

IDEOLOGY IN THE POETRY ANTHOLOGY 'FIRE IS NOT A COUNTRY' BY CYNTHIA DEWI OKA

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Abstract

The limited academic attention to the ideological dimensions of diasporic poetry—particularly the works of Indonesian diaspora poets—reveals a critical gap in contemporary literary studies. This research aims to explore how poetry functions not only as an artistic expression but also as an ideological medium that articulates hybrid identities, intergenerational trauma, and resistance to dominant narratives. Using a qualitative descriptive method and a Thematic Discourse Analysis approach, this study examines how the anthology *Fire Is Not A Country* by Cynthia Dewi Oka constructs ideological meaning through poetic language, literary devices, and narrative structure. The analysis focuses on eight selected poems that highlight recurring themes such as identity, family, migration, and trauma, which are intricately intertwined in representing the complexity of diasporic subjectivity and critiquing hegemonic socio-political structures. The findings indicate that Oka's lyrical strategies effectively infiltrate and challenge dominant ideologies—such as nationalism, patriarchal family expectations, and assimilationist pressures—while offering a counter-discourse that empowers marginalized communities through cultural articulation and collective healing.

Keywords: Cultural resistance; Diaspora poetry; Ideology; Thematic discourse analysis.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, cross-border migration has become a socio-cultural phenomenon that reshapes individual and collective identities, particularly within the realms of education, culture, and literature (Belamghari, 2020; Homer & Lim, 2024). Within this dynamic flow of movement, diaspora poetry emerges as a crucial medium for portraying transnational experiences and the complex processes of identity formation, especially among communities experiencing displacement and alienation. One prominent form is modern lyrical poetry, which not only conveys personal expression but also reflects ideological, social, and political tensions faced by the diaspora (Ahlgren, 2021; Olszewska, 2023). In this context, poetry can be seen as a tool for articulating hybrid identities, migration trauma, and resistance to the dominant narratives of both the country of origin and the host country (Caron & Khan, 2022).

The central issue in this study is the lack of exploration into how diaspora poetry—particularly works by Indonesian diaspora poets—articulates ideology and identity in the context of literary education and cultural studies. Previous research has primarily focused on themes and autobiographical elements without delving deeper into how poetic language serves as an ideological instrument that constructs or challenges dominant narratives about migration, exile, and fragmented identities (Abed, 2023; Androutsopoulos & Alexander, 2021; Asscher, 2020; Saxena, 2021). A deeper understanding of poetry as an ideological discourse practice is crucial for enriching the study of diaspora literature in academic settings, particularly in the teaching of English, postcolonial, and feminist literature.

To address this gap, this study employs Thematic Discourse Analysis within a qualitative descriptive framework, focusing on the anthology *Fire Is Not a Country* by Cynthia Dewi Oka.

The anthology reflects the complexity of Asian-American diaspora experiences, especially among women, in confronting political trauma, structural violence, and transgenerational dynamics. Through this approach, poetry is not merely analyzed as an aesthetic object but as a form of political articulation and a pedagogical medium for understanding diaspora experiences.

Theoretically, the study draws on feminist and postcolonial literary theories (Faulkner, 2017; McLean et al., 2017; Omar, 2025; Tanasale et al., 2025), diaspora and hybridity theory (Sharma & Mehta, 2023), and ideological discourse analysis (Beetz et al., 2021). These concepts facilitate an understanding of poetry as a discursive construction that reflects and produces power relations, memory, and identity. Moreover, this framework is highly relevant to contemporary English literature pedagogy, as it introduces students to the political and cultural dimensions embedded in literary texts.

While offering a novel approach, this research maintains a conceptual thread with prior studies such as Marei & Shanneik (2021), who examine poetry as a form of ideological resistance in diaspora communities, and Carrera (2024), who employs discourse analysis in the context of digital culture. However, this study differs in both its object and context. Marei & Shanneik focus on lamentation poetry in Shia rituals, whereas this research analyses lyrical poetry through postcolonial and feminist lenses. Carrera explores digital humour, while this study situates poetry as a space for articulating personal and political trauma in the context of the Asian-American diaspora. Likewise, Statham & Ringrow (2024) highlight digital video campaigns, whereas this study focuses on poetic texts as intimate representations of ideology and diaspora experience.

The main objective of this research is to explore ideological themes in the poetry anthology *Fire Is Not a Country* through three key questions: (1) How do the four main thematic areas—identity, family, migration, and trauma—reflect the ideological dimensions of the diaspora experience in Oka's anthology? (2) How does Oka employ literary devices and specific linguistic choices to articulate complex layers of meaning related to cultural displacement, generational trauma, emotional adaptation, and political violence? (3) How do Oka's poems challenge dominant sociopolitical narratives about diaspora communities, and what counter-discourses do they offer regarding the construction of identity and cultural belonging in the context of displacement?

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of Thematic Discourse Analysis with ideological reading of women's diaspora poetry in *Fire Is Not a Country*. Unlike previous studies that focus on religious rituals, digital expression, or visual political activism, this research emphasises a deep analysis of lyrical poetry as a form of cultural resistance to diaspora marginalisation. It expands the field of diaspora literary studies by revealing how poetry can serve as a medium for articulating plural identities, intergenerational trauma, and counter-discourses against dominant ideologies in an increasingly fragmented world.

The primary contribution of this study is its integration of Thematic Discourse Analysis with an ideological reading of women's diaspora poetry, particularly in *Fire Is Not a Country* by Cynthia Dewi Oka. This research broadens the horizon of diaspora literary studies by demonstrating that lyrical poetry can serve as an effective pedagogical medium for understanding diaspora experiences through an intersectional lens, encompassing hybrid identities, intergenerational trauma, emotional migration, and political violence. In the context of teaching, the findings provide both theoretical and practical foundations for the development of curricula in contemporary English literature, postcolonial studies, and feminist studies, by emphasising the importance of ideological analysis in literary interpretation. Thus, poetry can be utilised not only as an aesthetic object but also as an educational instrument to foster critical

awareness, cross-cultural empathy, and resistance to dominant narratives in literature and cultural studies classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept and Function of Ideology in Literature

In literary studies, ideology is not merely understood as a set of collective values or ideas, but as a narrative and aesthetic mechanism that constructs and deconstructs relations of power, identity, and social institutions. As explained by Backer (2020), ideology operates through ideological state apparatuses, including literature and culture, which subtly reproduce structural domination. Literature, in this sense, is not merely an aesthetic arena but also a complex ideological medium—one that can both reinforce hegemony and serve as a tool of resistance. Ajmal & Zainab (2024) reinforce this argument by demonstrating that ideology in literary works is often embedded in language choices, metaphors, and character representation, making critical reading a means to uncover tensions between subjective experience and broader social structures. Thus, this study positions poetry not as an autonomous text but as an ideological site that opens space for struggles over meaning and power.

Diaspora, Identity, and Lyric Expression

Poetry, particularly in its lyrical form, possesses a unique capacity to express the ruptures in identity and the migratory trauma experienced by diaspora communities. Laird & Oatley (2022) emphasise that poetry is a form of literary expression that is semantically and affectively dense, enabling the encapsulation of complex human experiences within an economical linguistic structure. In the context of diaspora, poetry becomes a site for articulating transnational emotions such as longing, alienation, and loss. Shenishen (2023) notes that diasporic poetry often contains rhetoric that reflects ideological conflict, making it more than a mere form of personal expression. Meanwhile, Cyzewski (2021) notes that poetic forms such as elegy are employed to mourn the loss of cultural roots, while free verse is used to express the freedom that challenges conventional boundaries of citizenship and language. This suggests that poetic forms themselves have ideological implications, where structural choices both shape and reflect the poet's political stance. Integrating these perspectives, this study argues that diasporic poetry represents an intersection between language, identity, and power, inseparable from its socio-political context.

Literary Devices and Thematic Discourse Analysis

The thematic discourse analysis approach in literature further emphasises that form and language in poetry cannot be separated from its ideological content. Bouvier & Way (2021), though studying digital humour, argue that narrative and linguistic choices are means to reproduce or subvert power. This principle also applies in the study of diasporic poetry. Rahman (2021) and Sohini (2022) stress the importance of reading poetry with attention to form and stylistic devices, as elements such as enjambment, repetition, and metaphor are not neutral but rhetorical strategies that reflect the poet's ideological stance in postcolonial and feminist discourse. This approach provides a strong methodological foundation for the present study, which analyses *Fire Is Not a Country* not only thematically but also through its language and structure, which are rich in meaning. Accordingly, this analysis not only fills a gap in the study of contemporary diasporic poetry but also contributes to broader discourse on how identity and ideology are constructed through literary form.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a descriptive qualitative method with an eye on Thematic Discourse Analysis. With flexible data collecting and processing approaches, this approach was selected

as it offered an in-depth knowledge focused on human events (Lim, 2025). Using discourse analysis, one found how people comprehended books, discriminated between cohesive and incoherent structures, and grasped latent meanings in communication (Yule, 2017). Braun & Clarke's (2019) development of thematic discourse analysis helped the researcher to find and understand trends of meaning (themes) within textual material. In this setting, the approach was used to investigate how Oka's poetic language's ideology was organized, especially in a few poems that highlighted important subjects such as trauma, family history, identity, and migration.

Instruments

The main method used in this study was theme discourse analysis, which was done qualitatively on Oka's collection of poetry. It was all about finding common motifs in the poetry to better understand their more profound ideological connotations.

Procedures

It read each poem over and over again to make sure one can understand everything about it. Then, a meticulous coding strategy was employed to identify the main themes that consistently emerged in the study's analysis. It employed thematic analysis to examine how these motifs revealed underlying ideological ideas, following the advice of Nowell et al. (2017). The study examined several key aspects closely. It paid close attention to the terms used, especially those related to trauma, family, migration, and identity, because they helped us understand the emotional and thematic issues in the book. It also examined how metaphorical language can reveal ideological differences and emotional depth in poetry. It also looked at the structure and organisation of each poem's story to see how they built and shared experiences of migration and identity. It examined cultural allusions, including emblems of migration and legacy, to see how they related to other texts and added further meaning. The study employed these methods to critically examine how the poems conveyed ideological views on identity, family, migration, and trauma. It also showed how Oka's poetic language challenged mainstream cultural narratives through art.

Data Analysis

The study used descriptive qualitative methods and theme discourse analysis, as Braun & Clarke (2019) explain. The first thing the researchers did was to identify the main ideas in the poems, particularly those related to trauma, family, migration, and identity. Then, the data were sorted into groups based on themes that frequently appeared in the texts. It placed a lot of emphasis on examining the poet's style and word choices, which helped us determine her political views. Then, these concerns were examined within a broader social and cultural context to explore how the poems addressed and questioned issues of power, identity, and displacement. This approach to analysis helps to understand the logical and emotional aspects of the lyrics that discuss the diaspora experience.

FINDINGS

This study employs Thematic Discourse Analysis to examine eight poems from Cynthia Dewi Oka's book, *Fire Is Not a Country*. This study looks at the following poems: *Meditation on the Worth of Anything*, *For My Father Who Once Rubbed Shoe Polish on His Bald Head*, *In Europe*, *My Mother Wears Shades*, *The Year of the Shoe*, *Discernment*, *Interlude—Ancestral Agendas*, *Recurring*, and *Elegy with a White Shirt*. It chose these pieces because they have a lot of themes that are important to Oka's poetry, like diaspora, identity, family, and memory. It looks at each poem in terms of its word choices, use of metaphor, narrative structure, and cultural references to better understand how these works tell politically charged stories about worldwide events and feeling like an outsider.

Identity

Cultural Displacement

In the poem "*In Europe, My Mother Wears Shades*" (p. 89), an ideological representation of cultural alienation experienced by diasporic individuals emerges through symbolic lexical choices. The poem explores the experience of identity within the context of cultural displacement. The title itself—repeated in lines 20–21 as “sunglasses like black moons floating on her face”—symbolizes the mother’s effort to conceal her identity and emotions. This symbol creates a sense of distance between the subject and her environment, acting as a metaphor for the existential estrangement faced by diaspora subjects in unfamiliar settings.

Moreover, lines 3–4—which use the terms "evergreen windmill" and "centuries-dead Rembrandt"—reflect the historical and cyclical cultural scene of Europe—persistent yet strange to the narrator, from a different cultural background. Lines 26–27, with diction such as “gash” and “bits of lace,” simultaneously suggest violence and tenderness, highlighting the symbolic tension between two cultures that remain partially unbridgeable.

The image of a woman in “a blue dress” in line 31, along with the “frowning” expressions of local children in line 34, creates a contemplative space regarding identity and the feeling of not belonging within a new social structure. In line 66, the phrase “cool confidence” is used to describe the blue marble in Charlemagne’s Cathedral in Aachen—a symbol of European architectural and historical grandeur that remains emotionally inaccessible to the diasporic subject. Later, in lines 89–90, the statement that “love and grief are part of a long-term strategy” reflects the emotional survival strategies passed from mother to daughter—selectively choosing which emotions and relationships to retain or relinquish.

The culmination arrives in line 101, where the narrator refers to herself, while observing a local family, as “slightly malevolent,” offering a profound reflection on the inability to fully connect with surrounding cultures and individuals. Altogether, the poem’s symbolism and diction construct a narrative of identity that is fluid, distanced, and continually negotiated between preserving one’s cultural heritage and adapting to new social systems. Therefore, the poem’s ideological message revolves around the conflict between preserving one’s native identity and the drive to assimilate—a dynamic mirror of identity development in the diaspora.

Recognition

In the poem "Meditation on the Worth of Anything" (p. 3), the author emphasizes within conflict as a main process of identity building. Here, identity is shown as the outcome of critical thought on family legacy and personal values developing within cultural conflicts. This process is expressed using well selected lexical elements that portray the daily reality the narrator and their family live as well as emotional difficulty. The first sentence, "I'll pay you, if you're worthy," (lines 1–2) highlights how frequently external criteria define self-worth, therefore perhaps contradicting the quest of internal significance. Domestic images, including the mother's making of "rice-and- vegetable soup" (line 5), which stands for sacrifice and resilience as fundamental to identity within the framework of financial limitation, accentuate this conflict.

Lines 9–10's metaphor "memory is long and bendy, a red line that curves around the globe" (lines 9–10) implies that diasporic memory is non-linear and tightly related to a complex, multigenerational family history. Lines 22–23—"I wore four-sizes-too-big-but-ironed jeans"—show the narrator's bodily representation—that of dissonance between outer appearance and interior distortion of the self. Lines 24–25, "threatening kids by thumbing a knife across the skin of an orange," depict efforts by the narrator to impose authority or achieve acknowledgment despite weakness. Concurrently, the picture of "a flower head made of paper" (lines 34–35) starts to represent family values like love and care that help to define human

identity. Phrases like "You really look after me. You eat for everyone. Lines 37–38 underline the often underappreciated but vital mother's influence on the narrator's identity. Figures like "a man with thinning hair and jutting cheekbones" and "a girl... in a traditional yellow kebaya" (lines 44–45) show how enduring traditional cultural components shape family identity even in the middle of modernism.

Emotional affirmations such as "You love me" and "You are the best" (lines 41–42) signal that identity is often formed through invisible, generational acts of love. Overall, the poem's poetic strategies suggest that identity is neither static nor individually born but is formed through relational bonds, cultural inheritance, and emotional experiences within the diasporic condition. The poem's ideological implication is that identity formation is a response to dynamics of power, sacrifice, and unspoken love within familial narratives.

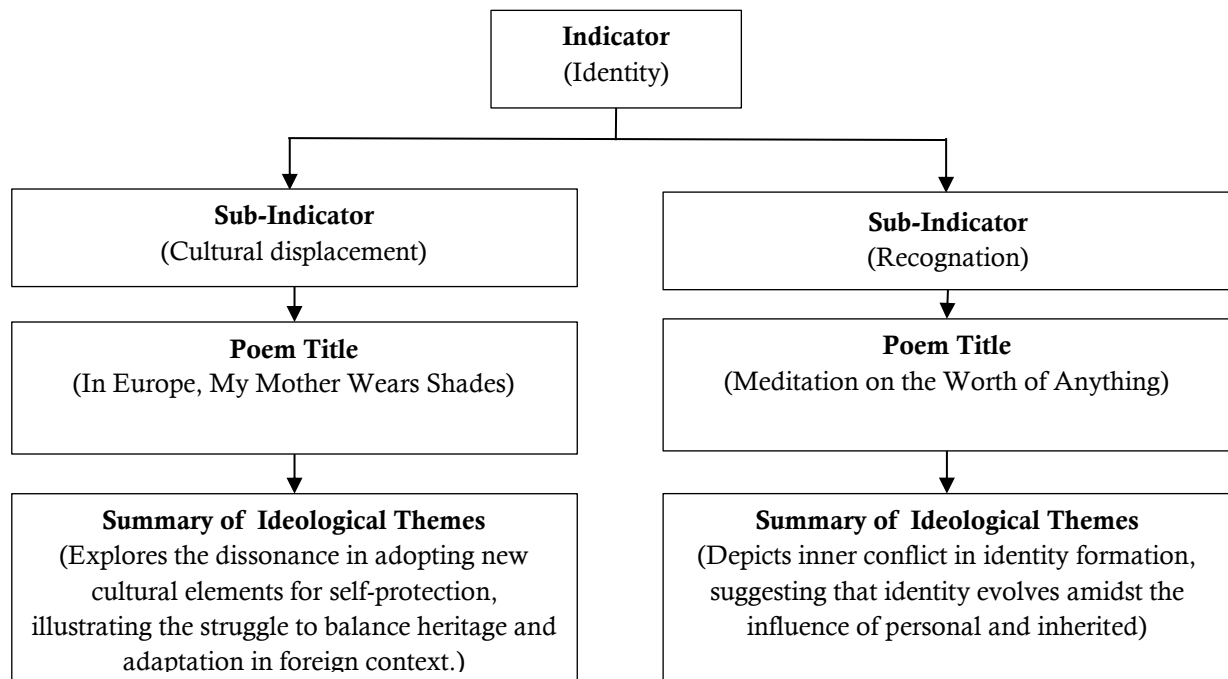


Figure 1. Mapping of Identity Ideology

Family

Intergenerational Trauma

In the poem "For My Father Who Once Rubbed Shoe Polish Over His Bald Head" (p. 22), intergenerational trauma is represented through the father's actions, which reflect an attempt to conform to social expectations while concealing the scars of expulsion. The lexical choices in this poem depict familial dynamics and the emergence of transgenerational trauma revealed through the interaction between the narrator and their father. Lines 12–13, such as "my painted face speaking English as though it never knew another purpose," illustrate the narrator's identity formation influenced by dominant cultural demands, while also showing the emotional distance from the father rooted in unspoken experiences and values.

Line 15, "reduced to nothing but hours," indicates how the father figure is trapped in a functional routine devoid of personal meaning, reflecting the loss of emotional expression in traditional family structures. Meanwhile, lines 16–17—"cooking, cleaning, washing, sewing, tying my mother's shoelaces"—highlight a transgression of gender roles, illustrating how internalized trauma blurs conventional boundaries between masculinity and femininity in migrant families. This captures the conflict between the repressed want for emotional closeness and society norms of masculinity.

Lines 17 and 19, "purpose? That is a word for everything we have not yet found the strength to cast away," it is the result of the inherited weight of unresolved family history defining life's meaning. Lines 22–24, "for me to come back, for someone to say, You are not done yet," show the father's optimism for his child's success—a yearning for recognition of his unmet role. The narrator then exposes in lines 29–31 the psychological effects of hereditary trauma: "my body attacked the hair on my head." It dropped in fistfuls, till I was half-lunar, representing the physical expression of generational anxiety.

At last, lines 34–35, "he is not concerned about finding a job. He says, "Leave me be," to show the generational change wherein the younger generation seems free from overt demands but still bound to silent cycles of suffering. The poem's diction creates an ideological picture of emotional legacy in families, therefore influencing how future generations see identity, responsibilities, and goals in a diasporic environment.

Family Obligation

The poem "Interlude—Ancestral Agendas" (p. 73) shows the emotional and social strain to preserve family customs as well as the immigration sacrifices done to meet generational expectations. By means of symbolic interaction among the narrator, ancestors, and young people, the poem creates family responsibility not just as a pragmatic obligation but also as an ideological weight transmitted in the shape of unmet goals and hopes. Signifying the symbolic act of wearing inherited legacies, one of the main representations shows in line 31: "It's my mother's old wedding dress." The clothing is a symbol of unfulfilled expectations, hopes of the mother now passed on to her daughter, not just a physical item. This gesture indicates how passing down memories of ancestors and the framework of hope is a part of developing identity for the following generations.

Lines 57–59, "My dream was for my daughter to marry a rich European and improve our family's fortune," also clearly show how social and financial pressures are built into family expectations. These hopes become burdens for future generations, and they go on even after the person dies because they show that family expectations are not limited to one time or place. In lines 60–61, "I wanted to see an opera live at the Bolshoi Theatre," personal wishes of ancestors also crop up. This shows how unfulfilled personal goals can turn into shared duties. The lines 52–53, "Our frustrated dreams must come true before we can retire," support the idea that demands and unmet wants stay with us even after we die. So, the poem shows family as more than just a social institution; it also shows it as an intellectual entity that passes on hope, disappointment, and duty from one generation to the next. The poem generally shows "familial responsibility" as an ideological component anchored in cultural values and immigrant experiences, where every generation is positioned as the inheritor of ancestral hopes. Through symbolic lexical choices and intergenerational narrative, Oka shows how emotional and cultural legacies create an ongoing cycle of sacrifice within the diasporic context.

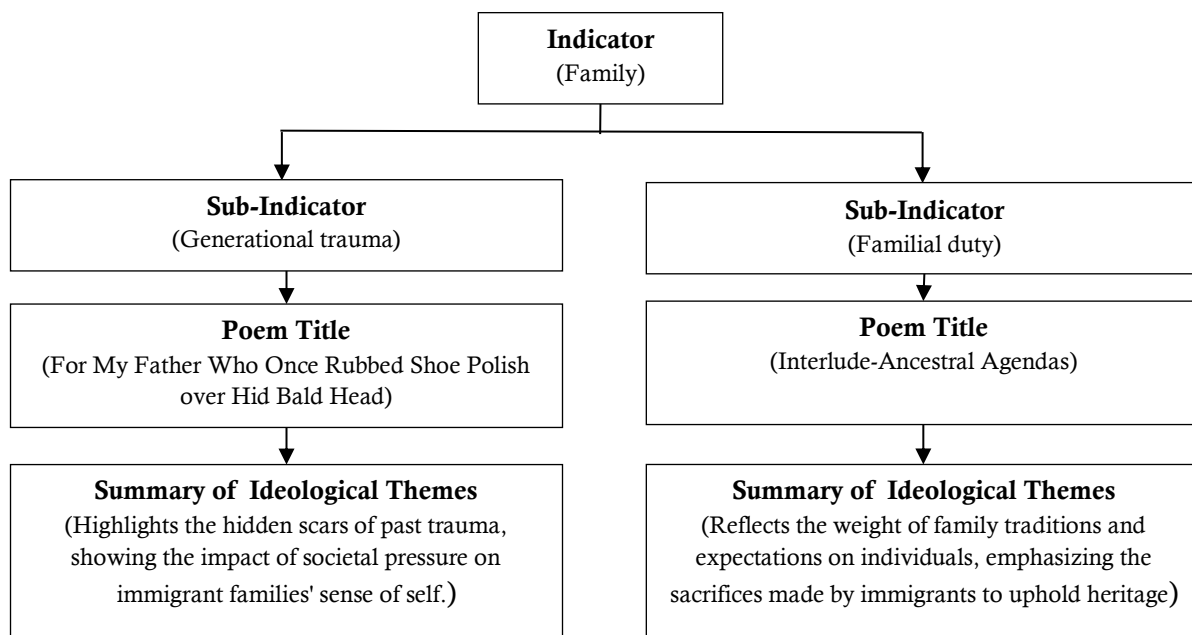


Figure 2. Mapping of Family Ideology

Migration

Emotional Displacement

In the poem “*The Year of the Shoe*” (p. 6), migration is portrayed as a force that causes emotional displacement, where the symbol of the “shoe” serves as a metaphor for the severance from one’s cultural roots and the struggle to adapt to a new environment. Migration is not only framed in terms of physical movement but also emotional loss, marked by alienation, childhood trauma, and relational tensions. Lines such as “She would hear none of the hard whispers between Teacher and Father” (lines 49–50) highlight the emotional distance between the child and the adult world, where verbal aggression replaces nurturing communication. The phrase “a secret among secrets” (line 55) reflects a childhood steeped in secrecy and emotional alienation, which accumulates as psychological burden. The symbol of a stone in the shoe, described as “a bite” (line 31), concretely represents the persistent emotional pain—indicating that trauma becomes an enduring part of the lyrical subject’s identity.

Furthermore, the temporal reference in the title—“The Year”—along with the image “shoe after shoe piling on its floor like toothless mouths” (lines 57–58), suggests that traumatic experiences are chronic and shape an emotional landscape that cannot be escaped. This poem presents emotional migration as a complex process in which memories, wounds, and identity travel not only with the body but also become psychologically embedded within new social and temporal spaces. Ideologically, the poem articulates identity rupture within diasporic experience through traumatic imagery rooted in childhood memory. Instead of portraying integration as a linear process, it emphasizes emotional dislocation as a form of resistance to dominant narratives that glorify successful cultural adaptation. Thus, “*The Year of the Shoe*” expands the understanding of migration as a process encompassing not just geographical relocation but also the restructuring of identity through recurring experiences of loss and trauma.

Adaptation

The poem “Discernment” (p. 9) portrays the slow and painful process of adapting to a foreign culture, highlighting the emotional and psychological struggles faced by migrants. The theme

of migration is framed through an emotionally charged and ideologically rich narrative of adaptation, uncertainty, and the forging of a new identity. Lexical choices such as “We tied the children to the elephants of our hearts” (lines 2–4) symbolize deep emotional bonds to family and cultural heritage, while also signifying the burdens passed down to the next generation in the “Country of Wanting” (line 6)—a foreign land full of hope and ambiguity.

The loss of identity among younger generations is conveyed through the imagery of “The girls’ faces the next nothing” (lines 17–18), which suggests erasure of identity amid assimilation. Adaptation is also metaphorically expressed in “fire is her parent” (lines 42–43), where fire signifies a transformative force that burns away the old order, compelling individuals to conform to new social and cultural structures. The phrase “Out spills shame, rice from a cut” (lines 29–31) evokes the emergence of shame and vulnerability as consequences of negotiating between past identity and present reality.

Further, the line “Oeuvre of plastic bags, god-size” (lines 47–49) reflects the overwhelming modern realities of migration, including urbanization and consumer capitalism. The dreamlike image “Dreaming when our girl was little, she ate chrysanthemum-peppered earth” (lines 33–40) suggests that past trauma continues to shape the migrant’s current psychological state. Finally, the phrase “Headlights through blue-tipped fingers, the oncoming train” (lines 49–51) symbolizes fear and uncertainty about the future, depicting the external pressures that force constant self-transformation. Overall, this poem does not merely describe physical migration but illustrates an internal journey fraught with challenges, where individuals must renegotiate their sense of self within an unfamiliar and demanding cultural terrain. Through intense and symbolic diction, Oka conveys adaptation as an existential struggle imbued with ideological significance.

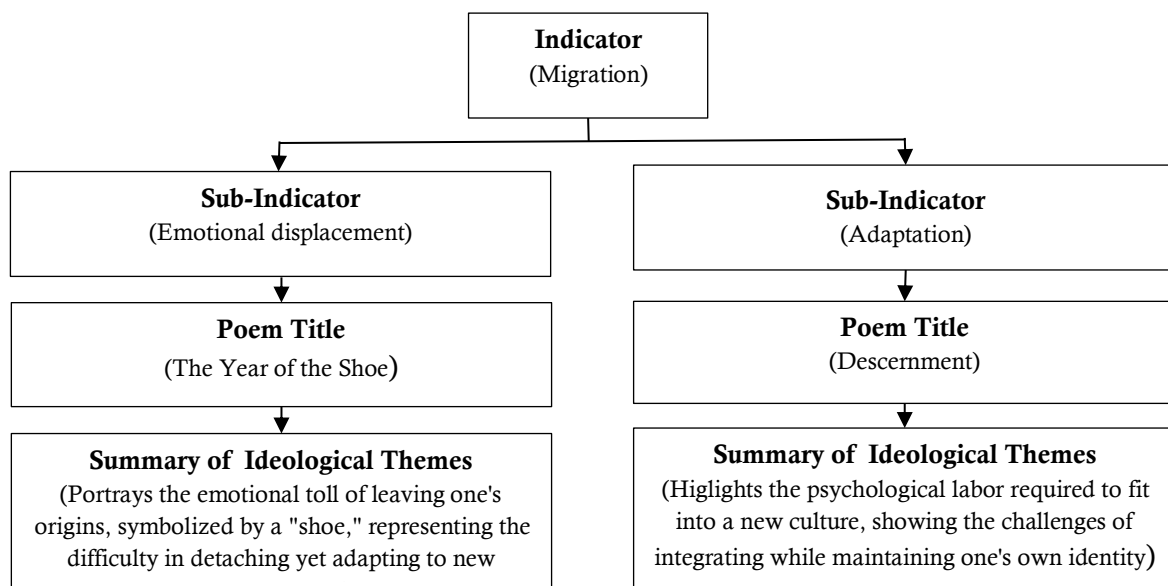


Figure 3. Mapping of Migration Ideology

Trauma

Recurring Pain

The poem “*Recurring*” (p. 83) highlights the theme of persistent trauma, portraying wounds that continually resurface in the narrator’s consciousness. Through powerful lexical choices and jarring visual metaphors, the poem represents a collective trauma that remains unhealed, affecting both the physical and psychological conditions of the subject. The opening line, “the ocean pulls, is pulled,” immediately sets up a paradoxical tension—both passive and active—

that mirrors the unending pull of traumatic memories. This cyclical imagery metaphorically illustrates the inevitability of past wounds that constantly intrude upon the victim's awareness.

Lines 9–12 use brutal vocabulary to make this point stronger: "Crushed, crushing, crushes bone." The blue-black covers the sky. Using destructive verbs over and over again makes you feel like everything is falling apart. Trauma is both an outside and an internal force that breaks down physical limits and overwhelms the emotional environment. The phrase "the blacker drugged dance of whales crossing out harpoon tips" (lines 12–14) evokes a majestic animal being hunted and tamed, which represents the narrator's vulnerability under constant mental stress.

The poem also explores how family and personal connections can be strained or fall apart. In lines 22–24, the father figure is broken up: "father's head, like a bottle's shiny, shined, lying simile because he hated, is hated, alcohol." The internal rhyme and repetition suggest a cycle of alcohol-fueled violence and inherited trauma, where alcohol becomes a symbol of familial damage. This is furthered in lines 25–27: "Breathless run, wrung, mother, sister already out of sight," evoking alienation and loss—common consequences of intergenerational trauma.

The motif of bodily fragmentation continues in lines 42–45: "mouth through mouth, the chasm and rope like tooth edge over it," conveying a sense of irreconcilable disconnection between self and others. Trauma in the poem is not merely recalled—it is embodied through metaphors of the body, illustrating violence and paralysis. The phrase "The crater of father" (line 46) presents the father as an emotional void, whose presence is marked by destruction. The statement "It husks me" (line 76) encapsulates the narrator's sense of being stripped of identity and agency, emphasizing trauma as an ongoing process of psychological erosion.

Overall, the poem's vocabulary and symbolic structure suggest that trauma is cyclical and somatic, transcending temporal boundaries. Trauma here is not a singular event but a haunting rhythm—physically debilitating, emotionally alienating, and relentlessly painful. The poem articulates how trauma becomes ingrained in the subject's very being, shaping identity through persistent rupture.

Political Violence

The poem "Elegy with a White Shirt" (p. 12) underscores the destructive impact of political violence through the symbol of the "white shirt," representing lives lost to systemic oppression. Through expressive language and strong images, the poem captures anguish brought on by such brutality. Lines 5–6—"the line of men in black, shields pressed side by side like a howl spelled out, its lashes"—conjure a tense encounter, stressing both the psychological and physical aspects of state-sponsored violence.

Words like "howl," "lashes," and "shields" point to a communal consciousness shaped by fear and defiance, suggesting simultaneously sensations of intimidation, agony, and resistance. Reference to the Battle of Orozco—"a blade is thrust through the suggestion of a body inside a white shirt"—adds a layer of intertextual creative reflection in lines 20–21. This line demonstrates how violence turns people into dead shadows under the uniform by killing their bodies and their sense of self. The "white shirt" here works as a metonymy, hinting at innocence while yet being a canvas for government aggression. Line 24, "the shirt is holding a line with other shirts like a wave cresting backward against its own dark sea," makes this picture even stronger by symbolically showing the group's momentum of resistance against oppressive powers that are too strong. The wave images support the recurrent, tumultuous character of political pain. Lines 40–41—"the wind-defying veils of redemption, my bones suggest spill"—show the inner struggle between hope for atonement and the body's remembrance of permanent loss. The veil symbolizes fragile aspirations, while the bones serve as a visceral metaphor for trauma etched into the self.

Lines 34 and 49—“My homeland lives like a witch in my house” and “the witch in my house in a white shirt”—offer powerful metaphors of the nation-state as a haunting presence within domestic space. Instead of providing protection and identity, the homeland becomes a source of psychological intrusion and fear, showing how collective trauma permeates personal and familial realms. Ultimately, the poem portrays political violence not as a distant or historical event, but as a force that dismantles identity, distorts memory, and invades the intimate spaces of everyday life. Through symbolic and emotive language, the poem presents violence as both ideological and corporeal wounds, shaping the subjectivity of diasporic communities.

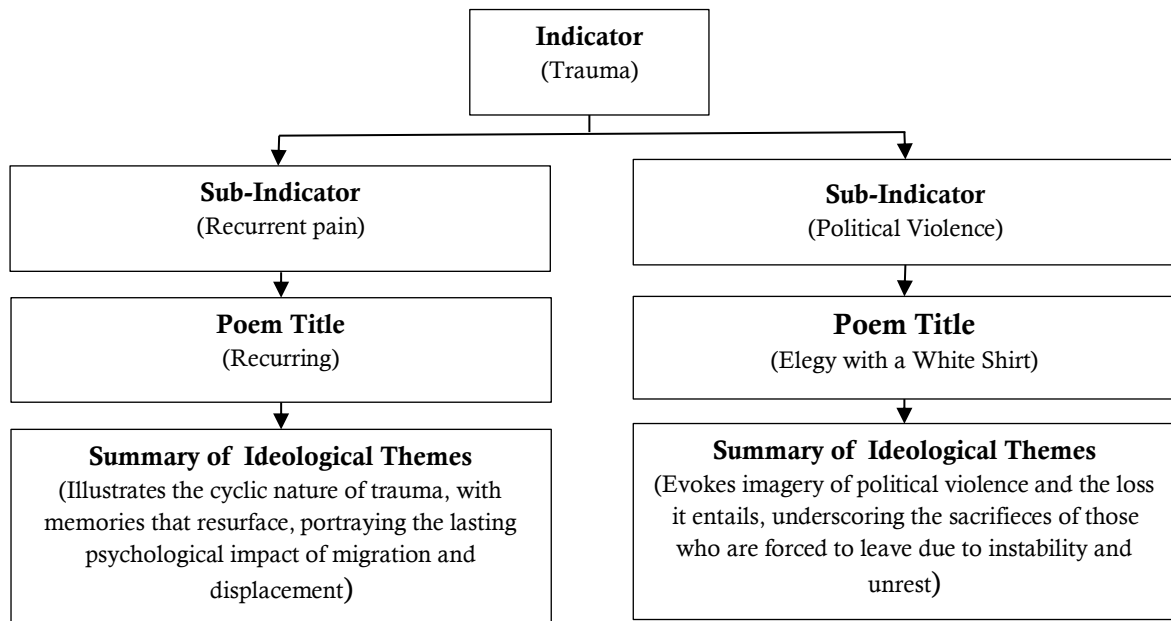


Figure 4. Mapping the Ideology of Trauma

DISCUSSION

The results of this research expose Cynthia Dewi Oka’s poetry collection *Fire Is Not A Country* as a major ideological site that not only represents but also criticizes the diaspora experience through four interconnected themes—identity, family, migration, and trauma. These themes provide a rich narrative coherence that shows diasporic subjectivity, not alone. Poetry is positioned not just as a means of creative expression but also as an ideological activity and a symbolic weapon of resistance against prevailing socio-political systems (Hanifa & Juniadi, 2024). Oka’s poetry’s topic of identity shows how dynamically, negotiatively, and constantly changing diasporic identity is. Oka subverts essentialist conceptions of identity using portrayals of cultural dislocation and psychological turmoil, offering tales that regard identity as a construction molded by trauma, migration, and intercultural contact. This knowledge supports Abouyassine’s (2023) claim that diaspora literature offers an articulative space for fractured and hybrid subjectivities that intellectually question the homogeneity of identity within nationalist and Western modernist discourses.

Through the family theme, Oka shows how ancestral expectations and intergenerational trauma shape—even burden—the self-conception of diasporic people, therefore revealing the junction of identity and familial structure. Through societal pressure, gender norms, and unresolved emotional legacies, her poems draw attention to the emotional dynamics within immigrant households as venues of ideological reproduction. This viewpoint corresponds with Salmenniemi & Ylöstalo (2024), who underline the family as the main site of ideological

reproduction via daily social activities. Oka's poetry's family story therefore provides a means for reinterpretation of identity and challenge of patriarchal systems and repressive cultural norms. Moreover, the migration topic captures the conflict between identity and family by means of criticisms of conventional multicultural stories and the urge to fit in host nations. Oka beautifully describes the loneliness, desire, and emotional weight experienced by diasporic people, showing how migrating subjects must continually negotiate their life and culture within an uneven global framework. These results align with Kumar's (2022) research, which emphasizes how diaspora literature portrays the challenge of retaining cultural legacy while negotiating social adaptation in the context of neoliberal globalization and structural inequality.

Trauma becomes the fundamental motif in this framework that ties the many facets of the diaspora experience together. Through vivid symbolism and strong language that expresses historical atrocities, social traumas, and suppressed memories, Oka's poetry addresses political as well as personal suffering. This emphasizes how important poetry is as a substitute source of record for history often overlooked by official narratives (Beg, 2023; Sutikno, 2023). Oka's poetry therefore become essential tools in encouraging communal awareness, healing, and opposition against repressive and forgetting systems of power. Theoretically, these results support the idea that diasporic poetry is a kind of language of resistance able to intervene in hegemonic ideas such nationalism, sexism, and capitalism (Bernadette & Alejandro, 2024; Khare, 2020). These ideas are not only expressed clearly but also seep through portrayals of the everyday conflicts and disputes the diaspora faces. Practically, Oka's poetry shows transforming possibilities across many settings, including critical education, art-based therapy, and the empowerment of diasporic communities via empathy-building, structural knowledge, and communal healing (Adekunle, 2023; Timalisina, 2019).

This study is unusual and mostly significant in its method, which blends an ideological analysis of diasporic women's lyrical poetry with Thematic Discourse Analysis. Unlike the work of Marei & Shanneik (2021), which focuses on lament poetry in Shi'a religious rituals, or Carrera's (2024) research on digital humor and visual intertextuality, this study delves into the symbolic and narrative depths of poetry as a form of social and political critique of Asian diasporic identity in America. While Statham & Ringrow's (2024) multimodal approach examines video campaigns to understand diasporic representation, this study demonstrates how poetic and figurative language structures serve as effective tools of articulation in framing ideological resistance both aesthetically and politically.

In the end, these results highlight the need of lyrical poetry—like Cynthia Dewi Oka's work—as a substitute media for comprehending and communicating the multifarious experiences of diaspora. Poetry opens space for interdisciplinary discourse that encompasses the psychosocial, historical, and political dimensions of migration and hybrid identity. With its potential as a tool for reflection, healing, and cultural activism, poetry can be employed in educational, therapeutic, and community-building contexts as a form of resistance and reconstruction of a more inclusive and just historical narrative. Thus, literary works become not only mirrors of diasporic reality but also transformative instruments in shaping collective consciousness, dismantling dominant structures, and advocating for justice within the global diasporic context.

Nevertheless, this study has several notable limitations. First, the scope of analysis is limited to eight poems from a single anthology by Cynthia Dewi Oka, which means the findings do not fully capture the complexity of diaspora poetry across diverse cultural backgrounds and social contexts. Second, the research is textual and does not include empirical data such as interviews with the author or readers, nor does it explore the performative aspects or public reception of the poems. Third, the thematic-ideological discourse approach employed is interpretative and therefore highly dependent on the researcher's subjectivity. Future studies

are thus encouraged to adopt comparative approaches across different authors, conduct reader reception studies, or integrate participatory methods to more holistically capture the dynamics of audience engagement with diaspora poetry.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that *Fire Is Not A Country* by Cynthia Dewi Oka represents a complex ideological discourse terrain, simultaneously reflecting and critiquing the diasporic experience through four central themes: identity, family, migration, and trauma. Identity is portrayed as a dynamic and negotiable construct, while the family structure is interpreted as a site for the reproduction of ideology and intergenerational pressures that shape diasporic subjectivity. The themes of migration and trauma reveal emotional dislocation and structural violence inherent in transnational experiences, mediated through poetic language, symbolism, and figurative narrative. Oka strategically employs literary devices to construct a counter-discourse against dominant narratives of cultural assimilation, homogeneous nationalism, and normative masculinity, while also creating an articulatory space for cultural resistance and collective healing. The limitations of this study lie in its analytical scope, which is restricted to eight poems within a single anthology and does not address reader reception or the performative dimensions of the poetic texts. Therefore, future research is encouraged to adopt a comparative cross-textual approach, expand the corpus to include other diaspora poets, and integrate participatory methods or reception studies to capture the dynamics of poetic engagement and influence within broader sociocultural contexts.

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