

Of Immigration, Cosmopolitanism, and Diversity: Lost Identity and the Challenge of Integration for Women in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*

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Abstract

Bringing together the problems of immigration, cosmopolitanism, and diversity, the article considers immigration as a powerful force of globalization. Examining Hiromi Goto's novel *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the article unwraps the intricate issue of immigration, focusing specifically on the lives of Japanese (and later, Japanese Canadian) women in Canada. Considering the well-known concept of the melting pot – that the novel overtly questions – the article demonstrates that the life of an immigrant even in cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse Western societies can turn into a personal and generational nightmare. The article pays close attention to the novel's technique of mixing two languages, i.e., English and Japanese, as well as two fonts, to demonstrate how the issue of otherness becomes twisted and how the immigrants turn into strangers both in their native culture and in the new one. To corroborate this idea, the article also considers some of the main problems for immigrants that the novel singles out, including new climate, food, traditions, as well as one's appearance, particularly when it is ethnically charged. Finally, the article examines the issue of otherness as a gendered problem, claiming that it is particularly hard for women to lead the life of an immigrant, preserve a specific culture, and be able to pass it on to further generations.

Keywords

immigration; diversity; cosmopolitanism; gender; identity; *Chorus of Mushrooms*

Introduction

Immigration is an old concept that describes the process of moving from one's home country or country of origin to another. Once moved to another place, one has to settle there, and adjust both culturally and linguistically. History knows multiples cases of successful and unsuccessful migration. The process of migration has also been imagined and reimagined in literary fiction and nonfiction. This article focuses on the Japanese Canadian author Hiromi Goto's 1994 novel *Chorus of Mushrooms* to discuss the problem of gender in particular but also race in migration. I closely examine the three female characters to unveil the novel's interpretation of migration as a gendered practice, commenting on the difficulties that women face once having chosen to migrate. I deal explicitly with the migration of Japanese women to Canada and their adaptation in the country, as described in *Chorus of Mushrooms*.

While the first largely recognized migration of Japanese people to Canada was in the 1870s (Hickman and Fukawa 2011: 5), Asian Canadian literature as such, including Japanese Canadian fiction that discusses migration, appeared only a century later (Ty 2016: 566). This is so primarily because, as Roy Miki pinpoints:

The existence of Asian in Canadian has always been a disturbance – a disarticulation that had to be managed originally as the 'Asiatic,' as the 'Oriental,' and subsequently as a sign of the multicultural, as the 'Visible Minority,' in order to sustain the figure of the citizen as the end of assimilation" (qtd. in Ty 2016: 566)

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 played a large role in constructing the image of the Asian as the Other in a number of countries, including Canada. The bombing not only turned Canada and Japan into enemies, but it has also dramatically changed the attitudes of white Canadians to the large Japanese Canadian population that was immediately perceived and treated as the enemy, too (Hickman and Fukawa 2011: 5). The memory of the war for decades prevented Japanese Canadians from being viewed as decent members of society. Their migrant backgrounds were silenced. Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* is thus a culturally important text that contributes to the construction of the Japanese Canadian history of migration, tackling the problem from the perspectives of gender and race.

Depending on various factors, immigration can be both a positive and a negative experience: while some move to another country because it gives them a chance to get a better education or job, others have to flee their homeland because of war, persecution, disease, or poverty. In other words, while for some immigration is a choice, others are forced to become immigrants. I use *immigrants* as an umbrella term that describes all individuals, including refugees and asylum seekers, who move to another country, regardless of the reasons for their immigration. Individual attitudes about living in a foreign place differ depending on various factors. Moreover, whereas some move to a new place while still babies or young children, others move at an older age. Significantly, age is one of the key factors that facilitate or, on the contrary, complicate one's adjusting to new cultures,

traditions, and languages. While these factors provide only a superficial overview of immigration, they give a hint at how complex such a social, political, and cultural phenomenon immigration is, since, at times, optimistic expectations turn into a harsh life in a foreign, if not fully alienated, place. And this does not necessarily depend on the people who surround an immigrant. Frequently, it is immigrants' longing for such basic things as food, smells, sounds, and climate conditions that can make one's life a nightmare far away from the homeland.

Globalization has, to some extent, "opened" borders to many, turning immigration into an ordinary process. That surely does not mean that this process is an easy one: certainly, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, and other factors play a part in the visa regimes and the possibilities of mobility around the world, especially so in the case of Western Europe and North America. Yet, to borrow from Peter S. Li, "[t]here were . . . international exchanges even before the age of globalization, but the speed, the scope, and the complexity of present-day cross-border interconnections mark the uniqueness of the global era" (2003: 2). It would be wrong to claim that globalization has somehow made immigration a happier or less painful *personal* experience. Immigration as an *intimate* phenomenon demands breaking the tight bonds with the homeland, becoming either partially or completely isolated from it. One might wonder then: How does one integrate into another society and a new country? How is the process more difficult if in a new place one is considered a racial minority? Does gender play a role in perceptions of immigrants? Is it harder for women to

become immigrants? These are the questions that this article attempts to answer, closely engaging in the analysis of Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*.

Immigration and Diversity: The Twofold Nature of Today's Globalized World

The arrival of Western European colonialists to the New World has turned the Americas into the most overt places for immigration. Canada has been particularly proud of its immigration history, which, in turn, has largely influenced the people's values and traditions. The country has become a cherished destination for numerous immigrants as a place of freedom, democracy, financial promise, and a peaceful future.

Having accepted a large number of people with various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, Canada, one might argue, has, in principle, become "postethnic" – the term that I borrow from David A. Hollinger (2000: 79). To specify, one might wonder to what extent the country preserved "the ethnos of [its] own" (Hollinger 2000: 79). Particularly in relation to Canada – the country that was initially populated by indigenous peoples of various tribal affiliations and later invaded by white European immigrants – this question seems both acute and disturbing. On the one hand, the white population has, indeed, become the majority on the continent during the times of colonization, having exterminated a large number of the Native American population. Yet a number of fugitive slaves as well as many slave descendants moved/fled/migrated to Canada,

constructing a considerable part of the population. Moreover, the perception of certain parts of the North American continent, including Canada, as the Promise Land, has later encouraged migration to that land. Therefore, while such a phrase as *the Canadian nation*, indeed exists, it is quite problematic to deal with it from a cultural perspective, particularly when considering the multiple cultures that the country accommodates. The term arguably poses a danger of *universalism* that would never accept the diversified nature of the Canadian culture.

The concepts of immigration and diversity are crucial in North American socio-cultural discourses. In turn, the notions of cosmopolitanism and pluralism help better understand immigration and diversity. Hollinger contends that cosmopolitanism “is defined by . . . recognition, acceptance, and eager exploration of diversity” (2000: 84). The scholar continues: “Cosmopolitanism urges each individual and collective unit to absorb as much varied experience as it can, while retaining its capacity to advance its aims effectively. For cosmopolitans, the diversity of humankind is a fact” (2000: 84). In turn, pluralism, according to Hollinger, prioritizes certain cultures within the population, prompting the existence and vitality of those ones that are particularly prominent. While for cosmopolitanism, Hollinger writes, it is the individual that matters, for pluralism the group and the community as such is the key (2000: 85-86). It is difficult to identify which of the two concepts, as interpreted by Hollinger, puts diversity at risk. In principle, I would argue that neither undermines diversity; rather they tackle the issue from slightly different perspectives,

still acknowledging the idea of multiculturalism and rejecting universalism *per se*. Nevertheless, it seems that cosmopolitanism encompasses a larger group of people and thus appears to be less discriminatory. Globalization undoubtedly plays a crucial role in the formation of the idea of diversity when, to borrow from Homi K. Bhabha, “the articulation and enunciation of ‘a global or transnational imaginary and its “cosmopolitan subjectivities”’ [are enabled]” (qtd. in Gikandi 2011: 110).

When discussing immigration, the problem of definitions and terminology can be a very delicate issue. In the context of such a multicultural society as Canada, how does one define newcomers? That is, do immigrants tacitly become a part of that society and are thus conceptualized as *us* or are they viewed as a separate social cell that differs from the main population (or perhaps also from those immigrants who arrived earlier) and thus should be addressed as *them*? I raise these questions because they are of primary importance to the novel *Chorus of Mushrooms* that will be analyzed further in this article, for in it, through the experiences of three generations of women, the author explores the difficulties and possibilities of adjusting to a new culture or preserving the culture of one’s ancestors while being an immigrant. For now, to clarify these questions, I refer to the concept of space that is relevant to any multicultural society. Masao Miyoshi insists that “in . . . immigrant and multiracial countr[ies] . . . multiculturalism is an obvious consensual choice, each group, minority or majority, demanding its own autonomous and independent, that is, incommensurable space” (2011: 137). Thus, in such

countries, diversity is, indeed, a pivotal concept that does not harm or distort one's cultural individuality; diversity accepts differences and never proposes limitations or commonality. Preserving diversity as the key cultural policy, however, as becomes clear, for example, in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, might be a hard task. The novel illustrates how some immigrants simply do not want to be considered as *them* but rather try hard to become the cultural majority (speaking the language without any accent, cooking meals that seem to be traditional in Canada, celebrating holidays that one has never celebrated in one's home country, etc.). In turn, others refuse to do any of these and quickly become outcasts. Diversity thus, according to the novel, while a possible and desirable aim, is also difficult to achieve. Gender and age, as the novel suggests, and as I will illustrate later in this article, are two significant issues to consider when discussing the problems of immigration and diversity.

Another perilous concept that emerges in this context is "totality" that, according to Miyoshi, "does not vanish when a nation is divided into ethnic or gender groups" (2011: 137). The scholar speculates about the division that one can make when dealing with various ethnic groups. Specifically, when talking about the Canadian nation, one can single out a group of Asian Canadians in it. However, it is unclear why one does not tend to specify any further: Does one talk about Japanese Canadians or Chinese Canadians? Is it a group of women or men? Are they heterosexual or homosexual? Finally, Miyoshi laments: "Where does the logic of difference stop? Doesn't a particular individual remain as unrepresented within such categories as does a citizen of a

totalized nation?" (2011: 137). To put it differently, totality – as a means of defining a nation or a specific group within that nation – can be both advantageous and disadvantageous for immigrants: on the one hand, it helps one be immediately considered as part of that nation, tacitly rewarding one with the features of that nation; yet, on the other hand, such a unification is a conspicuous lie that not only completely ruins the nature of diverse society but, in principle, rejects the ideas of individualism and cultural variety. The latter only intensifies the fear of being considered *them* that an immigrant might experience.

Since this article zeroes in on the story of three Japanese/Japanese Canadian women who are the protagonists in Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, it seems particularly useful to examine how the problem of immigration is treated specifically in Canada. Li claims there are two major ways to perceive immigrants. Firstly, immigrants are "those who have immigrated to Canada, and who, as newcomers from different backgrounds with unequal individual abilities, have varying degrees of success in adapting to Canadian society" (2003: 38-39). Secondly, "the social and economic worth of immigrants can be gauged by immigrants' performance in reference to native-born Canadians. Thus, what native-born Canadians do and think become the benchmarks to measure the success or failure of immigrants" (2003: 38-39). These two "assumptions," as Li calls them, "influenc[e] how they [immigrants] are evaluated and ultimately how they are incorporated into Canadian society" (2003: 38-39). These ways of perceiving immigrants, however, can be applied to other immigrant societies, as

they aptly pinpoint the major issues that surround those who start a new life in a foreign territory. A weightier problem that emerges in relation to immigrants in Canada is articulated in a so-called “folk version” of who an immigrant is (Li 2003: 44). The first immigrants came to Canada from France and England; yet their descendants no longer consider themselves immigrants. Immigrants from Asia, Africa, and some other non-European territories started to come to Canada only after the 1960s. Their non-whiteness was visually distinct to native-born Canadians and ultimately made the former “deemed to be too culturally and normatively removed from mainstream Canadians,” unlike, for example, immigrants from Great Britain or the United States who are apparently not even singled out by the collective consciousness as immigrants (Li 2003: 44).

Having introduced a new immigration policy in the 1960s, Canada took a path towards cultural and ethnic diversification. According to the report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration from 1994, “*Diversity is one of the Canada’s great strengths . . .*” (qtd. in Li 2003: 132; italics in original). One of the most illustrative proofs of that point is perhaps Canada’s strong adherence to multiculturalism: this policy “emphasiz[es] ethnic differences . . . and encourag[es] immigrants to pursue separate ways rather than to embrace the Canadian way of life” (Li 2003: 133-134). It is worth mentioning that not every native-born Canadian approved of this proposition, which resulted in relatively harsh censure of the policy by some citizens (Li 2003: 133). Despite this drive for diversity, one can speak of a “dominant culture” that particularly strongly influences children

who inevitably turn away from their native cultural practices while learning and exercising new ones (Li 2003: 136). Indeed, age, as it has already been mentioned above, is one of the key concepts to consider when examining such notions as *immigration* and *diversity*. This will be further underlined in the analysis of *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Additionally, the article will argue that, along with age, gender plays a significant role when dealing with the issues of immigration and one’s lost or newly acquired identity.

The ‘Gendered’ Immigration in *Chorus of Mushrooms*

Is immigration gender-biased? Is it equally difficult (or, for that matter, easy) for men and women? To what extent does gender determine how individuals will integrate into a new culture? Nahla Abdo asserts: “The processes of migration and immigration are gender-based: the decision to immigrate, choice of destination, access to knowledge and/or finance are all typically male prerogatives” (1998: 41). And although this view is not entirely true today considering the number of women who choose to become immigrants, it is clear that patriarchy has shaped the notion of immigration as the one that describes a male activity. In other words, for a long time, it was a man who was responsible for the financial security and physical safety of his (future) family, and, therefore, the choice to move to another country was made by a man. Immigration, however, as multiple examples demonstrate today (including *Chorus of Mushrooms*), is a problem that largely involves and affects women. Immigration is a feminist issue.

In this article I focus explicitly on heterosexual (single) women with children, because this is who the characters of *Chorus of Mushrooms* are. Yet while I exclude lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women from my analysis, I would like to note that for them immigration might be an even harder process. Immigration is evidently a feminist issue because of how and to what extent it affects women. It seems plausible to argue that a woman, and especially a woman with a child, is initially more vulnerable because if she moves to another place, she will be responsible not only for her own well-being but also for the well-being of her child (or her future child, if she chooses to have one). Indeed, according to the United Nations Population Fund (2018), women and girls make up half of all migrants; moreover, women choose to/have to migrate alone, being the breadwinners for themselves and their children. For women, an alien environment turns into an even harder place to exist in because she has to make sure that she, first, earns enough to put food on the table both for herself and her child, and, second, help her child adjust to a new place. Not being a citizen in a new country and thus initially being in a disadvantaged position, as well as being a woman, i.e., being already marginalized (indeed, Simone de Beauvoir's interpretation of the woman's place in a patriarchal society as "the second sex" proposed in 1969 continues to be relevant today), it might be too difficult for her to exist as an immigrant. Moreover, migrant women more frequently than men become victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation, they can be/become pregnant on their way to the country of destination or once they arrive, and they generally

experience various health problems on the move and/or in another country (UNPF 2018). Thus, immigration is indeed a feminist issue, and gender plays an important role in the immigration question. Along with that, Margaret Abraham et al. pinpoint: "Women, people of color, im/migrants, and other disadvantaged and oppressed groups have been and remain instrumental in pointing out how citizenship produces and affects insiders and outsiders . . . and how it can work towards a society that respects and accommodates people of all origins" (2010: 12). Not being citizens, female immigrants constitute a group of people who can experience a hard life in the country of their choice.

Hiroshi Goto's novel *Chorus of Mushrooms* is a particularly interesting case to examine when dealing with the problem of immigration from the perspective of gender. The novel tells a story of three generations of Japanese (and later Japanese Canadian) women – Naoe, who is frequently referred to as Obāchan, is the oldest of the heroines; Keiko (or Kay) is Naoe's daughter; and Muriel (or Murasaki) is Keiko's daughter – exclusively focusing on their struggle to adjust to their new lives in Canada as immigrants.

Theodore Goossen and Kinya Tsuruta underline the fact that "[f]or millennia, the Pacific Ocean was a virtually impassable barrier dividing the lands of East Asia from the North American continent" (1988: 1); yet this is no longer true. Narratives like *Chorus of Mushrooms* aptly demonstrate how North America in general, and Canada in particular, has become the destination of some Japanese families. The reason for immigration for this particular family was World War II

and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Having survived the war, Naoe finds a new home in Canada. The life away from the homeland is, however, not entirely idyllic for Naoe and her daughter.

The novel meditates upon the feelings of the female immigrants, inevitably dealing with the multifaceted nature of immigration. Naoe fails to adjust to the new environment as she, virtually, does not want to do so; Keiko, on the contrary, is very willing to become *Canadian*; whereas the youngest, Muriel, was born in Canada and is thus the most assimilated of the three. The novel chooses several trajectories to depict the failure to integrate or, on the contrary, the success to do so; specifically, it attempts to question the status of Canada as a domestic space for the three women through the strong focus on cultural and linguistic problems that emerge within the immigrant family, both challenging and celebrating the issues of cosmopolitanism and diversity.

Ann McClintock contends that “nations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space” (qtd. in Perry 2016: 111). In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, it is exactly the problem of defining a domestic space in similar terms within one family that alienates the women from each other. Naoe’s recluse is the most overt. One might argue that it is so because she moved to Canada being already a grown-up person: to break the ties with Japan is an impossible task for her. Having left her homeland not only because she wanted to but also – more significantly – because the post-war chaos in her homeland made her do so, Naoe becomes metaphorically trapped within the Canadian borders, realizing that she does not belong to the new culture. Yet this

happens not because Canada rejects her or her family, but rather because Naoe herself refuses to welcome the new culture and instead vehemently protects her Japanese cultural heritage. Immigration becomes a traumatic experience for this woman, not only because she finds herself far away from her homeland, but also because she realizes that her descendants will lose the cultural heritage of their ancestors, turning into cultural hybrids or forgetting about their Japanese belonging for good. Naoe is the only heroine in the novel who speaks Japanese, as if constantly reminding her daughter and granddaughter who they really are. To borrow from Ewa Bodal, “the loss of ancestral languages [is] key for the protagonists’ negotiating and fashioning their postcolonial identities” (2013: 237). The static life that Naoe leads in Canada is described by the heroine as follows:

Ahh, easy to lose track of days, of years, when a chair becomes an extension of your body. I wasn’t born in this chair, and I won’t die in it, that’s certain, but I have room enough to think here, and almost nothing can sneak past my eyes. I may be old, but I’m not blind. This chair can serve me still and I needn’t move at all. My words will rattle around me, I speak my words, speak my words, and I say them all out loud. I yell and sing and mutter and weep from my seat of power. (Goto 2014: 25)

Naoe creates a world of her own where she still exists as Japanese, both culturally and linguistically. The chair which she spends most of her days in symbolically stands for Canada, and although it “becomes an extension of [her] body,” i.e., she is, indeed, not just Japanese but rather a *Japanese*

immigrant, she insists on her cultural belonging, claiming that “I wasn’t born in this chair, and I won’t die in it,” thus underscoring the importance of cultural and linguistic heritage for her. The Japanese language turns into a means of reaching that balance between being an immigrant and remaining part of one’s native culture. At the same time, by not giving up her cultural belonging, Naoe manages to transform the place where she is into her “seat of power,” vividly illustrating the legitimate nature of diversity that she herself embodies.

Unlike her mother, Keiko enjoys her new life and considers herself Canadian. She tries hard to be part of the new culture and is even ready to change her name: “My name is Keiko, but please call me Kay” (Goto 2014: 193). Her desire to be integrated into the Canadian culture started immediately after the immigration:

When I decided to immigrate, I decided to be at home in my new country. You can’t be everything at once. It is too confusing for a child to juggle two cultures. Two sets of ideals. If you want a child to have a normal and accepted lifestyle, you have to live like everyone else. This has nothing to do with shame in one’s own culture, but about being sensible and realistic. If you live in Canada, you should live like a Canadian and that’s how I raised my own daughter. It’s very simple, really. (Goto 2014: 193)

Keiko is truly the only woman in the family who not only wants to be considered Canadian herself but who also tries to turn her other family members into such. For her, those immigrants who “always pine for the past” (Goto 2014: 193) are lost people,

strangers on a foreign land, who came there by their own will but, in principle, always want to leave. Keiko, on the contrary, finds it important to decide for yourself: either to go back to Japan or to stay in Canada and live the Canadian way of life. Having raised Muriel as Canadian, Keiko has clearly demonstrated the importance of belonging to only one culture (which is the dominant culture of the people in a specific country), depriving her own daughter of her ancestors’ cultural heritage.

However, it is the youngest of all, and, for that matter, the most *Canadian* of all – Muriel – who seems to be most sensitive towards the delicate yet painful issue of lost identity. Naoe has never tried to adopt a Canadian identity; Keiko was eager to turn into a Canadian; in turn, Muriel was forced into becoming a culturally *new* person. Muriel laments that the choice of her mother to turn her into a Canadian and to teach her English instead of Japanese deprived her of any possibility to communicate with her grandmother. “I wasn’t given the chance to choose. I feel a lot of bitterness about how I was raised, how I was taught to behave. I had a lot of questions about my heritage, but they were never answered. The place where we lived didn’t foster cultural difference. It only had room for cultural integration” (Goto 2014: 193-194).

Muriel realizes that her family – “the only Japanese-Canadians for miles around” – somehow differ from the others in that “small prairie town,” when her school friend Patricia points out the “funny smell” in Muriel’s house (Goto 2014: 126, 126, 67). This smell that clearly distinguishes Muriel’s family from any other Canadian family in the town symbolically stands for the cultural

difference of the immigrants, intensifying the fact that no matter how hard Muriel's mother tries to be considered Canadian, she will never be one because she is different:

I [Muriel] 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. (Goto 2014: 68)

The language that the author chooses to describe the shock that Muriel experiences finding out about her being different is crucial. The words "insidious," "contaminated," and "betrayed" are used to reinforce cultural differences as some polluting, poisonous, unhealthy, and very dangerous phenomena. The migrant family is identified as the Other, meaning not just being different but indeed being a threat to the *Canadian society*. Japanese culture is not seen as one of many other cultures but rather it is perceived as a disease. Pivotal, this is a perception that not only is shared by Muriel's Canadian friends, but that infiltrates Muriel's mind too, making her believe that not fitting a certain cultural norm is embarrassing at least and a crime at most.

Being finally told by Canadians that Muriel is different, the girl is eager to find out more about her cultural heritage. Surprisingly, she finds support not in her mother, whom she speaks the same

language to, but in her grandmother – the person who speaks the language that Muriel has never learned. She eventually adopts a new name – Murasaki – the one that her grandmother gives her. According to Pavlina Radia, one should view this process of renaming as following: "[T]he loss of belonging caused by immigration produces psychic, linguistic, and cultural longing that evokes the need to covet the unnamed or missing whatever the cost" (2009: 193). The changing of her name and the fact that Muriel lives in peace with her Japanese heritage illustrates her being proud to consider herself *different*. Unlike her mother, she is never ashamed of her Asian roots and believes that hiding her heritage is not only impossible in *white* Canada but also unnecessary. Her cultural identity is not a crime, looking *different* is not a crime, speaking a foreign language is not a crime. Being the youngest and the most alienated from Japanese culture, Muriel teaches her grandmother and mother how to be an immigrant. Muriel's attempt to cook a Japanese meal – the *tonkatsu* (which is also her Japanese family name) – for dinner is very symbolic in this context, as the meal, according to Donald Richie, "had divine, medical powers to 'bring the diseased body back to life'" (qtd. in Radia 2009: 194). 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.

Goto deals with the problem of immigration, cosmopolitanism, and diversity not only by means of portraying the three Japanese women in Canada, paying close attention to their views and

behavior, but she also attempts to present the language as the key aspect in an immigrant's life. Bodal contends that "the particular language spoken . . . may serve as an important tool in shaping one's view of the world" (2013: 235). It is, therefore, pivotal that, when presenting each heroine, Goto uses different languages and even fonts. Naoe is perhaps the most vivid example here, as she is the only one who speaks Japanese exclusively. The reader is never provided with a translation, which intensifies the cultural and linguistic difference that Naoe personifies. It is interesting, however, that the Japanese characters are used very rarely in the novel; for the most part, the author transliterates the words, thus an English-speaking reader sees familiar letters but is never able to understand what the old woman talks about. Naoe's case is particularly interesting to examine, for she is indeed the only character in the novel that explicitly rejects the new culture and attempts to preserve her Japanese cultural and linguistic heritage. Generally, a number of migrant and postcolonial literary narratives use native words albeit the texts' main language which is English. Postcolonial studies scholars claim that "many postcolonial writers are trying to overturn the assumptions of cultural and racial inferiority imposed by the colonizers and foolishly accepted by the colonized. Therefore, nativization of the English language in postcolonial texts is a means of 'teaching' the colonizers that there is nothing disgraceful about the culture and traditions of the colonized" (Kehinde 2009: 76). In the context of migrant literature, the use of native words performs a similar function: these words that occasionally appear throughout the novel

reinforce the validity of the Japanese language. One's native language is not something shameful that migrants should get rid of, forget, or unlearn as soon as possible. On the contrary, it is a significant part of one's native culture that remains a part of an immigrant's life. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, including the words in the characters' native language helps promote diversity; moreover, transliterating these words, while on the one hand may be interpreted as partial destruction of the language, is also a useful technique to make this language more comprehensible (at least in terms of reading) for English-language speakers both in Canada and worldwide. Keiko, as it might already be clear, never uses Japanese words. Muriel's (un)familiarity with the new language is, however, commented through the usage of 'foreign' words several times. Once, while choosing an eggplant in a supermarket, she is asked by a local woman what "an eggplant" is called in her language; the woman obviously does not realize that 'Muriel's' language is English. It is even more problematic that, seeing an Asian-looking girl next to an aisle with Chinese ethnic food, the Canadian woman assumes that Muriel is Chinese, to which Muriel responds: "I don't speak Chinese" (Goto 2014: 97). The scene foregrounds racial discrimination that the descendants of Asian immigrants might experience in countries like Canada.

Another important scene takes place later, when Muriel goes to a special store to buy Japanese products. She gives a list of necessary products written by Muriel's grandmother to a shop assistant, saying: "I know what the words mean, but I have no idea what they are" (Goto 2014: 140). The cultural dissonance is apparent

in this scene: while Muriel, indeed, comes closer to Japanese culture, learning new words, she discovers only the linguistic side of her ancestry. The true Japanese nature remains a mystery to her that she, living in Canada, will never be able to attain. Hence her request to help her with the shopping: she might have heard about the products that she is asked to buy, she might have even tried them as part of some meals, but she has never had to buy them, search for them on the shelves, cook something from them herself. In other words, she has never experienced this side of Japanese culture, having been born in Canada. Her grandmother and mother might have told her stories related to Japanese products but, until the moment Muriel had to go shopping herself, those were indeed just stories.

Through Naoe, Keiko, and Muriel, Goto portrays archetypes of female immigrants, accurately accentuating numerous aspects of their lives. Goto presents three painful experiences. Naoe, in principle, never adjusts. It is crucial that she goes missing at the end of the novel, thus metaphorically showing that she, indeed, cannot live in a foreign country, pretending that she is part of that culture. Keiko so strongly wants to be Canadian that she almost turns into a parody, ready to reject who she is just to make sure that the others think of her as *us*. It is pivotal that Keiko is demoralized when she finds out that her mother – the woman who most of all reminds her of her homeland – is gone. Having lost Naoe, Keiko finally loses all attachments to Japan, which turns out to be a deeply traumatic experience for her. Indeed, despite her strong desire to be recognized as Canadian, she ultimately acknowledges the importance of her

Japanese cultural heritage. Muriel becomes stuck between two cultures, realizing that she does not fully belong to any of them. 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. The novel focuses on numerous aspects that accompany immigration, revealing it as a traumatic process in many ways. A combination of various cultures can be beautiful on many levels, 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.

Conclusion

In the novel, Goto writes: “There are a lot of sad immigrant stories” (2014: 108). And although this is undoubtedly true, the stories of Naoe, Keiko, and Muriel/Murasaki can hardly be described with the simple word *sad*. Through the three different stories about the members of one family, the novel attempts to illustrate a complex yet successful account of immigration. Clashing two strikingly different cultures and bringing them together in the lives of the three women, the novel celebrates diversity; it celebrates cultural differences and gives hope for every other person who chooses the difficult path of leaving their homeland and finding a new one.

In the end, it is important to address the issue of diversity as the one that is tightly connected to the problem of space –

whether a geographical, linguistic, cultural, or personal one. Goto's technique to create a cross-cultural setting in her novel contributes to a great extent to one's understanding of the problems of immigration, diversity, and cosmopolitanism. The author comments on the choice of place/space in her narrative as follows:

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, I was utilizing a setting or background that I was very familiar with – my father does have a mushroom farm. What is very interesting about mushroom farming in Alberta is that you have to create such an alien environment on the prairies. The space is enclosed and the temperature has to be maintained as well as the humidity – which is ludicrous, especially in a prairie winter – so it was interesting for me as a writer to explore the implications of that sort of enclosed, “safe” environment, within a broader, larger geography that could be perceived as hostile, which fed into a lot of the themes I was working with. (Goto 2002: 18)

Creating this “alien environment” for her Japanese heroines in Canada, the author underlines the differences between the two cultures and their polarities that eventually result in the hardships, misunderstandings, and, at times, despair in the lives of the three women. Yet while never imposing a connotation of *homeland* on the new environment (indeed, Japan remains the country of a special significance to each heroine), Goto reveals how this alien space can transform into a *safe* space for the three generations of immigrants. This space enables the women to feel *at home*, never

forgetting who they really are. These complex and intricate issues entwine *Chorus of Mushrooms*, turning it into a story about loyalty – loyalty to one's self, one's culture, and one's family – that ultimately respects and promotes diversity.

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