



**HAL**  
open science

# Reconsidering Canadian Multiculturalism Through Post-Colonial Exilic Narratives

Sawssen Ahmadi

► **To cite this version:**

Sawssen Ahmadi. Reconsidering Canadian Multiculturalism Through Post-Colonial Exilic Narratives. *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and applied research*, 2023, 70 (01), pp.151-170. hal-04536970

**HAL Id: hal-04536970**

**<https://hal.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/hal-04536970>**

Submitted on 15 Apr 2024

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Public Domain



---

## **Reconsidering Canadian Multiculturalism Through Post-Colonial Exilic Narratives**

Sawssen Ahmadi\*

*University of Avignon, 74 Louis Pasteur, 84029 Avignon, France*

*Email: sawssen.ahmadi@yahoo.com*

### **Abstract**

The reason behind Canada's choice of a multicultural policy as a significant identification of its national identity remains a mysterious enigma. The focus of this paper will be on how Canadian ethno-racial minorities, especially Asian-Canadians, would question the Canadian multiculturalism in their literary narratives like the novelists, Joy Kogawa, Hiromi Goto and Gurjinder Basran. As a matter of fact, the characters of Kogawa's *Obasan*, Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and Basran's *Everything Was Good-Bye*, go beyond the fact of being a part of literary imagination to encouraging the reader to revisit the efficiency of the Canadian multicultural system in the real world. They are unable to tell if this multiculturalism really guarantees them the right to be culturally different and at the same time to be regarded as Canadian citizens. On the one hand, this system encourages the cultural diversity of the ethnic Other and this is viewed by minorities as an act of segregation sending them back to their ethnic Otherness. On the other hand, it tends to assimilate them within the mainstream culture, which is taken by racial groups as an attempt to erase their racial origins. Thus, the reader of Asian-Canadian literature finds him/herself as confused as the Asian diaspora studied.

**Keywords:** cultural diversity; integration/invisibility; citizenship/belonging; multicultural policy.

---

*Received: 7/21/2023*

*Accepted: 8/29/2023*

*Published: 9/2/2023*

---

\* Corresponding author.

## 1. Introduction

The panic of being unrecognized as an independent Western country with its full identity seems to be a big problem befogging the Canadian mentality. This might be the reason behind Canada's choice of the multicultural policy as a significant identification of its national identity. According to Pierre Auger, in Canadian politics, the term multiculturalism covers the three meanings that are identified by Unesco as follows; "the observation of cultural diversity, the programs and policies designed to promote and manage cultural diversity and the right of individuals to the difference and the place that can/should occupy this difference taking into account both the constitutional principles and the common values (consensus) of the host society"<sup>a</sup> [1:83]. However, quoting Ashutosh, Mayuri Deka assumes that "multiculturalism generates a new animus in which some immigrants are convivially placed in relation to the nation at the expense of others" [2:146-147]. The beginning of our investigation into the Canadian multicultural policy will be through the discussion of its cultural diversity.

## 2. Cultural(less) Diversity

We would like to start with the identification of what is meant by cultural diversity according to ethno-racial minorities. By referring to Homi Bhabha, "cultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs; giving rise to liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity" [3:34-35]. We will relate Bhabha's terms to the Canadian context of cultural(less) diversity, where this diversity might exist or might be nothing but a shadow. According to Auger, Canada is "frequently identified as the country of openness to linguistic and cultural neighborhoods, a multicultural country, [...] but geographically divided into territories, politically into provinces and ethnically [into] linguistic enclaves"<sup>b</sup> [1:83]. Auger asserts that Canada is associated with the label of multiculturalism because "it has made it a key concept, [or] dynamic strategy, demonstrating a political will to manage the ethno-cultural diversity as a resource for the country and to include clear policies of recognition and promotion of this diversity, perceived as a kind of cement of the Canadian identity"<sup>c</sup> [1:83]. In this part entitled 'cultural(less) diversity', we will explore Auger's viewpoint claiming that Canada is "a multicultural country, but rather homogeneous in every part of it"<sup>d</sup> [1:83].

---

<sup>a</sup> The original quotation is as follows: « Dans la politique canadienne, le terme multiculturalisme recouvre les trois acceptions identifiées par l'Unesco: 1. L'usage démographique: constat de la diversité culturelle; 2. L'usage politico-programmatique: l'ensemble des programmes et des politiques destinés à promouvoir la diversité culturelle et à la gérer; 3. L'usage idéologico-normatif: il définit pour les individus leur droit à la différence et la place que peut/doit occuper cette différence compte tenu à la fois des principes constitutionnels et des valeurs communes (consensus) de la société d'accueil ». Auger, « Le contact des langues et des cultures au Canada: un bilan du modèle Multiculturaliste », *Plurilinguismes et Multiculturalismes*, 83.

<sup>b</sup> The original quotation is as follows : « On parle souvent du Canada comme le pays de l'ouverture en matière de voisinage linguistique et culturel, un pays multiculturel, comme si ici les choses s'étaient passées différemment et que les hommes et les femmes de ce pays étaient différents de leurs autres congénères du vaste monde. Un pays fédéré certes mais devisé géographiquement en territoires, politiquement en provinces et ethniquement en enclaves linguistiques ». Auger, « Le contact des langues », 83.

<sup>c</sup> The original quotation is as follows : « Le Canada est très souvent associé à l'étiquette de multiculturalisme parce qu'il en a fait un concept-clé, dynamique, démontrant une volonté politique de gérer la diversité ethnoculturelle comme une richesse pour le pays et d'y associer des politiques claires de reconnaissance et de promotion de cette diversité, perçue comme une sorte de ciment de l'identité canadienne ». Auger, « Le contact des langues », 83.

<sup>d</sup> The original quotation in which Auger describes Canada is as follows : « un pays multiculturel certes mais plutôt homogène pris dans chacune de ses parties ». Auger, « Le contact des langues », 83.

In fact, Canadian multiculturalism gives the impression of being tolerant of the issue of ethnic otherness. Nevertheless it seems to be a system built upon paradoxical pillars, where diversity and homogeneity coexist, and this is illogical. In his introduction to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Wayne Booth speaks about Bakhtin's way of explaining the act of co-existence of many languages, and we find that his words, even if they are about fiction, can be useful to simplify the image of multiculturalism. By adapting Booth's terms, one can say that Canadian multiculturalism "presents two opposing tendencies where there is a centrifugal force dispersing minorities outward into an ever greater variety of voices, and there are various centripetal forces preserving them from overwhelming fluidity and variety" [4:xxi-xxii]. The ambiguity and ambivalence of the multicultural policy reflects the complexity of the Canadian identity.

If Canadian identity itself is not clear, as is the case of its multicultural policy, how would ethnic minorities react once they attempt to adapt to the Canadian national sense of belonging. In order to fathom the problem of these minorities with their identities and the country's identity as well, it will be helpful to define the Canadian identity. Before the emergence of multiculturalism, Canada was recognized for its biculturalism, as is explained by Gwendolyne Cressman in the following quotation: "The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism established in 1963 was primarily concerned with the relations between the French and the English, defined as the 'founding races' of Canada, while paying some attention to the 'other ethnic groups'. Although this was an attempt at redefining the national community and a sense of togetherness within the Canadian confederation, aboriginal peoples were largely ignored" [5:13]. Therefore, the story of Canadian identity goes back to its bi-construction upon bilingual as well as bicultural hegemonic pillars. Once the phenomenon of globalization interfered in the world's whole structure, the Canadian discourse on identity transformed the notion of bi-culturalism to multi-culturalism. Theoretically, multiculturalism is a matter of acknowledgement of cultural and ethnic diversity, but politically speaking, it is a subject of unity for the sake of the Canadian nation. This was Cressman's viewpoint, while H el ene Bertheleu thinks that: "Multiculturalism has been accused of marginalizing the immigrants by sending them back to their 'original' culture. This is, for example, what the famous writer Neil Bissoondath (1995), himself a former migrant, denounces, a policy which, he says, interferes in private life and uses public funds to preserve usages that he judges as 'private' "° [6:21-22]. Thus, one can deduce from Bertheleu's argument that the multicultural policy seeks to acknowledge the ethno-cultural minorities as members of society by integrating them as citizens. By confronting Bertheleu's viewpoint with Cressman's, one can note that Canadian multiculturalism is paradoxical, as long as it is about guaranteeing "diversity" and "homogeneity", but also "division" and "unity"; this is on the theoretical level. Then, Neil Bissoondath's estimation that multiculturalism marginalizes immigrants by sending them back to their original culture, or let us say, to their ethnic ghettos, racialized spaces and internal exile, leads us to explore the pragmatic aspect of Canadian multicultural policy. The attack of Bissoondath, a former migrant from Arima, on multiculturalism motivates us to examine the viewpoint of other ethnic minorities regarding this policy, as for example, the female character, Meena in Gurjinder Basran's *Everything Was Good-Bye*.

---

° The original quotation is as follows: « Le multiculturalisme  tait accus  de marginaliser les immigr s en les renvoyant sans cesse   leur culture d'origine'. C'est par exemple ce que pense le c l bre  crivain Neil Bissoondath (1995), lui-m me ancien migrant: il d nonce une politique qui, dit-il, s'immisce dans la vie priv e et utilise des fonds publics pour pr server des usages qu'il juge 'priv s' ». Bertheleu, « Multiculturalisme, citoyennet  et conflit », *Multiculturalisme, modernit  et citoyennet  au Canada*, 21-22.

The critic Mayuri Deka assumes that Basran reflects “the inherent dangers of creating a culture of separation and exclusion based on a binary of power/powerlessness, by narrating how this essentializing discourse of multiculturalism places the immigrant within a specific space of ‘difference’ ” [2:148-149]. Deka’s assumption can be explained by quoting, from *Everything Was Good-Bye*, the statement of Meena’s sister, Tej who tells her sister that they “were a natural target for judgments; a family already wounded was easy prey for a community that often turned on itself” [7:49]. Unlike the transcendental ghetto/racialized space of Meena, which characterizes immigrants’ internalized feelings of marginalization, Tej’s observation is about an external culture of separation and exclusion of these immigrants.

Still in the context of examining the Canadian injustices committed against ethnic minorities under the cover of multiculturalism, we will refer again to *Everything Was Good-Bye*, specifically to Meena’s portrayal of her father’s death to highlight the existing multicultural racism, as follows: “My father had fallen from the twentieth floor of a luxury high-rise apartment building where he’d been framing the walls. [...] It seems strange to me that this building existed somewhere outside our mention of it. That somewhere people were living in these air-conditioned units, pushing their blond, blue-eyed babies in strollers along the very sidewalk where my father lay dead” [7:14]. In Deka’s terms, for Meena, “the ‘outside’ of air-conditioned units, pools, and private parks is as alien as the ‘blond, blue-eyed’ people inhabiting it, and her own experience of life in Canada is vastly different from what she envisions as that of the white community” [2:149]. Deka argues that, “living in a neighborhood marked by poverty and constant struggle and with her father’s death, Meena realizes that this white culture of priority does not include the ever-expanding South Asian diasporic population” [2:149]. This alludes to a spatial ghetto reflecting the Canadian garrison mentality which promotes a culture of separation. Such spatial and moral distance between the culture of the white hegemony and ethno-racial minorities puts into question the real application of the Canadian multicultural system.

Deka indicates that Basran’s *Everything Was Good-Bye* “traces the changing face of Canadian immigration history and questions what constitutes ‘belonging’ by rejecting conventional multiculturalism’s assumptions that position specific socio-ethnic and national identities as irreconcilable and defined by mutual respect but also distance” [2:148]. According to Deka’s argument, Canadian multiculturalism generates fractures over the sense of belonging. In addition to their dismembered selves, the members of ethnic minorities find themselves members of an ambivalent theoretical re-membered multiculturalism that dismembers them from both the mainstream as well as their fractured racial communities. We can illustrate this by referring to Meena’s childhood adventures with different racial groups at school especially with “the Smart Ethnic”, about which she says: “They weren’t FOBS, or fresh off the boat, as we referred to the immigrants who smelled like onions and had body odour that was thicker than their accents. Nor were they DIPS—the Dumb India Punjabs who clustered together like jalebies, [...]. They were the ethnics who took all the advanced classes in Algebra, thinking this would somehow help them in life just like the French-immersion kids thought that their piss-poor French would land them dream jobs” [7:18]. Meena’s naming of some of the ethnic groups stresses the bitter truth about the existence of racism even between diasporic minorities themselves. They used to divide themselves into separate groups according to their skin colors or countries of origin. Even the group to which she adhered ultimately does not escape from her sarcasm. Meena’s argument itself is full of racism and she refers to some people as “immigrants” as if she were not a descendent of immigrant Indians, as if she considers herself as a

white/mainstream Canadian. Meena's mother is very weak in relation to her slavish adherence to Indian rituals, but she is very strong in facing racist discrimination. The following quotation is one of Meena's stories about her mother's dealing with the intolerant 'Others': "I'd witnessed my mother's anger when cars squealed by our house as voices yelled "Paki, go home!" and eggs hit our windows. One night ..., it wasn't eggs. The window exploded and a firecracker rolled towards me through shards of broken glass. [...] My mother taught the boys a lesson, one in compassion. When a dozen eggs hit the window the next night, I knew she wished she'd taught them a lesson in retribution" [7:17]. The strength of this woman in dealing with the issue of racism is manifested through her lesson about "compassion". She refuses even to imitate the Other's aggressive reaction and she tries to stay quiet and to behave with wisdom. Thus, the stereotype of the Indo-Canadian, Meena, could be seen as a representative of other immigrants and ethnic minorities' struggle with the ambiguous multicultural policy, which assures segregation rather than providing a sense of belonging. These ethno-racial minorities find themselves subject to the hegemonic white Canadian identity which is itself an uncertain and a neither/nor Western identity. Furthermore, Meena's life, in Dekka's terms, "reflects the growing anxiety of immigrants of South Asian descent who are struggling to find a place for themselves within the discourse of Canadian multiculturalism" [2:145-146].

In Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the Japanese-Canadian female character, Murasaki states that her isolation from other Asian groups because of her fear of being rejected by the mainstream, is that of a coward [8:125]. The critics, Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, argue that for the same reason Murasaki did not learn a word of Vietnamese "despite working for years with the Vietnamese pickers on her parents' mushroom farm (*CM*, 105), and what she calls 'cowardice' is perhaps connected to the many instances of white liberal racist behaviour of which she is often a target" [9:104-106]. Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López note that "Murasaki records people's tendency to take her for Chinese, or to assume that she can read or speak any Asian language or identify Asian vegetables, simply because she looks Asian, and this is why she irritably complains, 'Let a woman choose her vegetables in peace' " [9:104-106]. This is quite clear in the following ironical statement of Murasaki: "You're invited somewhere to be a guest speaker. [...] You're the only coloured person there [...]. People talk race this ethnic that. [...] I was standing in the ethnic Chinese rice noodle Tofu-patties exotic vegetable section of Safeway" [8:89-90]. She confesses that she stands in her marginalized "safeway" in an attempt to lessen her exotic estrangement. Later on, Murasaki tells her narratee that when her mother asked her about her relationship with another white man, her answer was: "Mom, he wanted to have Oriental sex with me" [8:124]. One can observe that white Canadians connect these ethnic minorities to their Asian origins, not by respect of cultural diversity but only to marginalize and exoticize them.

Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López mention that "critics perceive connections between the use of the Japanese language in this novel and the consumption of Japanese food, because food is another important marker of racial and cultural identity" [9:111]. This explains why the reader of *Chorus of Mushrooms* observes the importance of Japanese food especially for Naoe since it reminds her of her Asian identity. What interests us here is the stereotype of the offspring of Japanese immigrants, Murasaki, who assumes that: "There are people who say that eating is only a superficial means of understanding a different culture. That eating at exotic restaurants and oohing and aahing over the food is not even worth the bill paid. You haven't learned anything at all. I say that's a lie. What can be more basic than food itself?" [8:201]. In this context, it would be so pertinent

to quote again the critics, Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, who restate Sturgess's assertion that "to eat or not to eat Japanese is synonymous in the novel with the recognition or non-recognition of cultural heritage (33), consequently, it is a perceptible sign of difference, and therefore conducive to either [acceptance] or rejection" [9:111]. This reminds the reader of an anecdote that happened to Murasaki once with an Asian woman. When Murasaki went to an "Oriental Food" store, she met Sushi, a woman working there. Sushi noticed that Murasaki resembled very closely her father Sam Tonkatsu, who comes there to buy his preferred oriental food "salted seaweed paste" [8:137]. Murasaki was surprised since she thought that her father did not eat Oriental food like her assimilationist mother. In the same respect, even the reader is surprised because s/he learns that Murasaki's father is secretly loyal to his Oriental food/identity but without the awareness of his wife, Keiko, and his daughter. Later on, Sushi asked Murasaki whether her mother was white because Murasaki has no idea about Oriental food as if she were a white Canadian. Sushi identifies this food to Murasaki as follows: "Don't worry, once you eat what they are, you won't forget them, [...]. Mirin, nori, miso [...]. The recipe book should help. Is your mom white? [...] Eating's a part of being after all" [8:138]. Therefore, Sushi confirms Sturgess's statement that is restated by Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López declaring that food is part of being. The case of Murasaki's father, Sam, who eats his Oriental food secretly puts into question Canadian cultural diversity. In fact, Naoe's death depressed Murasaki and her parents. In order to get rid of the gloomy atmosphere in their silenced home, Murasaki, also called Muriel, decided to go and buy Japanese food. She confesses that she enjoyed this food with her father and dejected mother. Even Keiko, who does her best to erase every single Japanese trace, finds therapy for her depression in eating Asian food that she used to avoid. The three of them felt much better in acknowledging their original identity through this Japanese food. As is argued by the critic Tatiana Prorokova, in the following quotation, this Japanese food brings this diasporic family back to life: "Muriel's attempt to cook a Japanese meal—the *tonkatsu* (which is also her Japanese family name)—for dinner is very symbolic [...]. The *tonkatsu* not only resurrects Japanese identity in Muriel's life, making her find out more about the traditions of Japan, but it also literally turns into a remedy for the family that has been rejecting their Japanese belonging for too long" (italics in original) [10:105]. Then, Muriel/Murasaki says that, "eating Tonkatsu in the heavy silence between night and dawn, [is] a strange configuration" [8:153]. The act of eating the food that reminds them of their Japanese identity is done in total silence and darkness as if they are hiding from something. Certainly, they are not hiding from Canadian cultural diversity but rather from cultural-less diversity.

The critics, Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, highlight Darias Beautell's "identification of multiple tensions between the liberal discourse of racial equality and the colour-coding that pervades Murasaki's world."<sup>f</sup> Moreover, Beautell "underlines the workings of the strategies of homogenization of the other within the white dominant so that difference is categorized and controlled from within, a process in which the racialized subject may even participate."<sup>g</sup> The best way to explain Beautell's statement is by referring to an example provided by Murasaki who narrates the following: "If you eat too many Jap oranges, your skin turns yellow. [...] My hands look yellow. May be it's the Christmas lights [...]. No, they were definitely yellow [...]. Mom turned from the sink [...]. 'Oh God', [...]. She grabbed my wrists and dragged me to the sink [...]. 'Yellow', she was muttering, not even hearing me. 'Yellow, she's turning yellow she's turning yellow' " [8:91-92]. Murasaki

<sup>f</sup> Darias Beautell quoted in Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, *Transnational Poetics*, 104-106.

<sup>g</sup> Beautell qtd in Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, *Transnational Poetics*, 104-106.

seems to be attached to her Japanese origin unlike her mother who does not even buy the Japanese food that her mother, Naoe, loves. Keiko dwells in the pool of assimilation to the extent that she becomes enraged once she notices the “yellow” color of her daughter’s hands. The “yellow” color, metaphorically, refers to the Japanese race. Thus, as is viewed by Beautell in the quotation above, the racialized subject participates in the conflict between the discourse of racial equality and color-coding. Keiko’s fear of being taken as an Asian and not a Canadian woman leads her to react in such a way. This is one of Murasaki’s stories that calls into question Canadian cultural diversity.

As a Japanese-Canadian woman, Murasaki does not refrain from thinking about her present and revisiting her past in an attempt to get rid of her exotic internal exile and to investigate the Canadian cultural mosaic. In remembering a childhood anecdote, she draws the following observation: “ ‘Everybody is the same’, the teacher said, ‘Jesus doesn’t see any difference at all. He loves you all the same’. I thought that Jesus must be pretty blind if he thought everybody was the same. Because they weren’t. They weren’t at all. [...] At Christmas time, there was always a brown paper bag for each child. Mostly peanuts very cheap, but a scattering of coloured mints. And a Jap orange” [8:58-59]. We would like to comment on this quotation by referring to Eva Beautell’s statement that Goto’s novel “provides one of those interesting fictional analyses of the role of visual structures in the official construction of cultural difference in Canada, with a special emphasis on the production of the Asian Canadian subject. [...] one of the most salient issues the novel explores is precisely the problematic lack of coincidence between the intended and the actual realities of the cultural mosaic” [11:8]. Actually, we are trying through this part to show that there is a gap between the theoretical Canadian cultural mosaic and the actual reality of such a cultural mosaic. By referring to the quotation above, one can say that at home within her family, Murasaki has an open space to think about her choices, yet at school she was deprived of the freedom of choice. She found herself, together with other Indian and black minorities, being taught specific courses, imposed on them in Sunday school. The problem of Murasaki was her inability to trust her teacher’s enlightening proclamations. The latter told her students that “Jesus loves the little children of the world”. Murasaki was not totally convinced. The expression “Jesus must be pretty blind” reveals two important facts about Murasaki. The first one is that she is not a Christian believer like her integrationist mother. The second fact is that Murasaki redirects a sarcastic message through mocking the teacher’s claims that they are the same only in religious matters. This is what they taught her as a child yet the following quotation shows Murasaki’s denial of her teacher’s pedagogical attitudes: “I was horrified. Something so insidious tattooed into the walls of our home, the upholstery in our car, the very pores in our skin. We had been contaminated without ever knowing. For all that Mom had done to cover up our Oriental tracks, she’d overlooked the one thing that people always unconsciously register in any encounter. We had been betrayed by what we smelled like. We had been betrayed by what we grew” [8:62]. This quotation reveals that not everything taught at school is true, because in reality the racism practiced against minorities did, does and will always exist. Unfortunately, the majority in Canada, that is basically Christian, does not follow Jesus in viewing others as equal and similar. The serious trouble lies at the level of the bad effects engendered by racism against these ethno-racial minorities. They feel that they do not belong to the Western majority and will usually be considered as an Oriental minority.

The Japanese-Canadian novelist, Hiromi Goto reveals that Canadian multiculturalism is a theoretical matter, since in reality one can see a cultural-less diversity especially through the stereotypes of immigrants, as is



shown in the next quotation which is about an elementary teacher in south west Calgary talking about many children from different cultures in her class and shedding light on a new boy, called Ken, who had immigrated from Japan, as follows: “There are a lot of sad immigrant stories. [...] ‘Ken had brought a live skunk into the school [...]. We were absolutely paralyzed and Ken didn’t know [...]. The children ran, screaming, outside and the whole school filed out. Ken came out with his skunk and the fire-men took it away in a net. [...] When I got home that day, I wrote a letter to the immigration office to suggest they offer wildlife identification courses as well as the English lessons’ ” [8:102-103]. The first sentence in this quotation is Murasaki’s identification of immigrants’ unhappy history through this story. This teacher’s terms make her appear as a racist who does not respect the “different cultures” in her class. She criticizes these immigrants and makes of her ethnic student a subject for a “Funny Stories Contest”. She suggests that immigrants need “wildlife identification courses” just because a young boy brought to the school something that he innocently wanted to share with his friends. The letter written by this teacher is a sign of cultural-less diversity. Thus, we can conclude this analysis by quoting the critic Prorokova’s argument that: “While *Chorus of Mushrooms* understands the power of diversity, it reveals how difficult, and in some instances even impossible, it is for a society or its certain members to facilitate diversity. [...], yet, as the novel demonstrates, an attempt to combine several cultures can be met with negativity by the country that accepts immigrants and is thus difficult for immigrants who try to build a new life in a new place, their descendants being continuously affected by these cultural intolerances and injustices” [10:107]. As is argued by Prorokova, a combination of multiple cultures can be beautiful but this can only be in one’s imagination. Through the cultural loss of the three female characters in Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*, one can observe the impossibility of maintaining an equitable cultural diversity. In addition to Goto, there are other Asian-Canadian activists who put into question the idea of Canadian cultural diversity which is oppressed by the process of integration/invisibility, and this is the subject of the next part.

### 3. Integration / Invisibility

Throughout their novels, Kogawa, Goto and Basran take their readers and researchers on a special linguistic journey within which they bring different languages together to convey their voices as linguistic minorities living with other ethno-racial minorities in Canada. In fact, their specific manipulation of heteroglossic languages stresses their multilingual abilities as if they were polyglots, and thus they negate Elizabeth Yeoman’s claim saying that “CanLit may be multicultural, but it seems it is not multilingual” [12:42]. Nevertheless, the use of translation, in the literature of Canadian minorities, seems to be more complicated than a simple aesthetic tool. In addition to the aesthetic dimension of the use of translation, there is a possibility that the translation from the dominant language can be the result of cultural assimilation. What is evident in *Obasan*, *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *Everything Was Good-Bye*, is that translation seems to be facilitating the cultural transfer which means that diasporic authors like Kogawa, Goto and Basran, are appealing for cultural diversity. Consequently, they do not accept the ‘conspiracy’ of ‘cultural assimilation’. Being multilingual authors who are aware of their uneasy situation of duality in a bi-lingual country serves their transgressive creativity. Through the mere use of translation, they fight for their rights such as the freedom of their linguistic choices because language is one of the basic pillars of identity. They appeal for a multilingual system and consequently for cultural diversity so that they avoid issues like marginalization and discrimination. However, there is the problem of acculturation and linguistic integration that is able to erase the original identities of these ethnic minorities, including the authors

discussed, as Japanese and Indians. Since, in Grenoble and Whaley's terms, multilingualism "leads to divisiveness, breakdowns in communication and inequalities" [13:30], the solution being proposed by Canada can be found in the process of cultural and linguistic unity and homogeneity through the system of integration.

There is no doubt that a system of integration applied in a multicultural country must include the linguistic, social, cultural and economic integration of its ethnic minorities. Michèle Kaltemback, Jacques Dorin and Sheryl Rahal discuss the system of integration through the process of intermarriage in Canada, as follows: "Intermarriage is an important factor of integration. Exogamy is on the rise in Canada, those of Northern, Western and Eastern European origins tend to exhibit the highest proportions of ethnic exogamy. [...], while Asians, the most recent immigrant groups in Canada, exhibit the lowest proportions of ethnic exogamy" [14:78-79]. There is a quite obvious attempt to integrate ethnic minorities within the mainstream. It is not surprising that Asians exhibit the lowest proportions of ethnic exogamy. In *Obasan*, one can notice that Naomi and Emily are "spinsters", which means they refuse the idea of "exogamy", or this might be a refusal of this kind of integration. We can take as an example the following quotation within which Naomi, her Uncle and Emily check the latter's documents and diary: "Even before the supper dishes were cleared away, Aunt Emily was [...] sorting documents and conference papers on the kitchen table [...]. 'Not like woman', Uncle said as he sat at the table and watched her working. 'Like that there can be no marriage' " [15:43]. What interests us, as readers, is the Uncle's depiction of the word warrior, Emily, whose activism does not allow her to accept marriage or the tactic of exogamy. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Murasaki is in a relationship with a white. She talked once about her partner's attempts to convince her to marry him, and the following is her comment on marriage: "the institution of marriage isn't my idea of what a commitment is about" [8:191]. She is no ordinary woman who seeks to get married. She has a transgressive character like Naoe's. Murasaki is like Naomi and Emily in *Obasan*; these female characters refuse to be trapped within the institution of marriage and reject the tactic of exogamy. In *Everything Was Goodbye*, Meena's Indian mother and Liam's white Canadian father oppose the marriage of their offspring. This is an indication that there are some Indians who powerfully reject integration.

Immigrants leave their homelands in an attempt to find better conditions in the host countries. Little do they know that the countries that welcome them will impose on them another language as well as other modes of life. The problem is that there are, on the one hand, people who accept the idea of assimilation and integration within the host society for the benefits of their family and children. On the other hand, there are "stubborn" ones just like the stereotype of Naoe in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Obasan Aya in *Obasan* and Meena's mother in *Everything Was Good-Bye*. They refuse to forget about their Asian origins.

The process of assimilation changes every single aspect of one's life in order to gain acceptance in the host country. In such cases, one could talk about "hegemony" that is by definition the dominance and the control of one group over another. The dominated minorities accept the authority of the dominant group even if this authority is against these minorities' interests, ideology, and principles, or in Kogawa's ironical terms, "everything is accepted" [15:34]. In *Obasan*, Naomi Nakane tells how the Nisei, the second generation of Japanese-Canadians, found themselves Christians since the religion of the white mainstream is Christianity. Japan, as an Asian country, is very well known for its religious diversity. The most common religious tribes and beliefs there are mainly the Shinto and Buddhism. Naomi, whose case is representative of other Japanese-

Canadians, does not follow any religion. She is not a religious young woman. She does not mention during the whole novel her affiliation to any religious tribe, but she keeps telling us about the religious affiliations of her family. Moreover, Naomi is classified as a “Sensei” or third Japanese generation in Canada, but has no single relationship with any religion. However, Naomi’s grandparents or the “Issei” are Buddhists, while her mother, father, Obasan and Uncle are Christians. She depicts them practicing this religion as if it were their religion and not the westerners’. Naomi does not follow any religion. She describes the celebration of Christmas as follows; “All of Christmas is like this. A mixture of white lights and colored twinkling lights in the dark” [15:86]. There is an image where one can see white people and people of color gathered in the usual and endless darkness. While Naomi’s parents, aunts and Uncle are Christians, her grandparents preserved their Buddhist beliefs. The Nisei, who are the offspring of Buddhists, found themselves forced to adopt Christianity as a religion. The Nisei’s conduct could be explained by the historian, Roger Daniels<sup>h</sup> who affirms that they were required “to kiss” the Bible if they wished to get their citizenship. Once they are Christians they must follow Christian rituals. This is how Naomi describes their ceremonies: “Sensei says loudly, ‘Let us pray’. [...] And everyone repeats in a mixture of Japanese and English. [...] ‘I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth – miyuru mono to miezaru mono no tsukurinushi o shinzu’. [...] Father, Obasan, and Uncle are kneeling but the others stand, their hands formed into cups in which Sensei places the paper bread” [15:209-211]. During the prayers of her family members under the guidance of the Sensei, Naomi is satisfied with her task of contemplating their gestures and words. The mixture of both Japanese and English appears to be ridiculous even though it is tragic. It affirms the dramatic, ambivalent life they are living as if they were in an exile with all these instructions to obey. One can see that this religious integration is very far from the notion of cultural diversity. Through the prayers of these Japanese-Canadian stereotypes, “one can approach a linguistic hybridity that is marked by the use of different languages, voices and speeches: due to such lingual multiplicity, [hence Kogawa challenges] the idea of one pure and essential identity” [17:31]. This might be read as an implicit call for cultural diversity by the Japanese-Canadian novelist, Joy Kogawa.

Naomi reveals another reality that contradicts the notion of cultural diversity in Canada, as follows: “Until May 1943, when we first attend school, Stephen and I have no formal studies [...]. At home, Obasan keeps me busy making a scrapbook of the Royal Family—Some of the children attend Japanese—language classes but I hear Obasan and Uncle whispering that it is unwise to have us go. The RCMP, they are saying, are always looking for signs of disloyalty to Canada” [15:163-165]. According to Naomi’s story, if the Japanese children attend Japanese-language classes, they would be accused of disloyalty. Ironically, the young Naomi thought that she was on holiday by not attending school, little did she know that such “holidays” would never leave her memory and would trap her in an internal psychological exile. This is how Kogawa dealt with the question of Japanese-Canadian integration that is not very distinct from Gurjinder Basran’s way.

By adapting the statement of Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López about Indian-Canadian literature, we can say that one of the most prevailing themes explored in Basran’s *Everything Was Good-Bye*, “is

---

<sup>h</sup> The following is Daniels’s statement about the attribution of citizenship to racial groups, only after “kissing the Bible”: “As one elderly Issei fisherman remembered it [...]. ‘You kissed the Bible and held up your hand’ and then they said: ‘Here you are, here’s your paper’ [...]. Some people, though, told lies to get their papers’.” Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps: North America, Japanese in the United States and Canada During World War II* (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1993), 173.

the traumatic disruption of the mother-child relationship [...] caused by the adoption of 'foreign' values and customs, whether by the 'modernization' of India (often seen in terms of Westernization) or by their experiences in Western countries" [9:14]. We find Meena's mother complains of her daughter's childish behavior by telling her elder married daughter Serena the following: "sometimes I think I should send her to England to live with her sister, or may be India this time? She could learn to cook, learn some respect and usefulness. Indian girls in England are still Indian" [7:29-30]. This mother treats severely her daughters and she is not aware that she is overwhelming their lives with this treatment, especially the complicated character of Meena.

The insubordinate character of Meena is characterized by her hatred of religious beliefs. She has informed her previous Indian friend, Ranjit, in England that she is not willing to "marry someone who was so religious and traditional" [7:32]. Therefore, it would not be surprising to learn later on that her boyfriend Liam resembles her also. He invites her to his family house where she, "followed him up a few stairs and down a dingy, green-carpeted hallway adorned with a 'Jesus loves you' " [7:44]. The last phrase "Jesus loves you," might be ironical. After that Liam acquaints his Indian girlfriend with his extreme hatred of religion. He told her that he named his dog Darwin and this "was [his] first attempt at religious rebellion [...], [he] did whatever [he] could to get [kicked out of] school [...], [he] quoted Nietzsche and questioned everything. In religious studies, [he] pointed out that if Mary Magdalene was a prostitute it was likely that Jesus was a John. In English [he] wrote an essay called 'Jesus, Portrait of a Coloured Man,' arguing that based on anthropology, Jesus could not have been white" [7:47-48]. Meena finds in Liam's personality the category of man she is looking for, neither religious nor traditional. Even though the religious rebellion of this man is exaggerated, there is a possibility of understanding his overstated antipathy to Christianity and his argument about the whiteness of Jesus as an attempt to call for the equality of people, regardless of their religious beliefs. It could also be considered as an indication of the "uncertainty" of Canadian identity, and the refusal of the Asian Meena to follow the Punjabi culture. In Deka's terms, Meena's desire to be "a part of that structure of power underlines her many efforts at assimilating into the dominant Canadian discourse of whiteness by separating herself from her South Asian culture, and her abhorrence of all things South Asian is evident throughout the novel" [2:150], as for example, when she says: "I hated the bitter subzi, soft and chunky mounds of potatoes and cauliflower. 'Shit'—that's what the white kids at school had said my leftover lunches looked like. 'Meena eats shit' (Basran 7)" [2:150]. Deka thinks that "such a distancing from South Asian and, specifically, Punjabi culture, is reflective of Meena's reaction to multicultural policy's division of ethno-racial communities which reinforces the racial binary that prioritizes one community over the other" [2:150].

Meena's critical eye continues to chase the different forms of racism and the integrity of some people versus that of the conservative ones. Meena's memories remind her of another ethnic figure called Tina. The latter falls victim of the former's criticism. Meena denounces Tina's blind "mimicry" as follows: "She pulled at her leopard-print leggings and adjusted her leather anti-apartheid medallion, which hung between her ample breasts in a display of social outrage despite her name-brand Ralph Lauren shirt. [...] This display of ethnicity was all purchased from the African store in the mall where everything was made in Hong Kong. [...] She was part melting pot, part multicultural and part privileged" [7:19]. Tina is being criticized for her fake identity that she nurtured to achieve her purposes as easily as possible, at the cost of other minorities who reject the idea of assimilation. Bhabha's following terms would be the best way to describe Tina's adopted and adapted image:

“The access to the image of identity is only ever possible in the negation of any sense of originality or plenitude; the process of displacement and differentiation (absence/presence, representation/repetition) renders it a liminal reality. The image is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence, and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss” [3:51]. Hence, Tina’s perception of her ethnic image of identity is negated and turned into a “liminal reality” which reflects the loss of such image. Unfortunately, Tina, as well as other ethno-racial minorities, fall into what Bhabha calls, “the illusory perspective of the ‘third dimension’ of the mimetic frame or visual image of identity, they are faced with a dimension of doubling” [3:50]. He explains that “such binary, two-part, identities function in a kind of narcissistic reflection of the One in the Other, confronted in the language of desire by the psychoanalytic process of identification. For identification, identity is never a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality” [3:51]. Meena talks about Tina as an emblem of the easily assimilated ethnic category. She stigmatizes her mimic appearances and the western cover that she has chosen to wear, because she knows that the assimilation of such stereotypes would harden the survival of the rest who prefer to preserve the racial originality and difference. This is how Gurjinder Basran has approached the issue of integration from an Indo-Canadian viewpoint, let us now see how other Asian-Canadian authors like Hiromi Goto would deal with this theme.

Sofie De Smyter indicates that “there are Japanese Canadian women authors who are shown to move away from the wartime experiences of Japanese Canadians in order to accentuate the struggle of newly arrived immigrants to fit into Canada’s multicultural society” [18:176]. De Smyter’s statement refers to Japanese-Canadian female writers like Hiromi Goto and her novel that approaches the strife of immigrants within the Canadian discourse of cultural diversity. The characters in *Chorus of Mushrooms* oscillate between acceptance of integration and refusal of assimilation. In the following quotation, Murasaki’s father explains to his daughter the family’s choice of assimilation: “We decided, your Mom and I, that we would put Japan behind us and fit more smoothly with the crowd. And from that day, when we decided, neither of us could speak a word of Japanese. Not a word would pass our lips. We couldn’t even think it. And I was ashamed. I felt a loss so fine it pierced my heart. Made it ache [...]. And I was feeling like I was half missing for a good ten years, never mixing with other Japanese folk, the communities in Calgary and Lethbridge, because it made the ache unbearable” [8:207]. The critics, Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, comment on this father’s argument by considering it as, “a sacrifice of [immigrants’] cultural roots, and an effort to mix in and to pass for white which heralds only silence and invisibility” [9:111]. We can say that not only do Murasaki’s parents feel ashamed of putting Japan behind, but even their Canadian daughter feels an endless loss. There is a cultural conflict between the three generations belonging to the same family just because of some members’ choice of integration, or let us call it, choice of “invisibility”. The assimilation of Murasaki’s parents reveals their willingness to join the ‘garrison mentality’, whereas the stubborn grandmother is thrown into her border zone, or let us say her spatial and transcendental ghetto and internal exile. Murasaki, however, is another confused and confusing story. She tells *Chorus of Mushrooms*’ readers about such unfair truths that are caused by the “hypocritical” assimilation and its drawbacks.

Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López criticize not only the choice of Murasaki’s parents of “invisibility”, but also attack critically what they call the “liberal multiculturalism’s hypocritical celebration of cultural ‘diversity’ ” [9:111]. Concerning the mythical identity of the Canadian multicultural system, Murasaki

utters the following expressions: “I came to realize that the shape of my face, my eyes, the colour of my hair affected how people treated me [...]. When I finally noticed, the measure of my discontent knew no boundaries. [...] Mom knew from the start [...] but all she chose to do was hide beneath a fluffy woolly skin of a white sheep. This was her only safety. She chose the great Canadian melting pot and I had to live with what she ladled” [8:175]. Murasaki’s depiction of her feelings against her mother as a child seems to be strange. She says about her mother after the death of her grandmother that she is a “mother in name but a total stranger” [8:128]. The estrangement of the mother reflects Murasaki’s internal exile as an ethnic woman of double origin who is judged by her racial appearance in a country that is supposed to advocate cultural diversity. The duplication of the word “knew” stresses the awareness of the daughter and her mother of their choices even though they are not the right ones. They are compelled to consent to the Canadian melting pot in the absence of better chances and solutions. They can guarantee safety only in removing their Japanese skin to wear the fake skin of a “white sheep”. The imagery of the “white sheep” refers to the fear and weakness that are the main characteristics of this animal. It is a metaphorical reference to the feebleness of this minority in front of the dominant hegemony. They are fake because their difference is not accepted. They find themselves rejected as different Oriental Others whose marginalization urges them to assimilate. The motherhood of Keiko urges her to protect her own daughter, who described her father once as “blameless as a chameleon changing colour” [8:32]. This mother as well as other mothers of double origins accept to be like “chameleons changing colour” only to secure better futures for their children and they need to be blameless in the eyes of their critics, especially if these critics are their children that they seek to protect through integration, like Murasaki in the following example: “You had an immigrant mother who sat muttering beside the door. Who waited for people to enter so she could spit foreign words at them [...]. It was another thing of parent/child conflict. Add a layer of cultural displacement and the tragedy is complete. That’s a lie. One of many, I suppose. Mom is a whole different story and one I can’t even begin to comprehend. Me sitting here and Mom sitting there and Obachan out” [8:98]. This quote is not only about generation gap, but rather about a cultural conflict between ethnic minorities themselves. Murasaki’s words give the impression that she provides a critique of her mother, but paradoxically, it seems that Murasaki is trying to justify her mother’s story. The tragedy of such ethno-racial minorities is not only about cultural displacement, but also about an internal exile or an inner split between two languages, two cultures and two identities or senses of belonging. We shall note that the case of this family, even if it is only a part of literary imagination and artistic creation, reflects the real situation of many immigrants. Whether these ethnic groups accept assimilation or not, they find themselves always invisible citizens.

#### **4. Citizenship / Belonging**

The study of “citizenship” and the sense of national belonging, in this paper, is always in relation to Asian-Canadian narratives and the efficiency of the multicultural policy in the real world through the literary imagination explored. The complicated system of Canadian multiculturalism drives ethnic writers, like Kogawa, Goto and Basran, to create stereotypes that oscillate between their original culture and an ambivalent acceptance/rejection of Canadian white community. In the following quotation, Naomi is reading Emily’s manuscript about the Japanese-Canadians’ struggle for liberty, or, let us say, struggle to be considered as Canadian citizens: “I came across a statement underlined and circled in red: **I am Canadian**. The circle was drawn so hard the paper was torn. [...] ‘This is my own, my native land. Then as I grew older and joined the

Nisei group taking a leading part in the struggle for liberty [...] after our former homes had been sold over our vigorous protests, after having been re-registered, fingerprinted, car-indexed, roped and restricted [...]. For better or worse, I am Canadian' ” (emphasis in original) [15:47-48]. Emily's manuscript shows the endeavors of the second generation of Japanese-Canadians to be considered as Canadian “Nisei”, or at least Canadian citizens. They need this citizenship to guarantee an honorable treatment and to avoid persecution and racism. There is a repetition of the expression “my native land” to emphasize their sense of belonging. This recalls our attention to the critic Cheryl Lousley's statement that racism makes Japanese-Canadians, like Naomi and her family, “unhomed”, as is argued in the following way: “Kogawa does more than historically write the racialized Other into those white spaces; she naturalizes their presence [...]. Rooting the Japanese Canadians in the very land of Canada undermines their construction as ‘exotic species’ who must be weeded out and reveals how the racist policies do not leave Naomi and her family ‘homeless’ but rather ‘unhomed’: positioned in the contradictory place of alien and native” [19:88-89]. In reading Emily's pamphlet entitled, “Racial Discrimination”, Naomi notices that, “whenever the words ‘Japanese race’ appeared, Aunt Emily had crossed them out and written ‘Canadian citizen’ ” [15:40]. It is evident that a militant character like Emily refuses even to read the expression “Japanese race” which is a sign of racism, segregation and exoticism. In the same context of enlightening her niece, Emily says to Naomi: “ ‘What this country did to us, it did to itself,’ she said. [...] ‘We’ve never recovered from the dispersal policy. But of course that was the government's whole idea—to make sure we'd never be visible again. Official racism was blatant in Canada’ ” [15:41]. She criticizes the Canadian system by noting that, “But Canada is supposed to be a democracy. [...] Why do they consider us to be wartime prisoners? [...] there is a deep bitterness among the Nisei who believed in democracy” [15:103]. The Nisei or the second generation of Japanese-Canadians, like Emily and Obasan Aya, suffered a lot because they considered themselves to be Canadian citizens. The problem is that even the third generation of Japanese-Canadians, like Naomi and her brother Stephen, are not regarded as Canadians and experienced segregation and racism. In the following quotation, Naomi narrates one of her melancholic experiences, or what can be called racial exile: “In 1948, three years after our exile from our place of exile [...]. Nearly 20,000 Canadian citizens will be deprived for another year of one of the fundamental rights of citizenship [...]. They are the Canadians of Japanese origin who were expelled from British Columbia in 1941 and are still debarred from returning to their homes. [...], for another year no Japanese Canadian may enter British Columbia without an RCMP permit, and those now in the interior may not return to the coastal area” [15:236-237]. What the reader can call ‘ghetto’, and Kogawa calls “ghost towns”, Naomi calls “exile”. The latter reads this extract taken from a newspaper that talks about the restrictions imposed on Japanese-Canadians. What is puzzling is that it is stated that they are “Canadian citizens”, but with no rights. What one can observe in reading this “silent” novel is that whatever this wounded Japanese-Canadian community reads or writes reveals a deep internal exile. This means that the citizenship of these ethnic minorities of double origin is useless. This is how Kogawa approaches the theme of belonging and the efficiency of citizenship in a society in transition. Let us now move on to Goto's way of approaching the same topic.

Charlotte Sturgess argues that “the blurring of boundaries between subjectivities makes room for a position for the Other as co-teller within the very act of storytelling, promoting not only the possibility of a reconfigured Asian community but proposing an open circuit of communication” [20:191-192]. As a matter of fact, *Chorus of*

*Mushrooms* is characterized by its multi-voicedness and “through the use of literary heteroglossia, that is manifested through the various narrative voices, Goto seeks to break the silence imposed on the Japanese community in Canada and to negate the idea of one single essentialist identity” [17:23]. Goto’s novel is an open space where various voices intermingle to convey the voice of invisible citizens who are of ethno-racial origins. By retelling the stories of her grandmother, Murasaki allows Naoe to be the second narrative voice. Naoe’s stories always start by the expression: “Mukâshi, mukâshi, ômukâshi...”. According to Sturgess, “by accomodating the Other in the act of storytelling in this way the narrative proposes citizenship itself as a site of negotiation between different voices and interests located in non-homogeneous community sites” [20:191-192]. We can better explain Sturgess’s statement by quoting Murasaki’s following terms: “Obachan, everyone wants to hear stories. And I can’t finish them. They scatter like sheep. Like dust” [8:63-64]. What inetrests us here is Murasaki’s observation that “everyone” desires to hear her ethno-racial stories. In such a way, Goto, the writer, revitalizes her Japanese folk stories and at the same time she appeals for non-homogenous communiy sites. Unlike Kogawa’s evocation of the expression “Canadian citizens” several times through the tongue of her word-warrior Emily, Goto does not mention the term “citizens” explicitly. She refers to the concept of citizenship in a transcendent manner through her blurred way of interweaving voices, languages and stories. This is how the Japanese-Canadian, Goto, deals with the controversial theme of citizenship within her narrative, and her style might be considered different from Kogawa’s. Unlike Goto and Kogawa, the Indo-Canadian Gurjinder Basran addresses the topic of citizenship from a globalized economic viewpoint. As for Meena in *Everything Was Goodbye*, she criticizes her own mother’s way of thinking and behaving yet she does the same for the white Canadians. Meena is neither satisfied with the Indian identity nor with Canadian citizenship/belonging. She refuses to be an ordinary person since she hates carrying umbrellas or wearing hats, and submitting to “the steady stream of rain” [7:16]. She does not want to follow the stream of life in passive submission. In the following quotation, she goes back to a memory of school days in order to draw a comparison between an orphan Indian girl and her Canadian classmates in the case of rainy weather: “By the time I arrived at school I was soaked and my hair fell in dripping black waves around my face. As I walked down the hallway towards my locker, my shoes squeaking against the shiny linoleum floors, the janitor shot me a disapproving look. I curled my shoulder into my chest, shivering a passive apology. Warm, dry white kids, driven to school by their parents, paraded past” [7:16-17]. The disobedient reaction of Meena reveals that she was always ready to defend herself like her “passive apology” for something beyond her control. Apart from the pressure of the oppressed mother at home, she had been teased at school for her different skin color. The white children were brought to school by their parents whereas the fatherless foreign girl used to come alone, and is discriminated against by some children. Besides, Meena’s “third space” of endless memories leads her to remember her sister’s viewpoint portraying the situation of strangers/immigrants. Meena’s sister, “Harj, who had studied sociology in university, ... told [Meena] that she thought giving strangers titles was a way to rebuild [their] villages outside of India; adopting the appearances of community was easier than creating a real one” [7:49-51]. Harj ironically points to the easy choice made by immigrants to be integrated rather than to preserve and defend their original identities.

Basran attributes to her female protagonist two names in order to emphasize the loss of Canadian immigrants’ offspring and inability to locate their belonging. As is suggested by Mayuri Deka, Meena’s “distaste at being called by her full name, Meninder, which identifies her as Punjabi rather than the anglicized shortened version,



Meena, or sometimes Maria, shows her concerted attempts to integrate into white Canada” [2:146]. Deka adds that: “Meena reflects this new ‘hybrid’ identity that reimagines the contours of Canada’s ethno-racial and national boundaries by claiming shared ownership of conventional diasporic and multicultural discourses while commenting on how the multicultural narratives of harmony belie not only the underlying antagonisms between the racialized immigrant and the white settler descendants in Canada, but also the distancing of the second generation from the South Asian diaspora” [2:148]. The conflictual discourses of multiculturalism generate new hybrid identities that are torn between a racial origin and a national belonging. The stereotypical character of Meena reflects not only the uncertain identity of the second generation of the South Asian diaspora but also the uncertain identity of Canada to which these ethnic minorities strive to be considered as citizens.

One of the reasons encouraging us to study the literature produced by the Asian-Canadians is that they are unable to tell if the Canadian multiculturalism really guarantees them the right to be culturally different and at the same time to be regarded as Canadian citizens. On the one hand, this system encourages the cultural diversity of the Other and this is viewed by minorities as an act of segregation sending them back to their ethnic Otherness. On the other hand, it tends to assimilate them within the mainstream culture, which is taken by racial groups as an attempt to erase their origins. Thus, the reader of Asian-Canadian literature finds him/herself as confused as the Asian diaspora studied. Let us now survey the multicultural policy from a political point of view even if we are still discussing literary imagination.

## 5. A Tricky Policy

Despite the exotic identity of Canada as a nation and its fear of the unknown, Canadian people succeeded in transforming their vast country into a truly wealthy, sovereign state. The primary actors behind the international success of Canada are the policy makers. The latter could be regarded as inventive enough to attract people to their land so that they fill the gap of the sparse population that they have in a huge country. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Naoe’s “quasi-Shakespearean [expressions make her appear] as a transcendental trickster who seeks to reflect her difference through her satiric and playful foolishness as well as her deaf culture” [21:295]. Now, we will investigate the multicultural policy as a strategic “trick” used by the Canadian policy makers to manipulate ethnic minorities. There are various strategies employed by Canadian politicians to achieve the prosperity of their country. One of the strategies used is the opening of their doors to immigrants by facilitating the procedures for entry. The multicultural policy is another strategy employed to ‘protect’ and to guarantee a harmonious coexistence of the different ethno-racial groups. It is possible that the multicultural policy was invented to people the Canadian geographical vastness, to make it part of its national image and to cover its confused historical facts, in an attempt to encourage these minorities to settle in such a huge country and achieve economic progress.

The hybridity of the multicultural system reflects the hybrid and uncertain identity of Canada as a nation. The primary victims of such a hybrid identity are ethnic minorities who long for cultural and multilingual diversity, and at the same time want to be treated as Canadian citizens. In *Obasan*, the female character of Emily gives an example of how these racial minorities, like the Japanese-Canadians, are victims of the Canadian hybrid systems in the following way: “We’re a ‘lower order of people’. In one breath we are damned for being ‘unassimilable’

and the next there's fear that that we'll assimilate. One reporter points to those among us who are living in poverty [...]. Then if we improve our lot, another says, 'There is danger that they'll enter our better neighborhoods'. If we are educated, the complaint is that we will cease being the 'ideal servant' " [15:104]. What seems to be puzzling is that the Canadian government supports the demand of these diasporic groups through the initiation of the multicultural policy that is explained by Nadia Azzimani as follows: "the Canadian government has made of multiculturalism the keystone of its politico-economic identity, and the official discourse emphasizes this at the international level, while at the national level, diversity management is more nuanced [...]. This management of diversity leads us to analyze the evolution of the identity of the individual and the society, which is certainly moving towards a form of 'hybridity' " [22:55-57].<sup>1</sup> According to Azzimani, the multicultural policy is not created for the sake of cultural diversity, it is rather a 'double-dealer' demarcating the politico-economic identity of Canada as an emerging Western country. On the international level, multiculturalism is 'tricking' people with the mysterious fake cultural diversity within Canada. On the national level, however, the country is pressing ethnic minorities to collaborate with the dominant groups in the name of 'unity' in order to preserve international Canadian interests. In the next quotation, Kaltemback, Dorin and Rahal identify what the Prime Minister Brian Mulroney calls, 'multicultural identity': " 'we, as a nation, need to grasp the opportunity afforded to us by our multicultural identity, to cement our prosperity with trade and investment links the world over and with a renewed entrepreneurial spirit at home'. So the government's interest in multiculturalism is no longer merely in recognizing and encouraging cultural diversity, but rather in using it as a tool for economic development" [14:82]. This means that Canadian multiculturalism or "multicultural identity" is a matter of symbolic and mythic theory just like the national Canadian identity. It is possible to deduce that Canadian identity is proud of its hybrid binaries of diversity-unity, union-division, in pretending heterogeneity but appealing for homogeneity. In the same context, Kaltemback, Dorin and Rahal indicate that "the policy-makers were conscious of the risks of encouraging cultural identities and tried to balance this with active support for socio-economic integration, and this consecrates the position of ethnic cultures in the official definition of the Canadian identity" [14:79-81]. What interests us in the following analysis is the identification of the socio-economic integration of ethnic minorities within multicultural Canada, especially the attitudes of some Asian-Canadians towards such a policy. In *Everything Was Good-Bye*, Meena's analysis of the various kinds of racism, based always on her memories, leads her to state some of the students as examples, and she does not condescend to talk about the educational system at the time. This is why she introduces the character of her teacher called "Mr. Ellis" who tells his students that they would continue with their "discussions on labour practices in the emerging economies of the Third World", and Meena comments on this by saying: "I hated the term 'Third World' and its arrogant implications [...]. Nations built on the backs of immigrants who worked more and earned less in hopes of building a better life [...]. In India my father had been a respected engineer; in the West he was considered unskilled labour. Eventually, it killed him [...]. 'We were not poor when we came to Canada', my mother once said [...]. 'But this country tells us we are' " [7:20-21]. Meena's terms speak louder than the injustice involved within the economic field. The problem for her is that even the education system teaches students about the inferiority of the Third World. She feels it badly because her essence comes

---

<sup>1</sup> The original quotation is as follows: « Au fur et à mesure des années, le gouvernement canadien a fait du multiculturalisme la clé de voûte de son identité politico-économique. Le discours officiel insiste sur cet élément au niveau international. Au plan national en revanche, la gestion de la diversité est plus nuancée [...]. Cette gestion de la diversité conduit à analyser l'évolution identitaire de l'individu et de la société, qui se dirige certainement vers une forme 'd'hybridité' ». Azzimani, « Entre unité et diversité », *Multiculturalisme*, pp.55-57.

from this Third World, and her father, who was initially an engineer, accepted to work more and earn less as an immigrant, and the price of this sacrifice was his life. Meena's life as an ethnic girl living in a Western country seems to be full of hardships, an internalized exile and a boundless sense of inferiority. In her discussion of the borderless identities in Basran's novel, Mayuri Deka claims that "the South-Asian Canadian becomes reflective of the successful implementation of Canada's policies of immigration" [2:151], and she justifies her argument as follows: "This becomes increasingly evident in second-generation immigrants like Sunny and then Meena, who become an example of the possibility of complete assimilation into the national fabric as defined by Canada's multicultural policy. They become the success stories and act as both a model and a threat to those immigrants who want to cling too much to traditional norms that are seen as threatening by the hegemonic discourse" [2:152-153]. In other terms, not all of the South-Asian Canadians abide by Canada's policies of immigration. Meena's mother, for instance, is one of those immigrants who do struggle not only against Canada's "multicultural fabric" bias in favor of a white hegemonic discourse, but also against their assimilated offspring. These immigrants find themselves fighting against the implanted myths of their children who want to be considered as Canadians. This recalls a similar situation in *Chorus of Mushrooms* where there is a conflict between the same family members; some are faithful to their Asian heritage, others are assimilationists and others are just lost and unable to affiliate to any fixed identity. The economic success of Meena and her husband, for example, reflects only their economic integration and in Deka's terms they are unable to define the contours of inclusion and exclusion. This is how the Asian-Canadian novelist, Basran, evoked the paradoxical nature of the 'tricky' Canadian multicultural policy. The paradoxical multicultural policy seems to be just a globalized-economic cover or tool used to exploit these diasporic minorities in the name of justice. Previously, the manipulation of these racial minorities as human resources was made explicitly through disrespect, slavery, segregation and open racism. Currently, it seems that discrimination and profiteering wear a new globalized disguise under a multicultural mask tricking the ethnicity of these minorities.

## 6. Conclusion

The characters of ethno-racial narratives like *Obasan*, *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *Everything Was Good-Bye*, go beyond the fact of being a part of literary imagination and imaginary homelands to encouraging the reader to reconsider the efficiency of the Canadian multicultural system in the real world. The reader of such diasporic novels can easily observe that the authors tend to create interconnected voices within the same narrative. Actually, it is possible to justify the act of multi-voicedness and the fact of giving voice to voiceless racial minorities as a metaphorical reference to multiculturalism, that must guarantee their citizenship and sense of belonging to the nation even if they have different ethnic origins. As is suggested by Sturgess, "the creation of heterogeneous bodies, in these novels, breaks down the discourses of purity of origins on which nationalisms rely" [20:194]. This kind of literary imagination, which is produced by ethnic writers belonging to minor groups, subverts not only the generic literary conventions but also transgresses the notions of nationalist belonging and put into question the Canadian multicultural policy.

## References

- [1]. P. Auger. « Le contact des langues et des cultures au Canada: un bilan du modèle multiculturaliste ».

- Plurilinguismes et Multiculturalismes*. Sous la direction de Nadine Ly. Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2009.
- [2]. M. Deka. (2016). "The 'New Immigrant': Borderless Identities in Gurjinder Basran's *Everything Was Good-Bye*." *The South Asian Review* 37 (1): 145-161.
- [3]. H. K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London, NY: Routledge, 1997.
- [4]. W. C. Booth. Introduction. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- [5]. G. Cressman. *Multiculturalisme, modernité et citoyenneté au Canada / Multiculturalism, Modernity and Citizenship in Canada*, eds. Gwendolyne Cressman and Albert Hamm. Strasbourg: RANAM, 2009.
- [6]. H. Bertheleu. « Multiculturalisme, citoyenneté et conflit: une approche sociologique ». *Multiculturalisme, modernité et citoyenneté au Canada / Multiculturalism, Modernity and Citizenship in Canada*, eds. Gwendolyne Cressman and Albert Hamm. Strasbourg: RANAM, 2009.
- [7]. G. Basran. *Everything Was Good-Bye*. Salt Spring Island, B.C: Mother Tongue Publishing Limited, 2010.
- [8]. H. Goto. *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Edmonton, Alberta: NeWest Press, 1994.
- [9]. P. Cuder-Domínguez, Belén Martín Lucas, and Sonia Villegas-López. *Transnational Poetics: Asian Canadian Women's Fiction of the 1990s*. Toronto, Ont: Coach House Printing, 2011.
- [10]. T. Prorokova. (2020). "Of Immigration, Cosmopolitanism, and Diversity: Lost Identity and the Challenge of Integration for Women in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*." *Journal of Research on Women and Gender* 9 (1). [On-line]. Available: <https://journals.tdl.org/jrwg/index.php/jrwg/article/view/160>.
- [11]. E. D. Beautell. (2003). *Hiromi Goto's Chorus of Mushrooms: Cultural Difference, Visibility and the Canadian Tradition*. Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses, no. 16. Edited by Lourdes Lopez Roper and Isabel Diaz Sanchez. [On-line]. Available: [https://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/1273/1/RAEI\\_16\\_5.pdf](https://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/1273/1/RAEI_16_5.pdf).
- [12]. E. Yeoman. "Indigenous Writing in Indigenous Languages: Reconfiguring Canadian Literary Studies and Beyond." *Beyond "Understanding Canada": Transnational Perspectives on Canadian Literature*. Edited by Melissa Tanti, Jeremy Haynes, Daniel Coleman and Lorraine York. Edmonton, Alberta: The University of Alberta Press, 2017.
- [13]. L. A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley. Preface. *Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language*

*Revitalization*. NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

- [14]. M. Kaltemback, Jacques Dorin and Sheryl Rahal. *Canadian Civilization*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2007.
- [15]. J. Kogawa. *Obasan*. Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys Ltd, 1981.
- [16]. R. Daniels. *Concentration Camps: North America, Japanese in the United States and Canada During World War II*. Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1993.
- [17]. S. Ahmadi. (2023). "Dialogic Heteroglossia in Asian-Canadian Literature." *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research (IJSBAR)*, 69 (1). [On-line]. Available: <https://www.gssrr.org/index.php/JournalOfBasicAndApplied/article/view/15781>
- [18]. S. De Smyter. Review of, "Pilar Cuder-Domínguez, Belén Martín-Lucas, Sonia Villegas-López, *Transnational Poetics. Asian Canadian Women's Fiction of the 1990s*, Toronto, TSAR Publications, 2011, 200 pages." *Imagined Communities, Recuperated Homelands: Rethinking American and Canadian minority and exilic writing*, eds. Monica Manolescu and Charlotte Sturgess. Strasbourg: Ranam, University of Strasbourg, 2013.
- [19]. C. Lousley. (2001). "Home on the Prairie?: A Feminist and Postcolonial Reading of Sharon Butala, Di Brandt, and Joy Kogawa." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 8 (2). [On-line]. Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44085897>.
- [20]. C. Sturgess. "Questions of Voice, Race, and the Body in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and Larissa Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand*." *Crosstalk: Canadian and Global Imaginaries in Dialogue*. Edited by Diana Brydon and Marta Dvořák. Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012.
- [21]. S. Ahmadi. (2023). "Asian-Canadian Literature between: Quasi-Shakespearean Syntax and Deaf Culturalists." *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research (IJSBAR)*. 67 (2). [On-line]. Available: <https://www.gssrr.org/index.php/JournalOfBasicAndApplied/article/view/15478/6530>
- [22]. N. Azzimani. « Entre unité et diversité: la 'citoyenneté multiculturelle', esquisse d'un nouveau visage pour le Canada ». *Multiculturalisme, modernité et citoyenneté au Canada / Multiculturalism, Modernity and Citizenship in Canada*. Edited by Gwendolyne Cressma and Albert Hamm. Strasbourg: Ranam, 2009.