which revealed the military contribution of Chinese Canadians that had been hidden from public view.

The interviewees talk about the team as “great heroes” who proved that Japanese Canadians were equals in sports. The film is presented as a “Davids versus Goliaths” story of how a minority won over a majority (Osborne). It deals with the impact of internment on the disbanded team and its members, who were all part of the “mass expulsion” (a term used in the film by one of the former members). Eventually four baseball teams were formed in the camps, which included former team members. These teams participated in competitions, including the Slokan Valley championship on Canada Day, July 1, 1943 with thousands of internees and area residents in attendance. Clearly baseball was a morale booster in the camps, as well as having been a point of pride before the war.

The team came to symbolize achievement and a measure of acceptance for the Japanese Canadian community. The North American cultural discourse

around sports usually deals with either team pride or individual prowess. The film deals specifically with the former because of the team's role in representing a specific community. Osborne's strategies of dramatization, the use of archival footage, and first person on-camera accounts is compelling. The pain and tragedy of the disbanding is mitigated to a degree by the positive role of baseball in the camps – a sign of community resilience and the heritage of achievement the team represented.

Osborne is clearly sensitive to making the Japanese Canadians the prime movers of the film. She handles the story well, but the film, as such, does not have the deep emotional impact of *Obāchan's Garden*, because it is about a social entity and its role as a symbol of community pride rather than the suffering and resilience of a single person. While *Sleeping Tigers* has its painful moments, it is ultimately a story about pre-war heroic success. It is more of a sociological study and it does not offer a psychological insight comparable to *Obāchan's Garden*. The numerous references to various team members and their roles, as well as the historical chronology of the team's progress, altogether result in diffusing the story among too many participants and voices. The heroine of Ohama's film is a grand dame, weighed down by the world whose agency rejects victimhood, while the heroes of Osborne's film are victims of internment. It is very much a film 'about' the team made by a non-Japanese Canadian, which gives it an external quality and identifies it as a deflection from the subjective narration trajectory established by *Minoru* a decade earlier, and then enhanced by *Obāchan's Garden*.

8. *East of the Rockies* (2018) and the New Digital Media

East of the Rockies is an experimental augmented-reality (AR) narrative based on Joy Kogawa's famed *Obasan* novel from 1981. Its sequel titled *Itsuka*, in which the now-adult protagonist gets involved in the redress movement, came out in 1993. The technology of the AR animation, designed by the firm Jam3, allows viewers to see and explore various physical aspects of a re-creation of the Slocan Internment Camp, where Joy was interned as a child. When viewers tap and zoom, they activate a narrative spoken by Yuki, the fictional 17-year old internee, who is voiced by Kogawa's 21-year old granddaughter Anne Canute. *East of the Rockies* is a downloadable app that can be viewed on a cellphone or a tablet. The film mirrors *Minoru* from 25 years earlier in its use of animation and it mirrors *Obāchan's Garden* with its personal female voice. While being considered an animated film, it takes its structure from interactive video games.

This forty-five minute project began when Kogawa was approached to allow her original story to be used to create a new animated version as a way of bringing the darker sides of Canadian history to light in time for the country's 150th anniversary in 2017. An original script was developed and then re-done by

Kogawa. An article in a Canada Media Fund online publication explained: “For the project to gain popularity [...] it was essential that the *game* be available in the App Store” (Archambault 2019; emphasis mine). Devised for digital platforms, the project evaluated its success via the number of downloads the AR film got. In the first three weeks, there were almost 100,000 downloads (Archambault). This level of viewership far surpasses numbers typical of conventional distribution channels for short cinematic media. In its media release the NFB quotes Jam3’s creative director claiming that, “using immersive storytelling [...] can educate a brand-new audience with a learn-through-gameplay experience leveraging the power of AR on iPhone and iPad” (NFB 2019). The NFB described itself as “one of the world’s leading digital content hubs, creating groundbreaking interactive documentaries and animation, mobile content, installations and participatory experiences. NFB interactive productions and digital platforms have won 100 awards, including 18 Webbys” (NFB 2019). The App testifies to the NFB’s long history of adopting technological innovations to further its visual storytelling.

East of the Rockies effectively renders the Japanese Canadian experience of Second World War internment as integral to the understanding of Canada’s history of racism. A review of the video project in the *Japan Times* adds that the tone of reconciliation that Kogawa brings to the film reflects a “love of Canada by both first and second generation Japanese Canadians” (Bird 2019). What this study shows is that first-person narratives, whether as voice-over or directly articulated to the camera, tend to create a closer identification response in an audience than films that tend toward the legal-historical aspect. Ohama’s *Obāchan’s Garden* and Kogawa’s *East of the Rockies* are prime examples of this form of storytelling. It is a matter of audience engagement, empathy, and identification. An AR experience is a contemporary mode of achieving that level of psychological participation. *East of the Rockies* connects to a highly-regarded voice, builds on past narratives like her novels, and offers a discourse that empowers the subjective stance and its personal dimension. That Japanese Canadian women have captured that dimension suggests that their form of storytelling is powerful enough to move beyond a legal-historical discourse about injustice to a statement that embraces reconciliation on a very human level. In fact, it can be argued that their contribution to the cinema of the internment not only gives the story greater longevity though personal relevance for viewers, but actually contributes to the reconciliatory/forgiveness aspects of its message. It offers a kind of closure by giving them the last word.

9. Conclusion

The removal, internment, deportation, and dispersal of Japanese Canadians during and after World War Two changed the community and started a whole new phase of assimilation in the sociology of Japanese Canadian life. That phase ended with

the watershed redress agreement of 1988. The films analysed in this study represent three phases: the early or pre-redress phase reflected in the two films produced in 1945 and 1975; the middle or redress phase with the three films made between 1992 and 2003; and the late or post-redress phase with the AR film of 2018. Altogether, these six films provide a valuable insight into the public discourse about a contested topic. Though these film productions cannot be considered a totally accurate gauge of public awareness of the issue, one may consider this legacy of evolving narratives as a reflection of public attitudes toward the internment. The evolution of the narrative from early propaganda to acknowledgement of injustice, and then to a focus on political-legal dimensions of the event and its flagrant violation of human rights, to personal narratives of psychological distress and family suffering, serves as a reminder of how the past is officially constructed, remembered in counter-narratives, and re-invented for future generations.

Regarding the four concepts used in the analysis of this cinematic history – the colonizing racist gaze, utterance, trace/memory, and the discourses of power – each film strongly reflects at least one of these terms. *Of Japanese Descent* can be viewed as propaganda serving to underscore the primacy of the white Anglo-European in defining Canadian identity. Its discourse testifies to the power of the state and the dominant society's ability to render minorities like the Japanese Canadians unwelcome 'Others.' *Enemy Alien* revises this grand narrative by exposing the crimes and injustice involved in the internment. It is the first cinematic revisionist history in which Canada was depicted as a perpetrator nation. However, what reversed the story completely were the first personal narratives by Japanese Canadians – *Minoru*, *Obāchan's Garden*, and *East of the Rockies* – all of which empowered the voices and the viewpoints of Japanese Canadians of the *Nisei* (second) and *Sansei* (third) generations. Their memories and their willingness to speak about what had happened to them or their parents provide a human face to the historical event of the internment and its legacy of trauma. The theme of reconciliation and forgiveness that emerges in the post-redress period films is an important addition to this history.

However, silences are as significant as the trace memories offered in these personal films. Because internment affected thousands of people of all ages, one needs to reflect on how traumatic events are represented in film. None of the films that the NFB produced convey the intense emotional trauma that sudden dispossession, deportation, internment, forced labor on beet farms, and eventual dispersal across Canada and to Japan had on the internees. There are numerous reasons why this is the case. One is the reluctance of the victims to publicly (and perhaps privately) relate what happened to them. Another is the pain of the psychological impact they experienced (as compared to the political and economic impacts). Trauma theory recognizes that all kinds of trauma (war, physical and sexual abuse, violence to the person or loved ones, incarceration, racism, and denial of basic rights) involve denial, repressed memories, and the avoidance of articulating to others the impact of the trauma.

While telling the story may be liberating for some, the majority of victims prefer to remain silent. Shame is one factor in encouraging forgetting or ignoring the past. It may be that the victim (in this case an internee) may wish to spare the descendants the burden of their own trauma. The impulse to remain silent is widely recognized as a defense mechanism against the hurt one has experienced. I believe this response to trauma has had an impact on the cinema of this internment. It has turned it into a deliberately constrained documentation of the full range of impacts on the internees. While advocates and activists feel obliged to raise issue, the majority of victims prefer anonymity. This means the film record needs augmentation. The legal-historical discourse tends toward a collective statement about suffering and restitution, while the personal discourse tends to be more of a glimpse than a full airing. So much has been unsaid to date. The potential in this subject will keep it alive because much as been omitted.

The long historical period over which these films were produced suggests strongly that cinematic treatments about the internment will not cease. While every film in this study is intertwined with the socio-political and ideological discourse of its day, the severity of the consequences of internment will continue to attract attention. While the more recent interpretation of the internment experience reflects the opening up of Canada toward a more multi-cultural and multi-racial identity, especially post-1980, the real change has been driven by the Japanese Canadian community which was most affected and now owns the narrative and propagates it for all Canadians.

Since the NFB is a state-supported entity, it tends to reflect official discourse about Canada's history of systemic racism. What the NFB has contributed is the enshrining of the internment as a seminal event in this country's legacy of systemic racism. The NFB is part of the "institutionalized cultural process in the public sphere" (Thompson 597), and so has served as a vital link in the presentation of revisionist narratives. By changing the dominant narrative, the NFB has displayed malleability and attunement to the direction of the wider public discourse. If nothing else these films warn of what could happen if Canada goes to war with a country or countries from which minorities in Canada may have originated. There is no guarantee of a non-repetition of history.

Notes

1. The government of Canada deported 4,000 Japanese Canadian internees to Japan in 1946.
2. A 1986 study evaluated the economic cost to the internees of \$443 million in 1986 dollars. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/history-ethnic-cultural/Pages/Japanese-redress-campaign.aspx>.
3. Druick, Zoë, *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press,

- 2007; Gary Evans, *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 to 1989*, University of Toronto Press, 1991.
4. Suzuki, David, *David Suzuki: An Autobiography*. Vancouver: Greystone, 2006; Roy Miki. *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*, Vancouver: Raincoast, 2004.
 5. One scholar of CanLit described the conference as exposing, “how racial politics is embedded in the state apparatus and in Canadian writing – its funding and production, its teaching and study; because it compelled many of us to recognize that we can no longer afford to ‘profess’ by practising sedative politics, that is, continue with what we do as scholars and teachers by upholding the various mythologies of Canadian ‘civility,’” Kamboureli, Smaro, “Writing Thru Race – Vancouver, 1994.” *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 41.4 (2015), 17, *Project MUSE*. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/619150>.
 6. See Timmons, D.J. “Citizenship, Human Rights, and Social Justice: Addressing Core Concepts Through an Examination of Japanese Canadian Internment and Deportation During World War II,” *One World in Dialogue* 4.1 (2016): 28–39. <https://ssc.teachers.ab.ca/publications/Pages/OneWorldInDialogue.aspx>.
 - 7 For a discussion of literary trauma theory see Michelle Balaev’s “Trends in Literary Trauma Theory” in *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41.2 (June 2008): 149–166. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44029500>. In regard to the concept of “racial trauma” see Comas-Díaz, L., G.N. Hall, and H.A. Neville, “Racial Trauma: Theory, Research, and Healing: Introduction to the Special Issue,” *American Psychologist* 74.1 (2019): 1–5. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000442>
- For a discussion of inter-generational trauma transmission I found the following article, while dealing specifically with Indigenous populations of Canada, relevant to the transmission of internment trauma, “Historicizing historical trauma theory: Troubling the trans-generational transmission paradigm” by Krista Maxwell in *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51.3 (2014): 407–435.

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<https://www.canada.ca/en/national-film-board/news/2019/03/joy-kogawa-jam3-and-the-nfb-bring-canadian-history-to-life-through-immersive-ar-experience-east-of-the-rockies--an-interactive-app-retelling-of-acc.html>
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Cinema of Alejandro Jodorowsky: From Surrealism to Psycho-magic is forthcoming from Bloomsbury in 2022. Professor Melnyk, who is the former director of the Consortium for Peace Studies at the University of Calgary, has also published articles in the field of Peace Studies, and he has co-edited two volumes on Alberta Literature with his colleague Donna Coates. This article on the cinema of Japanese Canadian internment is inspired by all the three areas of his scholarly research.