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The Buddha in the Attic (2011) by Julie Otsuka: An Intersectional Reading

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Abstract

While this article is not another lament on the murkiness of intersectionality, neither theoretically nor analytically, it is a contention that the interplay of various identity markers undeniably contributes to sketch a unique painful woman experience that deserves considerable reflection. In this respect, Julie Otsuka's fictional work; *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011), could be read through an intersectional lens that opens ground for the interrogation of a gendered corrupted past, a past that holds *the lot* of racial immigration. This article, accordingly, operates on the historiographic nuance of this fictional work, whereby Julie Otsuka's ventures to excavate forgotten stories of former Japanese immigrant women during the Second World War. With the reliance on an unconventional narrative structure; reported from the perspective of the first plural personal pronoun 'we'-referred to as the 'choral narrator'- Julie Otsuka employs a narrative mode which helps individual subjectivities collide very subtly to celebrate a collective consciousness that desperately seeks recognition and identification. Throughout the narrative process, Otsuka re-imagines, extrapolates, even manipulates and selects elements of history by accentuating the painful experiences of these diasporic subjects as Japanese immigrant women struggling to find their place in America, regardless of the disillusionment that emanates from the consequences of the odd junctions of their lives, delineating the contours of oppression, discrimination and other forms of social inequality and personal malaise. Based on the postulate that

Otsuka appropriates the stories of former Japanese immigrant women as she mourns their lives in America and commemorates their resistance, two main issues are at the core of this debate: how is it that Otsuka highlights the particular interplay that oscillates between gender, race, and immigration in the lives of her women ancestors? And, how would her resort to the past help her understand the present of the diasporic subjects in contemporaneity?

Keywords: Identity, Intersectionality, Japanese Women, Immigration

Julie Otsuka'nın *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011) Romanı: Kesişimsel Bir Okuma

Öz

Bu makale kesimşimselliğin anlaşılması güç doğasından yakınmak veya bu durumun teorik veya analitik bir analizini yapmak yerine, kesişimselliğin bir kadının kendine özgü üzücü tecrübesinin anlatımına farklı kimlik öğelerinin etkileşimi üzerinden sağladığı katkı üzerine düşünmeye değer bir tartışma sunar. Bu bağlamda, Julie Otsuka'nın *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011) romanı, kadın tecrübesi özelinde ırksal göçün beraberinde getirdiği hasara uğramış geçmişin sorgulanabilmesi için kesişimsel bir bakış açısından okunabilir. Bu çalışma, bu kurmaca eserin tarihsel detaylarını Julie Otsuka'nın İkinci Dünya Savaşı esnasında Japon Amerikalı kadın göçmenlerin hikayelerini ortaya çıkarma girişimleri üzerinden analiz eder. Eserin "koro anlatıcı" olarak geçen birinci çoğul kişinin bakış açısına dayandırılan alışılmadık yapısı, Julie Otsuka'nın, çaresizce tanınma ve özdeşleşme bekleyen ortak bilinci kutlamak adına bireysel öznellikleri çarpıştırmasına yardım eder. Otsuka, anlatım sürecinde Amerika'da kendilerine bir yer bulmak için mücadele veren Japon göçmen kadınlar olan diasporik öznelerinin üzücü tecribelerine vurgu yaparak, baskı, ayrımcılık veya diğer sosyal eşitsizlik ve kişisel sorunlarla şekillenen yaşam tecrübeleri sonucunda yaşadıkları aydınlanmalara bakmaksızın tarihsel öğeleri zihninde yeniden canlandırır, tahminler yürütür, hatta bazılarını seçer ve onlara amacı doğrultusunda yeni anlamlar yükler. Otsuka'nın Amerikada'ki yaşam mücadelelerini ve dirençlerini andığı Japon göçmen kadınların hikayelerini uyarladığı varsayımına dayanan bu tartışmanın temelinde iki soru yatar: Otsuka kadın atalarının

hayatlarında cinsiyet, ırk ve göç tecrübeleri arasındaki etkileşimi nasıl yansıtır? Otsuka'nın geçmişe yeniden bakışı diasporik öznelerinin şimdiki hayatlarını anlamaya nasıl yardımcı olur?

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik, Kesişimsellik, Japon Kadınları, Göç

> *It is through recollection that we actively appropriate the past. But this appropriation is always an interpretation of the past, a selective and imaginative retelling of it from the outlook of the present. The past is a tribute to the very meaning of the present.*
>
> *Lara 1998, 43*

Introduction

In her fictional work *The Buddha in the Attic* (2011), the Japanese American Julie Otsuka ventures to re-fashion the history of a group of forgotten Japanese women seemingly prejudiced by the vicissitudes of an alien culture, which promised them a better life than the one they were deemed to live in their homeland, namely Japan. Otsuka's writings, notably *When the Emperor was Divine* and *The Buddha in the Attic*, seem to fall with a category of committed works of literature which not only do aim at memorializing (Leonte 2017) a tarnished history but also at accentuating the historiographic intention behind. Otsuka is neither obsessed by the accuracy of the historical facts she recounts nor is she interested in verifying the authenticity of the stories she retells, she is rather promoting a *literature of resistance*. The latter favours "the fabulation upon factual elements being implemented into and within a fictional account that leads to multifold/ multi-interpretative comprehension, enabling the readers to make up their own finality through the open-closure endings" (Larbi 16). Otsuka re-imagines the corrupted gendered past of the groups of anonymous women who travelled from Japan to America during the last century seeking solace, seeking happiness, seeking love: their husbands to be.

Known as the history of picture bride practice in the past century, Japanese young women were highly encouraged to embark in long-distance marriage arrangements where the principal protagonist,

notably the Japanese groom, was not present. On the basis of a mere photograph, these brides-to-be received long letters which portrayed an over embellished ideal life in America, where the husbands to be pointed at all the markers of a successful life of the immigrant[1] there, they wrote "I bought a beautiful house…I own a farm. I operate a hotel. I am the president of a large bank. I left Japan several years ago to start my own business and provide you for well" (Otsuka 10). Only then, these young women would officially immigrate to America to marry their male counterparts there and save them from debauchery, highly apprehended by the Japanese culture. Besides, because the American government did not allow interracial marriages, the Japanese government supported the practice hoping to preserve the Japanese family unity. However, this same practice entailed once more that ideal patriarchal principles were being achieved to the detriment of young innocent women's hopes (Tanaka 2002). The concept of marriage was denied its privacy, it was rather reduced to a mere contract, which involved arrangement and convenience and occulted individual will. Otsuka's narrative presents no single protagonist; it rather renders all characters equally important stressing their common painful fate. They are women who share their sufferings in a spirit of solidarity and sisterhood.

In an unorthodox narrative structure, the text echoes the voices of a group of nameless women who do not long for identification (Jobert 2015), for they consider their fate as one. The polyphonic tone of the text makes it appeal to any reader[2], notably any female reader whose life is impregnated by the burden of oppression. Otsuka tells the stories of these women under a forceful choral "we" to make their experiences collide and sound very similar despite the singularities which could demarcate every individual woman's experience,

> The story of the Picture brides is given greater political and rhetorical power through its collective narration- its specificities requiring a special narrative voice- and also because it has been rendered fictionally, this produces an artistic, dramatic work with a wider reach than the many historical sources upon which it is based." (Maxey 9)

The focal point of the present discussion revolves around the junctions of complexity that the interplay of gender and race engendered in the midst of the immigration experience in the past and that is still operating on the lives of the diasporic community. Urged by

the historiographic intention to correct the prejudices of the past, we hypothesize that Otsuka resorts to highlight the various intersections of pain and oppression her Japanese female ancestors have lived. In view of that, reading *The Buddha in the Attic* through the lenses of Intersectionality could help decipher the gendered corrupted past of the Japanese immigrant women.

Our reflection will progress as follows: first, we will be exposing the background and the specificities of this relatively recent approach, namely "Intersectionality," which took at its charge the claim that the interplay of various identity markers does hamper human lives at many levels. This said, we will be attempting then to point at the murkiness of "Intersectionality" both theoretically and analytically, and most importantly, we will be advocating rather its usefulness as a methodological tool to highlight the distinctiveness of each individual experience, mainly a female one. Secondly, we will be discussing the historiographic interest of the author behind excavating Japanese women stories of the past. Finally, we will be pointing at the unconventional structure of *The Buddha in the Attic* in terms of stages of complexity showing how these minority groups of women have lived and negotiated every single experience since they first came to America highly excited to end up deeply disillusioned.

From Social Identity to Intersectionality

As a recent social construct, the current idea of "identity" is rather a complicated one. Even though one knows how to use the word more or less correctly in everyday discourse, it proves quite complex to give an accurate definition of the wide range of its various meanings, for the fundamental paradox in the concept of identity is inherent to the term itself. Given the intense interest in identity across a broad spectrum of disciplines such as psychology, politics, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, scholars have all endeavoured to provide an answer to the question, "Who am I?"; a question raised both at the individual and the collective levels, at least once in one's existence. Considered almost infinitely negotiable, the attempts to elucidate this inquiry have just proved how multifaceted and complicated the issue is[3].

We argue below that we can refer to one of the most popular and useful sociological understandings of identity with particular

emphasis on the role that social groups play in shaping how individuals perceive and view themselves. From the Latin root "idem," meaning "the same," the term implies both similarity and difference, thus, the word "identity," as used today, has two distinct but entangled meanings and much of the force and interest of the concept evolve principally on the implicit question related to the extent to which these meanings intertwine. It is important to draw attention to the necessity to distinguish between "individual" and "social" identities, as the two differ at levels of categorization, which equally are two major components of the self.[4] When seen as individual, identity is something unique to each one of us and it is what differentiates one person from another through personal self-descriptions that concern specific individual characteristics and are expressed as adjectives and abstract categories (e.g. skills, traits, tastes, interests and bodily characteristics). However, when perceived from a social lens, identity becomes a category referring to a group of people designated by at least one label that is commonly used either by the individuals themselves, or by others, or both in terms of shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories, notably in instances such as: "American," "French," "Catholic," "women," or "men."

It is then necessary to acknowledge that identity is multi-layered and that the interaction of race and gender, as two of its major constituents among other markers, represent the main debate that has instigated the present research. Besides, it is in an attempt to understand how the overlapping of a race, ethnicity and gender shapes the ebbs and flows of a person's perception of the self, the Japanese immigrant women in our case, that we have pondered on an in-depth investigation of this relatively recent analytical tool named Intersectionality.

In its most rigorous and inclusive expressions, Intersectionality has been described as a concept, paradigm, approach, tool, pathway and theory and while some criticise its framework as not sufficiently empirical, others see it as suitable with great analytical potential. The term was originally used in order to address the marginalization of black women and became an axiom of Black feminist theory with tremendous popularity moving across time and beyond geographic and national boundaries. Indeed, its wide application has fostered scholarly disputes leading eventually to valuable insights into the intricate workings of multiple forms of social inequalities not only at the heart

of the legal system, but also at the level of critical inquiry including the field of literary criticism.

First mooted in academic circles in the late 1980s by the American legal scholar W. Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept was later popularized among female social justice discourse by Patricia Hill Collins as, "an analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape Black women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women" (299). The term Intersectionality caught on like wildfire and came to be regarded as "the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far" (Mc Call 2005). In other words, Intersectionality was to be deployed to understand and explain, resist and remedy those injuries resulting, most often than not, from the unequal distribution of power. In fact, issues like race, gender and class were once regarded as separate from each other. Now, these "axes of identity," in addition to other elements such as ethnicity, nation, age, and sexuality intersect and permeate a person's life to become integral to individuals' roles in society (Andersen and Collins 2006; Arrighi 2001; Collins 1993; Cyrus 1999; Ore 2000; Rothman 2005; Weber 2004)[5]. The race-class- gender matrix is also referred to as the intersectional paradigm, the interlocking systems of oppression or multiple axes of inequality (Berger, T. and K. Guidroz 2009). Regarded as revolutionary in terms of interdisciplinary and global engagement, "Intersectionality" has become something of a "buzz word" (Davis 1992) overlapping the multidimensionality of social identity, for as Lorde (1984) puts it in Sister Outsider *"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives"* (142).

Crenshaw was convinced that black women were stigmatised at two levels, notably at the level of their gender and race. In other words, she seems to contend that the specific discrimination they were subjected to results from the coalition between a gender-based intolerance and a race-based prejudice that eventually put them in a space which would neither attenuate the spread inequalities nor dismantle the existing hierarchies. The central idea of Intersectionality is that various forms of oppression, commonly known as the "Big Three"; namely, race, gender and class, as a rejection of the "single axis framework",[6] do interact with one another in multiple complex

ways moving across time, touching different disciplines and gaining popularity behind its boundaries.

Intersectionality theory came to serve theoretical and political purposes in several ways. First, the race/gender binary served to emphasize the dynamic aspect of identity construction. Otherwise said, by implicating the simultaneity of race and gender, Crenshaw as well as Intersectionality followers, participated in shedding light on intra-groups differences. In this case, race and gender, were not, according to Crenshaw, given sufficient consideration by liberal critiques of identity politics (Nash 2017). Second, the image of subordination through race and gender coalition reached its peak of eloquence with Crenshaw because of the discontent with the essentialism emanating from feminist and anti-racist scholars (Crenshaw 1989, 1991). It was time then to break with that long-lasting tradition and give voice to the voiceless. [7]

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the theory is "never done, nor exhausted... it is always already an analysis-in-progress" (Carbado, D.W., Crenshaw, W.K., Mays, M.M., and Thomlinson, B. 304). Crenshaw (1989) describes the concept as "provisional one way" to approach inequality. Her work has gained sufficient popularity to the extent that Intersectionality has become synonymous of oppression, "its vagueness and its open-endedness may be the very secret of its success" (qtd. in Davis 69). Paradoxically, the puzzling features tethered to Intersectionality may betray the concept itself. Reflecting on the concept's trajectory, Crenshaw confesses that her theory, which had a wide reach by now, was "over-and underused," and that "she can't even recognize it in the literature anymore" (interview qtd. in Berger and Guidroz 76, 65).

Collins (1990) in her turn sees that Intersectionality's triad, race, gender and class, forms the basis of what she terms as "matrix of domination"[8] which is reinforced by what A. Lorde terms the "mythical norm," which is defined in America as "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing" (Lorde 174).

Despite the controversy that remains over the character, limitations and implications around questions pertaining to its origins, methodologies, efficacy, and relation to identity and identity politics and to black feminism (Viviane M. May 2012, Collins and Bilge 2016 and Carastathis 2016).[9] Intersectionality theory and thus an intersectional approach can be used as a tool for analysing those hidden forms of discrimination which originate from identity intersections that still persist in a contemporary America which proclaims its global spirit.

The present paper originality probably lies in Otsuka's attempt to relocate the axes of Intersectionality. Originally depicted in black women lives' experiences, scholars have long pondered on the hampering power of the intersectional paradigm in the latter lives, neglecting other communities' levels of inequality. By reflecting on the stories of Japanese American women of the past, Otsuka is appropriating the intersectional experiment to another underprivileged ethnic community, notably the Japanese immigrant women. Additionally, she seems to confirm the worries of many Intersectionality promoters who advocated that a black woman experience, for instance, could not be replicated to any other woman experience whatever her origin; every single experience is unique.

The Historiographic Intention: A Need for Visibility

Interestingly enough, the title "The Buddha in the Attic" could be read as a subtle replica of the famous feminist essay by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) "The Mad Woman in the Attic"[10] (Monteiro 2017). However, while mainstream feminists of previous decades fought to rehabilitate the woman of the 19th century offering her deserved status and save her from the attic of male history, Otsuka's plea targets those minority ethnic groups who were compelled to renounce their culture in order to be accepted by the Other, notably Americans. Japanese immigrant women could not celebrate their Buddha, emblem of their legacy, and had no choice but to join the "amnesia of history" in Marni's terms (2011). Upon their internment in American camps, the Japanese's trace started to vanish. They were first missed by the Whites to finally end up forgotten in the attic of history, Otsuka reports:

> AT THE END of summer, the first rumors of the trains begin to reach us from afar. They were ancient, people say. Relics

> from a distant era … IN AUTUMN there is no Buddhist harvest festival on Main Street. No Chrysanthemum Feast. No parade of bobbing paper lanterns at dusk. No children in long-sleeved cotton kimonos singing and dancing to the wild beating of the drums until late in the night. Because the Japanese are gone, that's all. (Otsuka 126-7)

Forced to assimilate and embrace the White Americans' mode of life, the Japanese immigrant women's cultural legacy was relegated to an anonymous past which only memory could save. In this respect, Otsuka makes of her novel, a "work of memorialization" to use Maxey's terms, where there is an urge to come to an end with the past and heal its wounds. By commemorating and monumentalizing the past of her female characters, Otsuka not only did celebrate the memory of her ancestors, but she also defied the rigid univocal version of Japanese women history in America.

Though born American, Otsuka is very careful at highlighting the "woman question" as undoubtedly related to the "race problem", hinting probably to the impediment of ethnicity and gender in realizing the self even in a contemporary America where supposedly the word race is *anachronistic* in Hollinger's[11] terms. She strives to resurrect those forgotten women's lives, for she feels the urge to restore their dignity and correct fallacies advanced by white dominant discourses. She is tormented by their prevailing invisibility, "You now belong to the invisible world" (Otsuka 26). In this respect, Maxey states "[*The Buddha in the Attic*] reflects a community in its sheer volume and renders the invisible visible to mainstream America" (9).

Hence, it is in an attempt to subvert the White authoritarian male dominant voice that has fashioned the official history of America that Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic* seems to be directed. In the early parts of the narrative the women's voice wonders: "*Does anyone even know I am here?*" (30). Therefore, Otsuka's call melts with that of her ancestors in an outburst of rage and incomprehension. Visibility operates as the central vector of the whole text. In an interview with Josephine Reed, Otsuka explains,

> I've been travelling the country for years and speaking to many young people about the camps, but a lot of them have not heard about the camps still. I think it's not something that's included in

> most American history books, and so some of them are surprised […] They'll say, "This is a work of fiction, right? It didn't really happen." I'll have to explain that, yes, it is a work of fiction, but it is based on a very big and often omitted historical truth. (qtd. in Sikadir 29)

Admittedly, Otsuka is traumatised by the unfairness of the past and its distorted legacy. She seems obsessed by the noble role her fiction would play to restore dignity to the memory of her history and culture.

The Unconventional Narrative Structure:

A Call for Diasporic Identity

Actually, in no way is Otsuka original nor is she singular in defying traditional structures of fiction writing by using a forceful plural pronoun "we", for quite a few postmodern writers resorted to similar strategies before her[12]. However, her choice of this particular narrative structure could appear interesting in that it allows her make individual subjectivities hide discreetly behind a female group voice and contribute into demarcate racial hierarchy principles which have regulated their societies. Japanese women are regarded all alike despite their disparateness. Otsuka seems to insist on their sameness; they are all members of the same ethnic group and they all share the same similar experience of immigration, "On the boat we were mostly virgins. We had long black hair and flat wide feet and we were not very tall...On the boat we wore the same old kimonos we'd been wearing for years" (Otsuka 3).

Certainly, Otsuka's use of the plural ambiguous "We," the *narrative trouble* in Butler's words, is not devoid of ethnic sense of belonging though many scholars advanced the opposite claiming that ethnic interests are necessarily achieved at the expense of aesthetic quality (Munros 2018). Interestingly, Otsuka challenges preconceived views, mainly promoted by mainstream writers, by conflating the aesthetic to the ethnic and in this way responds back to the hegemonic discourses,

> [some *we* fictional narratives] employ the first-person plural in ways that defamiliarize perception and provoke readers to

> reconsider their automatized preconceptions of this collective label, such as which characters (or groups of people) are subsumed under it, what types of qualities they share […], what separates the 'we' group from other groups, to what extent the properties of one group overlap with those of another, and according to what criteria moving from one group to another is possible. (Marcus 3 in Munros 71)

Thus, in her deliberate distortion of the narrative perspective, Otsuka seems to point at three main levels of oppression, namely the disappointment of the first sexual experience, the frustration with their Americanized children and their disenchantment with their immigration experience.

On Japanese Women as Objects: The Gender Lure

It is more precisely the eight chapters' division of the novel which interests us as a marker of originality in terms of intersectional orientation. Japanese women life path seems to obey a manipulated chronological progression, an oxymoron as it were, in that Otsuka maps the different chapters' content in terms of levels of excitement and disillusionment. The linearity of the narrative is measured in degrees of pain and resistance. An interesting tension between silence and speech (Leonta 2017) is maintained all along the first four chapters. "*Come, Japanese!*", "*First Night*," "*Whites*" and "*Babies*" point at the Japanese women eagerness to reach America and realize their dreams, their own version of the American Dream, despite the deep hidden fears they carried out in their hearts confirming hence a latent disappointment which would never quit them, " A FEW OF US on the boat never did get used to being with a man, and if there had been a way of going to America without marrying one, we would have figured it out" (Otsuka 18). They were young and fresh women, full of hope and they expected handsome and loving husbands in America. However, their first most painful encounter with the unknown is accentuated through the description of their unforgettable sexual experiences, which are sketched bitterly all over the narrative. Their husbands' toughness is mostly associated with the recurrent use of "They took us," which appears to intensify the feeling of objectification women felt at the time,

> They took us with apologies for their rough, callused hands, and we knew at once that they were farmers and not bankers … They

> took us drunkenly. They took us roughly, recklessly, and with no mind for our pain. *I thought my uterus was about to explode*… They took us forever, and we knew we would be sore for weeks. (Otsuka 20-22)

Upon their early meetings with their white counterparts, those women felt doubly discriminated. They were obliged to fight for every single thing. Their voice sounds stronger than before as they refer to the Whites as "They," othering them in their turn,

> They did not want us as neighbours in their valleys. They did not want us as friend … ONE OF US blamed them for everything and wished that they were dead … We threw ourselves into our work and became obsessed with the thought of pulling one more creed … We forgot about Buddha. We forgot about God. We developed a coldness inside us that still has not thwarted. *I fear my soul has died*. (Otsuka 35-7)

This said, the bitter sexual experiences of the Japanese women are but one facet of their disillusioned lives. As they gave birth to their first kids, they innocently believed that they would preserve a part of their Japanese belonging in America. They were far from imagining that the Japanese heritage was to be lost progressively.

> *On Americanised Children: Neither Japanese nor American but Both*

In the fourth chapter of the narrative, the Japanese women gave birth to Masaji, Yukiko, Misuzu, Hiroko and many others thinking that they would save them for once from the tormented life they were living , "We gave birth to babies that were so beautiful we could not believe they were ours. We gave birth to babies that were American citizens and, in whose names, we could finally lease land" (Otsuka 58). Yet, soon they realized that the birth of a new generation of Japanese worsened their own situation and confirmed their eternal "subaltern" status. Though the following chapters of the narrative namely, "The Children," "Traitors," "The Last Day," and "A Disappearance," continue to be told from the women's perspectives, it seems that the echo of the stories aims at reaching the whole community of Japanese immigrants, be they women or men.

In "The Children" chapter, the Japanese women stories resonate a lack of control over their Americanized children's lives. Reared in the

midst of the White's culture, they spoke like them, they clothed like them, they have changed their names like them, "ONE BY ONE all the old words we had taught them began to disappear from their heads. They forgot the names of colors … THEY GAVE THEMSELVES new names we had not chosen for them and could barely pronounce. One called herself Doris. One called herself Peggy. Many called themselves George" (Otsuka 72-3). Fostering the deep incomprehension between the parents and the new generation, Otsuka strengthens the sense of loss Japanese women had experienced at this particular turning point of their lives. Their children, supposedly symbol of their legacy, are threatened by the dangers of the double standard life the immigration experience has forced them. Worst, Otsuka seems to insist that despite their willingness to bear adopted by the Americans, they would never be accepted as fully Americans, for "they knew that whatever they did they would never really fit in. [*They]'re just a bunch of Buddhaheads*" (Otsuka 77).

Accordingly, the rest of the three last chapters present an awful climax of the Japanese immigrant women's lives in America as the disappointment reaches its peak in the internment camps, where Japanese men are compelled to join after the Pearl Harbor Attack. The mercilessness of the American government stresses the lack of agency Japanese immigrants in general and Japanese immigrant women in particular had on their lives and confirms once more that the intersection of their gender and race hindered their lives of immigrants in America, "One of us left a rice ranch in Willows carrying a tiny Buddhist shrine in her pocket and telling everyone that things would turn out all right in the end" (Otsuka 107). The Japanese women's lives in America proved once more that a woman's life, whatever her origin is premised on continual sacrifices, leading minority groups, in general, to continually negotiate their existence.

On Appropriating the Immigration Experience: The Japanese as a Model Minority Group

In her attempt to foreground the singularities of the immigration experience of her Japanese women ancestors, Otsuka compares them to other ethnic minorities and stresses their uniqueness, what Pandey (2006) refers to as the "demand of a recognition of difference,"

We had all the virtues of *the Chinese*—we were hardworking,

> we were patient, we were unfailingly polite—but none of their vices—we didn't gamble or smoke opium, we didn't brawl, we never spat. We were faster than *the Filipinos* and less arrogant than *the Hindus*. We were more disciplined than *the Koreans*. We were soberer than *the Mexicans*. We were cheaper to feed than *the Okies and Arkies***,** both the light and the dark. (Otsuka 29, emphasis added)

Interestingly enough, by reflecting on non-Black women experiences of different origins, Otsuka is inviting us to interrogate various levels of pain and oppression through these women's lives, which have been obscured in the attic of history enforcing their invisibility. She therefore relocates the interplay of gender, race and immigration far from the confines of Black ethnic group and deports it to Asian women's experiences in the diaspora, notably Japanese women. One could advance that her appropriation of the immigration experience is probably the most pertinent example of the uniqueness of each Intersectionality experience on the one hand and the confirmation that a Black woman experience is not to be replicable to another minority woman experience on the other hand.

Conclusion

While the text under study, namely *The Buddha in The Attic*, refuses an official commemoration of history, a history fashioned by Americans notably and offers instead a genuine version of history as seen by the Other, Japanese in this case, it is nonetheless an interrogative puzzling space of reflection that strives to fight forgetfulness. Besides, having proposed an intersectional innovative reading to the narrative has allowed reveal, we contend, how the interplay of gender, race and immigration in former Japanese women's lives has served correct a distorted history of a minority ethnic group in America, construe the necessity for diasporic identities to celebrate their cultural legacy, and most importantly demystify the status of diasporic subjects under the shadow of globalization. Otherwise said, having stepped back in the past to mourn her ancestors' sufferings and put to the fore their various intersecting levels of oppression could be interpreted as a vital initiative from the part of Otsuka to point at the confusing status of Japanese

American women of today, notably hers. We argue then that not only Otsuka's appropriation of the immigration experience of former Japanese women does help her render the invisible trauma visible but it also sheds light on the potential richness of an intersectional approach to correct historical fallacies, still underexplored in literary texts to our sense.

Notes

[1] See Gasztold, B. (2018) "Domesticity and Immigrant Women's Labour in Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic*" for further details on the conditions of Japanese working immigrants in America.

[2] See Mie Hirara, "'Our Stories depicted by Julie Otsuka: *When the Emperor was Divine* and *The Buddha in the Attic,*" 2. http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/acd/cg/lt/rb/634/634pdf/yousi.pdf

[3] One of the most influential theories on identity derives from the work of psychologist Erik Erikson in the 1950s. Erikson is known for his model of identity development and gained much notoriety for having coined the phrase "identity crisis." In 1981, Tajfel and Turner defined social identity as involving the knowledge that one is a member of a group, one's feelings about group membership, and knowledge of the group's rank or status compared to other groups. These divergent views led to the birth of Identity theory and Social Identity Theory.

[4] The self-concept is a general term used to refer to how someone thinks about, evaluates or perceives themselves physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. The self-concept is formed and regulated as individuals grow based on the knowledge these same individuals have about themselves that is why it is multidimensional. A number of behavioural scientists, representing a variety of schools see the self-concept of the self as not only a useful explanatory construct but a necessary one. Included among these stand: W. James (1910), Cooley (1902), R. Burns (1897), G. Mead (1934), Sullivan (1953) and Lecky (1945).

[5] Quoted in Berger. M.T and Guidroz.K (Eds), *The Intersectional Approach. Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class and Gender*, University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, 2009.

[6] Crenshaw (1989) advances, "a single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law… is also reflected in feminist theory and antiracist Politics….Black women are theoretically erased, [and] this [single axis] framework imports its own theoretical limitations that undermine efforts to broaden feminist and antiracist analyses" (139).

[7] Women of the 1960s and 1970s were involved in various social movements. Many were involved in civil rights movement, feminisim, and gay liberation. The 1970s represented a time of social progress, and a call for change with a critique of the exclusivity of second-wave feminist scholarship. However, though second-wave feminists of the 1960s were mainly interested in breaking down certain conventions related to women's role in society in relation to issues like marriage, equal pay, the division of labor, and education, women of color of the 1970s often felt marginalizedfrom second-wave feminist politics. Black experiences have been overlooked and ignored from social and human history, which led Black feminist scholarship claim more visibility to those who were socially devalued (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1995; Lorde 1984; King 1993).

[8] Other elements such as age, sexuality, and religion might be included as they do intertwine to engender different forms of marginalization.

[9] See Jennifer, C. Nash (2017) "Intersectionality and Its Discontents" for further details.

[10] "The Madwoman in the Attic" is a revolutionary substantial essay written by two of the most committed agents of first wave feminism, namely Gilbert, S. and Gubar, S. in 1979. Relying on the analysis of early works of literature by forgotten women of past centuries, the scholars unveiled disguised manifestations of women rebellion through literature succeeding then to recuperate their genius from the attic of history often overshadowed by male stream canonical writers.

[11] David A. Hollinger, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1997, is Preston Hotchkis Professor of American History at the University of California, Berkeley. He has written extensively on the history of American science, religion in America, and the changing

role of racial and ethnic factors in the country's history. His two most recent books are "Post ethnic America" (1995) and "Science, Jews, and Secular Culture" (1996).

[12] Many male writers like Faulkner, Conrad, and Eugenides had already used "We" as a strategy to echo a group voice, notably male group, however Otsuka remains to our sense more innovative in that she succeeded to maintain it through the whole narrative to point at the a-typicality of her women characters' immigrant experiences.

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