



Asian-Canadian Literature Between: Quasi-Shakespearean Syntax and Deaf Culturalists

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Abstract

The first reading of Asian-Canadian narratives like Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and Shauna Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* might lead the reader to think that there is but one single dominant theme that one can call it "diasporic melancholia", yet this is way too confusing. One can underline the overwhelming presence of the two notions of "exile" as well as "silence". This paper seeks to shed light on the theme of "silence" not only as a consequence of the "diasporic melancholia" characterizing the different characters exposed in contemporary Asian-Canadian literature, but also as a feature distinguishing such ethno-racial stereotypes as "deaf culturalists" and also brings to light an Asian-Canadian quasi-Shakespearean syntax attempting to characterize ethnic minorities' hybrid identities.

Keywords: silence; deaf culturalists; Shakespearean syntax; word warriors.

1. Introduction

The reader of Asian-Canadian narratives, especially the Japanese-Canadian ones, can easily observe the presentation of "silence" as an aesthetic trait that is deeply rooted in Japanese culture and its rituals, like the Japanese tea ceremony, as is stated by Sally Ito, who is quoted by Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, as follows:

"The aesthetics of silence has been passed on from the Japanese to the Japanese Canadian as evidenced in the work of Nisei writer Joy Kogawa. Silence is a running theme in her novel *Obasan*. Silence is a way of giving shape to things that would not be so evident if talk or noise

were in the way.” (‘Issues’ 177) Yet silence in these novels often stems from different cultural or historical reasons. Drawing on a number of surveys conducted among the Nisei and Sansei in the United States and Canada, Makabe concludes that “conscious efforts were made by many Nisei not to talk about the past, particularly about the internment, not to congregate together, and to assimilate as completely as possible” (82). She further describes: “The very high degree of silence and concealment that has surrounded the subject of internment within most Japanese Canadian families. Communication tended to be quite limited in both frequency and length, with little substance.” [1:109]

This paper seeks to read the manifestations of silence, not as a sign of defeat or weakness but as a sign of silent revolt and resistance distinguishing Asian-Canadians’ hybrid identities. Contrary to Christiane Guillois’s claim that “silence is the basic space of [*Obasan*]” [2]^a and that it creates confusion, the critic Christina Tourino argues that: “silence [...] takes on the deeper dimension of agency, resistance, courage and insight” [3:138]. We will approach the rebellious side of Japanese-Canadians’ silence and then we will shed light on those voices that cannot endure silence.

2. “Deaf” Culture and/or Shakespearean Syntax

Through the critical reading of Asian-Canadian novels like, Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* and Shauna Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers*, one can observe that silence goes beyond the simple denotation of silence. It becomes one of the features characterizing some diasporic people who try to avoid the ghost of assimilation in a multicultural country like Canada. The silence of these characters makes them appear stubborn people distinguished by their “Deaf” culture. The use of the term “deaf”, in our analysis, is metaphorical and we will see that it is another characteristic of the Asian-Canadians’ hybrid identities. Murray E. G. Smith and Pamela Campbell’s identify the “deaf community” as follows:

For most Deaf Culturalists, the “deaf community” includes all those deaf people who have proudly assumed a deaf identity based upon a positive estimation of ASL, the deaf culture, and “the deaf way of being”. “Like other cultural minorities”, notes Courneyeur (1988: 5), “the Deaf community is structured through a network of clubs, schools, churches, sports associations, youth groups, arts groups, and advocacy organizations”. [...] Such attitudes reflect a fundamental tenet of the Deaf Culturalist view of the deaf condition: the notion that *deafness is not a disability* [...]. Polemical elaborations of the Deaf Culturalist program by Lane (1992), Baker-Shenk (1985), Courneyeur (1988), and Wixtrom (1988) are laced with such watch-words as “pride”, “empowerment”, “self-determination”, and “identity”. Patricia Shores-Hermann, a prominent Canadian Deaf Culturalist, observes that “we view deafness as a healthy condition, not an impairment”, and has likened the new militancy of the culturally Deaf to the black and women’s liberation movements that emerged during the 1960s (Courneyeur, 1988: 5). [4:444-446]

Therefore, the deafness of these deaf identities is not a physical disability but a sign of pride and positive difference or even their productive hybrid identities and undecided belonging, as is the case of the characters studied in *Obasan*, *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *What the Body Remembers*. Let us move on to see how Deaf ethnicity is represented by the characters. In *Obasan*, for instance, Helena Grice declares that “silence speaks,

and often louder than words” [5:93]. The eccentric situation of Obasan draws Naomi to commemorate her times with her Uncle. As a narrative voice, Naomi takes her readers back in time with the following scene:

The first time Uncle and I came here for a walk was in 1954, in August, [...]. It was a quiet twilight evening, much like tonight. [...] Uncle is almost never direct in his replies [...], he said abruptly, “Mo ikutsu? What is your age now?”

“Eighteen,” I said. [6:3]

Naomi’s past memory of their first coming here, helps the reader to have an idea about her Uncle’s character. The strange Uncle is “never direct in his replies” and tries usually to speak the Japanese language instead of English. When the narrator intends to ask, “why do [they] come here every year?” [6:4], there was no response. She confesses that from her Uncle and Obasan as well, she has learned that:

speech often hides like an animal in a storm. [...]

[The Uncle] seems about to say something, his mouth open as he stares straight ahead, his eyes wide. Then, as if to erase his thoughts, he rubs his hands vigorously over his face and shakes his head. [6:4]

Instead of answering his niece in expressive words for the reason behind their visit to this location every year as if it were a sacred or holy celebration, his response is summarized in his body language with mysterious gestures. As an omniscient narrator, Naomi is able to read his hesitant thoughts. The Uncle hesitates to give a suitable justification to his companion about their act of revisiting the same place at the same time. From 1954 until 1972, Naomi follows Uncle when he comes to this place without knowing why they do so, yet she learned from both Obasan and her Uncle that “speech often hides like an animal in a storm” [6:4]. Through this metaphorical image, the reader finds out that both Obasan and the Uncle prefer silence over speech. All one knows about Obasan is that, she is a woman who avoids ‘speech.’ She is a woman represented by the word “Obasan” which is the title of the novel and means “aunt”. One can recall the critic Gayle Fujita’s identification of Obasan, as follows:

“Obasan” as any woman or any aunt acknowledges Aunt Emily’s role as family and social historian in educating Naomi, and acknowledges the connectedness of all women’s lives—Naomi, her mother, her two aunts. But “Obasan” is mostly Aya-obasan herself, a woman of deep strength and feeling, inviolate and self-contained but sustaining the lives of others. [7:41]

In fact, the third chapter begins with the description of Obasan in the kitchen. She is a woman who cannot hear very well, “she is so deaf” [6:13]. This is how Naomi depicts this female character. The deafness of this woman is not a physical problem, if we take into account what Deaf Culturalists believe, following the quote at the beginning of this subpart. It is rather a metaphorical reference to the inability of Obasan to hear the English language and precisely the English voice as a non-English-speaking person. According to Naomi’s viewpoint,

Obasan is undergoing a difficult situation because of both getting old and the death of her husband, consequently she stays silent. In the following depiction, the narrator shares with her reader the melancholic atmosphere of Obasan's home as well as "the density of her inner retreat" [6:17]:

We sit in silence sipping and turning the cups around on the tips of our fingers. [...] When she speaks, her voice is barely a whisper. [...] Such an old woman she is. She opens her mouth to say more, but there is no further sound from her dry lips. The language of her grief is silence. She has learned it well, its idioms, its nuances. Over the years, silence within her small body has grown large and powerful. [6:15-17]

This quote shows the dominance of silence over any other power. Silence is the language of Obasan and becomes part of her body or, let us say, her identity. This woman was, unfortunately, taught to be silent and her voice seems to be silenced. She does not express her sadness and this is what Naomi says about her: "Seeing Obasan now, older than the grandmother I know as a child, older than any person I know today, I feel that each breath she takes is weighted with her mortality. She is the old woman of many Japanese legends" [6:65]. Naomi continues talking about the task of persuading her stubborn Obasan to leave her "old" home and come and live with her. According to this eccentric portrayal, one could understand that Obasan is the stereotype of the real Japanese identity. Then, Naomi introduces the character of her brother, Stephen, who is of little help to Obasan. Stephen hates the strange silence of Obasan and this is why he chooses to escape to other cities as it is stated in the novel, like London, New York and Montreal [6:17]. As a male character, he is incapable of making Obasan feel better. This fact might allude to the inability of man sometimes to understand the feminine mystery. One must not forget that the novel is entitled *Obasan*, and the exaggeration of the depth of Obasan's silence leads the reader to give it another hypothetical title that is *Silence*.

The female speaker, Naomi, appears to be unable to stop her limitless sad memories. For example, she remembers how her aunt Emily "was unable to get a teaching position" after graduating [6:25]. Added to that, Naomi's memory cannot forget the "sleek boat", also depicted as "a work of art" that was designed by her father but was taken by "the RCMP officer" in 1941. This can allude to the perseverance and patience of the Japanese community. Naomi denounces the arrogance of the Canadians in leaving her aunt jobless and in depriving her father of his work of art and livelihood. All these melancholic events took place during the period of persecution starting in 1941. Naomi comments on these facts in the following way: "The memories were drowned in a whirlpool of protective silence. Everywhere I could hear the adults whispering, 'Kodomo no tame. For the sake of the children [...]' Calmness was maintained" [6:26]. One could deduce that the silence of both the Uncle and Obasan is not a passive and submissive silence, it is rather a wise and "protective silence". Naomi heard the protective whispers of the adults who were ready to endure anything for the sake of their children. The image of these characters, who drowned within their unhappy memories and could not get rid of them, reflects the situation of the Japanese community in North America.

Obasan is a woman who is usually silent, as she was described previously, but she keeps uttering expressions like the following: " 'Lost,' she says occasionally. The word for 'lost' also means 'dead.' [...] 'Eyes can no longer see' " [6:27-28]. She repeats the term "lost" also on page 31, and after describing her "loss" as a "death",

now she says that her loss is equal to “forgetfulness” [6:31]. She dwells within a mysterious silence and her loss proves that she is trapped by her traumatic past but she does not desire to show it. She rather pretends to be forgetful. Whenever she remembers a memory or is asked a question by Naomi, Obasan repeats the expression, “everyone someday dies”. This is how Naomi comments on her ambiguous gestures: “Obasan [...], she’s lived in a darkened house. [...] She does not respond. Her face is expressionless [...] ‘Everyone someday dies,’ she says again. By repeating this so often, I suppose she is trying to make realizable what is real” [6:53-55]. One can notice that Obasan does not speak much, but when she talks, her words are like daggers, for example, the words “lost” and “dead”, that she is always repeating, could denote the loss, as well as the death, experienced by the Japanese in a foreign land. Naomi portrayed her earlier as deaf and her deafness could be metaphorical not biological. Later on, Obasan presents herself as a blind woman, “eyes can no longer see” [6:28]. She might mean the blindness of either the Canadian majority or the Japanese minority. The problem is that Obasan is still looking for something that even Naomi has no idea about, as is mentioned in the following quote: “Obasan is searching through bundles of old letters and papers. [...] She squats beside a pile of magazines—*Life*, *New Liberty*, *Mechanix Illustrated*—mostly from the fifties” [6:29]. Obasan’s continuous search proves her persistence in attaining her ambiguous goal. Certainly these letters have a metaphorical significance. Despite her silence, she keeps looking for “*Life*” and “*New Liberty*” and these words are written in italics to emphasize this reality. Feng asserts that Obasan, in her patient forbearance, becomes a universal and quasi-mythical mother figure who guards an alternative path to the truth, and adds the following description:

What she has carefully preserved might be “discredited knowledge”, disregarded by hegemonic discourse but nourishing and sustaining none the same. Obasan’s silence almost creates an aura of protection that somewhat compensates for the premature loss of the mother for Naomi. Obasan has once tried to educate the children about Japanese endurance by pointing out that people who patiently go through life’s difficulties will be like the best samurai swords tempered in the hottest flame (131). This culturally specific reference implies that Obasan herself is also as a warrior figure. Only she fights with her silence. As the narrator observes, “the avenues of speech are the avenues of silence” (228). [8:35]

Feng’s identification of Obasan’s silence as a protection is recognized by Naomi who says that “the memories were drowned in a whirlpool of protective silence. Everywhere I could hear the adults whispering, ‘Kodomo no tame. For the sake of the children [...]’ Calmness was maintained” [6:25-26]. Besides, according to Feng, “the voice in silence [is] Obasan’s Japanese way of enduring hardship with patience” [8:35]. Therefore, Obasan’s silence could be categorized as a sign of the deaf and stubborn culture of the Japanese. Even in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, we can distinguish Naoe as another figure of Japanese deaf identity. She is stubborn enough to refuse the dominant Canadian culture and to neglect silence as well. She acts usually as a strong woman, she cannot accept defeat. She translates her memories into real historical stories and other imaginary ones. She represents deaf ethnicity and looks at her deafness as a difference in human experience. She is proud of her stubborn identity.

The stubbornness of Naoe in *Chorus of Mushrooms* labels her with the feature of “disability”, incapable of hearing the instructions of the majority. She says, “I might be stupid as well as deaf. How can they think a body can live in this country for twenty years and not learn the language? But let them think this. Let them think what

they will, for they will” [9:4]. She admits that she is deaf and her deafness alludes to her transcendence of the dominant Canadian hegemony. In the critic Prorokova’s terms, “Naoe creates a world of her own where she still exists as Japanese, both culturally and linguistically” [10:103-104]. The following quotation signals the transcendent character that Naoe possesses:

“Gomennasai. Waruine, Obachan wa. Solly. Solly.”

Ha! Keiko, there is method in my madness [...], no one hears my language. So I sit and say the words and will, until the wind or I shall die. Someone, something must stand against this wind and I will. I am [...]. Of course there was wind in Japan. I remember so well [...]. Gentle as wish, as thought and certainly no need to challenge it with my voice. [...] My brother and I drank misoshiru from black lacquer bowls and crunched daikon left over from the pickling bins. Still as a pool of water, we were waiting. Waiting for Okasan to bring our rice and Otosan to come home. [9:5]

She is annoyed because of her daughter and the wind as well. The Japanese words and phrases are not explained by any English translation. Then, Naoe protests because “no one hears” her language that is difficult to understand, and they do not even know it. For the sake of conveying her Japanese voice, she is ready to challenge everything, even the wind. Generally speaking, the wind symbolizes a natural power that is marked by the movement of a current of air blowing from a particular direction. Naoe is bold enough to volunteer to fight such a power. The depiction of the wind in Japan by this female voice can be seen as a hint that as long as the person is in his home country, he does not need to rebel, to fight, or to challenge any power. One has to note that this is not strictly true, though. Moreover, Naoe’s longing for Japanese food proves that she is against the process of assimilation that urges immigrants like her to forget about their origins and identities.

Charlotte Sturgess points to the idea that, “Naoe implores the elements of a quasi-Shakespearian cosmos-cum-little-house-on the prairie—her syntax broken, her ‘I’ strident –inviting the reader’s pleasurable participation in the interrupted flow of words” [11:188]. Besides, we can see in Naoe’s expression, “there is method in my madness,” a Shakespearian dimension. In fact, there is a very similar expression stated in *Hamlet*. It may be helpful to provide the quotation containing the expression about “madness”. The following lines depict a brief dialogue between the characters Polonius and Hamlet:

POL. What is the matter, my lord? [line 191]

HAM. Between who?

POL. I mean the matter that you read, my lord.

HAM. Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams—all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down, for yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.

POL. [Aside.] Though this be madness, yet there is method in't. – Will you walk out of the air,
my lord? [line 201]

HAM. Into my grave? [12:34]

Mark Burnett considers *Hamlet* as “the play’s most clearly identifiable trickster figure” [13:31-32]. Burnett identifies the madness of Hamlet and Polonius as a weapon used by trickster figures for certain purposes. The following quotation explains Burnett’s argument about what he calls, the trickster:

At what levels of a cultural consciousness does the trickster function, and what force does the myth carry in its literary manifestations? In addressing this question, two rival interpretations come into play. On the one hand, it is argued that the trickster is an archetype with his roots in the transcendental human psyche, that he can be understood in therapeutic terms of sublimation, projection and differentiation, and that he acts most dramatically as a psychological steam-valve (Babcock-Abrahams 1975: 183). On the other hand, there are social dimensions to the trickster’s activities, and opinion still hesitates over pinning down the eventual ramifications of his transgressive practices. [...] But Hamlet is sufficiently unpredictable in its effects to make it increasingly difficult to conceive of the play according to a binarism between the trickster and the tricked, the victim and the victimizer. At one level, it explores the situation of those who suffer by being arbitrarily manipulated; at another level, it implies that even the trickster has a vulnerable and foolish underside. [...] This point which is taken further by Pelton (1980: 15), who observes: “All tricksters are fools and fools, but their foolishness varies; sometimes satiric, sometimes creative, sometimes scatological, sometimes satiric, sometimes playful”. [13-31-39]

Hence, from Naoe’s quasi-Shakespearean expression, “there is method in [her] madness”, one can consider her as a transcendental trickster who seeks to reflect her difference through her satiric and playful foolishness as well as her deaf culture.

Therefore, the presence of the term “silence”, in these novels, is not a mere restatement of the psychological situation of the characters. It is very necessary to relate the term of silence to the presence of this Japanese minority in the Canadian territories. These Japanese people often stay silent, as is the case of Obasan and the Uncle, as if they were silenced by the Canadian majority. The dominant majority may use this tool of silencing minorities to avoid their rebellion. Nevertheless, silence could be a sign of meditation and thinking about the future. Normally, wise people prefer silence over chattering so that they can reorganize their thoughts. Whether it be a cliché or not, one can say that the Japanese people appear to be characterized by their silent wisdom whether they are in Japan or outside it, this remains one of their traits. The Japanese characters created can be considered as stereotypes representing the Japanese community in Canada. They succeed in reflecting the Japanese unity and sense of “togetherness” but time, and the majority’s power kill this togetherness and transform it into Otherness and diaspora. This is how the “deaf culture” is represented in this Japanese-Canadian novel. Now let us turn to the Indian version of “deaf culture” within India, as it is approached in Baldwin’s novel.

In Shauna Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers*, the character of Roop finds herself obliged to hide the fact of being deaf. As a matter of fact, an English doctor detected Roop’s weakness with just one working ear and the

other one damaged [14:75]. The following quotation depicts Roop's deaf ear/identity as an Indian girl: "She has kept her bad ear secret by sensing and adjusting her position in relation to each person's voice [...]. Her secret, kept so far even from Madani, shows she is not like other women. She can be ambitious even though she was born on a Tuesday under the strong– strong influence of the Mongol Star" [14:84].

Roop does not even tell her sister Madani about her "bad ear" because her father asked her to never declare this secret to anyone otherwise no one will marry her. Roop's deafness might refer metaphorically to her character as a young rebellious and ambitious girl before marriage. However, Indian norms render her obedient, and encourage her to hide this deaf identity in order to get married instead of being rejected. Unfortunately, she finds herself married to a modern engineer who orders her to learn and to remember various aspects of etiquette to fit in with his imitation of "English" ideas. Among the instructions that Sardarji's servant, Mani Mai, gives to Roop, one can mention the following, "No bindi on your forehead; Sardarji says that's a Hindu custom. [...] No nose rings, those are for Hindus, or Muslims like me" [14:154]. This teenager is quietly aware that she must listen carefully to Sardarji, who asks her to give her first baby to his first wife, Satya. Thus, Roop finds herself suddenly sinking "into silence" [14:165-166], even if:

A few months ago there was a Roop who might have protested, a Roop who had no fear because she could imagine no harm, no consequences. [...] But that Roop is gone and in her place stands a woman who has climbed beyond her father's kin, and now must hold fast to the gains of fortune. If she refuses, she can be sent home a failure, a burden to Papaji. Tongues will flap in the village. [14:167]

The objector personality of Roop withdraws into the institution of marriage and is replaced by a sacrificial woman. She has to sacrifice herself for the sake of her bankrupt father who has lost his fortune during the sickness of his wife. Roop's father once "needed money. So he borrowed from Shyam Chacha [...]. All Papaji's loans from Shyam Chacha have been recorded as land transfers, and little by little, Shyam Chacha has taken away almost half of Papaji's inheritance" [14:178]. It is possible to conclude that Roop's family has been the victim of these backward rituals, since the mother lost her life, the father lost his wealth and their daughter Roop might lose her mind under the pressure of her husband's suggestion of giving her first baby to Satya. Therefore, one can note that there is a difference between the Japanese "deaf identity" represented by Obasan and Naoe, and the Indian "deaf identity" that is buried by their customs, as was the case of Roop. The next subpart deals with the refusal of some characters of the very idea of "silence" or silent exile, because they have chosen to function as "word warriors" with some quasi-Shakespearean idioms.

3. Word Warriors

There is no doubt that a patriarchy formed by male figures like Sigmund, the widower father and Stephen, in *Obasan*, is difficult to accept for modern and well-educated women like Naomi and her aunt, Emily. Until this point, we have made an analytical reading of Obasan as a character who says a lot with her continuous silence. So, the appearance of a bold woman resisting patriarchal injustice as well as other oppressive systems could provide a balance to Obasan's silence and Naomi's questions. This female figure is called Emily and is still single at fifty-six. Like her niece, Aunt Emily refuses to be a "bargain in the marriage market" [6:9]. Even the Uncle once said about Emily that she is, "not like [a] woman [...]. Like that there can be no marriage" [6:43], for her. Emily's avoidance of marriage might be one of her strategies in fighting patriarchal oppression. Naomi links Emily's refusal of marriage to the fact that she is "too busy, rushing around Toronto, rushing off to conferences. She never stays still long enough to hear the sound of her own voice" [6:10]. By observing one of her old photographs, Naomi depicts Emily when she was a teenager as a "solid and intelligent looking. Beside her, [Naomi's] Mother is a fragile presence" [6:23]. This comparison between the "old maid", Emily and her married sister can lead us to suppose that Emily is a feminist character in comparison to her sister who is fragile enough to occupy simply the role of a vulnerable married woman. Moreover, the death of the Uncle who stands for "silence" might be an opening path for this female "word warrior", whose niece avows that, "talking to Aunt Emily is sometimes like walking through a minefield. I never quite know when she'll explode" [6:42].

After talking about her Uncle and Obasan's silence without explaining obviously the real reason behind their strange position, Naomi introduces a different character who is able to break this silence. Emily is an active woman, contrary to Obasan who makes the reader listen to meaning and not to the words. Naomi brings together the two women in the following short but meaningful comparison: "How different my two aunts are. One lives in sound, the other in stone. Obasan's language remains deeply under-ground but Aunt Emily, BA, MA, is a word warrior. She's a crusader, a little old gray-haired Mighty Mouse, a Bachelor of Advanced Activists and General Practitioner of Just Causes" [6:39]. Obasan seems to be a kind of ordinary, obedient and voiceless woman while aunt Emily is an activist, a well educated woman. Naomi can still remember her aunt's participation in a conference called "The Asian Experience in North America" [6:39], and how she asked her to read a pamphlet entitled "*Racial Discrimination by Orders-in-Council*":

I held the pages down on the steering wheel and scanned the sheets as the edges flittered in the gusts. There it was in black and white, our short harsh history. Beside each date were the ugly facts of the treatment given to Japanese Canadians. "Seizure and government sale of fishing boats. Suspension of fishing licenses. Relocation camps. Liquidation of property. Letter to General MacArthur. Bill 15. Deportation. Relocation of nationality." [6:40]

Emily is a strong woman who is doing her best to struggle against injustice and racial discrimination. She boldly unveils the scandals of official Canadian racism that makes up their harsh history. Naomi previously admits that "the RCMP officer" took away her father's yacht [6:25], and now Emily confirms this bitter fact

that happened to nearly all the Japanese-Canadians. The infamy of the Canadian treatment of this racial minority did not stop at that level, but there were other traumatic procedures like the suspension of fishing licenses, the relocation camps and the liquidation of property.

Emily is the model of transgressive, intelligent, motivated and independent Japanese Canadian. Naomi asserts that, "Injustice enrages Aunt Emily. Any injustice, whether she's dealing with the Japanese-Canadian issue or women's rights or poverty [...], rushing from trouble spot to trouble spot with her medication pouring into wounds seen and not seen. For her, the injustice done to us in the past was still a live issue" [6:41]. It might be true that she is interested in issues like women's rights and poverty but her main objective is to fight against the racial discrimination and the injustice done to them in the past and even now. Naomi indicates that she once found a letter in the package of her aunt. She read it as follows:

A form letter sent to all of us back in the forties to inform us to hand over the titles to our properties but advising us that whether we did or not, our houses would be taken from us. [...] Aunt Emily interrupted, "The power of government, Nomi. Power. See how palpable it is? They took away the land, the stores, the businesses, the boats, the houses—everything. Broke up our families, told us who we could see, where we could live, what we could do, what time we could leave our houses, censored our letters, exiled us for no crime. They took our livelihood." [...]

Aunt Emily, seeing me reading the B. Good letter, started talking of Grandpa Kato's Cadillac. She said "it was sold by the government for \$33 [...], and the amount Grandpa finally received was \$3,00 and a few pennies [...]. What a bunch of sheep we were. Polite. Meek. All the way up the slaughterhouse ramp. Why in a time of war with Germany and Japan would our government seize the property and homes of Canadian-born Canadians but not the homes of German-born Germans?" she asked angrily. "Racism," she answered herself. "The Nazis are everywhere." [6:44-45]

Emily interrupts Naomi's reading of her letters to add further explanation. By scrutinizing this quotation, one can notice the anaphora used at the level of the repetition of "us", "all of us", "asking us", "advising us", "taken from us", "told us", "exiled us". Added to that, the repetition of "we" and "our". There is a hidden message behind this anaphora. It can be an attempt to emphasize the real persecution that was exercised against them as a different "us". This "us" reveals the togetherness of this minority in facing bad treatment from the mainstream, and their otherness as seen by the majority. Emily goes beyond all this to evoke the government's oppressive power used against them and the unfair laws imposed on them. Emily often uses the pronoun "we" without specifying Japanese so as to be understood as Canadians belonging to Canada and not a dislocated Japanese minority. According to Emily, they are Japanese who left their home country in order to find better life conditions in Canada and not to be marginalized and persecuted. She challenges the mainstream limitations of their rights as a minority.

One could infer from Emily's intervention, whether with her written documents or her spoken comments, that she tries to teach her niece, who is a Canadian teacher, but knows little about the history of her Japanese origin. Although she disapproves of their past weakness as a "bunch of sheep" [6:45], she has never lost hope. She endeavors to enlighten Naomi and to advise her to be careful of the "power of government" that is able to "exile" them for no crime [6:46]. She continues her journey of enlightenment and asks Naomi to read a

manuscript sixty pages long entitled, *THE STORY OF THE NISEI IN CANADA: A STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY*—by Emily Kato” [6:46]. The whole title of the manuscript is annotated in capital letters to highlight the importance of every single letter. It is a manuscript exposing the Japanese-Canadians’ struggle for freedom. It was indicated previously that there are three generations of Japanese in Canada; the Issei or first generation, the Nisei or second generation and the Sansei or third generation. Thus, Emily recounts the struggle of the second generation, to which she belongs, to put an end to “the injustices of today” [6:49]. Overwhelmed by the harsh historical facts that she discovered, Naomi solicited her aunt in the following way:

Out loud I said, “Why not leave the dead to bury the dead?”

“Dead?” she asked, “I’m not dead. You’re not dead. Who’s dead?”

“But you can’t fight the whole country,” I said.

“We are the country,” she answered. [...]

“Life is so short,” I said, sighing, “the past so long. Shouldn’t we turn the page and move on?”

“The past is the future,” Aunt Emily shot back. [6:50-51]

During this polemical discussion Naomi was trying to convince her aunt to forget about the past and to move on. However, Emily defends fiercely her goals with her strong faith that the “past is the future”. She encourages her niece to carry on the fight and “to be a credit to the family, to strive onward to the goal” [6:38]. Naomi acknowledges the uniqueness of her hopeful Aunt unlike the rest of her community’s hopeless members who seek their safety even if the price is their invisibility. Emily advises her niece in the following simple but earnest manner, “ ‘You have to remember,’ Aunt Emily said. ‘You are your history. If you cut any of it off you’re an amputee. Don’t deny the past. Remember everything. If you’re better, be better. Cry it out! Scream! Denial is gangrene’ ” [6:60]. This female activist intends to convince Naomi to be at ease with who she is. She makes great efforts to motivate her in encouraging her to be her history as a member of a Japanese-Canadian minority with a special painful and traumatic past that she must not deny. She perceives the people who deny their history as amputees. Through such a comparison, she uplifts the value of one’s own history as a necessary part of the body. She does not stop at that level as long as she notices that Naomi is unstable and unable to be at ease wherever she is. The critic Fu-Jen Chen, however, draws our attention with his psychoanalysis of this word-warrior’s character by observing that Emily’s:

obsession with an exhaustive narrative traps her into the psychic structure of obsession. The obsessed person is the “thinking subject” who “deliberately ignores the unconscious” and strives for “the one truth” [...]. Looking for an absolute value and unequivocal fact, Emily insists on remembering the past and buries herself in her compulsive talks about the internment. Because she refuses to recognize deficiency and insists upon the completeness of the societal Other, Emily is ultimately identified as both a victim and an object of the dominance of the Other. Unable to overcome the trauma and gain access to the truth of her desire, she keeps circling around it. [15:120-121]

While Obasan is entrapped within the exile of silence, Emily lives within her internal exile of fighting for her rights, and Naomi struggles to identify the identity of her uncertain exile.

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Naoe could be regarded as a “word warrior” striving to convey her voice as a human being neglected for her old age and for being a minority within another minority; a woman and belonging to an ethno-racial community. She feels that she has a great responsibility to say all that she has learnt during her whole life in the shape of “words”. She says, “words, words, words, WORDS. Ahh, words grow heavier every day, upon my bony back. The words of an old woman can change little in this world and nothing of the past so why this torrent of words” [9:21]. The age of eighty-five makes Naoe’s thinking mature. She is a woman who has faith in her capability to change even a “little in this world” just through the process of “WORDS,” of enunciation, and this is very important in the narrative structure of the novel as well. The voice of this word-warrior makes her appear to dominate her “home”, as she assumes in the following way: “No one moves in this house without meeting my eyes. Hearing my voice. Take no notice” [9:4]. She is aware, on the contrary, that these words cannot touch the past to change it. As was observed by critics like Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, “Naoe’s words point to the conflicting issues of silence and alienation, of self and community that recur in the writing of Japanese Canadian women of the 1990s, despite contrasting with the portrayal of Japanese women of her generation that Joy Kogawa painted in *Obasan*” [1:99]:

As Beaugard has remarked, “The older women form a compelling pair, with Goto’s increasingly mobile and incessantly talking Naoe functioning as an assertive and noisy response to Kogawa’s silent and house-bound Aya Obasan” (“Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*” 52). For Beaugard, Goto is “writing back” to Kogawa, producing a remarkably different picture of a Japanese Canadian family in rural Alberta while engaging in similar topics and experiences. Libin, too, perceives Naoe as writing back to another canonical Canadian work, Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel* (1964): “*Chorus of Mushrooms* draws on *The Stone Angel* as a literary antecedent, as Naoe, like Hagar before her, abandons her house and her family. But unlike Hagar, who is limited in physical capacity and whose forays into the past are viewed as delusional, Naoe is equipped for her journey and is lucid and uncanny throughout” (“Some of My Best Friends” 107). Naoe is an unusual character for a woman of her generation. Rather than being crippled by the memories of a traumatic past, she is so empowered that she comes to symbolize a wealth of future possibilities. Thus, when asked about the whereabouts of her grandmother, Muriel^a gives whimsical explanations, from a hypothetical return to Japan to her being a succubus in the shape of a woman. Naoe embodies the power of the tale and the storyteller to create new life and endow the current one with new meanings. [1:99]

Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López restate Beaugard’s interesting comparison between the noisy Naoe and the silent Obasan. According to Beaugard, Goto is writing back to Kogawa, while we think that Goto’s work completes Kogawa’s. In the image of the old, incessantly-talking Naoe we see a reflection of the old Emily who is another Japanese-Canadian incessantly talking and moving in order to defend her community not only by “words”. Beaugard’s argument alludes to the passiveness of Obasan. We have, however, shown in the subpart dealing with the theme of silence, that Obasan’s silence makes the reader listen to meaning more than words; there is revolt in her uncanny silence. What we observe is that Naoe’s words and Obasan’s silence complete each other and represent the melancholic past of the Japanese-Canadian community.

Naoe declares that her silenced past is what makes her an old woman who talks incessantly. She knows that she

was silenced before. Now she resists in order to break this cage of silence and to unveil everything through storytelling:

There are ages of silence and ages of roaring. When I was young and beautiful [...]. Now my face is crumpled with care and seams adorn my cheeks. My mouth bursts wide and the words rush out, a torrent of noise and scatters. An old woman on a wooden chair might not be much to look at, but step inside her circle of sound and fall into a tornado. I was married, once, to a man, then we divorced. Most unheard of, fifty years ago, in Japan. And Makoto was the one to cry when the final papers were signed. [...] I am an old woman, and I am also stubborn, but that doesn't mean I'm stupid and bitter. It's only that I spent so much time saying nothing in my youth, I have to wake up for things unsaid in this house of dust and moth. [9:24-26]

This comparison between the young Naoe and the old one is precise and loaded with meaning. When she was a silent woman, she was regarded as “beautiful” and this beauty disappeared once she entered into her “ages of roaring”. She theorizes the idea that female beauty is valued according to the amount of words rushing out of her mouth. She reminds us again of a similar statement made by Hamlet about “beauty”, as is quoted in the following dialogue between Hamlet and Ophelia, daughter of Polonius (Lord Chamberlain):

OPH. Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?

HAM. Ay, truly, for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

OPH. Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

HAM. You should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not. [12:46]

If Peter Smith reads the expression “I did love you once” as “a lament on the hollowness of human relationships” [16:23], then we can say the same about Naoe’s lament on the “hollowness” of beauty that transforms “honesty from what it is to a bawd”, and attracts male appreciation. Naoe’s terms, and quasi-Shakespearean syntax, are designed to mock patriarchal bias towards female external beauty and internal silence. She reminds us of Satya in *What the Body Remembers*. During her attempt to study the character of Roop, she notices that her necklace is given to Roop as a compensation for her “tongue-tied state” [14:4]. Satya, thus, confirms Naoe’s observation that patriarchy appreciates female external beauty and internal silence. According to the quotation above, Naoe expresses also her deep regret and remorse over the years of her silence and obedience even though she was not that obedient as a woman since she was separated from her husband. As “an old woman” and as a “stubborn” person, she desires to revolt and “to wake up”, to express the unsaid issues in women’s lives.

As an active Japanese storyteller, Naoe has talked about the people that influenced her life in one way or another and she postponed the introduction of the character of her husband until the end. The appearance of the character of Naoe’s husband means that she will argue about her experience of marriage:

Dai Makoto. His name was Makoto Dai [...]. I had to put Kiyokawa aside [...] Dai Naoe. The words written on the marriage document made it so. Lucky for me I changed my name before I came to English. The spelling different, but the weight of the word in sound would have been burden enough to plague me. Naoe die. An easy thing to change a name. All it takes is ink and a piece of paper. A whole dimension on a family tree erased when one name is dropped and another assumed. All those mothers and daughters and mothers and daughters swallowed into the names of men [...]. Who cares what your father's father did and who was given what honour. Honour dies with the person who earned it. [9:38]

After this quote, it would be very useful to restate the whole name of the grandmother, Naoe Kiyokawa. This woman from the Kiyokawa family had been married once upon a time to a man called, Makoto Dai, consequently her name became Naoe Dai or "Naoe die" instead of Naoe Kiyokawa. She considers marriage as an affair that kills the woman's identity starting from the moment she becomes dependent on her husband. In other terms, marriage for this woman is death and the end of woman's individual identity. She advocates the fact that daughters carry their fathers' names for a short period until they are swallowed up by their husbands' names later on. It is not simply a matter of erasing the female identity but it is a dilemma of dependence on the male partner, on the patriarchal system and on the institution of marriage. Naoe's attitude registers her in the list of real feminists. This woman's feminism urged her to put an end to her marriage and she divorced her husband. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Naoe's feminist character ends her marriage, while in *What the Body Remembers*, Satya's feminist character puts an end to her life.

Roop has been depicted, despite her internal disobedience, as an obedient angel in her husband's house, contrary to Satya who incarnates a double rebel against both the colonizing and the patriarchal systems. She is the kind of woman whose husband does his best to satisfy her but in vain. As is argued by Cuder-Domínguez, Martín Lucas and Villegas-López, the older Satya dares "to confront Sardarji's masculine authority while the younger Roop is submissive and obedient" [1:21]. Satya remembers how she quarrelled with her husband about marrying another woman and he says to her: "I know you very well too—you have a tongue sharper than kakeyi's. I tell you, I'm so tired of your shouting" [14:13]. Sardarji's confession, that Satya shouts and has a sharp tongue, identifies Satya as a feminist Indian woman. She is bold enough to express her discontent and to criticize her husband, as is shown in the following quotation:

She doesn't enjoy helping Sardarji send the apricots each year. He pretends not to hear her, his face going blank, his eyes looking past her when she describes his action as she sees them—"You send fruit every year to the higher-ups just to keep all of them happy [...]. Why don't you take a stand, either say you're for independence and join the protesters or say you're a puppet of the British so people can respect you or revile you, but at least know what you feel?" [14:186]

This woman accuses her husband's neutrality and his pretense of being a Sikh man dependent on the British. She encourages him to choose one way, either a patriot protester, or complicit with British "higher-ups" whom he is striving to satisfy. She seems to be more patriotic than her husband. The sarcastic manner of Satya in addressing her husband, urges us to ask the question, why does Sardarji keep this wife who does not stop

releasing words like daggers? The answer is that she is “the wife of his early years of struggle and of building, and Roop the wife for modern times, the one for English dinner parties with Sardarji’s ‘superiors’ and for ornament” [14:235].

The blameless Roop wants to be treated by Satya as a younger sister but the latter will not do so. The next quotation depicts how Roop has gently requested Satya to teach her to play the piano and the latter’s reply demonstrates that she despises Roop because of her silence and obedience:

“Can you teach me also?”

Satya inclines her gaze to Roop’s level. “Teach you! Huh! What can you learn? Music like this is beyond women like you.”

After a moment, she says in an amending way, “What can I teach any one? All of us need our own ideas, not foreign ideas, this is what I tell Sardarji. But he—his mind is their colony also.” She laughs bitterly. “I told him, ‘I too am a colony—your colony’.” Her hand grazes Roop’s cheek. “Now you. So [...] we sit here together. Birds in the same cage.” [14:239-240]

From Satya’s messages, that are directed to Roop, one can witness a phenomenon within which a minority is oppressing the same minority. Then, the wisdom of this woman guides her to embellish her words and to evoke the issue of being Sardarji’s colony, while his mind is the colony of the European superiors. She stresses people’s need for their “own ideas, not foreign ideas.” This alludes to the feminist and patriotic character of this Indian who is different from the majority of Indian women. She is unlike Roop who keeps thinking about her fate, bringing up children and satisfying Sardarji. Satya always says boldly the undesired “truth” as her name indicates. She reminds Roop that both of them are engaged in the same cage of marriage and submission to the male authority that in its turn is submissive to colonial supremacy. Therefore, these women live in the cage of a double colonization.

Even after death, Satya does not leave the memory of Roop, and most importantly the latter decides to be “Satya’s vessel, bearing Satya’s anger, pride and ambition forward from this minute. She will contain her, woman with woman, hold her within” (*WBR*, 326). Satya’s death can be considered as the beginning of the awakening of the silent Roop. In a monologue, Roop asks her newly awakened self the following: “But why does Satya still live in my mind? She comes in the fragrance of night queen flowers though it is I who should feel as if I spent a hundred Brahma—years in silence. Now Satya is gone, why can I not speak?” [14:330]. Roop wonders about Satya’s existence in her thoughts. Little did she know that Satya is her inner truth; the truth of a silenced and marginalized Indian woman who wants to speak but cannot. Sardarji still thinks that Roop is always his obedient puppet: “He enjoys watching Roop going about her duties, knowing she will never fight him the way Satya did, on every small issue [...], but will meet him playfully, maintaining her innocent ways through the years” [14:359]. After having contained the character of the word-warrior Satya, the awakened Roop succeeds in tricking her husband by showing him playfully what he wants to see. He does not know that Roop is another new playful version of Satya. He still remembers Satya, precisely her “accusing voice seemed to echo [...]. He tried to picture her face, but what he remembered best was her voice—that infernal, niggling

voice” [14:368]. Sardarji and Roop remember Satya because she reminds her husband of his dependence on his British superiors and urges Roop to leave her exile of silence. Baldwin, thus, shows that truth does not die.

4. Conclusion

On the basis of this analysis, one can say that the adoption of silence by some female characters makes them appear as stubborn or “deaf identities”, whereas the refusal of the diasporic silence by other women characterizes them as transgressive “word warriors” thanks to their quasi-Shakespearean idioms. The common point between all these characters might be the following “interrogative dominant” as it is called by Mishra: “Where once ‘Where are you coming from?’ implied the beginning of inclusion in a community, now the same question is shadowed by another question (‘What do we do with them now?’)” [17:5]. Whether inside or outside their homelands, this question seems to become part of their internal exile, and their diasporic imaginary that is “so crucially connected to the idea of a ‘homing desire’ (Brah 1996: 180)” [17:5].

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