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## **Survival of the Fittest in Canadian Gothic Literature between: Ghetto and Garrison Mentality**

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### **Abstract**

This paper offers a study of some selected Asian-Canadian literary works that have capitalized, in Graham Huggan's terms, "on their perceived marginality while helping turn marginality itself into a valuable intellectual commodity" [1:viii]. The study of contemporary Canadian literature has been marked by the emergence of various ethno-racial writers such as Hiromi Goto, Joy Kogawa and Gurjinder Basran. The focus of this study will be on three gothic narratives notably, Basran's *Everything Was Good-Bye* (2010), Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994) and Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981). The ethnic women writers selected, namely, Kogawa, Goto and Basran write their gothic novels based on their traumatic memories as dislocated Asian-Canadian minorities and their gloomy present as well. Such ethnic writers find themselves lost between various identities and this is what they seek to reflect through their female characters' internal exile and their efforts to determine which identity they should have embraced in order to be accepted as Asian-Canadians with their in-between identities. This paper seeks to provide a critical analysis of the so called 'The Canadian Theme of Survival', or let us call it the survival of the fittest, and the paradoxical notion of 'garrison mentality' as represented in such Canadian gothic literature.

**Keywords:** Survival of the fittest; Canadian gothic literature; ghetto vs garrison mentality.

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## 1. Introduction

The choice of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and Gurjinder Basran's *Everything Was Good-Bye*, as the corpus of this paper is due to the fact that they evoke "the paradoxical nature of the 'tricky' Canadian multicultural policy. [According to these narratives] the multicultural policy seems to be just a globalized-economic cover or tool used to exploit these diasporic minorities in the name of justice" [2:168]. This means that ethno-racial minorities in Canada, especially writers, are not only questioning their identity/belonging as invisible and silenced communities but also revisiting the ideology of survival of the fittest. This is concerning the choice of this corpus and about the characterization of these novels as 'gothic', we can refer to one of the characters in *Obasan* her name is Naomi. The latter tells her reader the following: "we're trapped, Obasan and I, by our memories of the dead—all our dead—those who refuse to bury themselves" [3:31]. If Naomi "thinks that their dead relatives refuse to bury themselves, her reader notes that she and Obasan refuse to bury the ghosts of their past. [...] The melancholic memories of Naomi that she narrates about her mother, father and grandparents are all about dead people at the time of narration. One can interpret her act of narrating such sad stories as an attempt to challenge her past by confronting its sorrowful details. It can also be a kind of revolt against the dominant culture" [4:158]. As a matter of fact, the case of Naomi in *Obasan* is very similar to the ethno-racial characters' in *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *Everything Was Good-Bye*, and this is why this literature can be categorized as 'gothic'.

Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* revisits the history of the internment of Japanese-Canadians during World War Two, through the disordered memories of its central protagonist, Naomi Nakane. Hirom Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* tells the story of a Japanese-Canadian woman named Murasaki who finds herself torn between two identities and belongings; with an easily assimilated mother against a stubborn grandmother who refuses even to speak English in Canada. The relationship between these women is badly affected by a generational conflict as well as a linguistic one. The only victim of this familial tornado is Murasaki who ends up with an uncertain identity or let us call it a neither Canadian nor Japanese identity. In the same context of uncertain/hybrid identity, one can mention the character of Meena who as an Indo-Canadian woman finds herself also struggling with a neither/nor identity. Through the creation of the character of the uncertain Meena in *Everything Was Good-Bye*, the novelist Gurjinder Basran takes her reader to a world of postmodern racism and discrimination by focusing on the theme of Canadian ethno-racial minorities' acceptance or refusal of integration. The reader of such 'gothic' literature observes that even Canada itself is characterized by a queer and hybrid identity just like its ethnic minorities.

The provocative notion of "paradoxical Canada", mentioned by Northrop Frye<sup>a</sup> [5:222], is re-used by Smaro Kamboureli who believes that, "while the United States proceeded from a status of hegemonic self-confidence, Canada acted from a locus of self-awareness about its paradoxical position—paradoxical because Canada emerged from the Second World War as a major international player but one that lacked a strong cultural signature" [6:14]. In his attempt to discuss area studies about others, Kamboureli argues that "Canadian studies are mobilized by self-interest, and this kind of interest is to be actualized by seeing oneself in and

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<sup>a</sup> See Northrop Frye (1995), *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*, p. 222.

through the eyes of others, consequently, the establishment of Canadian studies programs abroad was about 'self-formation', 'a process of *Bildung*' " (emphasis in original) [6:14]. The act of studying Canadian literary imagination, which reflects aesthetically the Canadian identity, urges the reader to investigate the concept of Canadian "self-formation", or what has been called by Frye "the theme of survival"<sup>b</sup>.

## 2. The Canadian Theme of Survival

### A. Canadian Historiography

Edgar Schneider's claim that during the period 1920-1970 and "with the Dominion status still fresh and the settlement of new provinces in the West to be shouldered, the young Canadian nation was still very much in the making, busy with defining her external boundaries, both in a literal and in a transferred sense," [7:245] motivates us to scrutinize the Canadian "theme of survival" through the study of both its history and geography. Consequently, a brief survey of Canadian history will be very helpful to understand the 'Canadian mentality' and how it deals with various racial groups endeavoring to survive in mutual harmony without racism and discrimination. Certainly, our corpus is about the theme of survival in a country in transition. We can mention as an example, the female activist, Emily in *Obasan* when she wrote to her sister the first letter after the Pearl Harbor bombing saying: "Thank God we live in a democracy and not under an officially racist regime" [3:97]. This ironic statement comes before the letters which follow and cursed the Canadian government for the intended mistreatment of the Japanese minority, as in the following example: "God damn those politicians who brought this tragedy on us" [3:107]. As is argued by the critic Christina Tourino, "the Japanese Canadians in Kogawa's novel, are endangered, and are therefore, however ambivalently, invested in the survival and reproduction of their community" [8:134,135]. Not only are Japanese-Canadians endangered and invested in the theme of survival, even Indo-Canadians face the same problem. We can mention as an example Meena's comment, in *Everything Was Good-Bye*, on the endless mourning of her father's death, as follows: "Apparently, it was my mother's fate to be a widow with six daughters and our fate to become casualties of fractured lives. Though I struggled against such a predetermined existence, I knew that my sisters and I were all carved out of this same misery, existing only for others, like forgotten monuments that had been erected to commemorate events that had come and gone" [9:14].

Meena struggles to survive while she is convinced that she is trapped within an inescapable internal exile questioning her blurred existence. Thus, the question about the theme of survival concerns these minorities, this is why we need to treat this aspect starting from the overall theme of Canadian survival. We will start with a brief representation of Canadian history.

According to Northrop Frye, "English Canada was first a part of the wilderness, then a part of North America and the British Empire, then a part of the world" [5:221-222]. He claims that "the foreshortening of Canadian history would account for many features of it: its fixation on its own past, its penchant for old-fashioned literary techniques, its preoccupation with the theme of strangled articulateness" [5:221-222]. In fact,

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<sup>b</sup> See Frye's book entitled *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* in order to understand what he calls "the theme of survival".

Canadian history is indebted to its first explorers who influenced greatly its past and present status as well, and this is revealed by Michèle Kaltemback, Jacques Dorin and Sheryl Rahal in the following quotation: “During the early days of colonization, settlers were overwhelmingly French or British. [...] During that period, Britain was leaning on its Canadian colony to try and counteract the American rebellion. [...] As the need for labour increased with the growth of the colony, however, less desirable immigrants were called upon to work in camps and mines or to build the railway, but always in limited numbers and with the understanding that they would return to their countries of origin in the long run” [10:14,67]. The history of Canada retells the fact of the existing social inequalities between the merchants and the lower-class. It is an indication that these social inequalities were under the control of the financial powers of the English and their French counterparts. They needed “less desirable immigrants” to create an economic balance. After having exploited them, they wanted them to go back to their homeland once they had attained their objectives; the mainstream created its economic balance via these immigrants’ chaos and psychological internal exile due to such mistreatment and marginalization. This explicit exploitation and exclusion of the “Other” is already mentioned in our corpus as will be explained in the diary of the female character, Emily, in *Obasan* and in *Everything Was Good-Bye*, later on. These minorities endured the encroachments of these two European powers that were not in agreement. In Jean Chaussade’s terms: “It was not until the seventeenth century that the Europeans succeeded in establishing themselves on this side of the Atlantic and laying the foundations for today’s Canada. But for almost two centuries, the conquest, recognition and settlement of this part of the world were made *in the framework of the rivalry between the two main European powers, France and England*”<sup>c</sup> (emphasis in original) [11:50-51]. The last sentence highlights the fact of the strong competition between the French and English powers to settle in Canada and dominate it. The French-English rivalry was manifested in the economic field and even in religion, as is argued by Kenneth McNaught in the following quotation: “Continuing to view Quebec as the racial homeland of French Canadians [...], the leaders of the Conservative-clerical alliance developed ever more completely the potent political ideology of French and Catholic survival. [...] To Liberals who fought against clerical intervention in politics and who argued that Conservatism bred corruption and favoured English-speaking big business, the Church replied that Liberalism was irreligious” [12:48-161]. It could be possible that the economic competition between the two poles generated a religious ‘war’. Such a will to power put two European cousins in the situation of enemies fighting each other by manipulating religion. This religious manipulation is explained by Desmond Morton in the following way, “the French members voted to allow Catholic public schools in an overwhelming Protestant [Canadian] West. [...] English against French and, since religious prejudices outweighed race, Protestant against Catholic” [13:59]. Besides, it is needless to mention, in David Crystal’s terms, “the linguistic competition in parallel to the presence of French as a co-official language, chiefly spoken in Quebec, which produced a sociolinguistic situation not found in the other English-speaking countries” [14:37]. However, the specificity of Canada is not its bilingualism but the loss of the ethnic minorities once they choose English as their official language, as is observed by Crystal in the following quotation: “Because of its origins, Canadian English has a great deal in common with the rest of the English spoken in North America, and those who live outside Canada often find it difficult to hear the difference. Many

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<sup>c</sup> The original quotation is as follows: « C’est au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle que les Européens réussirent à s’implanter de ce côté de l’Atlantique et à jeter les bases du Canada d’Aujourd’hui. Mais durant presque deux siècles, la conquête, la reconnaissance et le peuplement de cette partie du monde se firent *dans le cadre de la rivalité entre les deux principales puissances européennes, la France et l’Angleterre* ». Jean Chaussade, *Le Canada: ou les risques d’éclatement d’un grand pays*, pp. 50-51.

British people identify a Canadian accent as American; many Americans identify it as British. Canadians themselves insist on not being identified with either group, and certainly the variety does display a number of unique features” [14:37-39]. If the British identify the Canadian accent as American, while the Americans perceive the opposite, then the ethnic minorities should have been torn between the uncertain two.

The French and English settlers were the two dominant groups seeking to control Canada freely. The unity of these two powers could only be observed when it came to the enforcement of regulations against minorities. In order to control these minorities, they urged them to forget about their ethnic origin once they wanted to be Canadians and not mere immigrants or members of racial communities. However, one can see how the French and English settlers had been insisting upon the fact of staying loyal to their religion and origin, as French speaking “Catholics” and English speaking “Protestants”. Subsequently, the ethno-racial minorities would end-up in turmoil and unable to decide whether to get assimilated or not and which racial power to follow. This is how they find themselves dwelling in an ambivalent psychological internal exile.

Desmond Morton considers Canada as a nation that has done great things in the past: “it is not bound by language or by a common culture but by a shared experience. History is what Canadians have in common. Canadians believe that their history is short, boring, and irrelevant. They are wrong on all counts. The choices Canadians can make today have been shaped by history” [13:vii]. Morton adds that “Canadians have had to learn how to live with each other in this big, rich land; whatever their future, they should understand how Canada has travelled through its most recent centuries to the present” [13:vii-ix]. In an attempt to explore Canada as a new emergent Western country, some scholars might agree with Morton’s viewpoint that if one follows that voyage, Canadian history “will give us confidence in change and compromise and in some enduring truths about communities and families and human beings. It should also tell us that no ideas, however deeply held, last forever” [13:vii-ix]. This means that White Canadians are interested in the history of their country, as is the case of the studied “unhomely” minorities who cannot go beyond their sad history in Canada and in their imaginary homelands.

The utterance of the expression “the history of Canada” is often linked to its geographic neighbor, as is shown by Albert Mabileau and Patrick Quantin in the following discussion: “In 1937, André Siegfried warned the reader of his latest work on Canada: ‘At the beginning, in the middle and at the end of any study of Canada, we must repeat that Canada is American. [...] It is almost a historical accident that there is a special country called Canada, distinct from the United States. Its existence is a political paradox: nature has not given it any particular personality and no geographical difference separates it from the south of its great neighbor’ (Siegfried, 1937, 5)”<sup>d</sup> [15:142-143]. It might be true that Canada is similar in some aspects to both imperial powers, Britain and America, yet it appears always to have a queer image with an ambiguous hybrid identity. In Hutcheon’s terms, the history of Canada is distinguished by the period “between 1867 and the First World War”

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<sup>d</sup> The original quotation is as follows: « En 1937, André Siegfried avertissait le lecteur de son dernier ouvrage sur le Canada: ‘Au début, au milieu et à la fin de toute étude sur le Canada, il faut répéter que le Canada est américain. [...] C’est Presque un hasard historique qu’il y ait un pays spécial appelé Canada, distinct des Etats-Unis. Son existence est un paradoxe politique: la nature ne lui a conféré aucune personnalité particulière et aucune différence géographique ne le sépare au sud de son grand voisin. D’où un problème de gravitation, car si le pôle du sentiment politique est en Angleterre, le pôle géographique du Canada est aux Etats-Unis, c’est-à-dire encore une fois hors de lui-même’ (Siegfried, 1937, 5) ». Albert Mabileau et Patrick Quantin, «Réalités de la Politique au Canada», *Canada et Canadiens*, pp. 142-143.

[16:xvii], during which Britain's cultural impact "had been enormous in English Canada because the community offered by Empire (and then Commonwealth) was appealing: British institutions acted as a protective wall for the 'garrison' of colonial culture. But not even that was able to protect Canada from the immense cultural and economic power of the United States" [16:xvii]. Canadian history can tell us about its uncertain identity as a nation, but we cannot ignore the importance of Asian-Canadian literary history as a disturbing entity identifying this nation. This is what we will explore in the next short subpart: It is so short because what interests us is not Asian-Canadian literary history but rather the ethnic historicity in Asian-Canadian literature.

### ***B. Asian-Canadian Literary History***

Undoubtedly, immigrants are among those who participated in the foundation of the present-day Canada considering its confusing history, yet they are not mentioned by white Canadian writers. However, the Asian-Canadian authors studied do their best to represent some of these immigrants. Kogawa, Goto and Basran, do not hesitate to share with their readers personal details about their histories in Japan and India and in Canada through their gothic narratives. In order to explore their Asian-Canadian "historicity", we need to go through the history of Asian-Canadian literature in relation to Canadian history.

Through their review of Asian-Canadian literature as an academic field of study that has a relatively short history, the critics Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López state Guy Beauregard's statement according to which "the history of the discipline has developed on the basis of the theory of Asian-Canadian constituencies 'coming to voice' after a long period of silencing and marginalization" [17:x-xi]. They also mention Lily Cho's observation as follows: " 'we cannot ignore the trenchant critiques of Canadianness embedded within [minority] literatures [...]. These explicit markings of difference call attention to a desire to be considered both within and without the nation [...]. Moreover, minority literatures in Canada insist on an engagement with histories of dislocation that are differentially related' ('Diasporic Citizenship' 93, 97)" [17:x-xi]. What attracts our attention to such disturbing and gothic narratives is their commitment to reminding humanity of their forgotten histories and scattered groups inside a paradoxical nation like Canada and outside Canada, elsewhere, in their imaginary homelands. One can notice the complexity of the study of the question of belonging of ethno-racial minorities, but the Canadian case is much more complicated because even Canadian geography can tell the story of an uncertain nation with a hybrid identity.

### ***C. Canadian Geography***

The first question that could be asked by the reader of this paper, might be about the relevance of Canadian geography to the study of Asian-Canadian gothic literature. As a matter of fact, we have to emphasize the significance of geography in Canadian studies and the act of studying Canadian identity, as is suggested by Charlotte Sturges in the following quotation: "By blurring boundaries between the outside and the inside, [...]. Van Herk reveals the prescriptive practices linking 'where' to 'who' in a Canadian context. Furthermore, when feminine subjectivities are enmeshed in the differential relations of race and/or ethnicity, [...] the textual manipulating of 'where' in relation to 'who' has particular relevance, as it combines the issues of locality and globality with those of distance and proximity in a politicized aesthetic with the female body as its centre and as

its problem” [18:193]. This quotation is taken from Sturgess’s comparative study of Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* and Larissa Lai’s *When Fox is a Thousand*, where she mentions other Canadian works interrogating the literary representations of prairie as a socio-symbolic space nurturing the feminine subjectivity and the question of belonging. Sturgess’s statement here points to the importance of Canadian geography as a space crossing racial boundaries and boosting feminine subjectivities in ethnic literature and the national image of Canada.

Indeed, we moved from the history of Canada to its geography because both can tell us about the real Canadian identity. Once we talk about Canada, there is an indirect reference to its geographic neighbor, the USA. Virginia Ricard describes the United States and Canada “as ‘compositions’ that even though not very ancient, are diverse countries composed of diverse elements” [19:89]. She explains her statement by declaring that the United States and Canada are abstractions, inventions, constructions, and “so imaginary communities in the sense that Benedict Anderson gave to the term, that is communities which are limited—not coterminous with all mankind—and in which we feel bound to people we have never seen” [19:89]. Ricard’s provocative notion of “imaginary communities” calls our attention to the Canadian imagination. What is important here, in Frye’s terms, is “the position of the frontier in the Canadian imagination” [5:222,223]. The latter observes that “in the United States one could choose to move out to the frontier or to retreat from it back to the seaboard, and the tensions built up by such migrations have fascinated many American novelists and historians, while in the Canadas, the frontier was all around one, a part and a condition of one’s whole imaginative being” [5:222,223]. We are attempting to explore the frontier which, according to Frye, “was primarily what separated the Canadian, physically or mentally, from Great Britain, from the United States, and more importantly, from other Canadian communities as the immediate datum of his imagination, the thing that had to be dealt with first” [5:222,223].

According to Paul-André Linteau, Canada is famous for its vastness as a country “extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific for a distance of 5,514 km, Canada is the second largest country in the world (9 975 139 km<sup>2</sup>)”<sup>e</sup> [20:3]. While Jean Chaussade depicts it as the second biggest county in terms of the distance yet it is “a sparsely populated (27.4 million inhabitants)”<sup>f</sup> [11:6]. Magda Stroinska and Vikki Cecchetto, however, focus on the weather of this huge country which has an influential role in reshaping the lives of people. Stroinska and Cecchetto claim that, “[m]ost of the [...] Canadians inhabit the southern part of the country. [...] [and] because of the harsh climate and the physiographic make-up of the country, only about 12 per cent of the land is suitable for agriculture” [21:130,131]. This is what probably makes this North American country appear “as an ‘economic and political dwarf’ in relation to [...] the United States of America. [...], in spite of all the efforts made since [1867 when it was created] [...], Canada remains a fragile state, [...], a country that needs to be constructed, a country in search of its identity”<sup>g</sup> [11:6]. The geographic hugeness and the sharp criticism that is directed at this country, do not stop Canada from prospering progressively, as is explained by Chaussade in the

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<sup>e</sup> The original quotation is as follows: « S’étendant de l’Atlantique au Pacifique sur une distance de 5 514 km, le Canada est, en superficie (9 975 139 km<sup>2</sup>), le deuxième plus grand pays du monde ». Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire du Canada*, p. 3.

<sup>f</sup> The original quotation is: « le Canada [...] mais faiblement peuplé (27,4 millions d’habitants) ». Jean Chaussade, *Le Canada: ou les risques d’éclatement d’un grand pays*, p. 6.

<sup>g</sup> The original quotation is as follows: « il apparaît comme un ‘nain économique et politique’ par rapport à son voisin immédiat: Les Etats-Unis d’Amérique. De fait, malgré tous les efforts menés depuis plus d’un siècle (depuis 1867 date de sa création) [...], le Canada demeure un Etat fragile, un ‘colosse aux pieds d’argile’ comme on a l’habitude de dire, un pays qui reste à faire, à construire, un pays à la recherche de son identité ». Chaussade, *Le Canada*, p. 6.



following quotation: “Canada is therefore the country of cold and distance needing to be overcome despite bad weather [...]. In response to this extraordinary challenge, Canadians have responded with enormous efforts in the field of communications: the construction of transcontinental railways [...] and a trans-Canada highway [...]. These diverse transcontinental facilities express the political will of Canadians to build from this [...] relatively limited base, and despite all the burdens associated with the vastness and ‘nordicity’, a true sovereign and wealthy state”<sup>h</sup> [11:20]. Canada demonstrates, likewise, its willingness to survive in spite of the difficulties facing it. It should be noted, however, that there is a common feature characterizing the Canadians. Evidently, we can distinguish this feature as a pejorative characteristic revealing their ambiguous fear of the unknown. After learning about the Canadian history as well as its spacious geographical territories with a harsh climate, one can conclude the mysterious Canadian existential fear. Margaret Atwood believes that “every country or culture has a single unifying and informing symbol at its core. [...] The symbol, [...] functions like a system of beliefs [...] which holds the country together and helps the people in it to co-operate for common ends” [22:31]. Now, let us discover the Canadian unifying symbol, considering that “what constitutes Canadian culture, and Canadian literatures today, is shaped by the ‘elsewhereness’ of Canadian artists and writers” [6:18] as is declared by Smaro Kamboureli, and this is what we will show in the next part.

### 3. The Garrison Mentality: The Fear of the Unknown

It would be very pertinent to learn about the Canadian imagination through the perspective of the white, English-speaking Canadian, Margaret Atwood. The latter explains to her reader what she labels the Canadian symbol, as is stated in the following quotation: “The central symbol for Canada [...] is undoubtedly Survival, *la Survivance*. [...] Bare Survival isn’t a central theme by accident, and neither is the victim motif; the land was hard, and we have been (and are) an exploited colony; our literature is rooted in those facts [...]. The Indians and Eskimos have rarely been considered in and for themselves; they are usually made into projections of something in the white Canadian psyche, a fear or a wish” [22:32,91]. According to Atwood, the Canadian symbolism, or what she, also, calls the theme of survival, becomes progressively internalized within white Canadians. The worries of these Canadians about their lives, in a vast country with a harsh climate like Canada, are manifested in a “central symbol” about “Survival, *la Survivance*”, which is reflected in the literature of white Canadians. One can say that the Canadian survival theme appears to the reader as an internal exile of the Canadian imagination. The literature written by white Canadians, which is different from that of the ethnic minorities’, shows not only the white fear of the aboriginals but also the supremacy of whiteness over the natural inheritors. On the one hand, the white settlers conquer the natives’ lands, and on the other hand, they mock them. The act of picturing native Indians and Eskimos just like ‘animals’ proves that the white Canadian psyche is absorbed by its fear of the different ethnic Other. The difference between the Japanese and Indian writers studied and the aboriginals, is that these Asian-Canadian female writers hold a similar position to the whites and denounce their white supremacy. Therefore, this theme of survival simply represents the mentality of

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<sup>h</sup> The original quotation is the following: « Le Canada est donc le pays du froid et des distances à vaincre malgré le froid et les intempéries [...]. Face à cet extraordinaire défi, les Canadiens ont répondu par des efforts gigantesques dans le domaine des communications: construction de chemins de fer transcontinentaux [...] et d’une route transcanadienne [...]. Ces divers aménagements transcontinentaux expriment bien la volonté politique des Canadiens de construire à partir de cet [...] base relativement restreint, et en dépit de toutes les pesanteurs liées à la vastitude et à la nordicité, un véritable Etat souverain et riche ». Chaussade, *Le Canada*, p. 20.

the Canadian imagination.

What is identified by Atwood as the Canadian symbol, is called by Northrop Frye, the Canadian mentality. Frye thinks that “the simultaneous influence of two larger nations speaking the same language has been practically beneficial to English Canada, but theoretically confusing, because Canada’s identity is to be found between the other two” [5:220], i.e. Great Britain and the United States of America. Canada’s inbetween mentality reminds us again of the inbetweenness of Asian-Canadian minorities. In Frye’s terms, “it is simpler then to notice the alternating current in the Canadian mind, as reflected in its writing, between two moods, one romantic, traditional and idealistic, the other shrewd, observant and humorous” [5:220]. In her discussion of the Canadian imagination, Atwood emphasizes the Canadian fear of the Other, particularly the aboriginals. Frye, however, saw that “the single most important defining force on the Canadian imagination is the terror of the hostility of nature and many other critics would follow him in this view over the years to come,” as is stated by Linda Hutcheon [16:xvii-xviii]. The latter claims that according to Frye, due to “the Canadian national consciousness of the historical and physical reality of a vast country sparsely inhabited, faced with the unknown, the unrealized, the humanly undigested, Canadians built their psychological garrisons” [16:xvii-xviii]. We find that Frye’s book entitled *The Bush Garden*, which is about the literary history of Canada and a criticism of the Canadian imagination, is very useful to explain what is meant by the Canadian “garrison” mentality. Hutcheon, for instance, proclaims that Frye’s “vision of the Canadian imagination, as mentally garrisoned against a terrifying nature and frostbitten by a colonial history, is a provocative vision” [16:viii-ix]. In the following quotation, Frye, as a Canadian literary theorist, justifies his classification of the Canadian imagination as a garrison mentality: “A garrison is a closely knit and beleaguered society, and its moral and social values are unquestionable [...]. It is much easier to multiply garrisons, and when that happens, something anti-cultural comes into Canadian life, a dominating herd-mind in which nothing original can grow. The intensity of the sectarian divisiveness in Canadian towns, both religious and political, is an example: what such groups represent, of course, vis-à-vis one another, is ‘two solitudes’, the death of communication and dialogue. Separatism, whether English or French, is culturally the most sterile of all creeds” [5:227-228]. Ironically, Frye points out that a garrison refers to a “tied” society and that the multiplicity of garrisons leads to an “anti-cultural” Canadian life, as if he was attacking implicitly the multicultural policy. Despite the vastness of the Canadian landscape, its people are mentally garrisoned and entrapped within an internal psychological exile. Through the following quotation, let us discover at whom Frye’s attack is directed: “As the centre of Canadian life moves from the fortress to the metropolis, the garrison mentality changes correspondingly. [...] But though it changes from a defense of to an attack on what society accepts as conventional standards, the literature it produces, [...] tends to be rhetorical, an illustration or allegory of certain social attitudes. [...] The conflict involved is between the poetic impulse to construct and the rhetorical impulse to assert, and the victory of the former is the sign of the maturing of the writer” [5:228-233]. Frye’s critical transition to talk about the creative side of the garrison mentality is another attack on the self-conflicted “white” Canadian intellectual life. He indicates that the writer externalizes his anti-creative enemy who must be the racial Other. This reminds the reader of the assertion of one of the characters, in Kogawa’s *Obasan*, that Japanese-Canadians are seen by white Canadians as the enemy [3:96-100]. This leads us to suggest that Frye’s argument can be considered as a proof of the claim of ethnic minorities to be considered as the “enemy”, while the Canadian imagination is engaged in

a self-conflict. In the next part we will study some literary “nationalist élites” described by Elleke Boehmer as “those who have been caught in a situation of *split perception* or *double vision*, bilingual and bicultural, yet alienated from both, the élites who sought to challenge aspects of imperial rule also found they might gain advantages from making compromises with it” (emphasis in original) [23:110]. This was a short version of the so called a ‘garrison mentality’ that motivates the reader to wonder about its significant effects on Canadian ethnic minorities.

#### 4. The Marginalizing Ghetto

Beyond the question of literary imagination, the garrisoned psyche of some white Canadians, who are entrapped within their fear of the unknown, the Other and the emptiness of their homelands, must have influenced directly or indirectly ethno-racial minorities. In fact, the garrison mentality, that is based on the ‘separatism’ of the white settler and the rest of ethnic minorities, results in the emergence of “ghettos”. We can define the concept of “ghetto” by using Hugues Lagrange’s terms. Lagrange explains that the term “ghetto” implies “segregation, poverty, unemployment and financial dependence,” and that: “Didier Lapeyronnie considers that the ghetto is a set of social relations and a particular way of relating oneself to oneself. He strongly asserts that ‘individuals locked up in the ghetto are silenced politically,’ they are no longer engaged with the objective social aspects of their own existence, their judgments and behavior are marked by nostalgia, and it is only in this individual imagination that ‘social and moral life [can] correspond’ ”<sup>i</sup> [24:232]. Didier Lapeyronnie’s viewpoint concentrates on the denotation of “ghetto” concerning the individual self which lies at the level of his imagination, but what interests us is the meaning of the term in relation to ethno-racial communities. Lapeyronnie’s claim that the individuals confined in ghettos are silenced politically is not totally true regarding the books in our corpus. We find some who prefer silence like the Japanese-Canadian characters in *Obasan*, namely Naomi’s father, her Uncle and Obasan, but as it should be noted, it is only a “protective silence”, in their words, “ ‘kodomono tame. For the sake of the children...’ Calmness was maintained” [3:26]. The Japanese-Canadian female character, Emily, however, is politically engaged. She dedicates her life to defend the Japanese that used to be humiliated within these ghettos.

As is argued by Lagrange, “the image of the ghetto conveys the idea of separation and confinement”<sup>j</sup> [24:233]. Mirna Safi, for instance, declares that spatial segregation or what she calls, “ghettoisation,” is used “historically against stigmatized ethnic and racial groups,” and she adds that “research in social psychology shows that the specificity of ethno-racial categorization lies in the fact that stigmatized members of dominated groups can be both despised and deeply hated even to the denigration of their belonging to humanity”<sup>k</sup> [25:13].

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<sup>i</sup> The original quotation is the following: « Certains auteurs utilisent néanmoins ce mot de ghetto pour la France, tout en évitant de le définir par une configuration de caractéristiques et de relations objectivables—ségrégation, pauvreté, chômage, dépendance financière. Ainsi, Didier Lapeyronnie, dans une analyse très fouillée, sans nier l’importance de ces caractéristiques, considère que le ghetto est un ensemble de relations sociales et un mode particulier de rapports de soi à soi. Il affirme avec force que ‘les individus enfermés dans le ghetto sont réduits au silence sur le plan politique,’ ils ne sont plus en prise avec les aspects sociaux objectifs de leur propre existence, leurs jugements et leurs conduites sont marqués par une nostalgie, et c’est seulement dans cet imaginaire individuel que ‘vie sociale et morale [peuvent] correspondre’ ». Hugues Lagrange, *Le déni des cultures*, p. 232.

<sup>j</sup> We find that the following short quotation is very useful to define the term of “ghetto”: « L’image du ghetto véhicule l’idée de la séparation et de l’enfermement ». Lagrange, *Le déni des cultures*, p. 233.

<sup>k</sup> The original quotation is as follows: « La ségrégation spatiale (la ghettoisation) ou encore les génocides se font ainsi historiquement à l’encontre des groupes ethniques et raciaux stigmatisés alors que l’on ne connaît pas de sociétés où les

Safi's statement can be better illustrated by Emily's diary in *Obasan*, as is shown in the following way: "The last ruling forbids any of [us to] go anywhere in this wide dominion without a permit [...]. We go where they send us [...]. Everything is like a bad dream. [...] There's no sadness when friends of long standing disappear overnight—either to Camp or somewhere in the Interior. [...] We just disperse. It's as if we never existed [...]. This curfew business is horrible. At sundown we scuttle into our holes like furtive creatures. [...] the people are treated worse than livestock. [...], it's the reportage of a caged bird. [...] We're like a bunch of rabbits being chased by hounds" [3:105-107]. This is how the Japanese-Canadian activist, Emily, describes the ghetto. It is a somewhere in Canada where this ethnic minority experiences a traumatic tragedy, so that even the reader of her wounded expressions feels the trauma experienced by these Japanese. In reading and imagining the images drawn by Emily, the reader fails to find the exact words to interpret such an image. These Japanese-Canadians were caged physically like birds and rabbits, but mentally and psychologically, they are encaged in an internal exile. They were deprived of their humanity. We can, therefore, understand that a ghetto refers to the act of segregating ethno-racial minorities metaphorically and spatially, and our choice of the title of this subpart, as "the marginalizing ghetto" and not "the marginalized ghetto", suggests that these minorities have been always stigmatized.

As a matter of fact, the Asian-Canadian minorities had been herded into what used to be called during the war, "concentration camps", but later on became ghettos. The women dealt with here, as the offspring of Japanese, have been separated and isolated in Vancouver—British Columbia with their families. This location is renowned for its various ethnic groups. Aesthetically through their literary works, Kogawa and Goto succeed in transforming the painful scattering of the racial "Other", into a source of inspiration reflecting their ethnic discriminatory experiences through the language of metaphor. We can use the scholar, Deborah Madsen's terms to say that "the migrant community is a community gradually establishing itself in a 'third space' that is neither European nor Canadian nor [Asian in the case of our study] but is all these and is also authentically itself at the same time" [26:40]. The positive side of the ghetto is that although it can segregate and humiliate the physical existence of the racial Other, it cannot control his creative imagination, and this is the case of Kogawa and Goto. The latter demonstrate, in Rushdie's words, that "the largest and most dangerous pitfall would be the adoption of a ghetto mentality," and in spite of their internal exile, "they do not forget that there is a world beyond the community to which they belong" [27:19]. This does not negate the burden of the ghetto on these minorities who grow up feeling entrapped by an internal exile. Then, let us explore the hardships of Canadian ghettos by referring to the literary ghetto of our corpus.

### ***A. The Spatial Ghetto***

As literary voices, the authors studied tell us, through the tongues of their characters, about the ghetto as an experience scattering ethnic minorities and gathering them together simultaneously with other marginalized groups. In *Obasan*, for instance, the female character Emily, as a word-warrior against all injustices, writes a diary uncovering various scandalous practices against the Japanese minority in Canada during and after the

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hommes et les femmes (les jeunes et les vieux) vivent dans des espaces séparés ou s'entre-tuent. Les recherches en psychologie sociale mettent en évidence que la spécificité de la catégorisation ethno-raciale réside dans le fait que les membres stigmatisés des groupes dominés peuvent être à la fois méprisés et profondément hais jusqu'au dénigrement même de leur appartenance à l'humanité ». Mirna Safi, *Les inégalités ethno-raciales*, p. 13.

wars. She asserts that the government took their letters, exiled them for no crime and took their livelihood [3:44]. Among the letters embedded in this diary, Naomi reads the following letter through which Emily's words sum up the Canadian mentality/garrison mentality that is manifested through its treatment of this racial minority at the time, in 1942: "Rumors are that [Japanese-Canadians] are going to be kept as prisoners and war hostages—but that's so ridiculous since we're Canadians [...]. I found Grandma Nakane there sitting like a little troll in all that crowd ... Grandpa Nakane was in the Sick Bay [...]. Nesan, maybe it's better where you are, even if they think you're an enemy. [...] They are going to move the Vancouver women now and shove them into the Pool before sending them to the camps in the ghost towns" [3:111,117]. Emily here gives *Obasan's* reader an idea about what a ghetto really is. The "ghost towns" described by Emily are where the Japanese minority was segregated and separated from the towns inhabited by white Canadians. One can see that Naomi's family is scattered; while her Grandma Nakane was placed with other Japanese women into the Pool, Grandpa Nakane was in the Sick Bay, Naomi's father Mark was in the Camp, Emily and her father in B.C. [3:121], and Naomi's mother in Japan. What is really tragic is that Emily is not sure if her sister, Naomi's mother, is in safety in Japan, as she says in the following quote: "maybe it's better where you are, even if they think you're an enemy" [3:117]. Previously, Emily said that the Japanese-Canadians were considered as the "enemy" in Canada, and now, she wonders if her sister is seen as an "enemy" in Japan. She worries about her sister who is in her homeland. This means that not only were Japanese-Canadians segregated and separated into ghettos or "ghost towns" in Canada, but even those who went back to Japan were segregated into psychological ghettos of fear. This was Emily's version, while the critic Fu-Jen Chen explains the Canadian government's relocation policy against the Japanese community as follows: "The Canadian government removed 23,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, 75 percent of them Canadian citizens, from a designated protected zone [...], male Japanese Canadians were separated from their families and sent to road camps in the British Columbia interior, to sugar beet farms on the prairies, or to internment in a prisoner-of-war camp in Ontario. At the same time, women, children, and older people were moved inland to internment camps in the interior of British Columbia, many of them ghost towns" [28:105].

Emily defends the cause of the Japanese-Canadian community as a whole but her feminist character had not forgotten to talk about the huge responsibility of diasporic women, especially mothers, as an ethnic minority suffering within another persecuted minority. This is made clear in one of her letters as follows: "The men are luckier than the women. It is true they are forced to work on the roads, but at least they're fed, and they have no children to look after. Of course, the fathers are worried but, it's the women who are burdened with all the responsibility of keeping what's left of the family together" [3:120]. Emily points out to the responsibility of women to protect their families, mainly children, from being dispersed, while she attacks the Canadian politicians "who brought this tragedy" on them [3:107]. Despite the apparent strength of this militant woman, her words and writing show her as an ethnic woman engaged in an ambiguous internal exile. She identifies her wounded community not by saying "we are Japanese-Canadians", but rather by saying: "We are hammers and chisels in the hands of would-be sculptors [...]. We are the chips and sand, the fragments of fragments that fly like arrows from the heart of the rock. We are the silences that speak from stone. We are the despised rendered voiceless [...]. We are sent to Siloam, the pool called 'Sent'. [...] We are the Issei and the Nisei and the Sansei, the Japanese Canadians. We disappear into the future undemanding as dew" [3:132]. Through such painful

diction, Emily transcends her wounded soul and boldly attacks the politicians who caused the calamity. She also transgresses the majority's concepts regarding minorities and otherness. In this way this powerful female character denounces a whole history of marginalization, by attacking the majority's act of throwing the Japanese not only into a spatial ghetto but also a limitless internal exile. Therefore, the ghetto mentality appears to be one of the concrete results of the garrison mentality with its ideology of survival of the fittest. Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* reveals to the reader what we called in this paper as a spatial and physical ghetto, but Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* will show us another kind of Canadian ghetto, that we will call the transcendental ghetto.

### **B. Transcendental Ghetto**

Through Asian-Canadian gothic literature, one can differentiate the spatial ghetto as it was represented in *Obasan*, from what we can call the transcendental ghetto, as is the case of *Chorus of Mushrooms*. This transcendental ghetto occupies a metaphorical space in this novel, where the novelist does not mention directly the notion of ghetto, but one can feel its presence through the characters' feelings of being racially segregated. According to the critics, Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, Guy Beauregard perceptively points out that: "[M]uch of the most engaging Asian Canadian cultural work [...] addresses narratives of nation and their fissures [...]. Goto and Yoon both actively renegotiate their location in racialized and gendered representations of Canadian national culture, and refuse to accept the Canadian nation as "finished product" from which they are inevitably excluded ("The Emergence" 57)" [17:x-xi]. The mysterious character of the old Naoe, in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, proves her challenge to the garrison mentality with its ideology of survival of the fittest that excludes her. As is viewed by Beauregard in the quote above, Goto renegotiates her location in racialized representation of her marginalized hybrid identity that challenges the Canadian nationalism as a "finished product". Goto achieves this through the character of Naoe who "bundled herself in the thickest coat she could find" in order to start her foolish journey outside her home [29:79]. About this uncanny decision, Naoe confesses the following: "I want to see before I leave this place forever. The fushigi smell where the mushrooms are growing ... I would like to dip my fingers in the moist soil where they ripen in the dark. ... I will see before I leave" [29:82]. Naoe's journey leads us to quote the critic Charlotte Sturgess's statement that, "Goto's narrative can be placed within a tradition of prairie writing in which representations of the land are tropes of a (sometimes conflicted) relation to the Canadian nation and to what lies beyond its borders" [18:192-193]. Sturgess restates Claire Omhòvère's definition of Robert Kroetsch's statement, "I wear geography close to my skin," as "a provocative poetic proposition insofar as it short-circuits the dynamic opposition between place and space through a metaphor that condenses the mutual enwrapping of the intimate and the extimate, physical affect and intellectual judgment, man and the environment (30)" [18:192-193]. Goto describes Naoe's first steps toward her geographical journey by highlighting the following: "She stood still in the darkness, blinking in wonder. [...] Closed her eyes, feeling the seeping the sinking into. Slipped deeper, and deeper, her eyes closed, her hands floating on the water [...]. Murrur murrur forming humming earth tipping under body swelling growing resound and the SLAM of breath knocked from lungs, beyond the painful register of human sound, the unheard chorus of mushrooms" [29:83-86]. One can see that Goto's text does not only wear geography, but also it is laden with ethnic metaphors and philosophical dimensions. One can note that even if Naoe is not here the authoritative narrative voice, her body speaks out loud "beyond the painful register of human sound." Then, similarly to Sturgess, we can say that "Goto's text, like those of certain other Canadian women writers (Aritha

van Herk or Suzette Mayr for example), seems to wear its geography under its skin, the relation to a specific Canadian locality becoming a way of exploring specific forms of feminine subjectivity” [18:192-193]. What is done by Naoe through this uncanny journey inspires us to call it a transcendental ghetto that challenges the theory of the survival of the fittest.

There is no doubt that white Canadians have never been through what Naoe suffered already as a Japanese immigrant. However, they mourn the disappearance of this old immigrant woman in a published article as is stated by Murasaki in the following quotation:

“Local Elderly Woman Disappears

Search Continues

Late Tuesday night, the immigrant mother-in-law of local mushroom farmer, Sam Tonkatsu went missing during blizzard-like snow conditions. [...] Local RCMP and neighboring ranchers are combing the countryside, but weather conditions hinder their search” [29:88].

One can observe that not only is Naoe uncanny but even Goto’s style is as confusing and ambiguous as Naoe’s character. This quotation seems to be an article in a newspaper announcing the loss of Naoe, but Goto’s narrative voice, Murasaki identifies it as a “true story” [29:87]. From this quotation, we can suggest that Goto does not only challenge the Canadian notion of national identity, but she also challenges her readership’s logical perception through the icy-journey of an old woman. She transcends the literary generic conventions as well as her reader’s interpretative scope only to underline the impossibility of a fixed determined national and racial identity.

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the mechanisms used to deal with the ghetto mentality vary from one character to the other. We find that the Japanese-Canadian character, Murasaki tends to isolate herself even from other Asian immigrants as is revealed in the next quotation: “And I never talked with him in my entire life. He never talked with me. Instinct born of fear, I knew that being seen with him would lessen my chances of being in the popular crowd. That Oriental people in single doses were well enough, but any hint of a group and it was all over. I thought I was proud of being Japanese-Canadian, but I was actually a coward. I don’t know what Shane’s reasons were for never talking with me. I never asked” [29:125]. Murasaki’s attitude is the result of her fears of being rejected by some white Canadians. The real trauma is that even the ethnic Shane seems to be sharing the same attitude towards Murasaki, as if they were both inhabiting a “third space” containing their psychological internal exile. The critics, Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, mention Sasano’s claim that in Goto’s novel, “Japanese Canadians inhabit a kind of border territory, more precisely, they inhabit Bhabha’s ‘liminal space’ within the nation, performing a different, acceptable, yet subversive Canadian identity” [17:104-106]. Sasano asserts that “Goto’s characters experience marginalization, but ultimately dissolve the centre/margin dichotomy upon which it relies, resisting the prescribed notions of Canadianness and Japaneseness in the Canadian context through the performative act of writing themselves into the nation (39)” [17:104,106]. Goto shows that the garrison mentality is a discriminatory space limiting ethnic minorities’

existence and reminding them that the survival is only for the fittest. We say that because we witness a kind of inspiring ghetto in *Chorus of Mushrooms* where the novelist challenges the garrison mentality through Canadian geography. She subverts the garrison mentality and transcends the ghetto mentality. All that has been mentioned in this part tells interested scholars about Canadian identity/mentality. In the literary field, one can notice that Canadian ethnic minorities focus on the theme of the ghetto mentality, while the white Canadians concentrate on the garrison mentality. What has been developed, here, as the ghetto, is identified by Mayuri Deka, in her discussion of *Everything Was Good-Bye*, as “racialized spaces”. Quoting Cheryl Teelucksingh, Deka states that “the space of contention, that Meena occupies, reflects the discursive construction of minorities within what Teelucksingh calls the ‘racialized spaces’ in Canada, and whose analysis of these spaces reveals that multiculturalism is predicated on difference which promotes the marginalization and oppression of certain immigrant groups such as the South Asian community” [30:146,147]. The marginalization of the South-Asian community because of multiculturalism is another controversial issue that needs to be discussed alone in detail. What interests us here is the notion “racialized spaces” that can explain what we called transcendental ghetto in this subpart, and refers equally to the internal exile represented in these gothic narratives. As an example of ethnic minorities’ ‘racialized spaces’ in *Everything Was Good-Bye*, we can refer to Meena’s depiction of her family’s situation as Asian immigrants after her father’s death, as follows: “he was a myth and my mother was a martyr. [...] Apparently, it was my mother’s fate to be a widow with six daughters and our fate to become casualties of fractured lives. Though I struggled against such a predetermined existence, I know that my sisters and I were all carved out of this same misery, existing only for others, like forgotten monuments that had been erected to commemorate events that had come and gone. [...] My mother returned to our guests composed: the perfect widow in perpetual mourning [...]. After they left, others would take their place” [9:14-15]. The Indo-Canadian, Meena portrays her internal exile within which she keeps her mythical dreams about her dead father. Meena and her family represent a stereotypical image of the case of other immigrants who are entrapped by the sense of spatial and psychological dislocation. They are martyrs to their mythic notions of uncertain and ambivalent belonging. Meena’s internalized melancholic expressions prove that she dwells within what Cheryl Teelucksingh and Deka, quoted above, as “racialized spaces” and what we call a transcendental and psychological ghetto, in other words an internal exile. According to Deka, “[m]ost of Basran’s characters negotiate their concepts of self and Other within this scope of the rapidly expanding and changing multicultural national image that applies ‘difference’ as its central narrative” [30:150-152]. This confirms the hypothesis that supposes that Canadian literature is being produced under the garrison mentality that is about the “division” between the “us” and “them” and the survival of the fittest.

## 5. Conclusion

The marginality of ethno-racial minorities in Canadian literature displaces them from the periphery to the center despite the dominant garrison mentality that is based on the survival of the fittest and the spatial and psychological ghettoization of the ethnic Other. If the historians, psychologists and sociologists underline the constructed character of identities; the Asian-Canadian writers represented through the homelands of imagination of our corpus show the complicated and ambivalent character of identities. In fact, Joy Kogawa, Hiromi Goto and Gurjinder Basran as well as their female characters unite to show that identity is not innate and natural but nurtured—acquired and cultural. Despite their uncertain/neither-nor identities, they convince their



readers that there is no Self without Other or no identity without otherness, and this is a hint of the dependence and subordination of the Self to the Other. One can observe through their gothic narratives that there is no sign of self-effacement but there is a call for ethno-racial diversity and multiplicity.

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