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## Dialogic Heteroglossia in Asian-Canadian Literature

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### Abstract

The feature of some Asian-Canadian narratives is that they give a linguistic voice to voiceless/wordless characters to defend their rights as marginalized and invisible identities. The focus of this paper will be on the study of *Obasan*, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, *What the Body Remembers* and *Everything Was Good-Bye* as literary productions in a transitional era within which language and translation influence identity construction and representation. The purpose is to tackle the dialogic translingual and heteroglossic technique used by diasporic writers to represent ethnic minorities' melancholic history and hybrid identities.

**Keywords:** dialogic heteroglossia; hybrid identities; ethnic minorities.

### 1. Introduction

When one talks about diasporic writers' self-reconstruction, there is an indirect denotation of a hybrid identity's construction. As a matter of fact, "identity theory and linguistic observations are in line with each other," [1:32] as is suggested by Edgar Schneider. According to Schneider, "individuals are members of several social communities at the same time," and thus "construct several [...] identities for themselves, each of which may manifest itself in linguistically" [1:32]. This recalls Steven Kellmann's provocative statement, that is quoted by the critic Mary Orr, supposing that, "[i]f identity is shaped by language, then monolingualism is a deficiency disorder" (p. viii) [2:524-525]. In her article entitled "*The Translingual Imagination* by Steven G. Kellmann," Mary Orr reviews Kellmann's attempts to define the wider question of how literary translingualism enriches the works of postcolonial writings.

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She insists that Kellmann “brings a strong advocacy of the mixed and unclassifiable aspects that translingual imagination contributes to creative ‘individuality’ ” [2:524-525]. We will discuss, in this paper, the interrelation between western and eastern languages as is manipulated for the sake of helping peripheral identities, in Schneider’s words, “to define and redefine themselves and their social roles in the light of the presence of other groups around, of their own historical roots and cultural traditions” [1:28]. Let us explore the dialogic heteroglossia as is represented in Asian-Canadian novels like, *Obasan* (1981), *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994), *What the Body Remembers* (1999) and *Everything Was Good-Bye* (2010).

One of the most broad objectives of this study, to borrow a statement from Richard Hillman and Pauline Ruberry-Blanc, is “to foster the dialogue which has been underway for some years now between the analysis of fictional representations of female transgression and the interpretation of recorded facts” [3:1]. Before discussing the metafictional aspect of the four novels, we need to revisit the technique of double-voicedness as one of the techniques used to show the subversive generic nature of our corpus. This technique will be approached as a linguistic technique manipulated by four diasporic writers, namely Joy Kogawa, Hiromi Goto, Shauna Singh Baldwin and Gurjinder Basran, to convey their voices and their universal messages through the “novel” which is depicted by Wayne Booth as follows:

The one grand literary form that is for Bakhtin capable of a kind of justice to the inherent polyphonies of life is “the novel”. If we think of “the novel” not as some formalists would do, not as the actual works that we ordinarily call novels but rather as a tendency or possibility in literature, one that is best realized only in certain novels and is entirely lacking in others, we can begin to study with some precision the conditions for achieving the elusive quality we have in mind. What we seek is a representation, at whatever time or place and in whatever genre, of human “languages” or “voices” that are not reduced into, or suppressed by, a single authoritative voice: a representation of the inescapably dialogical quality of human life at its best. Only “the novel”, with its supreme realization of the potentialities inherent in prose, offers the possibility of doing justice to voices other than the author’s own, and only the novel invites us to do so. [4:xxii]

We will address, in the following analysis, the dialogic quality of Canadian minorities’ life as is represented in the “novel” that offers to the novelists studied, and even to the reader, an open space to do justice to voices other than their own through what is called “heteroglossia”, especially, via heteroglossic voices.

## 2. Heteroglossic Voices

One can identify the concept “heteroglossia” by quoting Michael Holquist’s words as follows: “Linguistically, ‘heteroglossia’ is the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance, but in literature heteroglossia is that act which insures the primacy of context over text” [5:428]. By adopting Holquist’s definition of heteroglossia, we will show in this part through the corpus studied that, “at any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of social and historical conditions ensuring that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore hard to resolve” [5:428]. In Holquist’s terms, we will investigate “dialogism” as a characteristic “of a world dominated by heteroglossia [...] where there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential to condition others, and they challenge the existence of a unitary language by ensuring the overpowering force of heteroglossia, and thus dialogism” [5:426]. The linguistic complexity of our Asian-Canadian corpus is, therefore, another feature of the hybrid literary identity of narratives like Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, Shauna

Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*, Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and Gurjinder Basran's *Everything Was Good-Bye*. This hypothesis can only be justified after revisiting the definitions of "dialogism" and "heteroglossia" within the literary context, specifically the context of Asian-Canadian literature.

According to Michael Holquist, heteroglossia, "once incorporated into the novel, is *another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions" (emphasis in original) [5:324]. This heteroglossic speech "constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse* which serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author" [5:324-325]. Holquist's statement, suggests that "in such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions, and all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, as if they were actually holding a conversation with each other" [5:325]. Holquist clarifies that "double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized with an embedded dialogue of two voices, two world views and two languages" [5:325]. He goes on to add that "this double-voicedness in prose is prefigured in language itself (in authentic metaphors, as well as in myth), in language as a social phenomenon that is becoming in history, socially stratified and weathered in this process of becoming" [5:326]. In the following quotation, Holquist connects the process of "double-voicedness" to socio-linguistic speech diversity and "multi-languedness", by writing that the "double-voicedness":

sinks its roots deep into a fundamental, socio-linguistic speech diversity and multi-languedness. True, even in the novel, heteroglossia is by and large always personified, incarnated in individual human figures, with disagreements and oppositions individualized. But such oppositions of individual wills and minds are submerged in *social* heteroglossia, they are reconceptualized through it. Oppositions between individuals are only surface upheavals of the untamed elements in social heteroglossia, surface manifestations of those elements that play on such individual oppositions, make them contradictory, saturate their consciousness and discourses with more fundamental speech diversity. (emphasis in original) [5:325-326]

Based on Holquist's analysis of the discourse of double-voicedness, one can observe that such a discourse is made clear in G. Basran's *Everything Was Good-Bye* with two main synchronic voices. We are referring to Gurjinder Basran, the novelist, and Meena, the narrator and character at the same time. The two women speak at the same time with different intentions, and most importantly their voices are dialogically interrelated. This can be better explained through Meena's narrative confession in the following quotation:

Marriage was the easiest form of immigration [...], marriage by marriage, member by member, building a dynasty of ancestral strangers who shared only title and land. [...] I wanted to cry but couldn't. I conjured up sadness, pulling moments back from the past. My father dead on the ground. Liam walking away, my handwriting crossed out with indelible ink. I zoomed in on moments, finding new moments, new worlds inside each one that had never really existed. Narration and omniscience, dialogue and monologue in my own mind like a Technicolor imagination, a melodrama that could not make me cry. [6:172-178]

One cannot decide which words belong to Basran, or let us say to the writer's voice, and which expressions belong to the narrator, Meena. The two voices intermingle to convey the voice of estranged immigrants. Meena and Basran find that imagination can be a refuge within which they can turn their internal exile into worlds inside each one that never existed. From Basran's double-voicedness, let us now move to discuss the heteroglossic process of "multi-voicedness" in the other novels studied.

In *Obasan*, *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *What the body Remembers*, however, the reader can distinguish more than two voices. In these three novels one can talk about the voice of the author, the voice of the narrator and the synchronic voice of two other characters, or the co-existence of two diachronic narrators at the same narrative. In this case one can talk about heteroglossic multi-voicedness in these Asian-Canadian narratives. It is possible to suggest that this multiplicity is another technique manipulated by Kogawa, Goto and Baldwin, as diasporic ethnic writers, in order to deny the idea of a pure essentialist identity. Let us now survey such blurring process of multi-voicedness as is represented in our corpus.

From double-voicedness, we move to “multi-voicedness” discussed by Douglas Barbour, as is shown in the next quotation concerning another Canadian writer, Ondaatje:

“[T]he use of various voices out of legend” and “the insistence on more than one voice in these longer works starts Ondaatje on the path toward what Mikhail Bakhtin would call [...] ‘heteroglossic’ or ‘novelistic’ texts. The documentary impulse shares with the novelistic impulse the desire to listen to and re-present the voices of what Bakhtin calls ‘a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices’ (Bakhtin 1981, 262).” It engages “the factual” and out of its compulsive collage or invented “texts” it makes fictional worlds full of lively gaps. Ondaatje’s desire to speak the inner worlds of figures silenced by either too much documentation (Billy the Kid) or far too little (Mrs. Fraser, Buddy Bolden) leads him to produce multivoiced texts full of epistemological gaps that yet create worlds that exist only in the writing that creates them. [7:7]

It is true that Barbour is talking about Ondaatje and not the authors of our corpus, yet we can use Barbour’s statement to refer to the novelists studied because their style has similarities with Ondaatje’s. The multi-voiced/heteroglossic discourse is manifested through the use of various voices in the novels written by Kogawa, Goto and Baldwin. The heteroglossic texts of these three female writers make them appear like those of Michael Ondaatje by mixing the factual and fictional worlds through their gaps, and by seeking to voice the inner worlds of their silenced characters. By stating Ondaatje’s words, Barbour perceives that Ondaatje speaks from experience when he says, “ ‘[p]erhaps the documentary will always be a new form [...]. The need to chart what is around us, to say what is in the pot, creates at first strange bedfellows with the contemporary poetic voice’ [...]. The factual is only background and the term ‘documentary’ has itself undergone transformation” [7:8]. According to Barbour, Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* is “one of the most interpreted texts in recent Canadian literature, within which Billy, as a narrative voice, is not alone in being evasive” [7:36]. Barbour suggests that Ondaatje “manages to evade the reader’s grasp as well, for he too, the putative author of the book, is as slippery a signifier as his protagonist, and he begins to slip out of focus on the very first page” [7:43]. In order to clarify his argument, Barbour provides an example from *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. He states that in its original text, “the pronouns were specific, but now, on the first page of this new text, commenting on a photo that does not exist, and speaking for a nonreferential ‘I’ to an equally nonreferential ‘you’, it expands into a multiplicity of possible meanings. Where there was a single voice, there are now many” [7:43]. Thus, one cannot deny the similarity between Ondaatje’s multi-voiced discourse and the multilayered perspectives of Goto, Kogawa and Baldwin, that we seek to approach in the next analysis.

In *Obasan*, the first paragraph of the first chapter is dedicated to localizing the temporal and spatial features of the novel. The second paragraph, however, is devoted to the introduction of two characters and the narrative voice as well. The introduction of the first characters reveals that there are an “Uncle” and an “I” while the “I” is still enigmatic. The persona, who is telling the current story, is a first-person narrator speaking from

his/her subject position and participating in the events of the plot as a character. This first person narrator depicts what s/he is seeing and is living with her/his Uncle without clarifying to the reader her/his gender. The first oral interaction of this narrator as a character with the Uncle in the plot comes in a remark as follows: “‘Nothing changes ne,’ I say as we walk toward the rise” [8:1]. The attempt to hide the narrator’s gender creates suspense and might be also a hint of equality between the male and the female. Only in the second chapter, can one discover that this speaker lives officially in Alberta and is a teacher, whose name is Naomi. Then, the reader notices that Naomi is not the only narrative voice.

Emily’s diary, in *Obasan*, allows Emily, another female character, to occupy the role of the first-person narrator as well as Naomi. “The book feels heavy with voices from the past,” this how Naomi describes her aunt’s diary [8:56]. Thus, there are two diachronic narrative voices and the voice of the author, Joy Kogawa; this is the multi-voicedness we are trying to show. One could claim that there are similarities between Naomi and Emily with just few differences. Naomi is the first-person narrator of the whole novel while Emily is the narrative voice of her diary. The act of stating the exact dates gives also to Naomi the feature of speaking out loud her diary. While Emily’s letters were written during the Second World War, Naomi started talking in 1972 and she travels back through her memory to the past from time to time. Naomi talks about the sufferings of her family members as an oppressed racial community in a Western country, while Emily represents the silenced voices of an entire ethnic minority and addresses the entire humanity. Naomi tells her story from the point of view of a woman and a child, yet Emily’s story is of a young woman. As two narrative voices recounting their traumatic diaries, the two women use certain images to draw a clear picture of what was happening to them and what they felt as silenced women of color. Naomi, for example, uses the imagery of the grass, the ocean, the white hen, the yellow chicks and the “Yellow Peril game,” while Emily has another list of images oscillating between humor and sarcasm to portray how the Japanese community was oppressed during and after the Second World War, as is shown in the following quotation:

At sundown we scuttle into our holes like furtive creatures [...]. There are no partitions of any kind whatsoever and the people are treated worse than livestock [...]. Can you imagine a better breeding ground for typhus? [...] If all this sounds like a bird’s-eye view to you, Nasan, it’s the Reportage for a caged bird. I can’t really see what’s happening. We’re like a bunch of rabbits being chased by hounds. [...] I wonder if the whites think we are a special kind of low animal able to live on next to nothing—able to survive without clothing, shoes, medicine, decent food. [...] If we go to the ghost towns, it’s going to be one hell of a life. [...] 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 the Issei and the Nisei and the Sansei, the Japanese Canadians. We disappear into the future undemanding as dew. [8:105-132]

Every word is more meaningful than the other in Emily’s style, loaded with metaphors in order to emphasize the social and racial repression that she endured with her marginalized ethnic community. She tries to draw the exact images through a powerful expression of a powerless victimization. She chooses the personal pronoun “we” to refer to their collective calamity. She deprecates the curfews to which the Japanese-Canadians were subjected, like “furtive creatures”. She denounces the objectification of diasporic minorities as if they were a “livestock”, or a “bunch of rabbits”, “low animals”, “hammers and chisels”, “chips and sand”, or even fragments flying like “arrows”. According to Emily’s narrative voice, the Japanese-Canadians were deprived of their humanity during the Second World War; they felt themselves similar to animals or worthless objects. Besides, the white Canadians used to call them “enemy aliens” just to “make sure the Japs suffered as much as possible”

[8:110]. This is the content of Aunt Emily's diary that gives her the privilege of being an omniscient narrator controlling what she is writing, expressing, interpreting and observing such as the oppressor's unstated intentions. Emily's diary is narrated and retold by her niece, Naomi. These two female characters are given the opportunity to express their "intentions" by Joy Kogawa as a writer who has herself her authorial intentions. Let us now move to Goto's authorial intentions and her manipulation of many heteroglossic narrative voices.

As a Japanese-Canadian work, Goto's novel is marked by the multiplicity of narrative voices and this cannot be innocent. According to Charlotte Sturgess, *Chorus of Mushrooms* uses "the convention of announcing the narrators, but does not signal these shifts with the same regularity, where Part One announces and is centred on the grandmother, Naoe" [9:187]. Sturgess goes on to add that "the beginning of Part Two abandons this convention of naming and establishes a third-person stance, and in Part Four the reader is projected into the granddaughter's mind space in which she and the grandmother seemingly converse" [9:187]. About this part, Sturgess claims that the emphasis is on "performance", as "the two speakers are alternately announced as if taking roles in a play. Thus the characters' mind space becomes the stage where a kind of intimate, unspoken, or unauthorized dialogue takes place, as voice here is not equated with the autonomous presence of a character" [9:187]. Sturgess comments on what she calls "polyphonic orchestrations and intermingling viewpoints," as an "act of fusing of subjectivities serving to make the reader all the more aware of the conventions governing narrative voice per se and of the authority we lend to narrative voice in the creation of what we take to be a narrative identity" [9:187]. Sturgess's argument is helpful from the theoretical point of view and examples from the novel to illustrate this will follow. We will study Goto's hybrid technique that is manifested through her playful manipulation of heteroglossic voices in an attempt to challenge the notion of a pure and fixed voice/identity.

*Chorus of Mushrooms* is marked by a synchronic narrative voice alternating between the two female characters named, Murasaki and Naoe. Murasaki is a Japanese-Canadian woman, while Naoe is a Japanese immigrant and also Murasaki's grandmother. Although Murasaki seems, almost always, not very happy with her hybrid Japanese-Canadian identity, she appears to be a lucky woman married to a Canadian man who listens carefully to not only his wife's past memories but even her grandmother's stories in the shape of memories and myth, as is revealed in the following quotation: "I turned my head slowly in Obachan's lap [...] I snuggled close, curled my legs and stopped pretending to understand. Only listened. And listened. Obachan and I, our voices lingered, reverberated off hollow walls and stretched across the land with streamers of silken thread" [10:20-21].

Here, Murasaki is emphasizing the strength of her own voice and the voice of Naoe as well. Sometimes the reader fails to know who is speaking, the old Naoe or Murasaki. In fact, critics like Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, consider the narrative turn-taking between Naoe and Murasaki, in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, as well as "the repetitive but ever-changing nature of folk storytelling as a production of a kind of circularity, where one story feeds into the next so that it is hard to tell beginnings from endings. This imparts a timelessness that makes Goto's immigrant saga at the same time strikingly current and traditional" [11:139-140]. These critics also agree that:

Hiromi Goto partakes of this interest in the workings of subjectivity, particularly in her metafictional work *Chorus of Mushrooms*. [...] In the italicized sections of the novel, the narrator becomes an unidentified storytelling "I" swiftly responding to the reactions and interests of a listening "you". In those sections, Goto explores the structure and tests the limits of fiction at its

most basic level of interaction. Similarly, the boundaries between truth and fiction often become blurry, with storyteller and audience inhabiting a liminal space where anything can happen. In contrast, the non-italicized sections are variously identified as Naoe's or Murasaki's, but they occasionally weave their stories together so that at times it is hard to say who is doing what. [11:136]

What is described by Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López in this quotation, as an unidentified "I", is played either by Murasaki or by Naoe, while the listening "you" is primarily the white lover of Murasaki whom the latter is the primary narrator; the other "you" refers to Murasaki when she is the narratee of Naoe's stories, and the other "you" refers to the reader as the narratee of Goto, the manipulator of these intermingling heteroglossic narrative voices. Goto characterizes her narrative voice, Naoe, by wisdom that fascinates the reader so that s/he forgets the first female narrator, Murasaki. The first chapter, in the novel or "Part one", starts on the third page and at the top of this page there is the grandmother's name:

Naoe

Ahhhhh this unrelenting, dust-driven, crack your fingers dry wind has withered my wits, I'm certain. Endless as thought as breath-ha! Not much breath left in this set of bellows, but this wind. Just blows and blows and blows. Soon be blowing dust over my mummy. [10:3]

This quote reveals what Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López identified, in the previous quotation, as the non-italicized sections of the novel where the narrative voice is clear. At the very beginning of the narrative, the reader finds an anonymous female speaker who is narrating the story of her Obachan, Naoe, as she was asked to do by her male bed-fellow. It is clear that the narrator allows her grandmother to speak and instead of saying "her wits" or "she's certain", she says, "my wits", "I'm certain". In other words, the first woman who is speaking from the beginning and now is telling one of the stories of her grandmother, does not retell her story with a third-person narrator. Thus, the grandmother is able to speak as a first-person narrator. The granddaughter seems to be the kind who loves her grandmother too much to internalize her stories/voice and to share them with her narratee. The quotation above introduces the character of Naoe who talks to herself in a monologue. There is a repetition of words like, "dust", "wind", and "blow", and such anaphora might be used in order to stress the metaphoric dimension of these terms. Naoe does not seem at ease because of the dust that splits her fingers. The poetic use of alliteration that is marked by the repetition of the identical initial sound [wi] in the expression, "wind has withered [her] wits", also emphasizes Naoe's discomfort even before starting her fictional and factual stories. She perceives this "wind" and "dust" as endless, just like thoughts or the incessant activity of humans' thinking about the unknown, especially when the "dust" denotes the meanings of chaos and turmoil. The act of complaining of the dust or chaos and disturbance in her life, makes Naoe appear as a transgressive old woman/character, and Goto, the novelist, seeks to convey her voice by giving her the narrative voice.

As a matter of fact, Murasaki is a Japanese-Canadian woman who loves her grandmother's Japanese tales and despises her mother's attempt at mimicking blindly the Canadian identity. The following conversation between Murasaki and her male listener serves as a good reminder of the activity of retelling stories within other stories in Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* in an attempt to transfer the Japanese culture/identity to Japanese offspring of hybrid origins:

“I thought that you didn’t learn how to speak Japanese until after you grew up,” you say ...  
“That’s right,” I answer ...  
“Then how do you know what your Obachan said? I thought you couldn’t speak with her when you were growing up in Nanton ...”  
You watch me ...  
“Then how can you be telling a true story if you never knew what your grandmother said.” You ask. [10:12]

The questions of Murasaki’s narratee show his interest in really hearing about Japanese true stories. Nevertheless, the man’s questions make him look as if he were doubting what his female partner had been narrating. He finds it bizarre that she could understand her grandmother’s tales without any knowledge of the Japanese language. The following is her reply:

I snuggled my head in Obachan’s bony lap and closed my eyes to listen. I couldn’t understand the words she spoke, but this is what I heard.

Mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukāshi ... Listen, Murasaki, listen. ... The Greeks. Forget the Greeks! And don’t quote Bible verses to me, child. There were stories long before Eve tasted fruit fit for women. Yes, stories in each blade of grass [...]. They linger and grow and only women to reap them. Let the stories suckle your breast [...]. But these stories are not for you I speak them, but for whoever I will [...]. If someone should knock on the door, we’ll welcome them into this bed of tales. [10:18]

The harmony between these two women lessens the intergenerational gap and the cultural dispersal created by the character of Keiko. Murasaki confesses that she could not understand the words spoken by Naoe, but she kept trying to fathom them from the body language and the mutual love between the two. They communicate through telepathy. This allows Murasaki to make up her own stories or let us say her own version of history. This quote reveals very well the significance of stories in preserving the Japanese existence/identity, through the history of a race facing the risk of extinction in the West. Moreover, there is an exaggeration of the timeless important role of women. As a wise old woman, Naoe has awakened her granddaughter to the point that they are generous enough to share their own stories with other people. As is noted by the critic Sturgess, Japanese myths and folk-tales participate in, “the ‘recovery of voice’ by breaking silence, through [storytelling, confronting the past and], the power of self-reinvention leads in *Chorus of Mushrooms* to an imaginary suturing of the wounds of community and offers the perspective of a reconnected and revitalized diaspora” [9:191]. Therefore, 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.

Goto’s style is marked by its ambiguity that is enhanced through the two master narrative voices. The first narrative voice is supposed to be the second as long as she retells what the other narrative voice already told her in the past. The first is a young woman while the second is an old one. In fact, Goto allows an old woman to be an active and impressive narrator. Thus, Goto has given the opportunity for both, the youths and the elders in the community, to convey their silenced voices equally without any discrimination. The first part is differentiated by the narrative voice of Naoe and her faithful listener, Murasaki. In the second part, there is a transition at the level of narrative voice, where there is a movement from the alive Naoe to the dead Naoe, and from the “I” to the “she”. Even, the listener has changed since the role of Murasaki has changed from a listener to her grandmother to a speaker who would tell her lover about the story of her Japanese-Canadian family as well as her grandmother’s Japanese folk tales. In other words, there is a transition at the level of the plot’s narrative



voice once Murasaki switches the direction of oral discourse to talking about her dead grandmother. Hence the voice of Naoe turns from a subjective “I” to an objective “she”.

It is not an absent she, it is rather a present “she” with whom Murasaki can speak despite the existential distance; there is a spiritual continuity between the two narrative voices of Naoe and Murasaki. Charlotte Sturgess considers that, in an attempt to explore “subjectivity in relation to voice, the grandmother and granddaughter enter into an inner dialogue across space and time, blurring the boundaries between their separate identities, and this serves to question the construction of the body as unitary” [9:191]. This is the case as is revealed in the following quotation within which Naoe addresses Murasaki:

Naoe: Murasaki?  
Murasaki: Yes, Obachan?  
Naoe: I just wanted to hear your thoughts.  
Murasaki: Nice. Obachan, are you fine? [10:114]

Naoe is able to hear the thoughts of her granddaughter despite the distance. Tengu, who is Naoe’s companion in her journey outside her house, comments on her uncanny monologue by saying, “yer quite the one for mutterin’ to yerself tho I sher shouldn’t talk” [10:115]. Sturgess argues that the “fusing of subjectivities invents a community voice that, as Guy Beauregard points out, is a ‘writing back’ (or in this case, ‘speaking back’) to the broken world of Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* by inventing a different, more optimistic outcome for the three generations of Japanese Canadians (Beauregard 52)” [9:191]. By writing back to Kogawa, Goto creates inner and outsider dialogues between her characters in an attempt to break the internal exile of the confusing silence of the Japanese and to facilitate the re-construction of unitary identities able to convey the Japanese voice.

The first part of *Chorus of Mushrooms* is distinguished by its multi-voicedness that oscillates between Naoe and Murasaki as two narrative voices and the authorial voice of Goto, the writer. The second part of the novel starts on page 79. It is marked by the appearance of a third-person narrative voice, as is shown in the following quotation:

She bundled herself in the thickest coat she could find, [...]. As she walked down the hall, she stretched out brittle fingers to stroke the chair she had sat in for more years than she could hold in the cup of her hands. The straight wooden back, no cushion or armrests for comfort. She was drawn to it through force of habit, drawn by the patterns in her body. Was tempted to sit once more, inside the soft curve of the seat that her bony buttocks had carved over two decades, but no! The chair had lent her stability in the midst of prairie, dust and wind, but she could easily let it become her prison. [...] She whispered ja ne, with something close to loss or memory. The old woman stroked the back of the chair with a steady hand, then picked up her furoshiki. [10:79-81]

In this quote, there is a third-person narrator that is describing an unidentified “she”, without mentioning it is about Naoe. Here, through this zero focalization, Naoe is represented as a foreign character and not an authoritative narrative voice. In this paragraph, Naoe is like the other ethno-racial women in real world and life. They are deprived of their authority, especially once they get older and weak. They move from the subjective “I” to the objective/invisible “she”. In describing how she left the house, Murasaki says about Naoe who is replaced here by this “she”, that “she walked with an easy pace, face thrust into the bite of wind [...]. She stood still in the darkness, blinking in wonder” [10:83]. Returning to the multi-voicedness explored in Goto’s novel, one can say that such play with the narrative voices proves the heteroglossic aspect of this hybrid literary work. This narrative trick bestows on ethnic women different authorities and gives them freedom of expression,

especially since they are a silenced minority within a marginalized community. This literary technique allows these dislocated minorities, that are silenced by their internal exile of melancholic memories, the ability to be the center of their world. This is Goto's way of manipulating heteroglossic narrative voices. Let us now turn to Baldwin's narrative style, considering that she is another Asian-Canadian writer.

In Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*, the reader notices from the very beginning that the speaker is not clearly identified, as is shown in the following quotation:

Rawalpindi, Undivided India, 1937

Satya's heart is black and dense as a stone within her. She tells herself she pities Roop, but hears laughter answering her—how difficult it is to deceive yourself when you have known yourself a full forty-two years. She studies Roop's features, her Pothwari skin, smooth as a new apricot beckoning from the limb of a tall tree, her wide, heavily lashed brown eyes. Unlike Satya's grey ones, they demurely lowered, innocent. [12:3]

Being an observer outside what is depicted in the above paragraph indicates that the narrative voice is based upon the viewpoint of a third-person narrator and a zero focalization. This third-person narrator is an omniscient one that is able to read the characters' minds, thoughts and emotions. This omniscient narrator knows about the darkness of Satya's heart, her monologue and her attempt to "study" Roop. It must be noted that the above quotation is just the opening paragraph of the first chapter. Contrary to the detailed setting, the introduction of the characters appears to be blurred since the reader finds him/herself facing the character of a woman trying to examine another female character and the reason behind this study is still concealed. One of the two female characters is a subject to a metaphor claiming that her "heart is black and dense as a stone within her". A superficial reading of such a metaphor might lead to the meaning of Satya's wickedness, nonetheless this is a misleading interpretation. The adjective "black" does not signify only bad connotations. It could be a reference to the ambiguity of the noun that it describes. Hence, the depiction of Satya's heart as a "black and dense as a stone within her" could be a foreshadowing of the "power" and solidity of this woman from the beginning. Satya's heart introduces the reader to one of the features of this character and her "grey eyes" urge this reader to go back to the novel's "Prologue" to check what was said about an unidentified girl's "grey eyes". The Prologue begins in the following way, "Undivided India, 1895. I have grey eyes in this lifetime and they are wide open [...]. So angry am I, my eyes are open wide [...]. A girl who comes into this world with her eyes wide open will never lower them before a man" [12: prologue]. After being presented anonymously in the prologue as a bold woman challenging masculinity, Satya's character is explicitly introduced, to the reader, in the novel's first paragraph with her female strength and her "grey eyes". By calculating the duration between the "Undivided India, 1895" when Satya is introduced as a new-born girl, and the "Undivided India, 1937" when Satya is studying Roop's character, the result obtained equals 42 years that is the age of Satya "a full forty-two years". These details allude to the importance of this female character.

According to the above quoted paragraph, which is about Satya's examination of Roop, the latter is a young fertile woman. Unlike Satya's wide open eyes, Roop's brown eyes are "demurely lowered, innocent". Generally speaking, the eyes disclose some features of the person's character, for instance her vision or even her foresight. Subsequently, Satya seems to be a wise woman with her eyes wide-open that survey the innocent Roop, and she has also an open view of the world. In scanning Roop silently, Satya's soliloquy comments on this young woman by asserting that, "a man could tell these eyes anything and they would believe him" [12:3]. Consequently, one cannot know whether this narrator is a man or a woman. However, it is very clear that this

voice is of a third-person omniscient narrator that is not a participating character in the novel's events, yet is able to tell the reader about the characters' feelings and thoughts. Sometimes the female characters, Satya and Roop, are given the opportunity to speak from their own personal perspectives as two separate subordinate narrative voices, and this is a sign of heteroglossia.

The plot of *What the Body Remembers* is inaugurated by Satya's monologue during her examination of Roop at their first meeting. Since the two ladies share the same man, Sardarji, Satya often relates her analysis of her husband's character to his English superiors. The following is a sample of Satya's internal soliloquy:

How will a young woman know that he breathes deeply when he thinks too much, that he wipes his forehead in the cold heart of winter when the British settlement officer approaches to collect his yearly taxes? How can a young woman know how to manage his flour mill while he is hunting kakar with his English "superiors"? [...] How can she understand that all his talk of logic and discipline in the English people's corridors and his writing in brown paper files about the great boons of irrigation engineering brought by the conquerors are belied by his donations to the freedom-fighting Akali party? These thoughts fill Satya as she gazes at Roop's sleeping figure. [12:9]

Since these two women share the same husband, it is possible to compare Sardarji to the colonized India that is shared between two categories of Indian people: militant Indians and inactive Indians. This quote reveals the feminist-patriot character of Satya who seeks to fight the colonialism of patriarchy and the colonizer through her voice. Satya's questions make her appear as an Indian activist, while the sleepy Roop is like passive Indians. In fact, the focalization and point of view in this quote highlight Satya's resemblance to Hamlet. If Satya and Hamlet have anything in common, in Peter Smith's words, "it is that problems rather than solutions, questions rather than answers, are what [they] should be seeking" [13:23]. These are not simple thoughts going through the head of a jealous wife, but rather a matter of knowledge of her husband's politics of life as well as the British policies in their land. This engineer does his best to satisfy his European superiors. The ironical truth is that while he is conquering his wives, there are other people who are conquering him morally, materially and mentally. He collects from his first wife his previously given gifts to her, and donates them to the new wife just as the British collect "his yearly taxes". The patriarchal power that he is exercising in his house over his women is crushed by the colonialist hegemony. One can infer these remarks from Satya's internal voice bestowed on her by her creator, Baldwin who seems to manipulate a literary heteroglossia/multi-voicedness to challenge patriarchy and the colonial system.

What we call a multivoiced technique to describe the different viewpoints manipulated in *What the Body Remembers*, is called by Axelle Girard "a polyphonic narrative voice", as is shown in the following way:

Baldwin resorts to the use of a polyphonic narrative voice, mingling various speeches and discourses within the same passage by shifting from one type of narration to the other, from zero focalisation, as is shown in this sentence about Roop: "If Sardarji had not expressed his will, she would not have shared her daughter with Satya, so selfish and ungrateful she had become" (226), to interior monologue such as the following, "*I am not good-good enough for all he has done for me. If I am not careful, everyone will say let her be alone*" (226), thus the narrator superimposes two different discourses. (italics in original) [14:24-26]

Girard adds that "there are two different points of view emanating from the same character in the above sentences, Roop's inner rage is clearly counterbalanced by her superego taking on the shape of traditional discourse" [14:24-26]. Beyond Girard's argument about focalisation and point of view, one can note that

through the process of multi-voicedness Baldwin seeks to give speech to the silenced voice of Indian women even through their monologues. When Satya learns about her husband's choice of a new bride, she says: "I have lost my voice" [12:11]. If the bold Satya announces the loss of her voice what about other women like Roop. For this reason, multi-voicedness in Baldwin's novel allows these speechless Indian women to convey their voiceless voices. The following quotation is an example of such multi-voicedness:

By now Roop knows she must do as others do, listen carefully for Sardarji's ever wish. [...] And now Sardarji is suggesting, in his most problem-solving voice, that she [would] give Satya a baby [...]. Give her "sister" her baby.

But I like babies. I want my own. I know how to look after them—I looked after Jeevan's little boys [...]. I love the way they look at their mothers [...].

Roop's throat constricts into silence. [12:166]

The first part of this quotation is marked by a third-person omniscient narrative point of view, while the second part represents Roop's inner voice. Through the technique of multi-voicedness, Baldwin challenges Indian patriarchy by giving voice to the silenced Indian woman to express her thoughts and feelings, even through monologues. Because Sardarji refuses to listen to Roop, Baldwin makes her readers listen to Roop's words as an oppressed woman obliged to give her children to another childless woman.

From the process of multi-voicedness, we can observe the characters' desire to communicate with the Other in spite of the linguistic barriers. For this reason we will discuss in the next part what Marta Dvořák calls "the borderline between oneself and the other" where the word in living language, 'half someone else's,' lies (Bakhtin 293)" [15:121]. We will move, thus, from the process of heteroglossic voices, that is manifested through the double/multi-voicedness, to the process of dialogic languages used in our corpus for the sake of conveying the silenced voices of Asian-Canadian female minorities and also to negate the idea of single pure identity.

### 3. Dialogic Languages

We will discuss how Kogawa, Goto, Baldwin and Basran use language as, what Elly Gelderen depicts as, "a fundamental human faculty used for creative expression [...], [through which] many linguists consider a language to be a 'dialect with an army (or navy),' i.e. a political construct" [16:1-12]. Indeed, one can neither possess nor control language. In this context, it is possible to talk about the power of language. In her uncanny way, Naomi draws a strange metaphor to depict the power of language. She takes the advantage of the endless silence of her Uncle and Obasan to affirm that from both characters, she has learned that "speech often hides like an animal in a storm" [8:4]. Let us question such speech as it is manifested in *Obasan*, *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *What the Body Remembers*.

In these literary works, identity is defined as a commitment between individuals and collectives. Central to our investigation is, to use Schneider's words, "the notion of social identity and its construction and reconstruction by symbolic linguistic means" [1:26]. Kogawa's *Obasan* confirms Schneider's statement and also Bakhtin's viewpoint in *Discourse in the Novel*, saying that "at any given moment a language is stratified not only into dialects, but is stratified into languages that are socio-ideological."<sup>a</sup> In order to better illustrate such

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<sup>a</sup> Bakhtin quoted in Michael Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. [5:xix].

socio-ideological stratification of language, we can quote the following conversation between Naomi, as a teacher, and her students about the utterance of Naomi's name:

This year there are two Native girls, sisters, twelve and thirteen years old, both adopted. There's also a beautiful half-Japanese, half-European child named Tami. Then there's Sigmund, the freckle-faced redhead. Right from the beginning, I can see that he is trouble. I'm trying to keep an eye on him by putting him at the front of the class. Sigmund's hand is up, as it usually is.

"Yes, Sigmund."

"Miss Nah Canny," he says.

"Not Nah Canny," I tell him, printing my name on the blackboard: **NAKANE**.

"The a's are short as in 'among'—Na Ka Neh—and not as in 'apron' or 'hat'."

Some of the children say "Nah Cane."

"Naomi Nah Cane is a pain," I heard one of the girls say once. [8:6-7]

Naomi's attempt to defend the pronunciation of her name that characterizes her Japanese identity demonstrates that identity is a commitment between individuals and collectives. By referring back to Bakhtin's statement, one can say that language is stratified into dialects based on the socio-ideological backgrounds of the different speakers here. It is all about the uncanny articulation of an ethnic name by a white student calling his teacher "Nah-Canny". No need to approach the racist and socio-ideological aspect of this conversation within which racism appears as a "pain" in the words used to refer to Naomi's name. Then, Sigmund asked his teacher if she has ever been in love, and his question fuels her memory in the following way:

I am thinking of the time when I was a child and asked Uncle if he and Obasan were "in love."

My question was out of place.

"In ruv? What that?" Uncle asked. I've never once seen them caressing. [8:7]

Naomi's memory shows again the power of language and its stratification into a Pidgin English; "ruv" instead of "love", and its ideological dimension revealing another cultural cliché characterizing the Japanese who do not express their love/feelings. Even if they are living in a Western country, these Japanese characters demonstrate that they are not Westernized and they preserve their Asian identity. One can learn such cultural clichés just through the manipulation of one single term "ruv"/love, which attracts the attention of the reader and inspires his/her interpretative imagination. One can notice, in our corpus, that there is no "general language". This is the case of Naomi for example when she learns about the news of the death of her Uncle. Undergoing trauma and in an attempt to calm down, she hears her inner self saying: " 'Be still,' the voice inside is saying. 'Sift the words thinly' " [8:11].

In the four novels studied, language is obviously used as a mode of feminist representation. Goto, for instance, describes language as a "living beast" [10:98]. By referring to Judith Butler's argument about the concept of "representation" within feminist theory, one can state that representation in our corpus serves as "the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects, and as the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women" [17:1]. Butler's statement can be better illustrated by referring to Emily's letter addressed to her sister who was in Japan:

There are so many things to tell you. How different the world is now! The whole continent is in shock about the Pearl Harbor bombing. Some Issei are feeling betrayed and ashamed. It's too early to know how the war will affect us. [...] We're used to the prejudice by now after all these long years. [...] Thank God we live in a democracy and not under an officially racist regime. [...] the

Japanese cannot fish anymore. But the white fishermen are confident that they can make up the lack in the next season, if they can use the Japanese fishing boats. [...] They said we were all spies and saboteurs, and that in 1931 there were 55,000 of us and that number has doubled in the last ten years. A biological absurdity. Trouble is, lots of women would rather believe their president than actual RCMP records. It's illogical that women, who are the bearers and nurturers of the human race, should go all out for ill will like this. [...] But worse than my irritation, there's this horrible feeling whenever I turn on the radio, or see a headline with the word "Japs" screaming at us. So long as they designate the enemy by that term and not us, it doesn't matter. But over here, they say "Once a Jap always a Jap," and that means us. We're the enemy. [8:96-100]

Emily does her best to tell her older sister about what is happening in Canada. Every single sentence written by this ethnic female character enhances what is claimed by Butler above; the parodic language of Emily reveals her feminist character which brings the woman of color to political visibility. She exhibits the extent to which they were surprised by the attack on Pearl Harbor, especially the Issei or the first generation of the Japanese there. The Issei felt the sense of betrayal because they were attacked as if they were not Japanese. While the Nisei, like Aunt Emily, or the second generation of the Japanese, were offended as they were subject to prejudice in Canada. They were, moreover, aware of the white fishermen's abuse of fishing boats of the Japanese, who had not been allowed to fish and to work peacefully. In addition, they were accused of being "spies and saboteurs". The derisive tone of Emily increases when dealing with the issue of women, as active members of society worth respect. Their functions would have exceeded the trivial role of giving birth to "spies and saboteurs" just to betray the Canadians. Ironically, she depicts this as a "biological absurdity", instead of denouncing the idea of viewing the "Japs" as the enemy. Emily's letter can be considered as, in Butler's terms, "the development of a language that fully or adequately represents these ethnic women [...] to foster the political visibility of these minorities"[17:1]. Again, this is manifested through the word-warrior, Emily, when she criticizes boldly the goal of the Canadian government to keep her Japanese Community invisible, as follows: "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" [8:40-41].

We seek to focus on the authors who are the creators of these literary works. Through their literature, they struggle, as is mentioned in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, to go "beyond the painful register of human sound" [10:86]. As writers of artistic prose, they seek to shed light on, to borrow Holquist's argument, "the socially heteroglot multiplicity of their characters, along with the internal contradictions inside these characters, they create, artistically, nuances on all the fundamental heteroglot voices and consequently elevate the social heteroglossia" [5:278-279]. Their artistic tool is, in Holquist's terms, "literary language which is itself stratified and heteroglot in its aspect as an expressive system carrying its meanings with a certain degree of social differentiation" [5:288-290]. *Obasan*, for instance, shows that each Japanese-Canadian generation has its own language; in such a way the ethnic writer, Joy Kogawa challenges the notion of purity of identity. The heteroglossic languages that are used in our corpus stress the fact that these ethnic writers seek to challenge the idea of one fixed identity. Thus, they call for the respect of the socio-cultural diversity of the ethnic "Other".

It is possible to claim that the selected writers, namely Kogawa, Basran, Goto and Baldwin, are transgressive novelists, which means that they do not hesitate to transgress literary rules whenever possible. According to Axelle Girard, in *What the Body Remembers*, "the narrative voice undergoes 'partition' taking on the shape of a mingling of languages and speech within the frame of heteroglossia, and the text juxtaposes words coming from various Indian languages, like Urdu and Punjabi" [14:47-48]. In fact, one can find in Baldwin's novel *Hindi*, Arabic, Persian, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Urdu and Turkish words. We can state as examples

the following words taken from *What the Body Remembers*: “Bhainji” which means “sister” and is explained in the novel (p.5); “Hakim” (p.28) which is Urdu, Persian and Arabic; “kismet” (p.10) which is Hindi, Urdu and Turkish; “houris” (p.30) which is Arabic; “sant” (p.12) which is Hindi and Punjabi; “Roop” which is Sanskrit; “Satya” is a Sanskrit term; “Djinn” is Hindi and Arabic (p.34); “izzat” (p.456) is an Urdu term; “quom” (p.456) is an Arabic and Hindu term. Concerning this heteroglossic technique, Girard argues that Bachan Singh’s “‘limited English’ does not prevent him from writing ‘Punjabi well,’ ‘in both Persian and Gurmukhi scripts’ (43). Juxtaposing Indian words and English translations, Baldwin achieves a visual illustration of Partition within speech” [14:47-48]. An example of Bachan Singh’s speech that juxtaposes Indian expressions followed by English translations, is the following sentence: “Sikh martyrs. Aam–log. Ki Kende–ne?–What do you say in English?–ordinary Sikhs [...], all of India could learn what these Europeans really are” [12:46]. Therefore, one can add to the novel’s explored partition of India and the notion of the partition of the female body, as well as the partition of narrative voices, a partition of speech. Girard points out that in *What the Body Remembers*, “dialogism or the superimposition of conflicting speeches within the narrative voice also provides a field for competition between the coloniser/the colonised” [14:24-26]. This reminds the reader of Bachan Singh’s advice addressed to his son, Jeevan, as follows: “ ‘You, you go to the mission school soon, you learn to speak English, so you learn how they think–understand?’ ” [12:47]. Hence, the colonised seek to use the English language as a weapon to defend themselves, while their use of various Indian languages might allude to their intention to mislead the coloniser through languages that the latter cannot understand. Besides, Girard argues that:

The narrator’s reference to “Sardarji’s sister” Toshi, “that *churnail!* That witch!” (19) underlines the difference between two tongues, Hindi/English, and two categories, colonised/coloniser. Unlike Roop, “Miss Barlow is deaf to this with both ears. If Roop speaks in Punjabi, her face blanks as if Roop were a jackdaw calling” (386): the boundaries between coloniser/colonised are made clear by the narrator’s comparing Roop’s language to that of an animal from the coloniser’s point of view. But there is hope since both those female characters are women: this is why Roop dreams of a universal language that would be spoken and understood by both coloniser/colonised. (*italics in original*) [14:47-48]

In addition to Roop’s wish to have a common language between the coloniser and the colonised, Girard mentions that both “personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘we’ are set on an equal footing in the sentence she coins inside her mind: *‘Use the words I have/maybe we can say [...]*” (386), voicing a tangible desire for shared understanding and communication” (*italics in original*) [14:47-48]. It might be true that Roop wishes to have a universal language facilitating the communication between the coloniser and colonised, yet this is not her ultimate goal. Since Roop is always portrayed as an ordinary Indian wife seeking to satisfy her husband, then one can consider her dream of a universal language just to avoid learning English that is imposed on her by her first coloniser, Sardarji. The latter orders his servants to give English lessons to Roop [12:153]. Sardarji wants his new wife to learn and remember what must be suitable for him in front of his English superiors. Through a partition of speech between Indian and English, the reader finds Roop’s brother, Jeevan, advising his sister as follows: “ ‘Remember what I told you [...]. Learn English!’ and then in Punjabi, ‘English sikho!’ ” [12:303]. Jeevan himself was advised by his father to learn English. He needs to learn English in order to understand the coloniser and Roop needs to learn English to understand her patriarchal coloniser, Sardarji. According to Girard, “the aesthetics governing speech in *What the Body Remembers* lie within the frame of a dialectics of dislocation

and re-membering” [14:46]. This reminds the reader of the act of dislocating the Indian female body and re-membering it, as is the case of the dismembered body of the female character, Kusum.

One can observe that language in *Obasan*, *What the Body Remembers* and *Chorus of Mushrooms*, does not fit within regular linguistic boundaries, just like the literary hybrid identity of these narratives. Actually, one can approach a linguistic hybridity that is marked by the use of different languages, voices and speeches: due to such lingual multiplicity, the novelists of our corpus challenge the idea of one pure and essential identity. An implicit challenge to the conventional notions of storytelling could be noticed through a playful manipulation of English as a post-colonial language employed as a provocative narrative technique. Thanks to this linguistic technique, these ethnic writers exercise an intellectual imperialism.

Once we use the terms “immigrants” or “ethnic minorities”, we are referring to what is different in terms of; culture, ideologies, religions, racial groups, rituals and modes of life. Even if he is a “white” Canadian, Frye confesses that “to enter the United States is a matter of crossing an ocean; to enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent” [18:219]. The focus, here, is on the second “alien” category that had been “silently swallowed” by the homeland left behind and by Canada as well. The most important point is that these various groups of immigrants would logically need a common tie in order to live together in harmony. The intended tie is language as is discussed by Kathryn Batchelor and Claire Bisdorff in the following quotation:

Ever since the period of anti-colonial movements after the Second World War, and continuing through the period of decolonization of the 1960’s, there have been movements to revalorize the use of local and indigenous languages, particularly in the context of literary expression. This was regarded as an essential part of the process of liberation from colonial dominance by the European powers. [19:36]

Therefore, at certain times, immigrants were in need of a common language to communicate and to survive together; paradoxically, these immigrants are decolonized identities seeking to revalorize their previously colonized languages as a form of liberation. This means that they feel that not only are their voices silenced but their languages are equally silenced. We can approach this point by recalling Naomi’s strange dream/nightmare in *Obasan*. She says that her “white” dream is characterized by “Wordlessness” [8:33]. Later on she relates this wordlessness, which dominates her dream, to a woman, as follows:

The square woman farther down the slope moves up toward me from under the curly-branched trees. [...] She begins to speak but the words are so old they cannot be understood. There is a calmness in her face as she recites an ancient mythical contract made between herself and the man so long ago, the language has been forgotten. [8:35]

This woman portrayed by Naomi resembles closely the female character Obasan with her calmness, old words and ancient mythical tie with the man who resembles Naomi’s Uncle. Not only in reality but even in her dream, Naomi notices that language is forgotten by these two characters. Before this dream, Naomi mentions that Obasan told her that before his death the “Uncle, [she says], woke up this morning and called her but she couldn’t hear what he had to say” [8:16]. There is a clear absence of communication between this silenced Japanese-Canadian couple. This leads us to assume that there is a linguistic danger threatening the offspring of this wounded ethnic group. This is what leads literary artists like Kogawa to shed light on this linguistic problem and to convey the voice of such speechless/wordless injured community. Naomi, as a narrative voice, says that



“language has been forgotten” [8:35]. However her creator, Kogawa makes of language a special literary tool in her novel, *Obasan*, about which the critic Marilyn Rose says:

[It] is built upon the historical, journalistic and documentary accounts of the internment which preceded it. It assumes that ultimately language can convey actual human experience, whatever the complexity of the relationship between language and social context. Moreover, it is overtly rhetorical in its assumption that experiencing “real” human suffering, even indirectly, as when human experience is enacted in language, will radicalize the person who comes to know it, the reader. [20:215-216]

Kogawa together with other ethnic novelists like Goto, Basran and Baldwin show through their literary imagination that their Asian languages have not been forgotten, but rather silenced. They use language to portray the human suffering of some minorities through some stereotypic images. In order to talk about their invisibility as subaltern minorities they need a lingua franca. We find Murasaki in *Chorus of Mushrooms* confessing that she desires to “manipulate language” [10:99]. She assumes that her grandmother, Naoe, “showed [her] that words take form and live and breathe among [them]” [10:99]. Naoe herself points out that she can speak English but her “lips refuse and [her] tongue swells in revolt. [She] wants so much for someone to hear, yet it must be in [her] words” [10:15]. Starting from Goto’s characters, one can observe the significance of language and its playful use by these ethnic minorities to deny the idea of a fixed and single identity.

## Conclusion

Through their hybrid literary narratives, the Asian-Canadian novelists, Joy Kogawa, Shauna Baldwin, Hiromi Goto and Gurjinder Basran, show that they do not hesitate to benefit from the institution of fiction, that bestows on them a literary power allowing them to tackle unspoken truths and to go beyond ethnic boundaries, by manipulating heteroglossic voices and dialogic languages. Like the literary hybrid identity of these ethno-racial novels, one can observe that language in *Obasan*, *What the Body Remembers*, *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *Everything Was Good-Bye*, does not fit within regular linguistic boundaries. An implicit challenge to the conventional notions of storytelling could be noticed through the playful use of English as a post-colonial language employed as a provocative narrative technique. Due to their lingual multiplicity and hybrid polyphony, these writers challenge the idea of one pure and essential identity.

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