

slantED CANADIAnness in *Chorus of Mushrooms*
CanadiANIDADE NIPOnizada em *Chorus of Mushrooms*

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RESUMO: Este artigo tem por fim refletir sobre a pluralidade e diversidade que compõem a experiência hifenizada nipo-canadense analisando as totalmente diferentes perspectivas de três gerações de mulheres nipo-canadenses. Ele também tem o propósito de investigar de que maneira a apropriação do passado pode ser fortalecedora para o sujeito feminino racializado à medida que o processo de construção de identidade ocorre na diáspora, bem como que alternativas restam para o sujeito feminino diaspórico. A principal contribuição deste artigo está em sua tentativa de relacionar linguagem, cultura, gênero, raça, construção de identidade, experiência hifenizada e possibilidades futuras na diáspora com a finalidade de oferecer material para reflexão com relação a como se lida com estas questões naquele país nos dias de hoje.

Palavras-chave: Pós-colonialismo; Diáspora; Gênero.

ABSTRACT: This article aims at brooding over the plurality and diversity which make up the Japanese-Canadian hyphenated experience by analysing the totally different perspectives of three generations of Japanese-Canadian women. It has also the purpose of investigating in what manner the appropriation of the past can be empowering for the racialised female subject as the process of identity construction takes place in diaspora, as well as what alternatives are left for the diasporic female subject. The main contribution of this article lies in its attempt to relate language, culture, gender, race, identity construction, hyphenated experience and future avenues in diaspora in order to offer food for thought with regard to how these matters are dealt with in that country nowadays.

Keywords: Postcolonialism; Diaspora; Gender.

*Canada wa hiroi. Jitto mimi o sumashite kiite goran,
ironna koe ga kikoeru karaⁱ*
Hiromi Goto

*If I don't address my colour,
It is addressed for me in ways I find intolerableⁱⁱ*
Hiromi Goto

Wondering when does one thing end and another begin?ⁱⁱⁱ
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How might one feel when her original roots emanate from a distant land whose remaining memories reside mostly in an adamant grandmother, a genuine incarnation of a sight/site of resistance? Worse yet, when life, since an early age, has invariably been between cultural and linguistic borders on which two antagonistic sides are always fighting: one to keep alive pivotal elements of an erstwhile ‘home’, the other to enforce the hegemonic expectations of an adopted land? Herself a Japanese-Canadian who immigrated to Canada with her family in 1969 and had much to learn from her *Obāchan*^{iv}, Hiromi Goto certainly uses personal experience in her debut novel *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994) to depict Canada’s diverse cultural scenery through the totally different perspectives of three generations of Japanese-Canadian women. More importantly, the author gives her readers food for thought with regard to the cultural reality in that country after the first multicultural policy issued in 1971 and the Multiculturalism Act of 1988, as well as dwells on the alternatives left for the racialised female subject who lives in-between cultures.

By means of the recurrent “[m]ukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 2)^v, *Chorus of Mushrooms* promises from the start that one of its main aspects is going to be this unceasing looking back on the past. As a matter of fact, what immediately calls the readers’ attention is its non-linear, retrospective narrative which abounds in flashbacks and the use of autobiographical structuring features. In addition, another important element is that the novel has chiefly two narrative frameworks which pave the way for stories made out of other stories. In the outer framework, which takes place in Calgary, the Nisei^{vi} Murasaki tells stories to her Japanese lover who has just arrived to the country. Curiously enough, these very same stories and Murasaki’s grandmother’s memories are part of the inner framework, which takes place on a mushroom farm in the cowboy town of Nanton. However, this time Murasaki and her grandmother Naoe take turn in the story-telling. Eventually, “[a]s the stories are disclosed, the two narrative frameworks come together, collapse into each other” (BEAUTELL, 2003, p. 18) to write this noisy and polyphonic textual plait into the Canadian narrative: “Obāchan and I, our voices lingered, reverberated off hollow walls and stretched across the land with streamers of silken thread” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 52).

Nonetheless, it is worth observing that this excavation of the past is not nostalgic, but rather aims at remembering critically. Pamela Sugiman points out that “[t]he term nostalgia is taken from the Greek *nostos* (to return home) and *algia* (a painful feeling)” (SUGIMAN, 2008, p. 77). Indeed, painful experiences are brought back, but they are not so much to be

relieved as rethought so that both past and present can be best understood and recreated under a new light in favour of those formerly un/misrepresented female subjects such as Naoe and her granddaughter: “[i]t’s funny how you can sift your memories, braid them with other stories. Come up with a single strand and call it truth” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 93). First, despite her twenty years living in Canada, only after Naoe’s disappearance that most of her neighbours learn of the old woman’s existence. Much probably as a result of her daughter Keiko’s insistence on obliterating any traces of the family’s origins and cultural background. Second, even though the high school student Murasaki does not have the least idea of what ‘Oriental sex’ means that is exactly what her Canadian white boyfriend Hank Hardy expects to have on account of how Japanese identity is portrayed in *Shōgun*^{vii} (GOTO, 1994a, p. 4, 88, 121-22). In fact, it is only with the aid of critical remembrance that the past may stop being a burden and become a source of inspiration for the construction of a better present and future: “[m]emory may look back in order to move forward and transform disabling fictions to enabling fictions, altering our relation to the present and future” (GREENE, 1991, p. 298).

Needless to say, language itself is Naoe’s and Murasaki’s main weapon to deal with the invisibility to which their experience has been consigned by hegemonic powers. In effect, the reader’s lack of capacity to comprehend the parts written in Japanese can be quite disquieting. Loud and clear, these textual pieces make patent the need to get to know ‘the other’ so as to be able to apprehend her message and the limitations of one’s own language and culture, if not their prejudices. Moreover, as simple as it seems and Mari Sasano puts it, “[t]here is no reason that someone who does not understand Japanese could not do some research and find out what these sections mean, as non-English speaking immigrants have had to do with English” (SASANO, 1998, p. 6). Nevertheless, more than anything else, these parts signal how empowered grandmother and granddaughter are for being able to straddle two languages and two cultures: “I’m glad I learned Japanese because now I can juggle two languages and when there isn’t one word in English, it will be there in Japanese and if there’s something lacking in your [Naoe’s] tongue, I’ll reach for it in English” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 54). In this manner, Naoe and Murasaki are able to frame minutely experiences as a simple “I love you” or distinguish between hot and cold water which otherwise they would not in Japanese and English, respectively (IBID, p. 54, 170).

Furthermore, language usage is intimately bound up with the matter of identity and meaning construction “[b]ecause what we call something governs the scope and breadth of what it’ll be” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 68). That is possibly why Murasaki and Naoe decide to

change their names. However, in opposition to Murasaki's parents who surrender to internalised racism and rename themselves from Keiko and Shinji to Kay and Sam with the intention of concealing their Japaneseness, Murasaki and her grandmother adopt names which match their hyphenated identities. The former, with no problem whatsoever, leaves the name Muriel behind and begins to use the name her grandmother has given to her, namely Murasaki. By the way, Keiko says it is also the name of the first person to write a novel, a Japanese woman who was born in the late tenth century. The latter, in turn, chooses Murasaki's name translated into English, to wit Purple (IBID, p. 40, 112, 164-65, 189).

According to Stuart Hall, “[t]he subject’ and ‘identity’ are only two of the concepts which, having been radically undermined in their unitary and essentialist form, have proliferated beyond our wildest expectations in their decentred forms into new discursive positionalities” (HALL, 1998, p. 248). No wonder, then, that this ‘translation of the self’ may take place the other way around as the novel indicates by means of Tengu, a Japanese-speaking white Canadian who has lived in Japan and was rechristened by Japanese children after a sort of supernatural creature found in that country’s culture. What is more, he is also a cowboy music scholar who has been to the Land of the Rising Sun so that he could make a comparative study between *enka*^{viii} and country and western (GOTO, 1994a, p. 111). Thus, it is virtually impossible not to conclude that “[i]t is no longer the case, if it ever was, that the global flows of cultural discourses are constituted as one-way traffic” (BARKER, 2008, p. 160).

Effectively, as the examples above show, people are made of several, perhaps contradictory identities which all the time revolve around the axes of what is similar and produces continuity or that which differentiates and promotes rupture. In addition, always plural and in the process of becoming, identities are discursive constructions mostly typified by their fluidity and instability which change depending on time and place as well as are attendant on the intersections of diverse categories such as race, gender, class, nation and age (BARKER, 2008, p. 217-18). Nevertheless, given that identity is culturally constructed and is “constituted within, not outside, representation”, it is capital for the hyphenated female subject to resist what Stuart Hall calls “dominant regimes of representation” which have “the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as ‘Other’” (HALL, 2003, p. 234, 236, *author’s emphasis*).

Otherwise, she will end up as Keiko, who gives in to the racist gaze and experiences an overwhelming sense of self-disgust that makes her try to erase every telling indicator of

foreignness and construct this fragile ‘Canadian identity’ that collapses, for instance, as soon as she sees her daughter ‘turning yellow’ (GOTO, 1994a, p. 91-93). In other words, the female immigrant has to struggle against the stereotypes that essentialises ‘the other’ for her detriment and grapple for the right to represent herself just as Murasaki does when she plays with her inside/outside status: as a young adult, this time SHE is the one to decide what ‘Oriental sex’ means (IBID, p. 123). By doing so, Murasaki and Naoe take the most of what Homi Bhabha styles “interstitial moments” not only to subvert prevailing regulatory discourses, but also to undercut traditional identities (BHABHA, 1994, p. 269; SMITH; RILEY, 2009, p. 236-37).

Furthermore, taking into account that “[i]dentity concerns both self-identity and social identity. It is about the personal and the social. It is about ourselves and our relations with others” (BARKER, 2008, p. 245), food is a reiterated expression of resilience which has crucial symbolic importance in the novel. After all, “[e]ating is a part of being” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 138). In effect, it is noteworthy that identity can likewise be signified through signs of taste which are perceived as a sort of cultural text owing to the fact that they are also imbued with meaning, personal and collective (BARKER, 2008, p. 11, 216). In this way, that should come as no surprise Naoe’s remark about Keiko. All the time worried about what might give her Japaneseness away, “[m]y daughter has forsaken identity. [...] Converted from rice and *daikon*^{ix} to weiners and beans” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 13). Although food can be seen as a symbol of national identity and, thereby, able to characterise someone as belonging or not to a specific group (NARAYAN, 1997b, p. 161), Naoe is not at all interested in “[e]ndless evenings of tedious roast chicken and honey smoked ham and overdone rump roast” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 13). In order to evade this overdose of ‘Canadianness’, the old woman secretly colludes with her little granddaughter under the blanket when they eat Japanese food and share Naoe’s experience and stories (IBID, p. 16-21). At these moments, not only do they attempt against the ‘dominant regimes of representation’, but also begin to delineate their new hyphenated identities.

Having this notion of a parallel between food and identity in mind, as well as food as a cultural text, it is easily inferable that food itself can also be “[t]he substance of memory” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 141). For this reason, food can be used to heal sore identities, to retrieve repressed cultural identities as those of Keiko’s and her husband’s (BEAUTELL, 2003, p. 31-33). When Keiko has a nervous breakdown as a result of Naoe’s departure, it becomes crystal clear that she does not get any better on Western food: “Naoe: [...] What have you been

feeding her? / Murasaki: Well, macaroni and cheese. Hot dogs. Stuff like that. / Naoe: *Mattaku!*^x Of course she won't be getting better on food such as that! Have a little sense!" (GOTO, 1994a, p. 131).

As a matter of fact, only after tasting the energy provided by Japanese culinary which Naoe believes to nourish more than the body that Keiko is back on her feet (GOTO, 1994a, p. 14, 147, 151). However, what cannot pass unnoticed is that what Murasaki, her father and mother first eat is their own name Tonkatsu!!! Actually, a hybrid term that debunks any idea of cultural purity and embodies the family's own formerly denied hybridity which "allow[s] negotiation of the multiplicity of identities and subject positionings that result from displacement, immigration, and exile, without policing the borders of identity along essentialist and originary lines" (SHOHAT, 2006, p. 244; GOTO, 1994a, p. 209). More importantly, with reference to the use of food metaphors to talk about identity, it is inevitable to point out how superbly Murasaki connects these two elements with language by using imagery which strongly alludes to Julia Kristeva's abjection. Just like food, the very beginning that after eaten turns into a transgressive something else and a real danger to traditional identities (KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 4, 9-10, 70-71), words are continuously consumed and reshaped to such an extent that eventually there is no fixity in terms of meaning as there is not to identity either: "[i]t is the nature of words to change with the telling" (GOTO, 1994a, p. 32). Inasmuch as they are each one's and everybody else's, every uttered word is part of this never stopping process of turning into something else (SASANO, 1998, p. 6):

There are people who say that eating is only a superficial means of understanding a different culture. [...] I say that's a lie. What can be more basic than food itself? Food to begin to grow. Without it, you'd starve to death, even academics. But don't stop there [...] because food is the point of departure. A place where growth begins. [...] You tell a story, maybe two, with words of pain and desire. Your companion listens and listens, then offers a different telling. The waiter comes back with the main course and stays to tell his version. Your companion offers three more stories and the people seated at the next table lean over to listen. You push all the tables together and the room resounds with voices. You get dizzy and the ceiling tips, the chair melts beneath your body. You lie back on the ground and the world tilts, the words heaving in the air above you. You are drunk and it is oh so pleasurable (GOTO, 1994a, p. 201).

Of course the richness of this delightful and polyphonic interaction, which on a large scale, cultural and linguistically speaking, inevitably gives way to the construction of the most diverse and empowered types of identities, cannot be properly achieved while the otherisation of the racialised subject and this strong feeling of outsidersness that pervades the novel is still part of the everyday reality of immigrants and members of racial minorities in Canada. So

much so that even the white Canadian Tengu fears for Naoe's safety when she reacts against an officer's rough and prejudiced manners towards her: "[t]hese people should always remember that if *they* don't want any trouble" (GOTO, 1994a, p. 142-45, *my emphasis*). In fact, the point is that race is most likely to mark one as different, as a foreigner, regardless of her efforts to fit in. Proof thereof is Canadian-born Murasaki's incident at a supermarket produce section when she is out of the blue taken for a Chinese and interrogated as such by what she certainly sees as an authoritative white Canadian woman: "[t]his is what *our* eggplants look like. [...] What are they called in *your* language?" (IBID, p. 90-91, *author's emphasis*).

Notwithstanding, perhaps the real problem boils down to the fact that these "pressures to assimilate to the dominant white culture" for fear of discrimination or even racial violence can provoke profound and sometimes irremediable damages (BEAUTELL, 2003, p. 28). No sooner do they arrive in Canada, for example, Murasaki's parents decide not to speak their mother tongue anymore. As a result, due to a home atmosphere which "only had room for cultural integration", they end up 'forgetting' how to speak Japanese (GOTO, 1994a, p. 13, 48, 189, 206-208). In addition, having a mother whose "only make-believe [...] was thinking that she was as white as her neighbour", it is no accident that Murasaki does get very surprised when her white Canadian friend Patricia sees beauty not only in the Vietnamese Joe, but in Murasaki herself, as if being Japanese/Oriental were somehow inferior or abnormal: "[y]ou're Japanese, *but* I still think you're pretty too" (GOTO, 1994a, p. 29, 96, *my emphasis*).

Hence, there has to be some sort of reaction on the part of the racialised subject against this stereotyping process of othering which offers only two alternatives: either submit to social marginalisation of the sort the Chinese boy Shane Wu endures forever silently (GOTO, 1994a, p. 125-26) or homogenisation of 'the other' whose purpose is to circumscribe difference in compliance with stereotypes dictated by white hegemonic groups. Incidentally, this second possibility is very well illustrated by Keiko's uncomplaining consent to dye Murasaki's hair blond in order that her daughter can match white dominant standards and be the protagonist in *Alice in Wonderland* at a school play (BEAUTELL, 2003, p. 11; GOTO, 1994a, p. 176-78). As this episode demonstrates, when 'the other' surrenders to hegemonic pressures, she is useful to nothing but confirm this sense of normality of the 'typical Canadian'. Indeed, this idea is thoroughly consistent with Murasaki's statement that there is

“[n]othing like a freak show to make you feel normal, safe by comparison” (SASANO, 1998, p. 2; GOTO, 1994a, p. 89).

Maybe the best strategy is Naoe’s once she decides to disregard previous concepts, “[t]he words of an old woman can change little in this world” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 21), take hold of the means of representation and bear on “the way difference is articulated, addressed, and displayed” (LIBIN, 2001, p. 103). Are Japanese-Canadians that different that they cannot be deemed as ‘real’ Canadians? In what can be seen as “[a]n ultimate act of symbolic entrance into the Canadian tradition” (BEAUTELL, 2003, p. 38-39), that is precisely the sort of questioning Naoe promotes once she beats Canadian bullriders at their own game. By taking part in a traditional rodeo party, the Calgary Stampede, and becoming a star, the Purple Mask/Naoe casts strong doubts on conventional patriarchal taxonomies in terms of, among others, race, gender and age – she is over 85 years old!!! In the end, as the rodeo announcer puts it, “[t]his is where the world meets the West!” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 218). In other words, there seems to be no more boundaries for the purple cowboy rides the bull Revelation and shows that she is “a successful inhabitant of her environment, no problem. She has infiltrated the ranks. While furiously not white Canadian, she fully embraces and occupies aspects of that culture that please her” (SASANO, 1998, p. 10).

After all that has been discussed so far, it is a must and will possibly be less complicated to investigate *Chorus of Mushrooms* from the viewpoint of the female diasporic subject. In fact, diaspora has unquestionably been an important issue on the agenda of a significant number of contemporary nation-states (ALMEIDA, 2006, p. 194). What is more, it is a theme that permeates the whole novel and indelibly typifies the Tonkatsus’ lives as well as of innumerable others who have been part of transnational movements, mainly those which took place during the second half of the twentieth century. At an early age, for instance, little Naoe has to face the traumas of dispossession and dislocation when her father loses all the family’s assets and they have to leave her birthplace behind. Later on, after marriage, she spends ten years in China, time which comes to an end abruptly when World War II breaks out and she has to depart hurriedly back to Japan with little Keiko and suffer the separation from husband, father, brother and sister-in-law. And yet again Naoe experiences the feeling of “leave again, again, always leaving” when she moves to Canada with Keiko and her husband (GOTO, 1994a, p. 9-10, 45-47, 50). By now, it goes without saying that the notion of diaspora corroborates certain particularities previously mentioned and “forces us to rethink the rubrics

of nation and nationalism, while refiguring the relations of citizens and nation-states” (BRAZIEL; MANNUR, 2003, p. 7).

If on the one hand the migratory experience can be seen as a poetic spreading of enriching cultural and linguistic seeds since the term diaspora stems from the Greek words *dia* and *speirein*, which mean ‘through’ and ‘to scatter’, respectively (BRAH, 1996, p. 181), on the other its notorious negative aspects, *inter alia*, displacement and dislocation, cannot be ignored in any way. Actually, “diaspora suggests a dislocation from the nation-state or geographical location of origin and a relocation in one or more nation-states, territories, or countries” (BRAZIEL; MANNUR, 2003, p. 1) for reasons which might range from ‘voluntary’ immigration to forced exile. In this way, as opposed to Murasaki who willingly decides to start her random diasporic journey, the Vietnamese Boat People had to flee for their own lives: “[b]e very nice to these people, Muriel. They’ve suffered so much” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 34, 198, 204, 209).

Interestingly enough, there is a very close connection between the concepts of identity and diaspora due to this far greater focus on what has been on the way up to this ever-changing here and now. Barker claims that “[i]dentities are concerned with routes rather more than with roots” (BARKER, 2008, p. 256). Indeed, even though she might have physically left her ‘imagined’ community and arrived at an ‘encountered’ one (BRAH, 1996, p. 196), the female subject knows that somehow her diasporic travel has not finished yet in that she is continually fighting against this sense of not belonging, of being the eternal outsider who is only made visible owing to her complexion, cultural practices and name. Worse yet, if she does not obey “unwritten rules of conduct”, she is “alienated as an other, subject to suspicion and mistrust”, not rarely victim of exclusionary practices as a ‘natural’ response to her difference (GOTO, 1994a, p. 189; MOGHISSI, 2008, p. 257-58). Hence, in spite of her two decades in Canada, Naoe’s decision to cling to her Japaneseness makes everybody believe she is incapable of speaking English: “[h]ow can they think a body can live in this country for twenty years and not learn the language?” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 4). But she does not feel demeaned by that. On the contrary, she has a good time out of it: “[s]olly, Obachan no speeku Eeenglishu” (IBID). Needless to say, these antagonistic feelings of being (not) part are also key components in the construction of Naoe’s diasporic identity.

Nevertheless, it is illuminating to consider that there is no such a thing as a monolithic experience which subsumes all the standpoints of a particular diasporic community. In effect, *Chorus of Mushrooms* makes it very clear from beginning to the end,

and most especially in the newspaper's article "The Multicultural Voices of Alberta", which proves how diverse are Keiko's, Murasaki's and Naoe's points of view with respect to their diasporic trajectories (GOTO, 1994a, p. 189-90). Therefore, there has to be this confluence of narratives which encompasses different perspectives as well as individual and collective memories so that the plurality that constitutes the diasporic experience of a certain group be better apprehended and not essentialised (BRAH, 1996, p. 183; ALMEIDA, 2006, p. 195). Moreover, it highly contributes to bring to the fore relevant specificities in terms of gender, class, age, etc. Ultimately, the novel undeniably reveals that "more flexible or diasporic notions of citizenship are needed to probe the multiple belongings created in diaspora" (BRAZIEL; MANNUR, 2003, p. 6).

With respect to gender as a major factor in diaspora, it is worth noting that although the female subject is very often submitted to gender roles devised by both the dominant society in the adopted country and her home country culture, the diasporic experience can be quite transformative and empowering for her thanks to the distance from the family and other social regulatory powers (MATSUOKA; SORENSON, 2008, p. 163). Since an early age, for example, Naoe's father teaches her that she cannot press the family's *hanko*^{xi} for being a girl (GOTO, 1994a, p. 8-9). On account of that, she grows tired of seeing "[a]ll those mothers and daughters and mothers and daughters swallowed into the names of men". Even for Naoe the institution of marriage is not so much a choice as an obligation and she has to put her maiden name Kiyokawa aside (IBID, p. 24, 38). However, these very same gender constraints do not apply to her granddaughter Murasaki for whom, by the way, the concept of commitment has nothing to do with marriage at all (IBID, p. 191). In addition, despite her brother's childless marriage, Naoe does not worry about the extinction of her family name anymore for she has realised in diaspora that there exists an alternative sort of posterity: "[f]oolishness! To attach so much to the continuation of a name. [...] What matters are the things you do, the things you say out loud" (IBID, p. 70). Thus, Naoe knows her words will not die with her but, by means of Murasaki, will be passed on and on and on to "[t]he daughter of a daughter of a daughter of a daughter of a daughter of a daughter of a daughter of a daughter of a daughter of a daughter of a daughter of... the list is endless" (IBID, p. 52).

Therefore, the vantage point of an outsider in diaspora endows Naoe with better insight into her former homeland and culture. Nonetheless, not only with reference to the way women and other disenfranchised people were treated as second-class citizens: "[t]he pain and the hardship of the villagers who only rented the land they had worked for fourteen

generations but never owned for their labours. I am not bitter for losing something that was unevenly divided” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 10). More importantly, Naoe also realises the extent to which partaking in hegemonic groups can reduce one’s perceptions of what life really is to ‘the other’: “I could not know that we were privileged. That people hated us for our wealth and power. [...] Easy to be convinced of your strength if there is nothing to compare it to” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 9, 45; SASANO, 1998, p. 8).

Furthermore, it is precisely in the light of this new apprehension that Naoe also reconsiders the idea of home. If on the one side she nourishes fond memories of this “place of no return” that is her country of origin in her diasporic imagination: “[y]es, thank you. They [Mild Seven cigarettes] taste so *natsukashi*^{xiii}, after twenty dry years of prairie dust” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 112), on the other this mythic place that once WAS does not detract in any way from the fact that the old woman has come to Canada and made it her new home: “[n]o time now to learn new dust in a new home” (IBID, p. 4; BRAH, 1996, p. 192). However, her sense of home is not static at all. In accordance with Carl James who describes home as a boundless fluid construction which depends on “an individual’s life-stage, context, and situation” (JAMES, 2008, p. 247-48), Naoe states that: “[i]f you leave your home and start walking this road, I’ll meet you somewhere. [...] I carry my home in the cup of my palms [...]. This is no place for a woman like me to stay. Let me travel from story to story” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 190, 203). Nevertheless, it is also important to point out that different from Keiko who chooses to conform to white hegemonic standards, Naoe and Murasaki know by experience that in this new home they are likely to be oppressed not only in terms of gender, but as racialised subjects as well. For this reason, home as they see it now might turn out to be dangerous at times: “[h]ome should be a safe place, but there are times when I don’t feel safe at all” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 190; BRAH, 1996, p. 180).

In conclusion, in consonance with Edward Said’s assertion that “how we formulate or represent the past shapes our understanding and views of the present” (SAID, 1994, p. 4), Naoe and Murasaki take advantage of their capacity to occupy multiple subject positions to appropriate ‘the world of yesterday’ and recreate it in such a manner as to open the way for an empowering, plural and diverse Japanese-Canadian narrative. Actually, the novel shows that it is unavoidable for the immigrant to go through a real process of self-transformation in diaspora, but it need not be destructive. Much on the contrary, as Naoe and her granddaughter demonstrate when they embody the erosion of linguistic and cultural boundaries between Canada and Japan and display the possibility of concomitant resistance and change. So much

so that *Chorus of Mushrooms* does not aim at catering to mainstream Canadian readers, but rather delighting those disposed to recognise and learn from the diversity that comprises ‘real Canadianness’. Eventually, it is more than evident that the boundaries between local and global, nation and diaspora, are not that clear anymore. And it becomes even more complicated when it is considered the intersection of different diasporic trajectories as it seen throughout the novel. In other words, “insisting that a nation is defined by its geopolitical boundaries is inherently reductive, exclusionary, and problematic” (BRAZIEL; MANNUR, 2003, p. 15).

Hence, in view of all the matters analysed in this article, it is obvious that formal inclusion in terms of lawmaking, e.g. the Multiculturalism Act, has proved to be not effective enough in that exclusion can still be practiced in more subtle ways (BROOKS, 2003, p. 103). As Stuart Hall puts it, “[i]t is only too tempting to fall into the trap of assuming that, because essentialism has been deconstructed *theoretically*, therefore it has been displaced *politically*” (HALL, 1998, p. 249, *author’s emphasis*). Finally, even though Naoe and Murasaki do not at any moment offer any sort of final answer to the female diasporic subject with regard to her future avenues: “[d]on’t come to me for answers, child, these are only words” (GOTO, 1994a, p. 18), somehow they seem to make theirs Uma Narayan’s words below:

We need to move away from a picture of national and cultural contexts as sealed rooms, impervious to change, with a homogenous space ‘inside’ them, inhabited by ‘authentic insiders’ who all share a uniform and consistent account of their institutions and values. Third-World national and cultural contexts are as pervaded by plurality, dissension, and change, as are their ‘Western’ counterparts. Both are often replete with unreflective and self-congratulatory views of their ‘culture’ and ‘values’ that disempower and marginalize the interests and concerns of many members of the national community, including women. We need to be wary about all ideals of ‘cultural authenticity’ that portray ‘authenticity’ as constituted by lack of criticism and lack of change. We need to insist that there are many ways to inhabit nations and cultures critically and creatively. Feminists everywhere confront the joint tasks of selectively appropriating and selectively rejecting various facets of their complex national, cultural, and political legacies, a critical engagement that can alone transform one’s inheritances into a ‘culture’ of one’s own (NARAYAN, 1997a, p. 33).

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Notas

ⁱ (GOTO, 1994a, p. 190). Mari Sasano translates the excerpt as: "Canada is vast. Let your ear listen for a while, you can hear all kinds of voices" (SASANO, 1998, p. 6).

ⁱⁱ GOTO, 1994b, p. 219.

ⁱⁱⁱ GOTO, 1994a, p. 159, 213.

^{iv} *Obāchan* means 'grandmother' (GOTO, 1994a, p. 13).

^v Joy Kogawa translates this phrase in her novel *Obasan* as: "[i]n ancient times, in ancient times, in very very ancient times" (BEAUTELL, 2003, p. 20).

^{vi} Term used to refer to the children of Japanese-born immigrants. That is, the second generation.

^{vii} *Shōgun* is an American television miniseries based on the namesake novel by James Clavell.

^{viii} A popular Japanese music genre.

^{ix} White radish.

^x *Mattaku* means 'honestly'.

^{xi} "The family seal" (GOTO, 1994a, p. 10).

^{xii} Naoe uses the term *natsukashii*/nostalgic to refer to the Mild Seven cigarettes, which is a brand of cigarettes produced by Japan Tobacco.

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