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The National Body: Gender, Race, and Disability in John Okada's *No-No Boy*

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Abstract: To counteract the meagre critical attention paid to the subject of disability in John Okada's *No-No Boy*, this article first explores how the dis/abled characters' bodies and minds are besieged by ableist ideologies and how the book's ableist body politic sacrifices racial affinities between first-generation Issei and second-generation Nisei. While the protagonist's journey of redemption or rehabilitation climaxes in a tragic yet hopeful ending, this hope resides in ableist prerequisites and is located in two points in time—either a reconstructed, idealized past or an anticipated, promising future. *No-No Boy* ultimately ends up submitting to rather than challenging structural ablenationalism since Okada insists on the ableist myth of wholeness and does not recognize that we are always already disabled. As an alternative, this article views disability as necessary and internal to both the self and Other. Disability is constitutive of the subject in the radical sense that the subject does not pre-exist its disability but emerges through it. When we reorient ourselves to the ontological truth that disability is an internal and pre-existent division, we decrease the narcissistic investment in the ideal image of self and create the possibility of the subject's disinvestment from ableist culture.

Keywords: John Okada, disability, body, Japanese American internment, Asian American literature

"Are you blind?" she continued without waiting for an answer. "Deaf? Dumb? Helpless? You're young, healthy, and suppos-

> edly intelligent. Then be intelligent. Admit your mistake and do something about it."
>
> —Emi in John Okada (95)

> "I like my work, Ichiro. I like it because I'm working with people and for people who need help. Drunks, morons, incompetents, delinquents, the physically handicapped. I've helped them all and it gives me great satisfaction. But you and Gary, there's nothing wrong with you. . . . Unfortunately, they never told me about a therapy for your kind of illness."
>
> —Mr. Morrison in John Okada (220)

Nation-building in the United States has been operating ideologically to preserve the homogeneous national body, a body politic both as the political/legal organism likened to a human body and as the symbiosis of individual bodies apt for citizenship. The convergence of a coherent nation and a gestalt body—namely, ablenationalism—valorizes norms through practices of inclusion and exclusion. Ablenationalism, according to Sharon L. Synder and David T. Mitchell, is "the degree to which treating people with disabilities as exceptions valorizes able-bodied norms of inclusion as the naturalized qualification of citizenship" ("Introduction" 113). US citizenship and American selfhood are constituted through the privileging of white, property-owning, able-bodied, and able-minded men, while civic fitness for full citizenship and legal personhood is denied to minorities in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability. At various times in American history, "African Americans, immigrants, gays and lesbians, poor people, and women . . . have been defined categorically as defective citizens incapable of full civic participation" (Nielsen xii). Thus, to counteract racist, sexist, and heterosexist charges of inferiority or undesirability, racial, gender, or sexual minorities may emblematize disability as "'true' insufficiency" (Snyder and Mitchell, *Cultural Locations* 17) and view people with disabilities as a discrete minority. To reincorporate into the national citizenry and prove their worth as competent Americans, racial, gender, and sexual minorities may count themselves as part of the able-bodied/

minded majority, distancing themselves from "debilitating physical or cognitive associations" (Stanley 78).

Such a disavowal of disability is clearly reflected in ethnic-American literary studies. Under the regime of ablenationalism, disability is, at worst, critically dismissed by scholars as a trope in the prosthetic narrative to reinforce the American ideals of normalcy, health, wholeness, and autonomy. In *Concerto for the Left Hand: Disability and the Defamiliar Body*, Michael Davidson explains "narrative prosthesis" (a term coined by Snyder and Mitchell): the bodies of disabled characters are "sites of moral failing, pity, or sexual panic" and, to be exact, "a crutch to shore up normalcy somewhere else[,] . . . to provide an illusion of bodily wholeness" (176). Alternatively, when disability is not critically treated as "narrative prosthesis" or viewed as a trope, it is easily overshadowed by gender, race, or class in intersectional readings. Unsurprisingly, it was not until 2006 that the journal *MELUS* (*Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*) dedicated its first special issue to disability—"Race, Ethnicity, Disability and Literature."[1] Only in 2013 did *Amerasia Journal* publish an issue on disability—"The State of Illness and Disability in Asian America"—despite Chang and Eng Bunker (the Siamese twins) capturing the American public's response to the bodies of nation-states as well as Asian Americans since the nineteenth century[2] and the fact that Edith Maude Eaton, the first known Asian American female author, foregrounded the portrayal of illness and disability in many of her stories in the same period.[3] Despite the scarcity and lateness of literary criticism on these issues, disability and illness appear prominently in canonical and recently published works, "not as incidental events but as central organizing principles" (Schlund-Vials and Wu 207), as in Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* (1946), Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* (1997), and Chang-rae Lee's *The Surrendered* (2010). The absence of critical awareness of disability indicates its "uneasy relationship to minority studies" (Stanley 73), the slowness of Asian American studies to take up disability issues, or possibly the inherent ableism in Asian American literary studies.[4]

Reclaimed as a classic of Asian American literature, John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957) centers on disabled bodies and minds. Set just after

the end of World War II, *No-No Boy* begins with Ichiro Yamada's return home to Seattle from a two-year prison term. Imprisoned for refusing the draft and answering "no-no" on the loyalty oath to the two questions issued by the War Department in 1943 (earning him the title "no-no boy"),[5] Ichiro struggles to escape the disfiguring effects of war and incarceration, searching for a sense of wholeness out of fragments. Recounting a "therapeutic trajectory" (Kim 67), *No-No Boy* narrates a rapid sequence of Ichiro's reunion with his family and encounters with friends, neighbors, and strangers. The succession proceeds with his encounters with figures placed as foils to each other: Ichiro's mother, a mentally ill woman without feminine traits, contrasts with Emi, a loving, comforting woman who has a desirable, sensual body; Ichiro's dysfunctional, effeminate father—"a goddamned, fat, grinning, spineless nobody" (Okada 283)—differs from Kenji's father, standing six feet tall and strong; socially disabled, excluded no-no boys oppose self-assured yes-yes boys, who vowed to serve in the US armed forces and defend the US against foreign power; Ichiro, an emotionally-wounded draft resister, is at odds with Kenji, a veteran amputee (though both suffer from feeling incomplete). *No-No Boy* revolves around Ichiro's journey of meeting people, which unfolds through the contrast of the disabled and the abled.

Although the novel is populated with numerous socially, mentally, or physically disabled characters, Okada does not intend to explore the issue of disability or the experiences of disabled people. Besides, the novel, though tackling such a social and political taboo as the "no-no boys," actually ratifies the patriotic sentiments prevalent in the US in the 1950s. Often read as a "patriotic Cold War American novel" (Douglas 153), *No-No Boy* indeed embraces an assimilationist conception of citizenship, normative lifestyles, and the compulsory conformity to abled body and mind. Rediscovered and republished in 1976 by Frank Chin and the editors of the groundbreaking *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1974), *No-No Boy* is often praised for its painful portrait of the postwar Japanese American community and the effects of racism on Japanese Americans' psyches. The novel also repudiates the image of the Asian American body as perpetually foreign and the Asian

male body as effeminate. According to Chin and the editors of *Aiiieeeee!* and *The Big Aiiieeeee!* (1991), the real Asian American literary expression should be distinctly anti-orientalist and masculine given that American society exoticizes Asian tradition and deprives Asian American men of manhood. *No-No Boy* meets this particular "Asian American sensibility" (*Aiiieeeee!* xiv), celebrated by Chin and his fellow editors, that emphasizes an ableist, heroic, heteronormative, and masculine body. King-Kok Cheung asserts that "Chin's preoccupation with manhood as traditionally defined often translates as homophobia" and his harangue against the emasculation of Asian American men only supports "a widespread presumption in American society at large that a gay person is less than a man, particularly if he happens to be Asian" (182). Interestingly, while Chin and the editors of *Aiiieeeee* praise the novel for authentic portraits of Japanese American men, the only critical essay on *No-No Boy* through the lens of disability is Cynthia Wu's "'Give Me the Stump Which Gives You the Right to Hold Your Head High': A Homoerotics of Disability in Asian Americanist Critique," in which Wu highlights same-sex desire between men and the homoerotic body rather than a traditionally masculine, heteronormative body.[6]

To counteract the meagre critical attention paid to the predominant textual prosthesis of the novel, this essay explores the dis/abled characters in pairs: how their bodies and minds are besieged by ableist ideologies and how the book's ableist body politic sacrifices racial affinities between first-generation Issei and second-generation Nisei. In addition, I supplement my critique of Okada's prosthetic writing with an intersectional reading of gender, race, class, generation, and disability, an approach that serves as a site of socio-political critique. I will, however, also address my reservations about an intersectional approach to disability. Next, while Ichiro's journey of redemption or rehabilitation climaxes in a tragic yet hopeful ending, this hope, I argue, resides in ableist prerequisites and is not located in the present but rather in a reconstructed, idealized past or an anticipated, promising future. Okada's *No-No Boy* ultimately ends up submitting to rather than challenging structural ablenationalism, since Okada insists on the ableist myth of wholeness and does not recognize that we are always already disabled.

In Lacanian terms, the big American Other that suffers from disability or the split—the structural impossibility of totality—also upholds this ableist myth. I suggest instead viewing disability not as the contingent barrier or the effect of a norm but as necessary and internal to both the self and the Other. Disability is constitutive of the subject in the radical sense that the subject does not pre-exist its disability but emerges through it. When we reorient ourselves to the ontological truth that disability is an internal and pre-existent division, we decrease the narcissistic investment in the ideal image of self and create the possibility of the subject's disinvestment from ableist culture.

I. Generational Discontinuity: Mrs. Yamada versus Emi

Embarking upon a long journey to redemption, Ichiro begins by examining his relationship with his Issei mother, Mrs. Kin-chan Yamada, and engaging in a love affair with a woman named Emi. The only two female characters portrayed in depth in the novel, Mrs. Yamada and Emi stand in sharp contrast. Early in the novel, the narrator introduces Mrs. Yamada as having few feminine features: she is "a small, flat-chested, shapeless woman" with "the awkward, skinny body of a thirteen-year-old" (Okada 10). Moreover, with "a power in the wiry, brown arms, a hard, blind, unreckoning force" (20), she is a rock, "the rock that's always hammering and pounding, pounding, pounding in her unobtrusive, determined, fanatical way" (12). Emi is vividly different. Her sensual features and profound passion create an image of a substitute, nurturing mother to Ichiro: a "slender" figure with "heavy breast," "rich, black hair," and "long legs" like "a white woman's" (83).

The bodily disparity between Mrs. Yamada and Emi mirrors their opposite personalities, mentalities, and even political inclinations. Usurping the role of the head of the family (while her husband is coded as childlike and feminine), Mrs. Yamada is a domineering mother and a fanatical Japanese nationalist. With her repeated affirmation to Ichiro, "you are my son" (11; 15; 23; 42), she makes her son's body strangely continuous with hers: Ichiro recalls that his mother was once "half" of him and "that half" almost became the "whole" of him (16). He

even avers that it is "she who opened my mouth and made my lips move to sound the words ["no-no,"] which got me two years in prison" (12). Believing in Japan's glorious victory in the war, and seeing herself as a sojourner in the US, Mrs. Yamada saves her pennies for the day the Japanese government will send ships to bring her home. When people call her crazy for her delusions, she never thinks of herself as mad. Rather, she insists that the claim of Japanese defeat is "a trick of the American" (37) and that "they say it because they are frightened and because they envy my strength, which is truly the strength of Japan" (43). Mrs. Yamada embodies people's fear of Japanese fanatic nationalism since the novel portrays her as displaced, unreadable, inassimilable, and, indeed, disabled.

While the novel represents Mrs. Yamada as mentally disabled, Emi carries out the prescribed role of an able-bodied woman in the melodrama of heterosexual romance. Her feminine capacity nurtures, heals, re-masculinizes, and re-assimilates three disabled men in the novel on their road to redemption or rehabilitation[7]—Ralph (Emi's husband), Kenji, and Ichiro. Each of them suffers from an emotional impasse, an emasculating injury, or social exclusion. First, Ralph is emotionally stigmatized for his brother, a no-no boy. To reaffirm his Americanness, Ralph volunteers for an all-Japanese American Nisei military unit, and he decides to stay in the army after the war, leaving his wife alone in a small farmhouse in Seattle. Emi assumes the traditional role of wife, patiently awaiting his return and even submitting to Ralph's demand for another veteran, Kenji, to take care of her on his behalf. Fulfilling a version of male sexual fantasy, Emi provides Kenji with care, comfort, love, and a sexual outlet—enjoyable but guilt-free. Failing to re-masculate Kenji—who says to Ichiro, "I'm only half a man and when my leg starts aching, even that half is no good" (89)—Emi is again introduced to Ichiro. With a character of "maternal generosity" and "a deep capacity for sympathetic identification" (Kim 74), Emi, unlike Ichiro's demanding, aggressive mother, becomes a loving, tolerant, and forgiving mother figure. "A model of reconciliation" (Sokolowski 84), Emi offers "mutual forgiveness" as a personal solution to social/political stigma (88). She instructs Ichiro by saying,

> Are you blind? Deaf? Dumb? Helpless? You're young, healthy, and supposedly intelligent. Then be intelligent. Admit your mistake and do something about it. Anything. It doesn't matter what you do. This is a big country with a big heart. There's room here for all kinds of people. Maybe what you've done doesn't make you one of the better ones but you're not among the worst either. (Okada 95)

In Emi's view, Ichiro's recovery of manhood and integration into the national body might be possible if he dissociates himself from disability and assumes his "mistake." It is in such a restored gender relation and his encounter with an ideal, able-bodied womanhood that Ichiro finds a source of strength and a glimpse of hope.

The novel's expression of the disabled body and mind reinforces the hegemony of the ableist body politic in the US—an enactment of ablenationalism. One's body is read in private and public spaces as a textual, psychological, and national body. Annexed to the national body, the bodies and minds of the immigrant mother and American-born Emi bear witness to an ableist perception of self, citizen, and nation. Along these axes of body, mind, and citizenship, the novel sustains a sharp contrast between Mrs. Yamada and Emi: one's body as oriental, sterile, and deviant—the other's as American, nurturing, and sanguine; one's mind as fanatic and insane—the other's as forgiving and sympathetic. The former, as a Japanese sojourner, fails to express patriotism toward her new country; the latter is acculturated and owns forty acres of farmland. While Mrs. Yamada—a displaced, unassimilable alien—becomes a threat to the national body, Emi heralds the advent of a model minority image of Asian Americans. The bodies and minds of Mrs. Yamada and Emi—disabled and superabled; non-feminine and ultra-feminine—provide a contrast to normalcy and dramatize an ableist and normative exclusion and inclusion as the naturalized qualification of citizenship.

Passed as early as the 1880s, the "ugly laws" deemed it illegal for people with disability—including those who are "diseased, maimed, mutilated, or deformed in any way"—to go out in public places (Schweik 1575). Such state-sanctioned eugenic policies also screened out races with iden-

tifiable features different from norms in appearance, intelligence, ability, or health from participating in public life and claiming the rights of citizenship. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and The Immigration Act of 1882, for example, demarcate what bodies have or have not the capacity to be assimilated as competent American citizens. Even the American-born children of Asian immigrants could be viewed as the ultimate fifth column; as Vice President Calvin Coolidge asserted in 1921, "the unassimilated alien child menaces our children" (De Manuel and Davis v).

The racial and eugenic regulation of the US national body gradually lost prominence in the aftermath of the Nazi purge of the Jews, Romani, homosexuals, and disabled. Rather, the figure of the disabled veteran during World War II and afterwards became "an obvious figure of distributive justice in American society," and "the connection between the disabled veteran and the war hero was a familiar one in popular discourse" (Barton 567–68). Their bodies bearing the scars of battle, the disabled veterans "became a major project of the modern state, which endowed them with recognition as a group worthy of continuing assistance, and with entitlements in the form of advanced medical care and prosthetics, pensions, vocational rehabilitation, and job placement" (Gerber 3). Although the state's project privileged so-called worthy disabled veterans over disabled civilians, disabled veterans played an important role in rendering visibility to the needy after the war.

As disabled bodies grew more visible and less "ugly" in postwar American society, Asian American bodies also became less alien. First, the major threat that Asians posed to US culture was more the spread of communism than their languages, religions, or cultures. Next, the growing dominance of Parkian sociology in the 1950s, as Christopher Douglas observes in *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism* (2009), gradually displaced biological or racial distinction with social and cultural difference. Namely, Parkian sociology espoused a new assimilationist ethos that the ethnic/racial difference was not prescriptive but descriptive and might change quickly even within one or two generations (1–20). Accordingly, the assimilation of Asian "alien" bodies might support US foreign policy and prove the US to be an opposite to com-

munist regimes and a nation providing equal rights and opportunities for all. In addition, migration from Asia to the US rose dramatically with the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which removed the previous barriers to Asian immigration and even promoted Asian immigration through the family policy. The arrival of these newcomers from Asia transformed the demographic makeup of the nation and increased the exposure of Asian bodies.

Written in the Cold War climate of the 1950s, in which nuclear fears and the patriotic mandate ran rampant, *No-No Boy* expresses conformity to the assumption of American ableist supremacy. To Okada, a submission to ablenationalist inclusion seems to be ideologically and politically necessary. Okada tries to break the shackle of the anti-Japanese sentiments and racism still active immediately after the war, demonstrated by wartime commanding General John DeWitt's racist remark at a congressional hearing in 1942: "A Jap's a Jap. It makes no difference whether he's an American citizen or not" (Thompson 49). One's non-assimilation under a regime of racism justified racial inferiority and proved his or her body as genetically disadvantaged and disabled. Such a notion of ethnicity as biologically deterministic denies not only constitutional birthright citizenship to US-born Japanese Americans but also the possibility of assimilation of people of Japanese descent into American culture. To fight against racism, Okada's novel assumes ableist views against the Issei but in support of the Nisei: the Issei are portrayed as defective others; in contrast, the Nisei are potentially promising abled-bodied citizens. Okada emphasizes the Nisei body as deracialized—malleable and easily molded and assimilated into abled-bodied Americans. A body functions not only as a fleshly reality but also an allegorical vehicle that mirrors a given nation. In the novel, Emi's body is the site of the successful assimilation of Japanese Americans into the mainstream population—an assimilation that is achieved through severing racial affinities between first-generation Issei and second-generation Nisei.

This generational/familial discontinuity assists the Nisei in reconstructing an abled body free of the unassimilable or unwanted elements of Japaneseness, such as a traditional rice-based diet or other non-Western lifestyle choices. A rice-based diet was once assumed to be

responsible for Asian immigrants' vulnerability to disease and disability (Kraut 85). Food "organizes, signifies, and legitimates our sense of self in distinction from others" (Xu 2), and it embodies not only ethnic differences but also a lesser or greater degree of potential for disability. In the novel, the contrast in food—"Eggs, fried with soy sauce, sliced cold meat, boiled cabbage, and tea and rice" versus "coffee and milk and pop and cookies and ice cream" (Okada 130)—reflects the disabled Japaneseness of Ichiro's family against the abled Americanness of Kenji's family. So do their different lifestyles. Ichiro's home is depicted as a non-nurturing place where Ichiro feels "like puking" and wonders if everybody who sleeps in one room of this small house still pounded flesh (7),[8] while Kenji's home nurtures American bodies and minds: it is decorated with a "polished mahogany table, . . . new rugs and furniture and lamps and [a] big television set with radio and phonograph all built into one impressive, blond console" (118). Rather than representing ethnic pride in Japanese foods or customs, the novel demonstrates how willingly and readily the Nisei assume ableist values and 1950s middle-class family ideals in order to repel any sojourner theory of Japanese settlement patterns.

II. The Intersection of Disability and Race

To erase the public's doubt about the loyalty and assimilation of Japanese Americans, Okada exhibits how the bodies and minds of Japanese Americans can be molded and changed according to American ableist normalcy and nationalism. While his prosthetic narrative employs disability as a metaphorical crutch and casts Emi as conforming to ableist norms of citizenship, an intersectional reading of Mrs. Yamada's madness, on the other hand, may engage in a socio-political critique of ableism, racism, classism, and sexism. The overlapping perspectives of race, gender, class, disability, and immigration status help understand the mother's madness not simply as individual illness but as manifestations of broader socio-political disorder. She is mad, but more *mad at* the failure of the nation-states. Her delusions and hallucinations may be a result of the public's fear and war hysteria that ran rampant at that time. Rather than a deviation from normalcy, her disability can be understood

contextually as an effect of racial discrimination, social exclusion, and ethnic displacement. Within this joint framework of race, gender, class, and disability, we might conclude that the hegemony of nation-state ableism creates a psychotic existence. Is the mother placed in a position that elicits the emergence of symptoms associated with psychosis? Could her paranoia be just a sane response to the insane nation-states? Accordingly, who is mad—the racially othered minority, or the US?

As shown in recent scholarship on disability that has increasingly engaged with racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of social injustice, such an intersectional approach to disability reveals shared experiences of oppression and marginalization and how they interact with and constitute each other. To read Mrs. Yamada's disability from an intersectional perspective promises a site of contestation and produces a counter-narrative to ablenationalism; nevertheless, to examine disability with contextual specificity also brings up some concerns. First, it produces, in the words of Stephanie Hsu, "a racialized genealogy of disability" (21), just as Mrs. Yamada's racial minority status is foregrounded in a way that her illness is always already racialized. Even though her disability is not necessarily a sign of racial degeneracy, Mrs. Yamada, in contrast to whites, is treated first as a racial minority and next as a disabled individual. As a Japanese immigrant, she cannot be simply a disabled woman. As Hsu observes, "Asian American literary criticism has tended to read war's formative impact on the immigrant psyche as racial formation per se" (33). Insomuch as Mrs. Yamada's illness serves as "a device of analogy" for social/racial oppression (Quayson 40), her *impairment* represents a manifestation of oppression rather than a form of disability. However, what if she is really psychotic, suffering from neurological impairments? What if her mental, physical, or cognitive impairments predate the upheavals of internment? What if her body is marked by unspeakable urges that continually disrupt and trouble her mind and vice versa? What if she does not commit suicide but instead returns to Japan and yet still insists on Japan's victory in World War II? The intersectional approach to Mrs. Yamada's illness runs the risk, as Hsu cautions, of obscuring "the distinction between embodied difference and the experience of bodily suffering" (34) and failing to "convey

the ontological significance of living with an impairment" (21–22). Though an intersectional approach to disability acknowledges the complexity of multi-layered discrimination, the case of Mrs. Yamada may caution us not to embrace wholeheartedly an intersectional approach, since it might risk compounding the racialization of people of color with disability.

III. The Pursuit of Able-Bodied Wholeness: Kenji versus Ichiro versus Gary

Indeed, the intrinsic suffering of the impaired bodies and minds is effectively disregarded in the novel. On the one hand, Mrs. Yamada's mental illness looms large to suggest that the Issei are ineligible for citizenship. Kenji's physical injury, on the other hand, symbolizes heroic sacrifice and loyalty. A Nisei veteran, Kenji returns home with not only "a medal, a car, a pension, even an education" (Okada 55) but also a leg amputated and an infection that eventually takes his life. Bearing a battle scar, Kenji's disabled body is lifted by his peers and community to the status of a full man and complete American citizen. He sacrifices his physical body to gain a symbolic title. Yet war amputees, to the able-bodied majority, evoke an ambivalent set of emotions: though a source of pride as well as a symbol of heroic masculinity, an amputated/artificial leg also points to dependency or even shame. Regarding male disabled veterans, David Gerber writes:

> On the one hand, the warrior may be valorized as a symbol of masculine honor, on the other, pity and fear, the common emotions associated with our response to disability. . . .
>
> When war ends, however, and memories of it begin to fade in the general desire to return to a normal peacetime existence, the warrior hero gradually loses his luster and is reduced in stature to a beleaguered disabled man, whose needs may be perceived as an inconvenience. (5–6)

In the novel, the meaning of Kenji's disability is, nonetheless, explicit and unquestionable. To live up to the expectation of masculine heroism and racist patriotism, Kenji lulls misgivings about his life-changing

physical impairment to rest: he laughs off his sexual impotence and refrains from attending to his emotional turmoil. "In the eyes of many disabled veterans," as John M. Kinder argues, "it remains something of an unspoken rule that 'real men' do not draw attention to their injuries, and they certainly do not complain about them to outsiders. [They] are expected to be optimistic about their recovery and steadfast in their belief that they would 'do it all over again' if they had the choice" (167). To qualify for the role of supercrip or ultra-American patriot, Kenji has to render his body into one that matters little and does not trouble himself and others.

To some critics, Kenji appears "psychologically whole" (Lim 241) or in possession of "a certain degree of moral clarity" (Kim 71) because he, unlike other Nisei veterans, does not reject Ichiro for being a no-no boy and insists that "[n]obody's to blame, nobody" (Okada 122). What is more, Kenji shares with Ichiro, a draft resister, an investment in the fantasy of the corporeal body as a coherent whole and the nation as an ideologically consistent entity. When Kenji and Ichiro discuss trading places with each other, the fantasized exchange of Ichiro's manhood (represented symbolically by his genitals) for Kenji's social position reveals their mutual desire for inclusion and their mutual investment in the idea that happiness is rooted in being intact and whole. Here is their conversation, beginning with Kenji:

> "We've both got big problems, bigger than most people. That ought to mean something."
>
> "Whose is bigger?"
>
> "I was thinking all the time we were silent and I decided that, were it possible, I might very well trade with you."
>
> "For the eleven inches or for the seven or eight that'll be left after the next [surgery]?"
>
> "Even for two inches." (64)

Willing to trade his biological penis for Kenji's symbolic phallus, Ichiro says, "I'll change with you, Kenji. Give me the stump which gives you the right to hold your head high" (64). But Kenji responds, "no," refusing to change even "if it were possible" (73), because he values

his social status more than this part of his body. In fact, their shared yearning is not surprising because they submit themselves to the ruling ideology in the hope that the national body may promise and enable individual bodies as autonomous, normal, and, thus, American. Even though no matter how the trade turns out, they both remain "half a man" (89). But the fantasy of the complete and homeostatic Other (or the big Other, which Lacan equates with language and the law, and which refers to fantasmatic ideas of anonymous authoritative power and knowledge) helps them perceive their individual misfortunes and social disharmony as accidental, momentary, and, thus, repairable. Mrs. Yamada, Freddie (another no-no boy), and Kenji die in the novel. They are all unfit mentally, emotionally, or physically to live in an ableist, coherent nation-state. Under the dictates of ablenationalism, they must die to sustain an idealized national body; they must die to cover the idealized national body's failure for a unified national narrative. The ableist fantasies of corporeal wholeness and national homeostasis consolidate each other.

Near the end of his long journey to redemption, Ichiro meets another no-no boy, Gary, who charts a unique path to healing from his traumatic wound. Portrayed as a young man with "intelligence, charm, a degree in fine arts, health," Gary "has a problem," in the words of his new employer at the Christian Rehabilitation Center, Mr. Morrison (Okada 219). As a no-no boy, Gary is disabled as a social outcast: he has been despised and verbally abused by his colleagues at his previous workplace. Mr. Morrison claims that he knows nothing about "a therapy for this kind of illness," though he enjoys "working with people and for people who need help like drunks, morons, incompetents, delinquents, [and] the physically handicapped" (220). Significantly, Gary, a minor character sketchily depicted, is a no-no boy who survives this "illness." Unlike Freddie, also a no-no boy, who is caught in emotional turmoil and killed at the end of the novel, Gary does not condemn himself by blaming the national body, embrace Japanese nationalism (as Mrs. Yamada does), or desire redemptive inclusion (as Ichiro does).

Instead, Gary assumes the traumatic status of no-no boy as a nucleus of his being and, in Lacanian terms, identifies with his own particular

symptom: such a singular mode of living frees him from the big Other and gains him access to the truth of his desire. Opposite to the aim of therapy—to stay "happy" and "healthy"—the goal of Lacanian psychoanalysis is to bring into existence the subject who does not live up to the demands of the Other and is no longer subjected to the Other. It is "the subject of jouissance" who has traversed his or her most basic fantasy and is "living out the drive" (Lacan 46). Lacan writes that "[t]o know how to handle, to take care of, to manipulate[,] . . . to know what to do with [one's] symptom, that is the end of the analysis" (qtd. in Verhaeghe 145). Yet, to recognize the lack of the Other does not mean submitting oneself to social and political inequality. It means, rather, that the new recognition of the lacking, desiring Other stops one's blind pursuit of a fantasy of "complete" or "whole" being. Being American does not mean "whole" and the US is anything but a kingdom of totality and sufficiency. Both the subject and the Other are lacking, desiring, and inconsistent.

Before the war, Gary was unable to take any action. He wished to be an artist but could not act: "Before, it was talk, talking about life and sex and philosophy and history and music and real art, but never moving and continuing to talk and dream. I wasted a lot of time" (Okada 223). After years in prison, he tells Ichiro, "I got the talk out of my system. I died in prison. And when I came back to life, all that really mattered for me was to make a painting. It gives me peace and satisfaction" (223–24). Purging his system of "talk," Gary buries himself in his art, living to create. In a Lacanian sense, Gary works to bring out a new configuration of thoughts and modifies his subjective position with respect to his desire rather than the demand from the big Other. Not bothered "one single bit" by the world (226), Gary identifies himself with his no-no boy status—that is, in a Lacanian sense, the symptomatic point of being a no-no boy—and affirms that "[w]hat was unfortunate" for Ichiro "was the best thing that ever happened" to him (224). No longer attached to the deficiency of the Other by trying to answer, fulfill, repress, or avoid it, Gary is able to avoid a "quest for wholeness" or demand an impossible version of the nation. Gary finally recognizes the existence of the

fundamental lack in the Other as the necessary primal condition for the existence of the subject.

In other words, Gary's subjectification of no-no as the cause of his own desire further enables him to recognize that the national body is also disabled. Consequently, he divests himself from the appeal of ableist national ideals and citizenship ideologies that promise wholeness and Americanness. Gary realizes that he and many others hold together the national body and make possible an illusion of America as consistent, complete, and non-contradictory. Speaking as a painter, Gary confesses, "I don't blame them one bit for not hesitating to kill us. You [Ichiro] and I are big, black marks" (228). As such marks, Gary and other no-no boys represent a stain on the harmonious picture of America and in Japanese-American communities. According to Slavoj Žižek, it is, nonetheless, the stain that paradoxically keeps the picture harmonious, consistent, and whole. Using the tramp in Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* as an example, Žižek explains that the tramp "figures as the spot disturbing the picture, as a kind of blot on the white marble surface of the statue"—indeed, "the only proof we have that the picture we are looking at . . . is not meaningful signs . . . but rather the presence of some meaningless stain disturbing its harmony" (8). The stain is not simply "a foreign body, an intruder which disturbs the harmony of the social bond: precisely as such, the thing is what 'holds together' the social edifice by means of guaranteeing its fantasmatic consistency" (Žižek 123). It is the stain—an object resisting symbolization—that brings out meaning: "the real 'message' is the stain itself" (8). In view of Zizek's explication of the stain, no-no boys, as the black mark, are not frivolous or accidental. On the contrary, they are necessary attachments to make the nation a consistent entity without contradictions and hold together the racist and ableist Other so that the American dream can move forward.

IV. The Journey into a Temporal Loop

Ichiro's journey is still ongoing at the end of the novel, yet the book ends on an ambiguously optimistic note. The ending scene portrays an explosive fight between Freddie and Bull (a Nisei veteran), culminating in the former's sudden death in a car crash and the latter's collapse

into howling like a baby. "Putting a hand on Bull's shoulder," Ichiro shares "the empty sorrow, feeling the terrible loneliness of the distressed wails" (Okada 250) and then slowly walks down a street alone. At this moment, Ichiro starts to envisage the future with hope:

> He wanted to think about Ken and Freddie and Mr. Carrick and the man who had bought the drink for him and Emi, about the Negro who stood up for Gary, and about Bull, who was an infant crying in the darkness. A glimmer of hope—was that it? It was there, someplace. He couldn't see it to put it into words, but the feeling was pretty strong.
>
> He walked along, thinking, searching, thinking and probing, and, in the darkness of the alley of the community that was a tiny bit of America, he chased that faint and elusive insinuation of promise as it continued to take shape in mind and in heart. (250–51)

Throughout the novel, Ichiro searches for solutions to his socio-political and ontological predicaments. His journey ends with a hopeful note, but this hope resides in specific prerequisites. First, in contrast to characters with unfit bodies or minds in one way or another (including his mother, his father, Kenji, and Freddie) Ichiro is bodily and mentally qualified—"big enough for football and tall enough for basketball" (7) and capable of re-assimilation into American society and the ableist norms of citizenship. Under the ableist regime, Ichiro's hopeful future is written on his abled body and sound mind.

Second, Ichiro has an idealized past and a promising future that ideologically serves as a substitute for the present. Throughout his journey, other characters offer Ichiro temporal solutions to his psychic stigma and structural problems. For example, Mrs. Yamada's repeated praise and affirmation of "you are my son" endeavor to bring Ichiro back to an unforgettable union between him and his mother. Ichiro recalls:

> There was a time that I no longer remember when you used to smile a mother's smile and tell me stories about gallant and fierce warriors who protected their lords with blades of

> shining steel and about the old woman who found a peach in the stream and took it home and, when her husband split it in half, a husky little boy tumbled out to fill their hearts with boundless joy. I was that boy in the peach and you were the old woman and we were Japanese with Japanese feelings and Japanese pride and Japanese thoughts because it was all right then to be Japanese and feel and think all the things that Japanese do even if we lived in America. (15)

The above-mentioned depiction of the Japanese fairy tale, Momotaro Peach Boy, is reminiscent of the idyllic mother-son union in the oedipal schema. Along similar lines, Emi encourages Ichiro to imagine nostalgic moments full of American patriotism at school: "you're singing 'The Star-Spangled Banner' and see the color guard march out on the stage and say the pledge of allegiance with all the other boys and girls. You'll get that feeling flooding into your chest and making you want to shout with glory" (96).[9] In short, the advice from his mother and Emi aims to divert Ichiro toward the past, a time that treasures either corporeal wholeness or national homeostasis.

On the other hand, characters such as Ichiro's father, Kenji, Professor Brown, Gary, and others attempt to orient Ichiro toward the future. Their words—"take time" (44; 163; 213), "take all the time" (151), "better times" (109), "time will come" (164; 227) or "need a little time" (163)—envision a restored and intact individual or national body on the attainable horizon. For instance, the father advises: "you take *time*, Ichiro. There is no hurry. I do not understand everything that is troubling you. I know—I feel only that it is very big. You give it *time*" (213; emphasis added). And Kenji tells Ichiro to

> go back [to Seattle] and stay there until they have enough sense to leave you alone. Then get out. It may take a year or two or even five, but the *time* will come when they'll be feeling too sorry for themselves to pick on you. After that, head out. Go someplace where there isn't another Jap within a thousand miles. Marry a white girl or a Negro or an Italian or even a

> Chinese. Anything but a Japanese. After a few generations of that, you've got the thing beat. (164; emphasis added)

As long as the US is assumed to be a sacrosanct totality (either in the past or in the future), the present wound of the body politic is momentary, yet-to-be-whole. As a result, the present hatred of no-no boys and anti-Japanese sentiment will not necessarily be confronted head-on because of its contingent status. Given such advice from his father, Kenji, and others, it is no wonder that Ichiro eventually also believes in the futural assurance: "*Time*, how slowly it passes. I will hope and wait and hope and wait and there will come a *time*. It must be so. She is dead. *Time* has swept her away and *time* will bury my mistake" (196; emphasis added). Trapped in a temporal loop between the imaginary past and the promising future, Ichiro is perpetually becoming whole.

Ichiro's ongoing journey within the temporal cycle ultimately surrenders to rather than challenges structural ablenationalism. Entangled in the temporal loop, he cannot stop chasing the ableist myth of wholeness—both in individual and national terms—given that completeness means being American and vice versa. Okada does not recognize that we are always already disabled, and so are nation-states, which suffer from the same split—in Lacanian terms, the structural impossibility of totality. For Lacan, human beings are fundamentally split subjects: divided, inconsistent, incomplete, alienated from themselves, and with no possibility of wholeness. In the Lacanian notion of subjectivity, the subject emerges through her or his own loss of ability (or an original yet illusionary unity), as other disability studies scholars suggest.[10] The subject emerges not in the process of identification (or dis-identification) but when identification fails. The failure is not an effect of the gap between the ideal and empirical reality; instead, the impossibility of the full realization of wholeness is immanent to one's identification. Correlative with the creation of Lacanian subjectivity, one emerges as abled when he or she fails, rather than succeeds, to assume the ableist norm of a perfect body and mind. For the ableist, such an ideological normalcy holds out the promise of full jouissance and a complete mode of existence. To put it differently, the ableist ideology covers up the impossibility of total jou-

issance and offers the ableist a way to manage its traumatic absence. As in fantasy, the ableist ideal "convert[s] the subject's traumatic experience of lack into a more acceptable experience of loss [and] produce[s] the illusion that there is somewhere a satisfying object of desire" (McGowan, *Enjoying* 199). In brief, there is no pre-existing organic unity preceding loss, and what is missing is retroactively constituted through the act of recovery. The loss has already taken place and we are living in its aftermath. In the case of ablenationalism, disability is an internal and pre-existent division, logically and ontologically preceding ability/normalcy. Likewise, the ableist nation is sustained by disability as a constitutive lack: the abled enjoy being "abled" and appearing "normal" insofar as disability is a reflective barrier to be surpassed.[11]

We are always already disabled not merely because humans are born biologically premature, but because in order to enjoy being abled, we have to be disabled beforehand. Disability is not a provisional limit but a primary necessity, constituted through the structural logic of ableist normalcy. In addition, we are disabled not necessarily in the sense that as temporarily able-bodied persons (TAB) we are vulnerable to illnesses and accidents, which can occur in anyone's life, or in the sense of the irreducible gap between the actual and ideal body. It is in the ontological, structural context that we are always already disabled: constructed as irrevocably divided, split, and alienated from ourselves, we are unable to arrive at the impossible enjoyment of the ableist norm of perfect bodies and minds. Disability logically and ontologically precedes ability/normalcy.[12] Accordingly, Ichiro's journey will end due not to his accusation that the Other is racist or ableist but because of his assumption of a primary loss as the necessary condition for subjectivity. In this assumption he remains psychologically mobile, free from the ableist demand and from his blind pursuit of a fantasy of complete or whole being.

Disability is not the effect of a norm but what characterizes and precedes the ableist world. To recognize disability as inherent in both the self and the big American Other (namely, the subjective splitness and the structural impossibility of wholeness) could thwart a life that is oriented toward an ableist myth of wholeness/lack, dependent on the nation-state as a closed totality. Rather than targeting disability as the external

otherness of the ableist world, I suggest that we embrace it as our own internal limitation, not as "a state of loss" but as "originary" (McGowan, *End* 195). Such a new way of relating to dis/ability corresponds to a new mode of jouissance and inverts the condition of impossibility of wholeness and totality into the very ground of change. Of course, there still exist disabled people, but they would cease to be disabled in the way that we now understand the word. In *No-No Boy*, Gary changes the way he relates to dis/ability and modifies his subjective position, which allows him to pursue his desire. In contrast, the most difficult thing for Ichiro to accept is not his slavery to ablenationalism but his freedom to dissolve his psychic investments in it and to renounce the libidinal satisfaction derived from the feeling of guilt by which the ableist nation binds the subject to itself.

Notes

1 Moreover, it was not until 1997 that the University of Illinois at Chicago created the first Ph.D. Program dedicated to disability studies in the US.

2 For a detailed discussion on how they have captured the public's response to nation-states, see Wu.

3 For a discussion on Edith Maude Eaton, see Sibara.

4 Wu is a major advocate for examining the role of disability in Asian American writing. She contributed an important essay, "Rethinking Embodiment and Hybridity: Mixed-Race, Adoptee, and Disabled Subjectivities" (co-authored with Schlund-Vials) to *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature* (2015) and "Disability" to *Keywords for Asian American Studies* (2015). Lee also wrote "Pathography/Illness Narratives" in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature* (2016). These recent contributions to leading reference books show the increasing visibility of disability issues in Asian American studies.

5 The first question asks: "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty whenever ordered?" The other reads: "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and foreswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, to any foreign government, power, or organization?" (Williams and Coleman 63).

6 Since the novel's rescue from oblivion, critics have examined it through many different lenses, many of them by 1990, focusing on, as Ling argues, "its apparent call for ethnic recuperation and moral reconciliation, with an emphasis on Ichiro's ability to overcome his self-hatred and to complete his quest for a

sense of 'wholeness' through a difficult but ultimately successful process of redemption" (*Narrating* 33). Published in *American Literature* in 1995, Ling's essay "Race, Power, and Cultural Politics in John Okada's *No-No Boy*" demands a reading engaged with political and social issues within the context of the early Cold War. Since then, as Yamashita observes, "the literary criticism on *No-No Boy* has followed the path of a more critical engagement with Ichiro's individual subjectivity by taking into account the context of the publication, the intersectional identities of race and masculinities, comparative racialization, and structural perspectives" (294) and "from the fields of postcolonial, psychology, and noir" (292).

7 For a discussion of the role of women in disabled veterans' rehabilitation, see Gerber.

8 Jun also points out that "the narrative presents this home as the feminizing space of Asian alien difference from which Ichiro must be differentiated in order to achieve an American masculine subjectivity" (68).

9 Sokolowski argues that "[h]ere, oddly enough, the burden is on the citizen (Ichiro). The idealized past revolves around a feeling rather than a relationship of reciprocal rights and obligations; the result of the imaginative task is a lessening of the citizen's guilt" (88).

10 Lacanian psychoanalysis has been used in critical disability studies by such scholars as Davis, Michalko, Goodley, Wilton, and Shildrick.

11 As Goodley claims, "[r]ead through Lacan: ableist society upholds the imaginary autonomous citizen, promotes signifiers of ableist achievement, mastery and competence in symbolic culture and, crucially, denounces those who fail to match such ableist images and signs as really uncivilized, dis-abled, fragmented, dis-coordinated shells of humanity" ("Disability Studies and Psychoanalysis"). For a discussion on the intersection of Lacanian psychoanalysis and disability studies, see Goodley's *Dis/Ability Studies*.

12 To claim that "we are always already disabled," I do not ignore the injustice of social and economic inequality involved with disability, nor do I offer the categorical indistinguishability of dis/ability as an easy solution to ableism.

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