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Rooted-transnationalism and the Representational Function of Food in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*

Abstract: This paper uses a close reading combined with Koichi Iwabuchi's nascent concept rooted-transnationalism to illustrate the representational function of food in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994). By examining the representational function of food, we can understand how Goto chooses to arbitrate the belonging of the Canadian Nikkei characters in her novel. The three generations in the matrilineal Tonkatsu family begin the novel with varying (almost stereotyped) cultural identities, but by understanding how their identity is represented through food as the novel progresses we can see these identities worked into a nuanced dialogue with the modern diaspora condition. We learn that explanations of diaspora identity in literature using transnationalism as a framework can be enhanced by considering cultural identity in terms of its rootedness particularly interacting socio-cultural factors at varying spatial levels. Understanding the representational function of food in a rooted-transnational context shows how food problematises the belonging of Nikkei yet can also provide emancipation from the challenge of diasporic cultural identity. Through this analysis of Goto's novel we can gain a deeper appreciation of the complexity of modern Nikkei diaspora cultural identities.

Keywords: Rooted-transnationalism, food, representation, Nikkei, *Chorus of Mushrooms*

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1 Introduction

Academic interest in the relationship between food and identity has grown since the advent of cultural studies in the 1960s which offers various approaches to the topic including research by feminists, historians, cultural and literary critics (see Ashley *et al.* 2004; Watson and Caldwell 2005). The representational function of food with its fluid and multiple meanings provides minority authors with a particularly useful set of potential literary devices with which to explore diaspora subjectivity formation in their prose fiction. Food is a central theme in Canadian Nikkei author Hiromi Goto's (1994) novel *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Goto uses food to explore the cultural identities of three generations of women in the Tonkatsu family living in the prairies of modern Canada. But do previous analytical frameworks explaining the representational function of food adequately relate the complexity of the cultural identities of the characters in Goto's novel?

Previous studies on *Chorus of Mushrooms* exploring food and identity highlight gender, generations, and race as the main ingredients of (cultural) identity. Angelica Michelis (2014) looks at the function of food in women's writing including *Chorus of Mushrooms* and its impact on the narrative structure and the discourse of gender amongst the three generations of women. Mary Conde (2001) also focuses on gender and generations, linking the production of food with the production of cultural and maternal identities. Both studies show that not only are there multiple factors that contribute towards the cultural identity of the characters but that these factors affect each other. Other studies build upon postcolonial scholarship on diasporas by influential scholars such as Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha who underscore power relations with the host nation particularly in terms of race. Heather Latimer (2006: np) uses Kristeva's concept of abjection to show how "eating is a gendered and racialized

act that constantly informs how the characters see themselves emotionally and psychologically”. Lisa Harris (2008) gives examples in the novel of how the meaning of food is always socially constructed and changing in meaning, particularly in relation to race and space. Although Guy Beauregard’s (1995) article makes several observations on food relating to identity in the novel, it mostly deals with Goto’s position as an author and the politics involved in writing to and for diaspora.

With such focus on gender, generations, and race, the importance of space has been overlooked or oversimplified. Enoch Padolsky’s (2005) article ‘You are where you eat: Ethnicity, food and cross-cultural spaces’ uses Bell and Valentine’s (1997) framework in *Consuming Geographies* to analyse *Chorus of Mushrooms* (amongst other novels) at increasing spatial levels (the body, home, community, city, region, nation, and global). This is a productive way of showing not only the representational function of food in relation to cultural identity but also that spatial context matters. However, by dividing spaces into distinct categories and restricting his analysis to these categories, Padolsky does not allow for the complication of interaction between different spatial levels. For example, food and cultural identity at the spatial level of the body can be extended to include the body at other spatial levels too such as the body in the home, local community, city, and nation.

This paper builds on Padolsky’s and the other previously mentioned studies by demonstrating the representational function of food in constructing cultural identities in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Whilst it is important to understand how a ‘Japanese’ food can become an ‘ethnic food’ or a hybridised food in Canada, it risks oversimplification using the concept of transnationalism alone which ironically in attempting to de-emphasise the nation-state for

diasporas tends to draw attention to host and homeland. This can correspondingly distort our understanding of the cultural identities of the characters in *Chorus of Mushrooms*.

I use a close reading combined with Koichi Iwabuchi's nascent concept of rooted-transnationalism to understand the representational function of food in Goto's novel across various spatial contexts inflected by gender, generations, and race. I answer whether food problematises belonging for the Nikkei characters in the novel, or if it provides emancipation from the continuous challenge of diasporic cultural identity. The paper finds that novels such as this by Canadian Nikkei diaspora authors can perform an important role in questioning and rewriting dominant narratives involving Nikkei both in Canadian history and in contemporary Canadian society.

2 Rooted-transnationalism

Rooted-transnationalism is a concept recently created by Koichi Iwabuchi (2015) which develops our understanding of transnationalism to emphasise intersection with the host society. Transnationalism has been much discussed in the academy but in relation to diasporas it has usually been discussed in connection with homeland (see Hall 1990). By shifting emphasis to the interaction between diasporas with their host society we can gain a new perspective about how transnationalism works as well as improve our understanding of diaspora lives. Rooted-transnationalism focuses on discussing "when and how transnationalism matters to locally rooted mundane practices of migrants/diaspora" (Iwabuchi 2015). Therefore, we change the perspective of transnationalism from a very wide one which tends to underline globalisation processes to a more focused perspective that can shine a light on the circumstances of diasporas. In doing this, we become interested in issues from the everyday socio-cultural milieu including gender, generations, race, and social class. Food culture in relation to diaspora belonging crosses these

various spaces and socio-cultural factors, so it is a particularly useful mechanism with which to exercise Iwabuchi's concept. Since rooted-transnationalism supposes that transnationalism infuses all spatial levels within a host nation its categorisation is more flexible and expansive than that of Bell and Valentine, though with the limited space of this paper I will not be able to explore all the possible permutations.

Whilst we await Iwabuchi's detailing of his concept of rooted-transnationalism, I will provide my own elaboration of it based on my interpretation of how it differs from transnationalism, glocalization, transculturation, and cosmopolitanism in relation to diasporas. Transnationalism headlines global processes extending beyond the boundaries of nation states. As such, it tends to concentrate on economic, political, and cultural processes whereas rooted-transnationalism in its preoccupation with the rooted highlights the socio-cultural factors of gender, generations, race, and social class. Whereas transnationalism in relation to diasporas tries to move away from using terms such as host nation and homeland, rooted-transnationalism acknowledges the continuing influence of these yet shows that they matter less than socio-cultural factors. Whereas transnationalism is a concept which describes a movement or set of linkages that can occur across borders, rooted-transnationalism describes what happens to these at the rooted spatial levels of the everyday lives of diasporic subjects.

Rooted-transnationalism might therefore appear like the concept of 'glocalization' a portmanteau of the words 'globalisation' and 'localisation'. However, glocalization is not usually used in relation to people (i.e. diasporas) but rather to describe the adaptation of international products to the local markets in which they are sold, for example, the McDonald's Teriyaki Burger in Japan. Although in this paper I use the medium of food, I am less concerned with food as a globally marketed and distributed product and related economic or political considerations.

Rather, by concentrating on the representational function of food, I am interested in how food is appropriated by Goto with the emphasis on its spatial context and related socio-cultural factors where it produced and consumed. Rooted-transnationalism, by its very insistence in retaining the word transnationalism, differentiates itself from elaborations of glocalization that insist that only the glocal now exists (see Drori *et al.* 2013; Ritzer 2003). In this sense, rooted-transnationalism is more akin to Alexander's (2006) metaphor of globalisation being refracted by the local though with less emphasis on the political aspects of this and more attention on postcolonial readings of power affecting minorities. Rooted-transnationalism also clearly differs from cosmopolitanism since that is more of an ideology stressing shared community underpinned by moral and ethical ideals.

Postcolonial readings of diaspora identities in minority literature have focussed on the power relations between the minority and the majority. Several different approaches have developed and have been used with Canadian Nikkei literature. Fernando Ortiz's (1995) idea of transculturation considers the merging and converging of cultures (ethnoconvergence) and is usually used as a contrast to acculturation. However, as I argue, food in Goto's novel does not represent a merging or converging of cultures nor are there four predictable phases of transculturation; rather there is something more interwoven that can best be unpicked using rooted-transnationalism. Ortiz's idea was later superseded by writing on hybridity (most notably by the previously mentioned postcolonial scholars), but the accentuation there has tended to be in spatial terms on relationship with the homeland and in social factors on race; whereas I argue in Goto's novel we need to consider the host country in its various social spaces and socio-cultural factors.

3 The Three Generations

The story of *Chorus of Mushrooms*, to the extent that there is one, is of how three generations of women negotiate their identity and belonging in relation to Canadian society (including other Nikkei and minorities) as well as each other. Goto initially characterises each of these women to represent distinct approaches to being of Japanese descent in Canada. Grandmother Naoe only speaks Japanese and only eats Japanese foods. Her daughter Keiko only speaks English and only eats Western foods. Keiko's daughter Murasaki oscillates between comfort and discomfort in both extremes. Though the novel starts out with these characterisations they are worked through with each character—often using food—leaving them each in a different position by the dénouement. Changes in the narrative of food match changes in the subjectivities of these main characters. Japanese food grows in importance from something either avoided or enjoyed surreptitiously at the beginning of the novel through to something (re-)discovered and celebrated at the end of the novel. Food is important at various junctures that form the key themes in the novel, such as the relationship between Nikkei generations, the contrast between the urban and rural/prairies, the use of language, and the sense of belonging as an immigrant in 1990s multicultural Canada.

3.1 Naoe

For Grandmother Naoe, the link between Japanese food and cultural identity is obvious and of utmost importance: “Eating’s a part of being after all” (138). We do not know why she hides her consumption of Japanese foods from the rest of her family, arranging for food packets from her brother in Japan to be sent to a post office box then consuming the wares alone or only sharing them with her granddaughter Murasaki. Here the movement of food across national borders is not for Naoe a celebration of globalisation or multiculturalism. Rather, food as a marker of difference in the spaces of an unwelcoming home and host nation force her behaviour.

Perhaps she hides the foods out of respect to her daughter Keiko. Yet, the “old woman’s eager mouth” (16) contains a “tongue [that] quivers for food of substance” (141). Food within the private family space delineates the battleground over their different attitudes to belonging. Goto shows through these initial disagreements over food that cultural identity can be and often is contested within minority communities.

Naoe chooses not to belong to any social spaces in Canada such as community, regional, or national organisations (including those purposefully set up for elder generations of Japanese descent such as her). She exists entirely within the private space of the Tonkatsu family household. Her involvement with Canada the nation is minimal except that through her family. Even this she resists, such as her refusal to eat Keiko’s Western foods or to speak English. Yet, apparently limiting herself to her chair is a strategic way for Naoe to maintain control over her identity. It is as though Naoe has been transplanted straight from a maternal head of household role in Japan and that little has changed by her being in Canada. The Japanese food keeps arriving and she keeps chatting away in Japanese (sometimes just to herself). She positions her chair so that she can see and hear all that goes on in the family. Her family must always pass by her and are therefore influenced—particularly Murasaki—by Naoe’s strong sense of belonging to Japan.

Naoe’s identity becomes problematised when she runs away from home causing the meaning of food to shift in relation to the change in space. When she runs away it is partly “to get away from the smell of boiled beef” (99). This is ironic, since she is leaving the sanctuary where she can indulge her consumption of Japanese foods and is instead moving into the multicultural space where Western food dominates. Rather than seek out Japanese foods, Naoe seeks company. She finds on the road that her enjoyment of food can be taken to new levels

when she shares it, which makes her inability to do that with her family in her own home sad: “The chew champ craw of dried salted squid and good company to share it with. I’m content” (113).

The foods Naoe consumes after leaving home include Western foods and Asian foods. Naoe’s consumption of these foods is linked to her transforming sense of belonging. We can understand the importance of food to Naoe’s sense of belonging particularly as she moves from private to public space since it suggests she is not quite as dependent on ‘Japan’ as we may have initially thought. As well as her interaction with the stereotyped West in the form of rodeo, Naoe finds enjoyment in consuming Chinese food in Chinatown. This can be read as her negotiation of her belonging to now include interaction with white Canadians and other minorities.

3.2 Keiko

Naoe is scathing of her daughter Keiko who has turned her back on her Japanese roots: “My daughter who has forsaken identity. Forsaken! So biblical, but it suits her, my little convert. Converted from rice and daikon to wieners and beans” (13). When Keiko is offered some squid by Naoe “her lips turn white and she slams the kitchen door behind her” (14). Keiko “didn’t buy *hakusai* or *shoga* or *shiitake* or *daikon* or *satoimo* or *moyashi* or *nira*. There was a vegetable blind spot in her chosen menu and Obachan must have felt it sorely” (91). For Naoe, food is so important to being that she not only sees Keiko as lacking her full cultural identity but that she possesses a “ketchup brain” (13). Naoe bemoans “Endless evenings of tedious roast chicken and honey smoked ham and overdone rump roast. My daughter, you were raised on fish cakes and pickled plums. This Western food has changed you...” (13).

In Naoe’s mind, Keiko breaks the chain linking their lives in Canada back to Japan by not accepting her Japanese food. Keiko’s refusal of Japanese food not only breaks links with her

Japanese ancestry but also with the mother-daughter bond she could share with Naoe. Instead, Naoe shares her food, identity, and strongest bond with her granddaughter, Murasaki. Again, food in this context is not a celebratory expression of minority cultural identity in a multicultural society. Rather, the local differences in how food is consumed (its rootedness) as it comes from Japan to Canada causes division within the family. Goto reinforces her point that food does not carry the same meaning for all members of a diaspora, indeed, depending on the rooted context meaning can even be diametrically opposed for different people in the same family such as it is here.

The reason why Keiko has such a different attitude to belonging than her mother is because unlike her mother her day-to-day life is dominated by local public spaces and her (perceived) relationships within them. Her desire to fit in and belong with the mostly white local community trumps any desire to maintain cultural links with Japan. Keiko does not think that it is possible to have both or a hybridised identity. For Keiko, identity and belonging are determined by nation: “If you live in Canada, you should live like a Canadian” (189). Japanese foods sully this perceived relationship. Keiko does not even allow for the possibility of hybridised (Japanese) foods to be consumed by herself or her family. One day her daughter Murasaki overeats Mandarin oranges and her skin turns yellow (92). Keiko is shocked: “Yellow...Yellow, she’s turningyellow she’s turningyellow she’s” (92). Keiko desperately scrubs her daughter trying to remove this trace of Japaneseness presumably back to ‘normality’ of whiteness. As Latimer (2006: np) points out, Keiko’s reaction demonstrates the fragility of her ‘Canadian’ identity and her realisation of this fragility.

Keiko’s comeuppance for her cultural aphasia is to become sick and sink into depression when one day Naoe suddenly absconds. Naoe does not see herself as the cause of Keiko’s illness

but rather blames Keiko's "malnourished culture" (13). When speaking to Murasaki about Keiko, Naoe observes: "Of course she won't be getting better on food such as that!" (131). Keiko manages to become better again only when Japanese food nourishes her. She "attain(s) more dimensions than the cut-out character she had tried to force herself into becoming" (Gunew 2000: 231) once her repressed Japanese heritage with its embodied form of memory blossoms:

There were no hugs or kisses or mea culpas. There wasn't a sudden wellspring of words, as if everything we never said burst forth and we forgave each other for all our shortcomings. We sat and ate. No one saying a word, just the smack of lips and tongues. (153)

Thus, in Keiko's case, food can be both a problem and a solution in terms of identity and belonging. What matters is the rooted context. The Mandarin oranges Murasaki consumes at her school in Alberta would suggest a different localised nuancing of cultural identity compared to if those same oranges were consumed in Toronto by an Anglo-Canadian. In other words, the rooted spatial and socio-cultural context of transnationalism are of utmost important when studying diasporas.

When Keiko cooks for herself, her father and her mother, Conde (2001: 137) observes she is literally cooking the family's name 'Tonkatsu'. Tonkatsu's hybrid meanings "locate the family's identity outside culturally 'pure' markers" (Beauregard 1996: 59). Usually elder generations hand down family recipes to younger generations, more specifically it is often from mother to daughter. However, here Keiko can be seen to "repair this omission by taking on the maternal (and thus ancestral) role" (Conde 2001: 137). Rejuvenated through food, the bond between the different generations of the family becomes much stronger:

Mom got better and I went back to school. She still cooked her lasagne and roast chicken, her blocks of beef, but sometimes on a holiday weekend, she would ask me to whip up something from "my little cook book" as she called it. And I knew. (191)

Tonkatsu in Japan is considered as a food with a foreign (mainly European) origin. Viewing it through the lens of rooted-transnationalism in Alberta, however, tonkatsu is considered a Japanese food which has been adapted for the Canadian palate. Both instances show its hybridity, hence its ready application as a way of representing cultural identity. The hybridisation requires time and adaptation to the local ingredients. Tonkatsu will therefore vary in taste across the Nikkei world depending on local circumstances.

“What about our name? Isn’t our name Japanese?” Dad actually laughed, and it was a dirt brown sound. “It’s funny, really. That word. It was the only word I could utter when the change took place. Your Mom suggested we take a Canadian name, if we couldn’t remember our real one. But I was firm about that. I said if we couldn’t remember our own name, the least we could do was keep the one word I could remember. Tonkatsu! Of all things!” Dad started laughing so hard that tears were rolling down his cheeks. “Does our name really mean ‘breaded deep fried pork cutlets?’” “The translation isn’t literal as that, but that’s what it signifies. The thing is, tonkatsu isn’t really a purely Japanese word. Ton, meaning pork, is Japanese, but katsu is adopted from ‘cutlet,’ and I don’t know the origins of that word” (208.209).

3.3 Murasaki

Just as with her mother and grandmother, Murasaki's journey through food takes its own distinct path. On a day-to-day basis, she eats from her mother's Western food menu. She also regularly shares Japanese treats with her grandmother. Some of these Japanese foods she consumes vicariously through her grandmother, a premonition of their later oneness: "The grandmother smacked her lips, Sake! and the girl looked up, saw the old woman's eager mouth, and smiled because she could taste how sweet the sake was from her grandmother's face" (13). However, when Murasaki is young her Japanese ethnicity embarrasses her since she associates it with the smell of mushrooms:

I must be a mushroom

Everyone keeps me in the dark

And feeds me horseshit (103)

Mushrooms define the Tonkatsu family, whether they like it or not: "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 grew" (62). By writing about a mushroom farm, Goto is incorporating her work into the long line of settler narratives. Most pertinently, this includes *Little House on the Prairie* (Wilder 1974) with which *Chorus of Mushrooms* has a loose intertextual relationship. Many of the first waves of Japanese immigrants to land in Canada worked as farmers or as fishermen (see Nakayama 1984), as did later post-war waves of new immigrants from Japan. These professions have typically been associated with struggle over belonging, although in different contexts for the different eras.

Setting her book on a mushroom farm provides a perfect backdrop for Goto to problematise cultural identity and its related issues of assimilation, racism, and multiculturalism.

The wet conditions necessary for the growing of mushrooms contrast with the dryness of the local Albertan landscape and provide a metaphor to Murasaki on her difference to white Canadians. Mushrooms from Japan require special conditions to grow in Canada. Likewise, immigrants from Japan to Canada will only thrive under certain conditions. These conditions vary per locale—in this case, Alberta. Some may be seen as invasive and unadaptable to the local environment. Others may successfully adapt to the local environment with ‘Japanese’ characteristics surviving the transnational journey. Rooted-transnationalism emphasises that the rooted context is critical to a full understanding of transnational action. Thus, the mushrooms (i.e. identity) will vary across their journey even within different Canadian locales. A shiitake mushroom grown in Alberta is not the same as the original mushroom from Japan. Nor is it the same as a mushroom in British Columbia, or Manitoba.

Murasaki becomes aware of her difference when she is subjected to ethnic stereotyping in the ‘ethnicChinesericenoodle Tofupattiesexotic vegetable section’ (90) of a supermarket she visits. The lack of spaces—or even hyphenation—shows how Asian Canadians are essentialised and stereotyped in the mind-set of the Anglophone Canadian majority (Miki 2001: 59.60). Here we have a critical metaphor on Canadian multiculturalism. The ethnic (food store) occupies a contained and separate space within the nation (Canada). Within the ethnic store are subdivided ethnic groups. Yet, Goto recognises that the (white) majority Canadian is unlikely to be able to distinguish between these. The ethnic (or Asian) becomes a lumped term. The richness and variety of foods from across the world are reduced in the Canadian context to the ‘exotic’ or other.

The embarrassment of Murasaki's 'Japanese' link in *Chorus of Mushrooms* retreats when her adult self speaks. Indeed, it is Western foodstuff that becomes described as “sticky and cloyingly sweet” (178). The journey of Murasaki through food towards understanding her belonging is continuous and is not an easy one. The passage where it takes Murasaki three attempts to cook a successful tonkatsu encapsulates this. This could represent the various attempts she has from a child to an adult until she is finally able to come to terms with an identity that she is comfortable with. When she reaches the point of knowing her food (and hence at least for a moment her belonging) it is satisfying: “There’s nothing nicer than a tonkatsu dinner on a cold winter evening. It fills you up and everyone eats them lickety-split. Everyone loves tonkatsu” (137).

When Murasaki takes a long drive to visit an Asian grocery produce store, her trip has multiple possible interpretations. It could be a nostalgic way of fixing the broken link with her "authentic identity from Japan" (Beauregard 1996: 59) denied to her by her mother. Or, it could be a way of negotiating what being a Canadian of Japanese descent means to her, the "possibility of finding nourishment and sustenance in a hybrid cultural/culinary identity" (Beauregard 1996: 59). This would mean turning to a subjectivity rooted in yet also beyond just nation-states. Rey Chow argues in *Writing Diaspora* that "'being Chinese can no longer be defined to national boundaries alone" (Chow 1993: 92) and that diasporic intellectuals need to write narratives without relating cultural identity solely to nation-states. Food here offers a versatile method to think through the meaning of belonging in an international world yet one where the rooted remains important.

Murasaki states her philosophy on food—which likely serves as proxy for Goto's philosophy too—explicitly towards the end of the novel:

What can be more basic than food itself? Food to begin to grow. Without it, you'd starve to death, even academics. But don't stop there, my friend, don't stop there, because food is the point of departure. A place where growth begins.

(201)

The previous quotation firmly places food at the centre of Goto's construction of Canadian Nikkei cultural identity. As *Chorus of Mushrooms* progresses the act of eating becomes more social and significant moving steadily through ever increasing spaces from the home outward. The rehabilitated Keiko happily eating Japanese food with her husband and her daughter almost provides a happy ending. Likewise, Naoe's enjoyment of food becomes increasingly pronounced. However, Goto takes food far beyond its material meaning, its enjoyment, and even cultural identity. Goto links Japanese food with family, community, heritage, the coming together of different generations, and with the telling of stories.

4 The Race in Space

The previous section concentrated on how the representative function of food works in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. In this section, I would like to focus more on why Goto chooses to represent the cultural identities of the characters in the way that she does. For this we need to understand the history of Nikkei in Canada and of literature by other Canadian Nikkei authors and minorities. Since their first arrival in 1877 until present, migrants from Japan to Canada have struggled with their cultural identity. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988) on the one hand encourages ethnic identification as 'Japanese-Canadians'. However, historical events such as the Anti-Asian Race Riot (1907) and forced imprisonment during the Second World War were characterised by prejudice and racism. This has encouraged Canadian Nikkei to become Canada's most integrated minority with a 95 per cent intermarriage rate. Canadian Nikkei today

see themselves foremost as Canadians yet they also belong to a global Nikkei diaspora and are subject to many other influences from abroad—a rooted-transnationalism. This rooted-transnationalism grows more complex each year with continued flows from Japan and elsewhere of cultures, soft power, migrants, languages, communications, and of course foods.

Representation of minorities is not something altogether new but it is something that has gathered pace and recognition in the last couple of decades in Canada. Canada has recently produced several diaspora authors such as Michael Ondaatje and Yann Martel. They come with an acclaimed international profile to rival heavyweights such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, and Hanif Kureishi. These diaspora authors are concerned with how the past affects the present leading to the “unhomely condition of the modern world” (Bhabha 1994: 10) where diasporic identities are fragmented in modernity. All of them are also concerned at their most fundamental level with a literary interpretation of the question ‘Who am I?’ and seek to answer that question by unravelling the power relations around identity.

The most influential Canadian Nikkei writer is Joy Kogawa (1981), writer of *Obasan* a semi-autobiographical novel based on her incarceration during the Second World War. *Obasan* is of critical importance since it finally gave a voice to the Canadian Nikkei community which had previously been unheard amongst the dominant narrative showing events from Canada’s perspective. For the first time, Canadian Nikkei could influence their own representation amongst wider Canadian society. Representation of Canadian Nikkei then became a contested issue even amongst themselves, particularly in the run-up to Redress awarded by the Canadian government in 1988 as compensation for its wrongdoing to Canadian Nikkei during the Second World War. From being a mostly hidden and self-effacing group, Canadian Nikkei suddenly

needed to think about their identity, who they were, and how they wanted to be seen by others including Nikkei, other minorities, their host country, and homeland.

Chorus of Mushrooms has an important intertextual relationship with *Obasan*. I will focus here on how it picks up on issues related to race and ethnicity in relation to developments after Canada's official adoption of multiculturalism as policy in 1988. Whereas Kogawa was dealing with race in terms of overturning blatant racist stereotypes such as the labelling of Canadian Nikkei as 'yellow peril', Goto's novel deals with race in post-Redress multicultural Canada. The dominant narrative during this period is that through Redress the moral Canadian government has righted its past wrongs and that minorities now all live in a happy multicultural society which provides a template for the rest of the world to follow. Goto questions this dominant narrative, showing that multiculturalism has not eradicated racism. The racism in *Chorus of Mushrooms* is often subtle, seemingly unintentional, or based on ignorance; such as the curious white woman at the grocery store (see later), or Murasaki's junior high school boyfriend who asks her for kinky Oriental sex.

The racism in *Obasan* is more direct, intimidating, and physical—matching the racism Canadian Nikkei had faced up until the Second World War. One of the main characters, Stephen, faces racism through physical violence. Naomi's sexual assault whilst not necessarily racially motivated might act as a metaphor for racism against the racialised Nikkei female body. Naomi prefers *onigiri* [rice balls] whereas Stephen asks for peanut butter sandwiches (Kogawa 1981: 115). The siblings therefore make quite strong distinctions between 'Japanese' and 'Canadian' food, aligning themselves correspondingly with what they feel culturally comfortable or safe with. Stephen rejects Japanese food when it is offered to him by his family: "Not that kind of food" (Kogawa 1981: 136). Like Keiko in *Chorus of Mushrooms* who also rejects Japanese food,

Stephen's sister realises he will never be complete until he accepts food (and his full cultural identity). Stephen is like a "Humpty Dumpty – cracked and surly and unable to move" (Kogawa 1981: 136).

Goto's novel clearly alludes to *Obasan* in several ways but always with her own twists. For example, the incident where Murasaki overeats Mandarin oranges is clearly a play on the trope of the yellow peril used throughout *Obasan*. In addition to the previously mentioned metaphor of the difficulty of growing (Japanese) mushrooms in Alberta, Goto uses rice to show how a Japanese food can be unsuited to life in Canada. Several attempts to cultivate rice in Canada fail. Here the concept of rooted-transnationalism can be deployed almost literally—food cannot be merely transnational without consideration of local conditions. This provides a metaphor for migrants' journeys though it is ambiguous in the novel whether assimilation is being advocated or rejected. In *Obasan*, the problematic food is Naomi's uncle's stone bread. As Xu (2008: 28) describes: "stone bread [is a] product of persecution, poverty and powerlessness". Stone bread has been linked to the theme of silence (Fujita 1985). By making this food created by a male rather than a female, and by emphasising its characteristic of being inedible, Kogawa's character Naomi is forced to come to terms with the meaning of what stone bread signifies for Canadian Nikkei.

One of the things stone bread signifies is (lack of) cultural identity or belonging in Canada. Iwama explains: "The bread is also a symbol of the transformative nature of white- and Japanese-Canadian culture. Uncle's bread may not resemble that of his neighbours, but by his participation in the same exercise, and his use of the same ingredients, the attributes of the 'Canadian' activity and product, as well as those of Uncle's 'Japaneseness' are changing" (Iwama 1998: 221). The stone bread in *Obasan* therefore fills a similar role to tonkatsu in *Chorus of*

Mushrooms in that it shows the complexity of cultural identity through differentiation and the politics of belonging (or not belonging).

Kogawa uses food as a healing device for cultural identity in the same way as Goto does in *Chorus of Mushrooms* though again Goto makes a key adaptation. Kogawa does not use hybridised foods such as tonkatsu, rather foods such as miso soup and rice that lay strong claims to being national foods of Japan. These foods come to the forefront when suffering is utmost, such as when Obasan honours Uncle with a meal after he comes back from his Slocan internment camp (Kogawa 1981: 157). The only time hybridity is hinted at is when the young siblings pun the word Alberta with *aru bata* (Kogawa 1981: 13). Translated literally this would be "has butter". Butter is a strong signifying idiom in Japan of Western things. The term '*bata kusai*', literally "smells of butter", is used in Japan as a pejorative label for Western people and culture (Campbell et al. 1998: 126).

In Kogawa's follow-up novel *Itsuka* (Kogawa 1994), a character advises that the Japanese body requires Japanese food: "Mrs. Makino says we should eat Japanese food when we're not feeling well because our bodies are Japanese" (Kogawa 1994: 247). Marking a body as 'Japanese' and then linking it so directly to food immediately brings into sharp focus the issue of race. Kogawa's character appears to be saying that there is a strong and necessary link between the consumption of food and a racialised body. By extension she is also accepting, even encouraging, a concept of a Japanese race. Both Kogawa and Goto's novels implicitly question the scope and meaning of the term race, though Goto prefers to do so by inverting stereotypes of Asians rather than addressing them directly as Kogawa does.

Racial relations in Canadian society did not simply spring from Canada alone but are the product of its transnational history too. Critical race theory has shown how ideas of 'blackness'

and 'whiteness' have been borne from (colonial) European and North American political history. Canadian Nikkei cultural identity has been affected by media depictions of the community. Stuart Hall showcases the role of the media in the construction of race ideologies, particularly in the construction of blackness, in *Racist Ideologies and the Media* (Hall 2000). Canadian Nikkei were seen as a threat and labelled as the 'yellow peril' first of all in the early twentieth century (see Goellnicht 2008; Miki 2001). In *Itsuka*, Aunt Emily "...toiled to tell the lives of the Nisei in Canada in her effort to make familiar, to make knowable, the treacherous yellow peril that lived in the minds of the racially prejudiced" (Kogawa 1994: 49).

In more recent times, Canadian Nikkei have been viewed as a model minority (Hawkins 2009). Interestingly, Goto does not allude to this in her novel perhaps suggesting that she has an ambivalent relationship with this term. On the one hand, it is a way of elevating Canadian Nikkei in the hierarchy of immigrants in Canada. On the other hand, the label racialises them. It perpetuates difference between non-whites and others, and creates expectations that Canadian Nikkei must seek to live up to. It can also justify the exclusion of special treatment for minorities and imply that ethnic communities who are not 'model' are in some ways deficient. *Chorus of Mushrooms* critiques "the packaging and/or marketing of ethnicity for consumption" (Moyer 2012: 67). In a scene where Murasaki visits Safeway, this commoditisation of ethnicity is stark:

I was standing in the ethnicChinesericenoodleTofu- pattiesexotic vegetable section of Safeway..."What is that, exactly? I've always wondered." I looked up from my reverie and a face peered down on me. A kindly face. An interested face. "It's an eggplant." "Oh really!" Surprisewonderjoy. "How wonderful! This is what *our* eggplants look like. They are so different!"...

“What are they called in *your* language?” I looked up at the signs. “I don’t speak Chinese,” I said. “Oh. I’m sorry.” Sorry for what? I wondered...Let a woman choose her vegetables in peace. Vegetable politics.

(90.91)

Through food Goto illustrates how the Asian body is misidentified in Canada, or, not able to be distinguished. Roy Miki (2001: 61) observes in *Can Asian Adian*: “‘Vegetable politics’ is another way of pointing towards ‘race politics’, or ‘ethnic politics’, or ‘cultural politics’, all phrases that fold back into a national and colonial history in which the Asian body has been categorized” (Miki 2001: 61).

Food materially grounds the concept of race. In an interview with me Canadian Nikkei author Kyo Maclear put it: “For some I suppose, food is an East signifier to essentialize identity...it can be used lazily or meaningfully depending on the cultural context” (Maclear 2013). As I have demonstrated, Goto uses food thoughtfully to represent Canadian Nikkei particularly by challenging the dominant national narrative of successful multiculturalism as well as stereotypes of Canadian Nikkei. Goto even conflates eating with speaking: “Obachan [Naoe] always chewed [the squid] like mad, words falling out with each snap of her jaw” (18). Terry Eagleton writes in his essay *Edible Ecriture*: “Food makes up our bodies, just as words make up our mind...if body and mind are hard to distinguish it is no wonder that eating and speaking should continuously cross over in metaphorical exchange” (Eagleton in Griffiths 1998: 207).

Although I have argued that rooted-transnationalism allows a more nuanced understanding of diasporas, there is a danger that the Canadian Nikkei writers who use food to represent cultural identity “risk being seen, and (mis)interpreted, by the very symbols they are

attempting to reclaim" (Iwama 1998: 259). For example, when Kogawa uses food in *Obasan* "the repetition of food rituals may be understood to maintain racial labels of what it means to be authentically Asian. The tension of this predicament happens in all texts that involve a representation of transformative identities through the use of stereotype" (Iwama 1998: 259). Thus, it is difficult for Canadian Nikkei authors to tackle racial stereotypes without first acknowledging them and thereby somewhat reinforcing them especially whilst using food.

5 Conclusion

I have used rooted-transnationalism as an alternative concept capable of improving a key weakness of transnationalism—the tendency to overlook the importance of its impact on the rooted, particularly on people in various spaces under certain socio-cultural factors. There are some limitations to using rooted-transnationalism that became evident during my research. The concept awaits its full definition and explanation. This will be important to clearly differentiate it from terms, theories, and frameworks with which it overlaps. Although I have shown how rooted-transnationalism broadly differs from transnationalism, glocalization, transculturation, and cosmopolitanism; it is in its overlap with these concepts rather than its differences where issues occur. For example, consider the difference in analysis below between transculturation and rooted-transnationalism. Transnational food spaces involve taking daily Canadian Nikkei cultural spaces (such as the kitchen, the dining room, Japanese grocery stores, and Japanese restaurants) and considering them as spaces of transculturation. When Murasaki visits the Safeway store in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the 'tofupattiesexotic' section of the store is a space where Asian food is othered. However, when she visits the Japanese grocery store, the foods there are both familiar and strange. The other becomes normal. The Asian store becomes a site of transculturation that can reconfigure Canadian Nikkei identity. By seeing Japanese food as

normal and no longer a food to be avoided (as her mother Keiko encourages), Murasaki can validate and accept her Japanese cultural heritage. This differs subtly to the analysis I used earlier with rooted-transnationalism but there is clear overlap which needs to be clearly distinguished. Notwithstanding these limitations, rooted-transnationalism clearly shows that transnationalism has its limitations and that we should pay more attention to space and socio-cultural factors.

Rooted-transnationalism is particularly useful as a concept when used with diaspora communities who are by nature rooted-transnational. Therefore, it was a productive concept with which to rethink and add new analysis to the representational function of food in Goto's novel. The usefulness of such a dynamic and wide perspective as rooted-transnationalism ought to be unsurprising since cultural identity itself is constantly in flux and broad. Rooted-transnationalism's methodological rigour of considering multiple spaces and socio-cultural factors plus their intersections encourages imaginative analysis of related topics. By specifically exploring the representational function of food in relation to Canadian Nikkei characters with rooted-transnationalism, it makes us rethink what it means to be of Japanese descent. It teaches us that while we can attempt to move away from conceptions of identity based on nations, the local still matters though in very specific ways perhaps less related to global political and economic processes than is currently assumed. Diasporas can effectively be explained by their rooted-transnational characteristics. Although it is generally accepted that identity for diasporas often now transcends national spatial and political boundaries, rooted-transnationalism adds value by showing that identity is also internally diverse and locally rooted.

My analysis shows that food in *Chorus of Mushrooms* both problematises Canadian Nikkei identity, yet, apparently in contradiction, can emancipate the characters from the struggle

of identity. Goto shows that it is impossible to ignore the politics of food—"vegetable politics" (90)—whether producing, trying to produce, buying, consuming, or avoiding consuming. However, this can be used to the advantage of the minority. In a manner similar to strategic essentialism, food can be used to represent oneself for one's own benefit or enjoyment. As in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, *Obasan* has at its centre enjoyment of (Japanese) food perhaps to "resist the abjection of people of Japanese descent in North America" (Xu 2008: 28). Kogawa avoids simply portraying Canadian Nikkei as victims of historical injustice by showing how, despite their suffering, they can still thrive through food. By using food as representation, Goto imaginatively gives voice to Canadian Nikkei beyond their depiction in dominant narratives. Food and other methods (such as Goto's rewriting of Japanese myths and fairy tales) are used to position Canadian Nikkei not just within Canadian mainstream society but amongst other minorities in Canada too. By including Chinatown, Chinese foods, and various references to Oriental in her work; Goto represents the characters not simply as Japanese but as a minority group sharing characteristics with other minority groups in the rooted-transnational locality.

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