



**TRABAJO FIN DE MÁSTER**

**MÁSTER EN ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS Y CULTURALES INGLESES Y  
SU PROYECCIÓN SOCIAL**

The Things We Lost to Call America Home:  
John Okada's *No-No Boy* and the Multiple Effects of Racism

YOLANDA HERNÁIZ MARTÍNEZ

TUTORA ACADÉMICA: Dra. D.<sup>a</sup> Ana Isabel Zamorano Rueda

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

CURSO ACADÉMICO: 2021-22- Convocatoria: Junio

## Abstract

The Second World War and its aftermath were intense periods for the Japanese American community in the United States. During the conflict, the U.S. government implemented racist policies that forced more than one hundred thousand Japanese and Japanese Americans into detention camps. With the end of the war, these families were compelled to leave such grievances in the past, starting from scratch in a country that had flagrantly labeled them as enemies. A decade after the internment years, John Okada, a Nisei veteran, wrote in his only novel the traumatic experience of the camps and the stress of adjusting to American society in the following years. *No-No Boy* depicts the struggles of a young second-generation Japanese American who, after spending two years in prison for alleged disloyalty to the U.S. government, comes back to Seattle as a pariah. This dissertation analyzes the multiple effects of America's systemic racism on the figure of Ichiro and his complex portrayal by John Okada, whose own internalization of racist policies permeates the novel and creates a problematic narrative that both reinforces and contests assimilation as the only choice for America's acceptance of ethnic minorities.

The concept of racism will be studied following the narrative of Ichiro as character and narrator, delving into the acculturative stress provoked by trying to reconcile his heritage with his Americanness. His impossible understanding of biculturalism as a hyphenated identity will force him to a life of self-hatred and trauma, conditioning his relationship with his family, which he rejects in an effort to distance himself from his Japanese tradition. Moreover, the internalization of racism will take a toll on the synergies of the community, who will deal with the effects of the internment in silence, and will condemn those unwilling or unable to accommodate with white expectations. In the last chapter of this study, it is explored those aspects of the narrative that point to Okada's own bias in depicting America as a potentially welcoming country for Japanese Americans, offering hints at the author's own efforts to make his work acceptable within the white literary tradition. In all, this study aims to depict racism as an infectious disease that conditions every aspect of the life of its victims, including the narrative efforts of the writer, who ambivalently criticizes assimilationist strategies and reinforces them in an idealized depiction of America.

**Keywords:** John Okada, *No-No Boy*, racism, Asian American literature, internment camp.

## Resumen

La Segunda Guerra Mundial y sus consecuencias fueron periodos de gran intensidad para la comunidad japonesa americana en los Estados Unidos. Durante el conflicto, el gobierno estadounidense implementó políticas racistas que llevaron a más de cien mil japoneses y japoneses americanos a campos de detención. Con el final de la guerra, las familias se vieron obligadas a olvidar los agravios, empezando una nueva vida en un país que los había tachado flagrantemente de enemigos. Una década después, el veterano de guerra y Nisei John Okada plasmó en su única novela la traumática experiencia de los campos y el estrés de adaptarse a la sociedad americana en los años posteriores. *No-No Boy* describe la lucha de un joven japonés americano de segunda generación quien, tras pasar dos años en la cárcel por su supuesta deslealtad al gobierno americano, vuelve a Seattle convertido en un paria. Este trabajo analiza los distintos efectos del racismo sistemático americano en la figura de Ichiro y la representación que hace de él John Okada. La internalización de las políticas racistas por parte del autor permea la novela y crea una narrativa problemática que refuerza y a la vez cuestiona la asimilación como la única alternativa para la aceptación de la comunidad japonesa americana en la sociedad americana.

El concepto de racismo se aborda siguiendo la narrativa de Ichiro como personaje y como narrador, profundizando en el estrés provocado al intentar aculturar su herencia japonesa a la cultura americana. El entendimiento imposible que Ichiro hace del biculturalismo como una identidad partida desembocará en autodesprecio y trauma, condicionando su relación con su familia, a quienes rechaza intentando distanciarse de todo lo japonés. Además, la internalización del racismo tiene un efecto en la comunidad, que lidiará con las secuelas del internamiento en silencio, condenando a aquellos que no quieren o no pueden adaptarse a las expectativas. En el último capítulo de este trabajo se investigan aspectos que apuntan al sesgo del propio autor, quien hace una descripción benévola de América en su esfuerzo por hacer su obra aceptable de acuerdo a los parámetros literarios de la sociedad blanca. En resumen, este trabajo pretende describir el racismo como una enfermedad infecciosa que condiciona todos los aspectos de la vida de sus víctimas, incluyendo los esfuerzos literarios de John Okada, quien critica las políticas de asimilación a la vez que refuerza la representación de una América idealizada.

**Palabras clave:** John Okada, No-No Boy, racismo, literatura asiático americana, campo de internamiento.

# Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Resumen .....	2
Introduction .....	4
1. Where We are and Where We Come From.....	8
Historical Context .....	9
Theoretical Framework.....	15
2. The Rupture of the Self in the Quest for Assimilation.....	26
Shame and Self-Hatred as a Result of the Internalization of Racism .....	28
Schisms in the Family over the Japanese Heritage.....	36
Identity and Belonging: The Hyphenated Community .....	44
3. The Resilient Belonging: The Hyphenated Self.....	54
The (Troubled) American Promise .....	56
Self-Censoring in Aiming to Belong .....	60
Conclusion.....	70
Works Cited.....	74

# Introduction

Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past,  
threatens the future,  
and renders the present inaccessible.

Maya Angelou

Since the arrival of the Mayflower, the United States has become the destination of people from all around the world in pursuit of a better life. From the puritans to the gold diggers, America soon became a dream where starting anew was possible if only one was willing to work hard. The foundation of this new country was built on the expectations of Europeans, who designed this city upon a hill in their image and likeness. However, present already at its birth, it can be noticed an illness that continues to affect this nation until its present day. The same hypocrisy and racism that made Jefferson claim in the U.S. Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal” while owning slaves, make white America turn a blind eye to the systemic abuse that ethnic minorities suffer at the hands of its institutions.

Nobody told those who arrived in the country in the successive migrant waves the kind of hardships they would face in trying to make America their home. Racism was a virus that infected the country with the first slaves who disembarked in Virginia and continues to spread its deathly consequences up to the present day, with ten people killed in a shooting in an African American neighborhood in Buffalo, and three women wounded in a shooting in Dallas’ Koreatown, only last month. Not all the consequences of racism are as brutally disheartening as the shootings; white supremacy affects every aspect of the lives of ethnic minorities in the U.S., from where they live, what school their children attend, what jobs might be available, and what careers are more likely to be pursued. When reading ethnic writers’ experiences and getting shocked by those cases of injustice that make it into the news, I always wondered about the resilience of those minorities, and about the enormous sacrifice they continue to make to call themselves Americans.

Racism is not a bullet or an arrow, that causes a single wound that might heal over time, but a poison that contaminates every aspect of a person’s life. Racism is a

phenomenon that can be observed from multiple angles: the historical context that provokes it, the sociological effects on the communities, the psychological impact on the self, and its depiction or ignorance in the cultural efforts of white and ethnic artists. It is certainly no small fee for immigrants to pay when trying to make a living in America, it is unbearable the number of things they must lose to call America home.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the multiple effects of racism as suffered specifically by the Japanese American community, who endured some of the most flagrant cases of governmental racist abuse in the history of the United States. Moreover, this study aims to analyze the consequences of such policies as described in John Okada's novel *No-No Boy*, and as suffered and internalized by the author himself. Okada's novel, published in 1957 and rediscovered in the 1970s, has become a modern classic in Asian American literature, setting the basis for a tradition that flourished with the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Okada's work is remarkable not only in its ability to give voice to a community that had been forced to deal with trauma in silence but also in that it served as a beacon for a younger generation of authors who had no Asian artists to follow. When reading well-known Asian American writer Frank Chin on the importance of Okada for his work, one can only begin to understand what the novel must have meant for a minority with scarce possibilities to see themselves depicted in the arts:

To Asian Americans outside of Seattle, John Okada is the proof of our yellow soul. [...] Think of being born to a people who have no culture, no literature, no writing, no writers, except in some past across an ocean. [...] What if there were no whites in American literary history. There is no Melville, no Mark Twain, no Kay Boyle, no Gertrude Stein... [...] A white American writer would feel edgy if all the books ever written in America were by blacks, browns, reds, yellows, and all whites had ever published were cookbooks full of recipes for apple pie and fried chicken. That's what I grew up with. [...] I grew up told no one knew anything else about yellow writing because there was nothing else to know. [...] For me, the discovery of John's 1957 novel was like a white writer feeling gloomy and alone in a literary history, discovering Mark Twain. (Chin 225)

By analyzing Okada's work, I wish to achieve an in-depth understanding of the profound effects of racism on Japanese Americans in the 1950s, and how their suffering was depicted and conditioned by their desire to belong despite white America's narrow-mindedness. It is my concern that, in spite of the specificities of the historical context of the Second World War, the racist attitudes that are described in the narrative and mostly,

their devastating effects, can still be traced in today's America. Therefore, this study considers racism not as historically bounded, but as a systemic problem that is internalized and reproduced by minorities in their effort to conform to America's standards.

The research in this dissertation is focused on the concept of racism and its effects on different aspects of the victim. Through the close reading of the novel, I intend to demonstrate that racism is an expansive kind of abuse, whose consequences continue to resonate in the lives of those who suffer it even when there is no longer an obvious victimizer. I will try to locate the narrative within its sociohistorical context, attending to the singularities of the war and post-war times in the lives of Japanese Americans. However, this thesis aims to demonstrate that the effects of racism that can be observed in the novel go beyond the historical circumstances that might have caused it, and thus point in the direction of a problem that prevents Japanese Americans and other minorities to achieve happiness and fulfillment in America.

Throughout this study, I will delve into the psychological impact of racism, both in the self and in the family. Trauma and acculturative stress will be analyzed from multiple perspectives, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the limitations of working through in a society that is not ready to take responsibility. Asian American studies in particular and ethnic literature in general have a major concern in the construction of identities under the pressure of assimilation. In this sense, I will treat racism as a malady that has effects from psychological and sociological points of view, traceable through narratological devices such as the unreliability of the narrator and his stream of consciousness.

Continuing with the formation of the identity, in the last chapter I will take into account postcolonial theory to examine the elements in the narrative that point to subversion of normative white standards and a vindication of otherness out from the margins both of society and literature. However, it is my impression that racism's internalization is not only depicted in the story but also suffered by the author, who depicts in his work a vision of America that at times appears to reinforce assimilationist attitudes.

The structure of this dissertation is distributed according to two perspectives. The first chapter of this study revolves around the repercussions of racism on different layers

of the individual: the consequences on the self, with Nisei protagonist Ichiro Yamada's internalization in an effort to assimilate; the impact on the Nikkei family, with a first-generation Issei left stateless and unable to connect with their bicultural children; and the result of racist policies in the division of the community, with the understanding of patriotism as a destructive force in the Japanese minority. The second chapter delves into the effects of racism and collective amnesia within the Japanese community in their relation to white America and their proving of Americanness. This part is divided into fiction and reality: on the one hand, Ichiro's hyphenated self is analyzed in his struggle to make sense of America's contradictions, the myth of the American dream, and the minorities' exclusion from its achievement. On the other hand, it is also examined the elements within the novel that mark Okada's own troubles in making himself and his work available to the mainstream culture, questioning and at the same time reinforcing racist constraints in his quest for belonging.

In all, this work pretends to address racism as an infectious disease whose effects persist resonating in the lives of its victims, even when there is no longer an apparent white agenda behind them. The equation of Americanness with whiteness is a scourge that continues to devastate America and its citizens, affecting every victim in every aspect of their lives. The internalization of white supremacist ideology will make victims of racism torture themselves and others in pursuit of a standard that was never thought for them. Okada's work will be analyzed in this dissertation as a powerful and yet problematic narrative, that denounces the consequences of racist policies and yet succumbs to them, proving the complex and imperfect ambivalence of having the assimilationist dual model as the only potential choice.

# 1. Where We are and Where We Come From

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.

John Okada

John Okada's novel offers a polyhedral perspective on the many consequences racism has on the self. To understand his work, we must keep in mind a double approach that allows us an in-depth glance at the troubles of this author in depicting the complex reality of the Japanese American community of his time. On the one hand, the historical context gives some particularities to the situation of Japanese Americans in the 1940s and 1950s. Although racism is not historically bounded and can be traced to any moment of America's scarce two hundred and fifty years of history, some elements of the Second World War define and certainly condition the relationship of the Nikkei community with America at large.

On the other hand, *No-No Boy* locates itself at the gates of a new literary tradition. Asian American literature took this novel as an early example of a canon that would vindicate the literary efforts of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who had been forced to the margins of cultural movements. In this section, I delve into the first attempts at defining this literary tradition, and the characteristics of Okada and other contemporary writers who unconsciously contributed to the birth of Asian American literature. Moreover, it is suggested that in the development of ethnic minorities concerns, the Nikkei community focuses on aspects such as acculturation processes, feelings of belonging, and the construction of bicultural identities, that have been studied in the field of psychology. Lastly, the influence on those matters of white supremacist impositions has been approached by the thorough analysis of postcolonial theory, with well-known scholars such as Spivak or Bhabha denouncing the limits of ethnic representation in hegemonic discourse, and the potential for a space where double cultures can not only exist but thrive.

## Historical Context

The United States of America is a country built on the efforts of immigrants who arrived from all around the world in pursuit of a better life. No other country has its history so inextricably bounded by migration from its very founding and yet —or because of that— the United States continues to prove itself systemically racist towards migrant groups whose ethnic characteristics are different from the (white) American dream.

An ethnic group that defies and confirms America's narrow-mindedness is the Asian American minority. Uncomfortably distinguishable to the European eye, Asian Americans manage to escape the black-white racist dyad and yet challenge “the happy melting pot” (Ling 373). Although the history of each Asian minority cannot and should not be homogenized into the “Asian American” generic label, the object of this dissertation, the Japanese American struggle in the aftermath of WWII, cannot be understood without grasping to what extent racism is embedded in the Asian American experience. To comprehend how racism has been a fixed variable throughout American history, one must go back to the 19th century and the first policies against the Chinese population. Today's wave of Asian hate due to the COVID pandemic is not an isolated phenomenon, and it can be traced back to the first Chinese gold diggers or the Chinese labor in the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad:

The Central Pacific Railroad was contracted to build the difficult half from the Pacific, through the Rocky Mountains; within two years, 12,000 Chinese were hired – about 90 percent of the company's workforce. [...] When the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, Chinese workers were barred from the celebrations. The speeches congratulated European immigrant workers for their labor but never mentioned the Chinese. Instead, the Chinese men were summarily fired and forced to walk the long distance back to San Francisco – forbidden to ride on the railroad they built. (Zia 27)

This first glint of racism would quickly develop into physical violence by the last years of the 19th century with the “Yellow Peril” movement, which “established a particular brand of American racism that would be directed against Asian Americans into the next century” (Zia 27). From this time was also the first of a wide number of institutional grievances, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prevented Chinese people not only from migrating but also from becoming legal citizens, it was the first legislation “to restrict a group of immigrants based on their race and class” (E. Lee 36).

It is when Americans close the doors of the country to Chinese migration that other Asian countries came to play an important role in providing cheap work labor. Japanese, Indian, Korean or Filipino workers landed in America hoping to avoid the Chinese experience. “Ethnic hostilities were used to put the Asians against one another. Each successive immigrant group came with the expectation that they would avoid the problems of their predecessors and succeed in becoming American” (Zia 29). The tensions among different Asian nationalities would become unfortunately characteristic of the first Asian migration waves into the country. It would not be until the civil rights movements of the 1970s that activism would demand a united front.

More than 200,000 Japanese men and women led the next Asian migration wave within the last two decades of the century, supported by a Japanese government that, “unlike China’s, took an active interest in its citizen’s welfare, viewing the emigrants as its representatives to the world” (Zia 29). However, not even these institutional efforts in looking after the early Japanese diaspora would prevent America from imposing its racism. The Japanese and Korean Exclusion league reproduced Chinese hate as early as 1905, with the Japanese Exclusion Act, which “meant that even Asians not previously prevented from immigrating – the Japanese in particular – would no longer be admitted to the United States” (“The Immigration Act of 1924”), passed in 1924. Life was not easy not only for those aiming to migrate but also for those already in the country. In the 1920s different Alien Land Laws would prevent in many states “Japanese immigrants the right to own land” (Manzella 110). Barely fifty years after Chinese people were banned from entering U.S. soil, every other Asian nationality had suffered the same ostracism. It was evidence that, in the eyes of white Americans, Asian nationals would not be regarded individually, but only as a homogenous and suspicious collective.

While Japanese, Korean and Chinese people could not have considered themselves any more different, especially taking into account the relationship of invasion and oppression among the three, to European Americans they were indistinguishable. Racial slurs such as “Jap” or “Chink” would be used in what is known as “racial lamping, or white hegemony’s inability to distinguish between persons of different ethnicities and national origins” (Pisares 182). Every Asian community would receive anti-Chinese or Anti-Japanese slurs as if there were no differences between the countries, regardless of their relationship with American culture and their willingness to acculturate: “The Japanese were condemned as more dangerous than the Chinese because of their

willingness and ability to adopt American customs. Whereas the Chinese were attacked for not assimilating, the Japanese were reviled because they readily integrated” (Zia 30). The assumption that Asian Americans were unable to adapt and adopt U.S. customs would be proven false once and again, showing that America’s racism has nothing to do with the victims. However, the complex relationship between white America and the Asian American minorities underwent a drastic change in the context of the Second World War:

Suddenly, China and the Philippines were important allies of the United States against Japan. Almost overnight, the much-maligned Chinese and Filipino ‘rat-eaters’, ‘monkeys’ and ‘headhunters’ were praised as though they were much beloved – especially compared to Japanese. (Zia 40)

With the new division of Asian Americans into friends and foes, the former went to great pains not to be mistaken for the latter. “Knowing that Asians ‘all look alike’ to most other Americans, the Chinese posted signs saying ‘This is a Chinese shop’ and wore buttons that said ‘I Am Chinese’ and even ‘I Hate Japs Worse Than You Do’” (Zia 40). Moreover, the antagonizing of the Japanese brought opportunities of assimilation for the rest of Asian minorities, with many of them enlisting to show their patriotism and seeking “to become naturalized citizens. The demonization of Japanese Americans allowed other Asian Americans to become Americans” (Zia 40). Whatever difficulty the Nikkei community had endured up to the first decades of the 20th century, nothing can be compared to what happened right after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941:

In quick succession, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19 authorizing the exclusion of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast; U.S. attorneys on February 20 signed warrants for the arrest of more alien Issei; and on Saturday, February 21, more than one hundred FBI agents, backed up by state and local police, launched a fast-moving, coordinated second wave of arrest across the Pacific Coast states and Arizona. At 10 A.M on a cold frosty morning, as Takayo Okada prepared breakfast [...] two King County Sheriff’s deputies came to the door, led by FBI agent Hugh McMenam, who brandished a warrant for the arrest of Yoshito Okada. (Abe et al. 31)

Yoshito Okada was John Okada’s father. The author of *No-No Boy*, the novel under discussion in this dissertation, was forced, together with his family, to pack whatever belongings they could carry before they were located in the Puyallup Assembly Center (Abe et al. 36), a temporary facility that functioned as detention center while the

internment camps were constructed. The Okadas are just some of the 120,000 Japanese-Americans (War Relocation Authority 5) sent into detention camps alleging a “serious security threat to the United States” (Elleman 87), “removed from their homes in the Pacific Coast and sequestered in ten relocation or concentration camps” (Kashima 107). Half of the people who spent “time in what even [President] Roosevelt admitted were concentration camps” (“Behind the Wire”) were children (“Children of the Camps”), who grew up in detention.

As a matter of fact, the Japanese community posed not such a threat, and authorities knew so even before the Pearl Harbor attack. A secret report submitted to President Roosevelt confirmed Japanese American loyalty, and “FBI director J. Edgar Hoover also stated in a separate report that a mass evacuation of Japanese was unnecessary” (Zia 41). However, Lieutenant General John DeWitt, head of the Western Defense Command, “made it very clear that all Japanese, aliens or citizens, were the enemy. The distinction was solely racist” (Ivey and Kaatz 36). DeWitt’s arguments were heavily reproduced by the media, influencing a public opinion that all of the sudden saw an enemy in every Asian American neighbor.

If the incarceration was not enough testing of Nikkei’s loyalties, in 1943 a government questionnaire administered in the camps caused a stir, especially among the second-generation Nisei. “As a security-clearance measure, the War Department devised a Selective Service questionnaire which all males of Japanese ancestry over the age of seventeen were required to answer. Key to the questionnaire were questions 27 and 28” (Ling 360), which forced Asian Americans to hyphenate their identities in trying to convince American authorities that they were not the enemy.

Question 27 asked, “Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?” This first question was received with skepticism, but it was mostly answered positively, and “23,000 Japanese Americans served in the U.S. Army during World War II, the majority in the segregated 442nd Nisei Regimental Combat Team, the most highly decorated unit in U.S. military history for its size and length of service” (Zia 43). Not everybody conformed to what they saw as a double standard, and a small number “refused to do [so], reasoning that such a request was founded on the full rights of citizenship—which they did not have—and that they should not be required to serve in the same army that was enforcing their own detention” (Sandeem 292). Although they rejected the possibility of serving in the army as a way of

denouncing the U.S. racist system against Japanese Americans, to the American government they were perceived as disloyal.

Question 28 asked, “Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?” This was a double question and its poor formulation gave the impression of shadiness. The question hid a different implication for first- and second-generation members:

For the Issei, barred by racial laws from naturalized U.S. citizenship, to answer “yes” to the question as a whole would mean renouncing the only citizenship they had and render them stateless persons; for a Nisei to answer “yes”, to renounce an allegiance one never had, could be taken as an admission of having at one time or another actually harbored a loyalty to Japan. Both were viewed as trick questions by most. (Abe et al. 6)

In all, most Japanese-Americans were anxious to prove their loyalty and only “6,700 Japanese American men answered No-No to Question 27 and Question 28 out of the nearly 78,000 surveys distributed” (Endo 417). Those “No-No boys” who answered negatively to the questionnaire were relocated to Tule Lake Camp, considered the toughest concentration camp out of the ten who operated until the end of the war, and were denied access to privileges such as an early release or attendance to university while still in detention (Nakagawa 278). A small group of those who said yes to question 27 would later reject being drafted. This group, called “draft resisters”, “served an average of two years in federal prison, and this group included Ichiro [No-No Boy’s main character]” (Abe et al. 6). Those who have escaped the disloyal label at the time of the questionnaire found themselves again under pressure to show their alliance to the U.S. government, with matters of conscientious objection not taken into account.

With the end of the war, families were gradually allowed to abandon the camps, although where to go was an important question not every returnee had an easy answer to. “In addition to having faced initial stress and anxiety before and during incarceration, they now had to grapple with the many new problems arising as a consequence of leaving the camps” (Kashima 109). Most families had been forced to leave their businesses and their homes in a rush four years before, and many had nowhere to go back. The media had made a painstaking effort in reminding America who was the enemy, and from January to June 1945 it was reported more than 30 terrorist attacks only upon California

relocatees (Kashima 109). As it is depicted in Okada's novel, "feelings of insecurity and apprehension were manifest; mental suffering was felt by many as they faced the return to their preevacuation homes hearing tales of physical violence and damage to property" (Kashima 110). Some decided to return to their previous hometowns, especially in the case of cities with a strong Japanese community, and others moved and started a new life somewhere else, even though the reception was problematic.

The traumatic navigation of the anxieties provoked by the hostile attitudes of the U.S. government contrast with the growth that defined the postinternment period, marked as a time of change, of development for the Nikkei community that had to rebuild their dreams and their lives. The following years were not only characterized by the hard-working efforts of the community to reintroduce themselves to American society, but the 1950s were also years for the Japanese American members to negotiate their identities. Although there was certainly some bitterness out of what today is considered one of America's darkest episodes, most Japanese families did their best at integrating back into the community, looking forward to leaving the nightmare behind and feeling again like the Americans they had always been:

In the years following the war, the newly created families brought a spirit of change—the notion that Asians could be part of America if they proved their loyalty as worthy Americans. This reinforced the flip side as well, that to stand apart from the American mainstream could be disastrous. The old Japanese adage 'The nail that sticks out gets hammered down' was never felt to be more true. (Zia 44)

Their willingness to move forward provoked what has been defined as "social amnesia, a group phenomenon in which attempts are made to suppress feelings and memories of particular moments or extended time periods" (Kashima 113). This effort to leave the painful experience behind prevented Japanese Americans from verbalizing their grief, prompting schisms and divisions to become deeply embedded, causing distress and intergenerational trauma. This social amnesia was felt not only among families and friends but also in the artistic and intellectual circles. John Okada's novel *No-No Boy* was a rarity at the time of its publishing because in 1957 the Japanese community was not ready to deal with the raw depiction of the internal conflict suffered in the last decades. Okada's writing, ahead of his time in that sense, received almost no attention and was soon forgotten. In the foreword of a recent edition of the novel, American Canadian author Ruth Ozeki wrote directly to Okada:

In *No-No Boy* you wrote unflinchingly about the scarring experience of being a Japanese American on the West Coast during World War II, but that war had only ended twelve years earlier, and twelve years is no time at all. When your book came out, Japanese Americans were busy keeping their heads down, assimilating, and working on becoming the model minority of 1950s America. It's understandable. They had been rounded up and sent to prison camps in the desert. They had lost their homes and business and communities. They had suffered, and they wanted to move on. *No-No Boy* was radical, but it was ahead of its time. It was angry and raw. It touched nerves and opened wounds. It reminded them of a past they wanted to forget, and so they rejected it. Your book disappeared almost overnight. (VIII)

The internment period is considered one of the most deplorable episodes in the history of the United States, but as it has been described in this section, it was just the last of a great number of grievances that marked the lives of Asian Americans and Japanese Americans. The shamefulness of the U.S. policies would not prevent the American government from exerting other forms of abuse on ethnic minorities in the following years, leading American society to a state of turmoil that would result in the civil rights movements of the 1960s. John Okada is one of the most recognizable voices of this time, his novel setting the path for a tradition that would gain self-awareness a few years later. His narrative gives voice to a Nikkei community that had been forced to deal with their traumas in silence, forcing the world to see the tragic effects of racism.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Okada, a second-generation Japanese-American, was born and raised in Seattle. He left his home for the internment camp when he was eighteen. However, unlike his main character Ichiro, he managed to leave the camps for college and served in the army as an interpreter. After the war, he used his GI Bill to pay his way back to college and graduated in English and Librarianship (Abe et al. 4). Okada is said to have been very popular among his friends and community, and once back in Seattle he found many voices that inspired him in creating the characters of his novel, especially his friend Jim Akutsu's experience as a resister (Abe et al. 66). After publishing his novel, Okada continued to work as a technical writer, and his second novel was left unfinished due to his premature death of a heart attack in 1971, at the age of 47.

It has become sort of a legend how, in 1970, more than a decade after the publishing of the book, promising author and scholar Jeffery Paul Chan found an old copy of *No-No*

*Boy* in a Japantown San Francisco bookstore. Chan gave it to other eventually “Asian-American canon breakers” (Hsu) such as Frank Chin, David Ishii, and Lawson Fusao Inada. As Inada recalled in the introduction to the reedition of the novel in 1976 and later included in the 2014 edition xix), the group found more copies and distributed them on campuses and communities, giving it the spotlight that it had been denied in the late 1950s. It is also heart-breaking to read how, in the late spring of 1971, Frank Chin and Inada drove to Los Angeles to meet Dorothy Okada, who had become a widow only a few months earlier.

This dissertation intends to locate the novel as an early example of the Asian American literary tradition, that began to be defined in the 1970s, in the context of the civil rights movement. Asian American minorities had been reduced to the “orientalist” prejudice defined by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), a western stereotype that located Asian cultures as a subordinated Other:

The argument, when reduced to its simplest form, was clear, it was precise, it was easy to grasp. There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power. (36)

With the activism that brought minorities in the U.S. to fight for better living conditions, the “Asian American” label was coined and with it came the sense of belonging to a group that would start making “claims about a history of writing that had largely been obscured” (Song 3). This newly defined literary tradition shortly established its concerns around “questions of social difference, the possibility of coherent identity, the terms of political affiliation and unity, and the conditions of belonging and exclusion” (Parikh and Kim xxi). Moreover, the term Asian American served, right from its birth, to represent a “pan-ethnic category that brings together –if at times tenuously– members of various diasporas across different historical moments. It pertains to all who identify as “Asian” as well as to those who *have been identified* by others as Asian or “Oriental” (Parikh and Kim xxi). However, the Asian American concept has not remained uncontested.

Although in its origin it was used hyphenated, in this dissertation the term is dispensed with the hyphen, following recent tendencies that regard, in omitting the hyphen, a way for “‘Chinese’ or ‘Asian’ [to assume] a qualifying role in the expression,

giving greater weight to ‘American’ because the noun designates national and geographical affiliations and affirms the citizenship status of the bearer of the label” (Huang 3). Taking into account their ethnic heritage, this new understanding of the term places the focus on their right to belong to America.

The variations of the term notwithstanding, the Asian American literary tradition was designed as an umbrella under which writers could find inspiration and protection in a society and an industry that considered them rarities. Above all, Asian American literature provided its members with a sense of belonging:

Newly christened Asian American writers need not write in isolation. They are part of a tradition, which can be retroactively traced and recovered, and as such proficient at calling forth a public capable of appreciating the continuities that inform and sustain new work. Alternatively, Asian American writers might understand themselves as part of a literary movement connected to a racially based movement, one fully engaged in self-conscious attempts to break from the nightmares of the past and to call forth new forms of being together. (Song 9)

Chin, Inada, and Shawn Wong understood the need to honor the pioneers of such tradition, and after finding the novel they included Okada and other writers of his generation in their collection *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1974), setting the founding of a cultural identity. At the core of such tradition, the never-ending question of what it means to be Asian American guided the literary efforts of writers and scholars:

The question "to be" is not so much a question of essence underlying the category per se as it is a question of the social relations and circumstances through which an identity can stake and secure its very claims. Although the historical presence of Asian America as a communal geopolitical space and Asian Americans as a people can be traced to the founding of the US, their explicit categorical emergence is quite recent in origin. (Li, “The State and Subject of Asian American Criticism: Psychoanalysis, Transnational Discourse, and Democratic Ideals” 603)

Okada, therefore, belongs to the first generation of writers that have been included in retrospect as part of the Asian American literary canon. Together with Okada, other authors such as Carlos Bulosan (*America Is in the Heart*, 1943) or Toshio Mori (*Yokohama, California*, 1949) had an extraordinary influence on later well-known authors such as the already mentioned Frank Chin, or Maxine Hong Kingston. However, Okada’s

writing, as proved by the scarce popularity of his novel, had significant difficulties in getting his work recognized by a mainstream audience.

The limited space within the publishing industry allowed to Asian American writers forced them, especially those belonging to the first generations, to meticulously calculate the extent of the protest in their novels. In other words, the systemic racism that defines America not only shaped people's identities but also the way stories were told. Fortunately, what remained outside the white literary paradigm that ruled the publishing industry at the time still found its way into printing, although at the cost of being left at the margins of the literary industry. As scholar Seong-ho Yoon puts it, what racist America considers outside the white normative still forms part of an inner state of the country, only in opposition to a "particular articulation of the nation" (46), that might, over time, do not represent the mainstream point of view.

Okada's work can be contextualized both within the mid-century Asian American literary movement and, more specifically, in the genre of interment and post-interment literature. The 1950s Asian American literature was characterized by a "social realist style" (Adams 54), with authors like Okada or Bulosan mostly writing in prose, focusing on "the experiences of disenfranchised men, their female characters functioning as little more than foils, enough to suggest to critics like Viet Thanh Nguyen and Jinqi Ling that their narratives anticipate an androcentric, cultural nationalist sensibility" (Adams 54). Authors from this period such as Toshio Mori, Hisaye Yamamoto, and Monica Sone shared with Okada a veiled critique of racial discrimination:

Mid-twentieth-century prose realistically described the lives of ordinary Asian Americans as they were disrupted by economic insecurity and the war. Such disruptions adversely affected both familial and sexual relationships, sometimes resulting in madness and death. To this extent, the texts were critical of the USA, although antiracist critique is, for some later critics, difficult to discern in texts that ended in support of American democratic values. (Adams 69)

Although genres such as poetry and drama would have greater development in the following decades, when protest would take form through experimental techniques, there are early attempts in the 1950s at the hands of "the Japanese American Yone Noguchi, the Filipino Americans José Garcia Villa and Carlos Bulosan, the Japanese Canadian Joy Kogawa, and the Chinese Canadian Fred Wah, among others" (Huang 22). Within fiction, whether short stories or novels, a major theme of the time was undoubtedly the internment

of Japanese Americans in detention camps. It was not an easy topic, and it became sort of the elephant in the room, with authors afraid of disrupting the fragile peace in the post-internment years.

During the war, few pieces of literature would emerge since, “in the shadow of official control, criticism of government policies within camp was generally limited” (Robinson 46). Right after the return of the internees, some writing was published, mostly “written by non-Japanese, set in third-person narrative, and focused on the injustice of confinement” (Robinson 46). From this time the most well-known—and almost the only—work that made a significant impact was Okada’s novel, and it was brutally sent into oblivion by the readership of the time. “As the nation entered the mid-1950s and mainstream debate over the wartime events melted away, camp literature all but died out,” and it was not until two decades later, during the 1970s, that “in parallel with the development of a mass political campaign for reparations by former inmates, internment writing revived” (Robinson 46). It has already been mentioned in this dissertation that Okada’s novel was ahead of its time, and such an argument is based not only on the community’s reluctance to speak about the internment years but also on the characteristics of the internment narrative of the 1970s, highly related to Okada’s:

The third generation of camp literature, produced primarily by Japanese Americans, was intended for a community as well as general readership. In keeping with the movement ethos of breaking the silence that surrounded the camps, these works took on the status of testimony, favoring first-person narration. Moreover, the writing of the 1970s and early 1980s placed the trauma of internment at the center. (Robinson 46)

John Okada’s work is therefore located at the core of the Asian American literary tradition, even though his only novel was published before such tradition even formally existed. In the construction of the Asian American literary canon, there are elements borrowed from other literary theories that contribute to the development and understanding of the Asian American as a unique kind of literature. As it is described in different sections of this study, elements such as identity, belonging, or acculturation form some of the most important sources of debate and inspiration for Asian American writers. Located within a psychological approach to literature, it is worth delving into these terms in order to attempt a better understanding of Okada’s work and the author’s concerns.

In Okada's novel, at the core of Ichiro's struggles, it can be observed his difficulty in adapting to America's impossible expectations. This process of adjustment has been defined in psychology with the term acculturation, which represents:

The dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At the cultural group level, it involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural norms. At the individual psychological level, it involves changes in people's behavioral repertoires (including their food, dress, language, values and identities) and their eventual adaptation to these intercultural encounters. (Berry 15)

Acculturation is, in other words, a negotiation of tensions between the culture of the destination country, and the culture of the country of origin. Moreover, this clash between such cultures is endured in two different arenas: there is "cultural and identity maintenance by the group experiencing acculturation, and second, contact with and participation in the larger society" (Berry et al. 494). Professor Berry, specialized in cross-cultural psychology, established in the 1970s and 1980s four types of acculturation, depending on the nondominant ethnocultural group's relationship with their own culture and that of their adoptive country.

The first and most well-known scenario is that of assimilation, "when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures" (Berry 23). Assimilationist strategies have been endorsed in the United States by right-wing groups, who have equated assimilation with Americanization, finding in this term a feature "of racist rhetoric directed towards blaming the victim for negative other-representation" (Bowskill et al. 794). However, Berry underscores the limitations of assimilation for some ethnic groups, especially those like Asian Americans, who cannot easily amalgamate into white America:

There are obvious constraints on whether individuals can 'pass' into, and become accepted as a member of, another ethnocultural group. People's characteristics, such as accent, dress, and physical appearance, will signal their existing group membership, and if these features are not acceptable to members of the other group, they will impede (even prevent) successful assimilation. (23)

Assimilation appeared to be the only choice for Asian Americans in the 1950s, and Ichiro's efforts throughout the novel are mostly oriented toward this tactic. "In contrast, when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same

time wish to avoid interaction with others, then the separation alternative is defined” (Berry 23), a strategy which, as it will be later explained, corresponds to Mrs. Yamada’s relation to American culture. Acculturation also admits other two possibilities which correspond to characters in the novel. “When there is little possibility of, or interest in, cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss), and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination), then marginalization is defined” (Berry 23). Mrs. Yamada epitomizes the psychological risks of marginalization, forced to abandon his Japanese culture and yet unable to commit to the assimilationist process of Americanization she is expected. The last potential scenario is the most optimistic one:

When there is an interest in both maintaining one’s original culture and having daily interactions with other groups, integration is the option [...] here, there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, while at the same time the individual seeks, as a member of an ethnocultural group, to participate as an integral part of the larger society. (Berry 23)

Integration is never offered as a possibility in *No-No Boy*. Those of Japanese origin who manage to live happily have embraced American customs, while those who resist Americanization are condemned to trauma and depression. Of course, any acculturative option depends not only on the nondominant group but also on the receiving society. Those who must undergo the process of acculturation might not enjoy the freedom to actually decide on the kind of process and the degree of engagement with America’s culture. In the novel acculturation is not an option because America does not offer it:

Constraints imposed by the dominant group may enforce certain kinds of relations, or limit the choices of nondominant groups or individuals. This is most clearly so in the case of integration, which can only be freely chosen and successfully pursued by nondominant groups when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation toward cultural diversity. (Berry 23)

The integration strategy has been further developed in the last decades and has come to admit other terms such as biculturalism, which will be frequently used in this dissertation. Biculturalism makes reference to the same phenomenon, that in which “a person endorses at least one heritage culture and at least one receiving culture, [...] acquire[ing] some aspects of their receiving culture while still retaining some aspects of their cultural heritage” (Meca et al. 42). This approach was originally conceived as a cumulative system, with each culture adding to the other, but today bicultural identity is

understood as a polyhedric, intertwined and dynamic phenomenon (Meca et al. 41) that allows for a unique and inclusive construction of the self.

Highly related to the acculturation process are the construction of identities and the sense of belonging in the case of immigrant groups. Ethnic groups are significantly influenced by their relationship with American society, and it is only logical to understand their identities as permeable to the impact of American culture on their selves:

Identities are not hermetically sealed entities that are internally consistent and which necessarily exclude other identities. Social life is far too complex to conceptualize the relationship between individuals and the collectives of which they are a constituent part in such a crude, reductionist way, and the case of migration certainly provides us with a clear reminder of these dangers. (Jones and Krzyzanowski 43)

The sense of belonging, therefore, is not static, but a “transitory characteristic since it follows individuals’ social, cultural, and emotional state in that place, with that group, and at that time” (Peter et al. 96). When adapting to a new country, the way we see ourselves and the way we construct our identity depend on and are affected enormously by how we are perceived by the local community and whether we feel and are made feel at home. Belonging holds significant relevance in the formation of identity in ethnic minorities because the acceptance of the group marks how we define ourselves:

Belonging can be considered a process whereby an individual in some way feels some sense of association with a group, and as such represents a way to explain the relationship between a personalized identity and a collective one. [...] It is precisely because identities are formed in such a way that they should not be conceived of as things that exist prior to, or outside of, social action. (Jones and Krzyzanowski 44)

These two scholars make an emphasis on the importance of “the ‘mundane’, day-to-day things that feed into ways of belonging” (Jones and Krzyzanowski 43), such as buying a house or owning land. Since Asian Americans were banned from doing such things, in their understanding of identity and belonging a third element becomes relevant:

Citizenship (as an ideal) stands for the autonomy, self-legislation, and sense of civic solidarity that members of a group extend to one another. At the heart of the concept of citizenship is the question of the individual—both dependent and independent, always and yet never alone in the modern world. Considered as an ideal and practical identity, citizenship supplies both moral value and pragmatic institution. (Zamora 19)

Citizenship was, up until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not an option for Asian Americans, who were seen as a threat to America's "projection of uniformity and equivalence" (Zamora 19), who saw Asian American minorities as unable to overcome the undistinguishable marks of difference that forced this ethnic minority into Otherness.

As it is depicted in Okada's novel, matters of identity and belonging can be endorsed but they certainly can also be questioned by local communities. White America was unwilling to accept any integration that implied Asian Americans preserving their culture, and faced with the only option of assimilation, another psychological phenomenon quickly and painfully surfaced. The acculturative stress and its extreme form of depression are dominant features of Okada's narrative, permeating the narrative from the narratological devices to the semantic choices.

The concept of acculturative stress is associated with behaviors that take place in the process of acculturation, such as "lowered mental health status (specifically confusion, anxiety, depression), feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptom level, and identity confusion" (Berry et al. 492). This kind of traumatic experience is determined once again by "the nature of the host or larger society: is there a pluralist or multicultural ideology (with attendant tolerance for cultural diversity), or is there an assimilationist ideology (with pressures to conform to a single cultural standard)?" (Berry et al. 494) Acculturative stress is not exclusive to the normative society of the 1950s, just as racism is not an anachronistic feature of America's culture. This throbbing consequence of America's intolerance has been equated to post-traumatic stress disorders, and it has been studied to be more likely suffered by immigrant youth, such as Ichiro:

As a tension attempting to balance the extent to which they should preserve their original cultural identity and customs versus immersion in the new culture. They may feel pressured to blend in and to be more like their peers while discarding their own cultural customs and values. Adopting the host country's attitudes and behaviors that are different from the ones expected in their native culture may lead to family conflict as youths' values clash with those of their parents. (Rettger et al. 88)

The psychological process of cultural adaptation and the effects of navigating dominant group's reluctance to open-mindedness have also been largely studied in postcolonial theory, a branch of literary theory that analyzes the relationship of subordination between western empires and the rest of the world, depicted as the inferior

on Eurocentric standards. In this dissertation, Okada's own ability to present his narrative to a mainstream readership without censoring himself is questioned based on Spivak's well-known theory on the limits of the subaltern to have a voice within western discourse. Spivak built her theory on the subaltern based on Antonio Gramsci's definition of those without agency (Spivak 476) and used the term to describe "the limits of Western discourse, even postcolonial discourse, to interact with disparate cultures" (Maggio 420). In this study, Spivak's argument helps frame the limits of Okada's projection. It will be later contended that *No-No Boy*, in giving voice to the subaltern, had little echo among white readers, who were unable to understand and communicate with those of a different culture. Moreover, it will be argued that Okada was well aware of this potential reaction, and diluted his criticism in an effort to conform to white expectations.

Following Spivak's definition of the subaltern and confronting dominant cultures with their own intolerance, scholar Homi Bhabha calls for the idea of "hybridity" to defy hegemonic power, "shifting forces and fixities" in:

The strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the "pure" and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the reevaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. ("Signs Taken for Wonders" 154)

Bhabha finds in the adoption of cultural traits by ethnic minorities a form of protest, a subversion of assimilationist policies that forces white standards to confront their sense of uniqueness. Moreover, in his work Bhabha defines, extrapolating it from linguistic to social theory, a "third space where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences" (*The Location of Culture* 218). This liminal space offers hope for minorities in search of a space where their cultures can cohabit, and it has been widely developed by ethnic literature such as the Chicano tradition. Among its authors, it resonates within Andazúa's "borderland culture" and "mestiza consciousness" (25), also as a space for ethnic cultures to inhabit mainstream America.

Bhabha's "hybridity" and Andazúa's "mestiza" are brought to this thesis as an optimistic approach to the kind of inclusive society that is only inferred in Okada's work. In Ichiro's rigidness and inability to deal with the injustice of the system, the mestiza consciousness might be understood as a more inclusive alternative, "characterized by the

development of a tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity, by the transgression of rigid conceptual boundaries, and by the creative breaking of the new unitary aspect of new and old paradigm” (Lugones 34). This dissertation, therefore, analyzes the novel *No-No Boy* within the limits of the author’s imagination regarding racial inclusiveness, but also the criticism provided by postcolonial authors, and the optimism of other ethnic minorities.

## 2. The Rupture of the Self in the Quest for Assimilation

‘Don’t blame yourself.’

‘Then who’s to blame?’

‘Doesn’t matter. Blame the world, the Japs, the Germans.

But not yourself. You’re killing yourself.’

‘Maybe I ought to.’

John Okada

We meet Ichiro Yamada at Second and Main in Seattle. We learn, right from the first page of the novel, that Ichiro answered no-no to the loyalty questionnaire, that he has spent two years in jail because of that decision, and that he regrets it. Okada appears to mix two concepts in the novel, that of no-no boys, who answered negatively to the questionnaire, and draft resisters, who answered yes to both questions but then refused to enlist. The former went to a different detention camp, and the latter spent some years in federal prison. Okada refers to Ichiro as a no-no boy but explains how he went to jail. In this dissertation, both terms will be used interchangeably, following the author’s decision to equate them.

As he gets off the bus, he wonders what space in this new postinternment society is left for him after four years away from home (two in a detention camp), and an indelible stain that marks him as a coward: “He felt like an intruder in a world to which he had no claim. It was just enough that he should feel this way, for, of his own will, he had stood before a judge and said that he would not go into the army. At the time there was no other choice for him” (Okada 3). Ichiro’s trauma is clearly described from the very beginning. In a stream of consciousness that is going to become characteristic of the novel, Ichiro’s interrupted ideas and confessions come to exemplify the effects of the blame on those who were presented with such an impossible choice: “Christ, he thought to himself, just a goddamn kid as I was. Didn’t I know enough to wipe my own nose. What the hell have I done? What am I doing back here? Best thing I can do would be to kill some son of a bitch and head back to prison” (Okada 3).

For most of the narrative, Ichiro will blame himself and his clouded judgment but in these first lines, he refers himself to as a kid, somehow condoning himself for his lack of maturity. However, even if in these first pages he briefly recognizes himself as a victim, what is mostly underscored is his feeling of shame. Ichiro's desperation to manage a situation that he sees no escape for is made even more traumatic due to the fact that what causes such torment is never fully explained, "readers are deprived of those originary moments of trauma from which Ichiro's despair emanates" (Davis 57). Just as in real life the memories of the internment period would be kept under strict silence, in the novel the camp and prison times are not mentioned, becoming a haunting ghost that torments Ichiro but is never fully grasped by the reader nor by the American society of the time.

Ichiro is a Nisei, a second-generation Japanese American. In other words, Ichiro was born in America and, unlike his parents, has American citizenship and is allowed to own land. Within the Nikkei community, the second generation was the one who would anchor the families to the country. Raised in Japanese households but growing up in the American lifestyle, their biculturalism was jeopardized by assimilationist policies that were unable to understand Nisei loyalties towards both America and Japan. The narrow-mindedness of those who saw them as the enemy would force the second generation to choose whether they were one thing or the other, when in reality "the Nisei were truly Japanese Americans, growing up with one foot in each culture" (Taylor 13), embracing the best of each heritage.

Through the novel, Ichiro tries to come to terms with this cultural duality, denied by a society that asks him to choose. In the internalization of the racist ideology that cannot conceive of biculturalism, he is condemned to a life of emptiness, "Ichiro's refusal has left him unable to be 'wholly' anything" (D. Y. Kim 68). Okada explores the polarization of definitions of "Japanese" and "America", "assimilation and cultural maintenance" (Yogi 64), at a time when the concept of Japanese American had not even been created yet. In the racist America of the WWII aftermath, Americanness paralleled whiteness, leaving the ethnic minorities little room for existence:

The failure to distinguish between "Japanese" and "Japanese-American" created polarized ideas of "Japanese" and 'American' and forced upon Nisei the implicit yet false choice between the two. The choice is false technically, because Nisei are American by birth. On another level, though, the acceptance of this choice implies that Nisei adopt a narrow definition of "American" that excludes them because they are not of European

descent. The choice is also damaging because it would demand a hatred of everything considered "Japanese." For Nisei, then, this required a distaste for their parents and their culture and, ultimately, a veiled self-hatred. (Yogi 65)

The rupture of the self, which is forcefully divided into halves, provokes the arousal of several questions, such as: how can you accept who you are when you are denying half of yourself? How can you embrace a culture—or an idea of culture—that does not recognize you as its own? How can you pretend to be white when you are constantly reminded that you are not? “How, Okada seems to ask, can Japanese American survive emotionally in a postwar America filled with racism and unreasoning hatred?” (Storhoff 2) The answer to all these questions, as seen in the story of Ichiro, is a tremendous suffering, epitomizing “the tragedy of being unable to preserve both identities in favour of Americanness” (P. Kim 7). In the American society of the 1950s, biculturalism was not an option, everything that was not simply American was regarded as disloyal. In this poisonous duality, assimilation proves itself a painful and unsuccessful process in Ichiro’s journey. In the polarity of assimilating or remaining a foreign alien, second-generation immigrants saw their identities amputated. If assimilating is an arduous path, choosing the other extreme of the dichotomy and remaining truthful to the Japanese heritage is also deemed in the novel as a blind alley that marks you as an outcast:

*No-No Boy* reveals the double-edged sword of Franco Morreti’s definition of ‘socialization’ by illustrating the damaging effects of rejecting American assimilation and showing the tragic cost behind one’s successful acculturation: the loss of agency and the abjection of one’s ethnic roots. (P. Kim 9)

*No-No Boy* does not offer solutions, there is no successful conclusion on whether assimilating, not assimilating, becoming American, or Japanese, or Japanese American is not only viable but a better outcome. The novel offers, however, a glance at the effects of submitting your self in favor of a racist demand that nullifies your identity. The narrative depicts a society that could not see beyond the duality imposed by white standards, and the trail of suffering as the only path for bicultural Americans.

### **Shame and Self-Hatred as a Result of the Internalization of Racism**

The internalization of racism is such an effective and cruel way of punishment because at some point you no longer need to impose your racist ideology on someone; that person has already taken it as the truth and does not need the world to tell them what they already

accept to be factual. Ichiro's narrative is heart-breaking because he never ceases to believe he has committed an inescapable mistake. He does not need the Nikkei community or America at large to point out what he thinks was his cowardice, because he is his worst tormentor:

He was Ichiro who had turned his back on the army and the country and the world and his own self. He thought only that he had felt no differently after spending his first night in prison. On that morning, when he woke up and saw the bars, it had not mattered at all that the bars were there. This morning, for the first time in two years, there were no bars, but the fact left him unimpressed. The prison which he had carved out of his own stupidity granted no paroles or pardons. It was a prison of forever. (Okada 38)

There is a symbiotic relationship between Ichiro's environment and his self-hatred. All through the novel, Ichiro perceives elements of his reality that reassure him in his depression. He makes no difference between his life in prison and now that he is free because since he cannot escape his decision, a life behind bars made more sense to him than this potential future he does not feel he deserves. Even if saying no-no to the questionnaire was a mistake, Ichiro appears to be unable to come to terms with his past, and because he cannot leave it behind, he does not see the possibility of a future:

Okada created a protagonist who fails to piece together his fragmented past and whose predicament epitomizes the consequences of the racism that had fueled the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and continued to condition their lives and identities in the postwar years. (Ling 360)

As a Japanese-American who feels estranged from his family and whose past deems him unworthy of calling himself America, Ichiro's identity is dispossessed of every half. It is in this state of loss that Okada "epitomizes the consequences of the racism that had fueled the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and continued to condition their lives and identities in the postwar years" (Ling 360). In Ichiro's run-on discourse, within the pain and the bitterness, there is an important element of nostalgia for those times before the war when racism was subtler and they did not have to worry about consciously defining their identities:

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. Then there came a time when I was only half Japanese because one is not born in America and raised in America and taught in America and one

does not speak and swear and drink and smoke and play and fight and see and hear in America among Americans in American streets and houses without becoming American and *loving it* (emphasis added). (Okada 16)

As it will be later analyzed, the idealization of America is constant all through the novel, and Ichiro's love for his country is permanently on display. It makes the reader wonder how the U.S. government could ever see people like Ichiro, so infatuated with America, as potential threats. Part of Ichiro's self-hatred arises from his feelings of betrayal, he feels American and in saying no to the questionnaire, he interiorizes the government's assumption that he is a traitor. Ichiro never questions his biculturalism before the war, which describes as a wake-up call to racism, as if racist attitudes and abuse were not common before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Although this assumption is certainly mistaken, it implies the naivety of a young Ichiro who was hardly an adult when the war broke. Moreover, this idea of racism as a result of the attack can be related to the fact that Ichiro grows in a big city, Seattle, with a well-established Japanese community. It is not unthinkable that Ichiro might have never suffered open racist attitudes until the incarceration. This contrast between pre and postwar America makes Ichiro's new reality as a pariah even harder because his feelings of belonging before the war were, even if idealized, genuine:

When one is born in America and learning to love it more and more every day without thinking it, it is not an easy thing to discover suddenly that being American is a terribly incomplete thing if one's face is not white and one's parents are Japanese of the country of Japan which attacked America. (Okada 49)

In the novel, the denunciation of racism is always presented in an abstract way, which points to Okada's evasion tactic to focus on the effects of racism rather than personalizing the victimizers. By contrast, Ichiro's passion for America is tangible, he speaks of the language, the food, and the university he attends as elements that make him love his country. It could be inferred the idea that in loving the United States so much, it is only natural that he also assumed its racist thinking. As the reader delves into Ichiro's psyche, it becomes more remarkable that a person who feels so American and holds the country so dear, decided to answer no when he had the opportunity to show his allegiance and fight for its defense. It is unclear why Ichiro becomes a no-no boy. Okada, who was himself a yes-yes boy, makes his character's decision to pay tribute to every one of the nearly 7,000 men who were sent to Tule Lake Camp or prison.

The author cleverly echoes the reasons of many no-no boys, making Ichiro a universal voice against oppression. In doing so, the Okada makes the reader empathize with a cause that was rather problematic at the time since it was misunderstood both in and out of the Nikkei community. As it has been already noticed, racist policies were implemented in the name of a potential betrayal. It is precisely that feeling that led some Japanese Americans to say no, arguing that they could not be asked to serve after being treated like the enemy. In their negative answer, they were trying to contest the American system's hypocrisy, that considered them American enough to risk their lives in the army, but not enough to avoid detention: "I am not an American or you wouldn't have plucked me and mine from a life that was good and real and meaningful and fenced me in the desert like they do the Jews in Germany" (Okada 30). Although the incarcerated community was generally well-behaved during their imprisonment, it was obvious, even at the time, that Executive Order 9066 was a racist policy. Some German and Italian citizens were detained for questioning, but there were no exclusion zones for European American families.

You, Mr. Judge, who supposedly represent justice, was it a just thing to ruin a hundred thousand lives and homes and farms and businesses and dreams and hopes because the hundred thousand were a hundred thousand Japanese and you couldn't have loyal Japanese when Japan is the country you are fighting and, if so, how about the Germans and Italians that must be just as questionable as the Japanese or we wouldn't be fighting Germany and Italy? [...] If you think we're the same kind of rotten Japanese that dropped the bombs on Pearl Harbor, and it's plain that you do or I wouldn't be here having to explain it to you why it is that I won't go and protect sons-of-bitches like you, I say you're right and *banzai* three times and we'll sit the war out in a nice cell, thank you. (Okada 30)

The blunt vocabulary, the long lines, and the misspelling are all elements that Okada gracefully uses to make the reader understand the anger and the rage all those families must have felt when they were forced to abandon their lives because of their race. With the loyalty questionnaire, The United States government was making them choose between their Japanese heritage and an Americanness that the government itself had already denied them. In prison, without a release date and with family members distributed all around the country, it is striking that still so many men decided to join the military. Some of those who did not, had their family in mind: "I can't go because my brother is in the Japanese army and if I go in your army and have to shoot at them because

they're shooting at me, how do I know that maybe I won't kill my own brother?" (Okada 31), depicting links between the countries that the U.S. system was eager to eliminate.

All the potential reasons appear to lose their legitimacy once the war is over and no-no boys are left with the shame of disappointing their community and the country. As Ichiro states, "my reason was all the reasons put together. I did not go because I was weak and could not do what I should have done" (Okada 32). Ichiro internalizes the official American discourse that, no matter the abuse against his community, his was an act of cowardice that renders him in an unavoidable state of disgrace. It is "Ichiro's deep sense of shame [which] leads to intense self-hatred" (Ling 367). Even if he is aware of the role of the U.S. government in his suffering, he is incapable of confronting it (Xu 22), and displaces his anger on himself.

One of the most interesting strategies in Okada's novel regarding racism is that, just like the camps are never mentioned, there are barely any white characters in the story. We are at a point in the development of the racist discourse when they no longer need to be in the narrative to control it. "Racial hatred from White Americans was compounded by self-hatred, which resulted from internalizing White-supremacist views about their ethnic and racial identities and perpetuating these views within the Japanese American community" (Endo 420). There is no need for a white racist man to tell us that Ichiro is a "Jap" and there is no room for him in the country because Ichiro already tells so himself. If he does not feel Japanese – he barely speaks the language – and he does not belong in America, what is left?

Lying there, he wished the roof would fall in and bury forever the anguish which permeated his every pore. He lay there fighting with his burden, lighting one cigarette after another and dropping ashes and butts purposely on the floor. It was the way he felt, stripped of dignity, respect, purpose, honor, all the things which added up to schooling and marriage and family and work and happiness. (Okada 12)

In his depressive state of self-hatred, Ichiro believes he is not allowed any happiness. The internalization of "the common discourse that No-no boys were unpatriotic and weak-minded" (Endo 421) makes him for most of the novel unwilling or unable to allow himself any hope. Although his somber attitude never truly lightens, Ichiro is a young man of twenty-five, and in the second half of the novel, some characters such as Mr. Carrick, Emi, and Kenji help him see the possibility of a brighter path ahead of him. The only possibility for Ichiro to achieve happiness is to break free from the

assimilationist duality. Only by finding the way back to biculturalism can he stand a chance at contentment, because “the injunction to feel good [...] remains hollow as Ichiro is unable [...] to love himself; such love would become possible only if he embraced his heritage” (Xu 24). Unfortunately, embracing the Japanese in him never appears as a viable option:

Was it possible that he, striding freely down the street of an American city, the city of his birth and schooling and the cradle of his hopes and dreams, had waved it all aside beyond recall? [...] Was there no hope for redemption? Surely there must be, he was still a citizen. [...] And, as his heart mercifully stacked the blocks of hope into the pattern of an America which would someday hold an unquestioned place for him, his mind said no, it is not to be, and the castle tumbled and was swallowed up by the darkness of his soul, for time might cloud the memories of others but the trouble was inside of him and time would not soften that. (Okada 48)

The novel delves into the idea that once internalized, trauma is almost indelible. The racist discourse is so embedded in Ichiro’s mind that no matter what hope his heart might harbor, his mind cannot escape the torment. “I want only to go on living and be happy. I’ve only to let myself do so” (Okada 186). He becomes a victim and victimizer of his own mind because although “he is infuriated by anti-Japanese prejudice in others, Ichiro has internalized it himself and wishes, above all, to be treated as the American he feels himself to be” (Davis 56). After saying no to American loyalty, he denies himself atonement in an effort to make himself worthier of the short-sighted understanding of Americanness he has been instilled:

I have been granted a full pardon. Why is it then that I am unable to convince myself that I am no different from any other American? Why is it that, in my freedom, I feel more imprisoned in the wrongness of myself and the thing I did than when I was in prison? Am I really never to know again what it is to be American? (Okada 76)

Okada manages to explain the traumatic effects of racism on the self, the shame, the guilt, and the self-hatred that Japanese people were burdened with during and after the world war, and he does so without openly addressing American racism. There is some sense of inevitability in the fact that, as a different race, they were bound to suffer the most:

It’s because we’re American and because we’re Japanese and sometimes the two don’t mix. It’s all right to be German and American or Italian and American but, as things

turned out, it wasn't all right to be Japanese and American. You had to be one or the other. (Okada 84)

System racism appears as a revelation Ichiro is all of a sudden illuminated with, and he soon realizes it is a reality that cannot be changed. "What Ichiro needs to do, as he himself articulates it [...], is to accommodate himself psychologically to his place in the world rather than to try to change it" (D. Y. Kim 67). I would not venture to say that Ichiro comes to fully realize that what he suffers is systemically imposed, his fight is not against the system, and therefore his path towards healing must be focused on his own feelings. However, there is some problematic reading in the novel's approach to dealing with trauma, since its lack of acknowledgment of racism could be considered an invitation to conformity.

The internalization of racism provokes a dual relationship with the people around you. Ichiro does not need anybody to tell him about his mistake, about the fact that his cowardice makes him undeserving of being American because he already thinks that for himself. When walking around Seattle, he fears other people's reactions and condemnation, and yet their anger relieves him because it reassures the racism that he has already internalized. Right after arriving in Seattle, he encounters an old acquaintance from life before the camps. Eto's first reaction is the one of someone coming across an old friend. He asks him about his time in the army and whether he has arrived home, and there is a clear shift in his attitude the moment he realizes that Ichiro is a no-no boy: "The round face wasn't smiling anymore. It was thoughtful. The eyes confronted Ichiro with indecision which changed slowly to enlightenment and then to suspicion. He remembered. He knew. The friendliness was gone as he said: 'No-no boy, huh?'" (Okada 5). Eto's reaction, right at the beginning of the novel, gives the reader a quick understanding that Ichiro's internalization was a common phenomenon among the Japanese American community.

No-no boys were ostracized both by the Nikkei community and the rest of America, as they were "seen as selfish and unpatriotic traitors for decades after the war" (Endo 417). The internalization of racism left a deep mark on the Japanese American community who, anxious to assimilate into American society and to leave the internment years behind, saw in the no-no boys a reminder of their heritage: "no-no boys stir up what they truly wish to forget: they are also 'Japs' despite their 'badges of courage'" (Yoon 49). No-no boys suffered a double trauma, since as they dealt with their own past, they also

came to represent in the postinternment years the shame of a community that had nothing to be blamed for.

Ichiro not only sees in himself that Japanese half that everybody is trying to suppress, but he also cannot overcome the idea that in choosing not to enlist, he vindicated this shameful Japanese part of himself to detriment of the Americanness in him he so desperately wants to protect. In becoming a no-no boy, he thinks he made himself deserving of no better than the treatment he receives: “One could not fight an enemy who looked upon him as much as to say: ‘This is America, which is for Americans. You have spent two years in prison to prove that you are Japanese – go to Japan!’ These unspoken words were not to be denied” (Okada 47). Ichiro expects others to treat him as he treats himself, with shame. He will not defend himself because he considers what he did undefendable, and he is willing to accept others’ mistreatment, including his own brother’s, as a part of his penitence. From his encounter with Eto, what resonates is not the young man’s reaction, but Ichiro’s submission:

The hate-churned eyes with the stamp of unrelenting condemnation were his cross and he had driven the nails with his own hands. ‘Rotten bastard. Shit on you.’ Eto coughed up a mouthful of sputum and rolled his words around it: ‘Rotten, no-good bastard.’ Surprisingly, Ichiro felt relieved. Eto’s anger seemed to serve as a release to his own naked tensions. (Okada 5)

The fear of being recognized as a no-no boy and his passivity to others’ negative reactions mark toxic acting out of a never-ending trauma. A decision he made two years ago, defined constantly as a mistake, is repeatedly brought back to him even from benign characters such as Emi, his romantic interest, who “disagrees with the internment policy and identifies with no-no boys, [and yet] urges Ichiro to admit his ‘mistake’ and to do something to atone for his past” (Ling 371). Emi encourages Ichiro to leave the past behind and spend his future contributing to the country he has wronged, all on the basis that he indeed committed a mistake:

How was he to account for the past two years of the five for which they wanted such information as name of employer and work experience? What was he to put down as an alternative for military duty? There was no lie big enough to cover the enormity of his mistake. (Okada 131)

The narrative, however, reminds Ichiro that escaping is not possible because shame and hatred are not imposed from the outside anymore. The narrative gives an in-depth perspective of the damaging effects of a trauma caused by the internalization of racist attitudes. Moreover, this glance at the self-destructive inner thoughts of a young man after the internment period proves how the experience of the Japanese American community could not be circumscribed to those years, as its consequences continued to haunt and disrupt the Issei and Nisei generations in the following period. *No-No Boy* shows the tragic effects of internalizing the white discourse, and how deep the racist ideology could permeate the minds of a young generation desperate to feel themselves at home. The novel offers not only a profound look at the struggles of a young man in coming to terms with his identity, it also shows the limitations of working through trauma within the unfair system that provokes it.

### **Schisms in the Family over the Japanese Heritage**

Shame and self-loathing as a result of the internalization of racism are not isolated phenomena that have their consequences only on the formation of the identity. In negating half of yourself, you also deny everything that has any relationship with that part of your identity that you are trying to erase. In other words, racist assumptions that make Ichiro question his Japanese heritage have a direct effect on his relationship with his Japanese family:

A superficial reading of *No-No Boy* might suggest that post-war Japanese Americans like Ichiro were disrespecting their parents because they were simply assimilating to White American norms and ultimately rejecting their Japanese heritage. [...] However, a more critical analysis of Okada's text reveals how the intergenerational conflicts depicted were shaped by multiple unresolved traumas that the incarceration itself facilitated. Racial hatred from White Americans was compounded by self-hatred, which resulted from internalizing White-supremacist views about their ethnic and racial identities and perpetuating these views within the Japanese American community. (Endo 420)

Both the internment period and its aftermath had a major impact on the “rapid disintegration of Japanese American families” (Endo 419). Nevertheless, the generational gap between Issei parents and Nisei children was a reality that predated the racist governmental intervention, with the language as its most significant example. When Ichiro goes back to Seattle after his release from prison, he does not know where his parents are living. However, to make sure that Ichiro would find the new family home,

“his father had described the place to him in a letter, composed in simple Japanese characters because otherwise Ichiro could not have read it” (Okada 7). Ichiro is accused of aligning himself with a culture whose language he can barely understand. Moreover, when he is back in Seattle, the sound of that language does not sound familiar to him, but rather strange:

The gently spoken Japanese which he had not heard for so long sounded strange. He would hear a great deal of it now that he was home, for his parents, like most of the old Japanese, spoke virtually no English. On the other hand, the children, like Ichiro, spoke almost no Japanese. (Okada 8)

Ichiro was a lot more advanced in his assimilation process than U.S. authorities gave him credit for. His Americanness is such that he makes his own “the myth of western identity formation and its insistence on repressing "undesirable" Otherness” (Gribben 40). In internalizing a part of himself as “other”, it is born in him a “fear that he will never be able to belong to either of the two worlds that interpellate him respectively as a nation’s prodigal son and a mother’s Japanese son” (Yoon 51). As in any other community, there were differences between parents and children that were increased by the biculturalism of the Japanese American second generation. However, the conflict between Issei and Nisei was directly related to:

The difficulties inherent in what white America was asking of its Japanese American citizens: to what degree will you construct a Self ideologically recognizable as "American"? [...] the answer to this question was "to the degree you define yourself as different from what you come from," which, in Ichiro's case, is the womb of a Japanese mother. (Gribben 38)

Ichiro, consciously or not, made the choice to protect his Japanese heritage when he answered no-no to the loyalty questionnaire. However, he soon realizes that in protecting half of himself the world perceives him as denying the American in him, and therefore not enlisting becomes a decision he deeply regrets. His hatred for the Japanese in him and his family comes as an attempt to “reinscribe himself as an "American," an identification denied to him as a "no-no boy”” (Gribben 32), when the U.S. system labelled him as disloyal.

Several studies have drawn a comparison between the nuclear Japanese family and American individualism, another reason for Ichiro to reject his relationship with the

family. The traditional role of the family in Japanese culture notwithstanding, it is only natural that families and communities stick together when adapting to the context of a foreign country. Gribben argues that Ichiro's rejection of the family, and his estrangement of his mother in particular, is a result of his internalization of the "American ideal of acting only for himself" (40). Gribben delves into this idea arguing that, although Ichiro is uncertain as to "what he thinks he "really" should have done", [...] [he] hates himself for acting upon the wishes of his mother" (40). American individualism, at odds with the family tradition, gives Ichiro another way of atoning for his un-American flaws. Regardless of Ichiro's dream of independence from his Japanese family, his identity remains heavily intertwined with that of those around him.

When reading the novel, especially in those passages where Ichiro's thoughts flood the narrative with pain and depression, it is easy sometimes to overlook the effects of racism on other members of the Yamada family, and how they, in return, affect Ichiro as well. An unfortunately common feature in the abuse of racial minorities is the emasculation of male figures. In the case of the Japanese community, "Issei fathers were demoralized, regarding their ability to lead the family, and exhausted by the internment of their families and the destruction of their previous businesses and social lives" (Gribben 32). In the same way that Ichiro stands for a generation of young men who lost sense of their identity as a result of racist U.S. policies, his father, Mr. Yamada, also represents an older generation that was dispossessed of their sense of self and their position as head of their families. In the heteronormative conservative society of the 1950s, "Mr. Yamada represents symbolically castrated, defeated, and impotent Japanese immigrant male, who lost everything, including his paternal authority, during World War II" (Endo 420). This alienation of the male characters, especially in the case of the patriarchal figure, can be clearly observed in the conversations between father and son:

'You don't understand.'

'Ya, I do. I was young once.'

'You are a Jap. How can you understand? No. I'm wrong. You're nothing. You don't understand a damn thing. [...] Goddamn fool, that's what you are, Pa, a goddamn fool.'

The color crept into the father's face. For a moment it looked as if he would fight back. Lips compressed and breathing hastened, he glared at his son who called him a fool. Ichiro waited and, in the tense moment, almost found himself hoping that the father would

strike back with fists or words or both. The anger drained away with the color as quickly as it had appeared. [...] ‘I’ll go’ said Ichiro to the man who was neither husband nor father nor Japanese nor American but a diluted mixture of all. (Okada 105)

Within the overflowing sadness of the novel, there is a sense of sorrow for the man Mr. Yamada once might have been, and the ghost that remains when Ichiro comes back home. In his son’s mind, Pa is no longer “the unquestioned lawgiver, the unified symbolic order” (Xu 23), he is just a “fool” who can neither protect his son nor help his delusional wife. There is a contrast between Ichiro’s willingness to understand and sympathize with others’ traumas, such as Freddie’s, Eto’s, or even Bull’s, and his lack of empathy towards his own family. He is unable to recognize the effects of the malady he suffers in his father, to whom racism has left him stateless and stripped of any sense of belonging to his own family. What could be considered to be the harshest and cruelest words of the novel are directed at Mr. Yamada by his son.

If the mother, as it will be later analyzed in this section of the study, chooses the extreme of Japanese nationalism against American assimilation, Mr. Yamada represents the paralysis of most American Japanese that were unable to split themselves into halves and lost their whole selves in the process. In a way, Mr. Yamada stands for the ultimate outcome of the impossible fight between two parts of a person, the same struggle that Ichiro is undergoing at the moment of the narration, with the difference that Mr. Yamada’s Americanness was never his to begin with, and in denying his Japanese self, he no longer exists:

The old man piled the packages neatly on the table and admired them. ‘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. It will work out. After a while, maybe, you go to work or go to school if you wish. It can be done. You have a bed. There is always plenty to eat. I give you money to spend. Take time, ya?’

‘Sure, Pa. I’m not worried.’

‘So? Good.’ And his lips trembled a little and Ichiro felt that it was because the old man was finally saying what he should have long ago and knew that it was too late. (Okada 189)

Within the scarce positive notes of the narrative, the ending holds some hope for the father-son relationship. Even if Ichiro denies the possibility of reconciliation, there is

a noticeable change in the father's stamina after Mrs. Yamada's death. Mr. Yamada appears to free himself from the numbness provoked by racism once his wife commits suicide. No longer forced to remain loyal to Ma's extreme nationalism, Mr. Yamada seems to find a way of survival, establishing new ways of communication with his tortured son. Okada does not provide an overt happy closure, and he certainly describes a family whose wounds are beyond repair, with an extreme nationalist mother that dies incapable of dealing with their reality, and a younger son that enlists in order to leave behind everything he finds shameful in his family. Nonetheless, in Mr. Yamada's awakening and Ichiro's weak signs of working out his traumas, the author depicts some hope not only for the Yamada family but for the broken Japanese community.

In Mr. Yamada's reestablishing a connection with his child two last elements are worth noticing. Pa's attempt to reach Ichiro is also an endeavor to take back the reins as a doubtful head of a diminished family. Instead of imposing his patriarchal privileges, Mr. Yamada finds a way of getting closer to his son with sensitivity. A new kind of masculinity appears to timidly take form in the last chapters of the novel, with Ichiro's father proving a new model away both from the emasculated man and the patriarchal tyrant. A second reading of the previous fragment of the novel —Pa's last appearance in the narrative— could be interpreted as Okada's call for the Japanese American community to break their silence and work through their traumas. Even if Ichiro's response is discouraging, the fact that the eldest member of the family, an Issei father, chooses to reconcile with his son through dialogue and understanding, proves that there is an alternative way of healing for a community that had chosen to bury their traumas with silence.

Ichiro's relationship with Mr. Yamada shows a son disappointed by a father figure that does not fulfill his expectations as a role model. In the patriarchal concept of the family, the leading role is assumed by the mother, who becomes, in addition, the recipient of Ichiro's bitterness and a surrogate for the anger and fury that his son is incapable to direct at white America. Instead of addressing the racist policies that have caused his traumas, Ichiro is going to make his mother at fault for the Japanese in him, including his decision not to fight in the war:

She cursed me with her meanness and the hatred that you cannot see but which is always hating. It was she who opened my mouth and made my lips move to sound the words which got me two years in prison and an emptiness that is more empty and

frightening than the caverns of hell. She's killed me with her meanness and hatred and I hope she's happy because I'll never know the meaning of it again. (Okada 13)

Ichiro comes back home after spending two years in prison and is forced to redefine everything he knows, including his family, from a perspective in line with his internalization of racism. "Ichiro redefines his mother's connection with him in terms of his acceptance of racial pathologization, necessary for American manhood to define itself" (Gribben 40). His mother is no longer his mother, but a representative of a Japanese heritage that fooled him into abandoning his Americanness and that now must be fully exterminated from Ichiro's life if he is meant to reclaim his role as an American citizen:

He looked at his mother and swallowed with difficulty the bitterness that threatened to destroy the last fragment of understanding for the woman who was his mother and still a stranger because, in truth, he could not know what it was to be a Japanese who breathed the air of America and yet had never lifted a foot from the land that was Japan. (Okada 12)

Ichiro's despising of his mother speaks of the damaging effects of "the psychological violence committed by the ideology of assimilation and legalized racism" (Xu 21). Ichiro, in a harrowing shift of mentality, adopts the racist discourse that makes him a victim and uses it to victimize others, such as his mother, who do not align themselves with the narrow concept of Americanness that was allowed by the system:

Now that I know the truth when it is too late and the half of me which was you is no longer there, I am only half of me and the half that remains is American by law because the government was wise and strong enough to know why it was that I could not fight for America and did not strip me of my birthright. But it is not enough to be American only in the eyes of the law and it is not enough to be only half American and know that it is an empty half. I am not your son and I am not Japanese and I am not American. (Okada 16)

In this passage, as it resonates all through the novel, Ichiro has already made amends for the injustice he was put through by the U.S. government, but he is unable to overcome his resentment towards his mother. Ichiro's reinstatement into society is therefore conditioned by his rejection of a mother he holds responsible for his misfortune. A potential explanation for Ichiro's lack of criticism towards racist policies in opposition to his harshness towards his mother lies in the fact that Ichiro is using his mother as a scapegoat for his own trauma. "Ichiro's externalized hatred toward his mother is a sign of his guilt for dodging the draft, as well as the natural consequences of living in a country

that unjustly criminalized and racially profiles Japanese Americans” (Endo 420), He directs his rage towards her because as his son, she is part of himself.

The mistreatment of the maternal, understood as a source of “Otherness”, is not unique to Okada’s narrative but a common device in racist policies that equate female and maternal figures as the recipient of the ethnic culture. Consequently, together with “confusion, anguish, self-contempt, self-abjection and the loss of identification”, racism is characterized by “ultimately the devastation of the maternal” (Xu 19). With the violation of the maternal, Xu suggests, “there is little hope for the community as a whole” (24). This scholar locates this affront of the maternal as the last turning point for a community’s chance at survival:

The “bad” mother occupying the central place in *No-No Boy* signifies an ethnic community going awry, a community at the brink of destruction. [...] Ichiro’s hatred of his mother and loathing of things Japanese allegorize Japanese Americans’ profoundly painful ambivalence toward their ethnicity and the impossibility of coming to terms with their rejection by America, the country of birth for many of them. (Xu 25)

Okada’s description of the mother-son relationship has been analyzed as holding different readings, some of them rather problematic. Mrs. Yamada is loyal to Japan to the extent that she believes that her country has won the war and that a ship will soon rescue loyal citizens like her that stood by its side amid the war. This delusion and Ma’s pride in his son’s refusal to enlist somehow diminish the reader’s sympathy toward the character and give an excuse for Ichiro’s behavior. In Okada’s depiction of Ma, two fundamental perspectives surface. On the one hand, Ling offers an understanding approach towards Mrs. Yamada’s extremism, placing it as a result of both the external environment and her rigidity:

She thus becomes "a complex allegory of reaction against and yet imitation of her oppressor" -a caricature of the stubborn, unassimilable "Japanese" of racial stereotyping. Beneath her uncompromising facade, Ma is perhaps the most vulnerable character in the novel. (365)

Ling further describes Okada’s attempt of showing the effects of racism on the Japanese American family as a result both of “the ideological confusion in his community and the misdirected grievances against those who are innocent of creating their particular situation” (369). Ling goes along with the approach that suggests that indeed Ichiro uses

his mother to direct his self-loathing and that Ma is an innocent victim of racist America. This view, however, has been contested by other scholars who see the depiction of Ma's radicalism mirroring white Americanness as an example of Okada's complicity with Ichiro's internalization of racism:

Although Okada is ahead of his time in his unflinching description of the devastation inflicted by the internment experience on his community, he is nevertheless held hostage by the ideology of assimilation that inculcates a myth about the racial and cultural inferiority of U.S. ethnic minorities. This state of being a hostage is shown in his traumatic and painful portrayal of the mother figure, Mrs. Yamada, and in his impulse to reject and degrade the maternal, whose manifestations include food practices and rituals. In so doing Okada unwittingly rejects a vital component in his ethnic identity and heritage—enjoyment specific to the Japanese American community. (Xu 21)

Xu further develops her argument by asserting that “Okada's unwitting degradation of the maternal robs the mother figure not only of femininity but also of motherhood, dehumanizing her into a cold, hard, and hateful vessel of fanatic nationalism. She is now empty of love and nourishment” (24). This scholar makes a difference between Okada's depiction of the mother-son relationship, “complicit with the object of his critique” (25), and the author's success “in challenging racial myths in his characterization of Ichiro and Kenji” (25). Xu's analysis of Ma's characterization as evidence of Okada's bias is very thought-inspiring in that it shows ambivalence in the way Okada approaches male and female characters.

I would venture that Okada's accomplishments in describing male realities in contrast with his depiction of female suffering might be a result of his own patriarchal understanding of female issues within ethnic minorities. Under the struggle against racism, female matters are rendered secondary. In the normative society of the 1950s, concepts such as Crenshaw's “intersectionality” (1241) were far from being taken into question. Ma's abjection, therefore, is used as a tool in illustrating Ichiro's trauma, and not as a means to represent specific forms of racism against women. In Okada's *No-No Boy*, Mrs. Yamada's character represents the blind alley of those who choose the opposite path to assimilation. Obsessed with the idea of a triumphant Japan, Ma has no future other than madness. Unable to live in a reality that holds no room for people like her, she commits suicide, a problematic idea of liberation for both herself and her son Ichiro. Mrs.

Yamada's abjection and ultimate death symbolize "Ichiro's renunciation of his Japanese identity" (P. Kim 7), the only way for Ichiro to still have a future in America.

It is only after Ma's death that Ichiro can begin to understand her mother's behavior and achieves to grasp a "glimpse of a root cause for her madness in the racism of the country to which she has immigrated" (Ling 369). However, Ichiro's line of thought is more focused on his own process of healing than on really getting to understand his mother's motivations. Nonetheless, his mother helps Ichiro to begin his reconciliation with the idea of wholeness that racism has denied him so far:

Although the family and community surrounding him are fractured, Ichiro tries to reconcile divisions that tear apart those around him. In his reaction to his mother's death, for example, Ichiro accepts his connection with his parents and in so doing implicitly rejects the "Japanese"/"American" split that divides other characters. Ichiro's mother commits suicide after accepting the reality of Japan's defeat and the misery of her family in Japan. While Ichiro could have considered this suicide a liberation from a mother who symbolized Japan, his reaction is not so simple. Rather than considering his mother's death a welcome relief from an unwanted "Japanese" heritage, on the contrary, Ichiro comes to accept it. (Yogi 71)

In spite of the fact that some authors such as Yogi describe Ma's death as a moment of revelation in Ichiro's quest for wholeness, it is a symptom of the tragic effect of acculturative stress in Ichiro's self that he can settle his differences with his mother only after her death. There is a sense both of liberation and resignation, "a mother and a son thrown together for a while longer because the family group is a stubborn one and does not easily disintegrate" (Okada 21), Ichiro comes to understand, at his mother's funeral, that the cure for his self-loathing does not depend on others. The importance of this moment in Ichiro's healing notwithstanding, it might appear too daring to call Ichiro's dubious reconciliation with his mother an optimistic turning point, since it comes at the cost of the loss of the mother figure.

### **Identity and Belonging: The Hyphenated Community**

The loyalty questionnaire evinced a rupture among the Japanese American community. The same rupture that made Ichiro question himself, and that broke the Yamada family apart, also had a major effect on the Nikkei community as a whole. The injustice of Executive Order 9066, the arduous life in the camps and the struggles to start a life from

scratch after years in the country, all took a toll on the community, that turned against each other in their search for someone to blame for their misfortunes.

Ichiro, as a no-no boy, is depicted as the clear loser of an assimilation process he decided not to take part in. He envies those who said yes-yes to the loyalty questionnaire because, in his eyes, that decision granted them a right to citizenship. In reality there were “no clear losers or winners in the Japanese American community” (Endo 421). Those who assimilated and bowed their heads to American racism suffered no less than draft resisters, because in white America’s eyes, they were all the same:

In the first pages of *No-No Boy*, Ichiro’s alienation from American society is made clear: in addition to being punished by the U.S. government for denying his allegiance, he is coldly rejected by his fellow Japanese Americans who, unlike him, have adhered to the paradigms of American hegemonic assimilation.” (P. Kim 3)

Instead of unifying as a community against a common source of injustice, the Japanese American community tried its hardest to become invisible, each family looking for “strategies of assimilation/resistance, conformity/dissent, and accommodation /confrontation” (Yoon 50). At the core of the community’s discrepancies is not only their reaction against the American racist impositions, but their handling of their heritage. With “Ma’s pride in seeing Ichiro’s choice as an indication of his complete identification with Japanese culture contrast[ing] starkly with his condemnation by other Nisei youths on precisely the same ground” (Ling 368), Ichiro appears to find himself at the center of the dilemma on what path to choose regarding assimilation.

Ichiro’s decision two years before is an unresolved matter not only for him, but for the community as a whole. Ichiro’s label as a no-no boy is going to condition his relationship with other Japanese Americans who were themselves trying to unravel “a painful ambivalence toward their ethnicity and the impossibility of coming to terms with their rejection by America, the country of birth for many of them” (Xu 25). Ichiro himself describes this polarization with irony and no small amount of bitterness, knowing himself on the wrong side of the duality:

There were two extremes, the Japanese who was more American than most Americans because he had crept to the brink of death for America, and the other who was neither Japanese nor American because he had failed to recognized the gift of his birthright when recognition meant everything. (Okada 68)

The concept of recognition is another key element of the novel. Some families “easily” recognized themselves as Americans, and decided to leave behind their Japanese heritage in an effort to construct a future in this country that they had chosen as their own. By contrast, other families as the Yamadas could not see the way to reconciling their patriotism with America’s expectations. Okada makes a thorough effort in depicting the atmosphere of the Nikkei community in the first chapters of the novel. When Ichiro comes back from prison, his mother insists, to Ichiro’s dismay, on paying a visit to their acquaintances to let them know that the eldest son is back:

The Kumasakas and the Ashidas were people from the same village in Japan. The three families had been very close for as long as he could recall. Further, it was customary among the Japanese to pay ceremonious visits upon various occasions to families of close association. (Okada 20)

The Kumasakas, the Ashidas, the Okamotos or the Watanabes were once friendly neighbors who, coming from a similar background, stuck together in their adaptation to the American reality. Years of friendship that fall apart due to the effects of racism in their understanding of what it means to live in America, and whether or not, or to what extent, that makes them Americans:

[The Kumasakas], like most of the other Japanese, planned some day to return to Japan and still felt like transients even after thirty or forty years in America. [...] They continued to maintain their dreams by refusing to learn how to speak or write the language of America and by living only among their own kind and by zealously avoiding long-term commitments such as the purchase of a house. But now, the Kumasakas, it seemed, had bought this house. (Okada 25)

The war and its aftermath put an end to many families’ idea of going back to their motherland. The destruction of Japan after the war and their forced alliance toward their adoptive country made up many families’ mind to definitely stay in America. The long-nurtured idea of going back, shattered with the war, was both a result of many Nisei parents’ original plan of migrating only to make some money, and the outcome of racist policies prior to the World War, that prevented Japanese from claiming citizenship and owning land, leaving them trapped within their foreign status.

The Kumasakas epitomize the idea of a family who abandoned the returning project and established definitely in America. Their ability to adapt to the Nikkei new reality opposes the Yamadas, who still live and think with a foot in Japan. The contrast between

the two families does not end there, because their respective children also took divergent paths. The eldest of the Kumasakas enlisted, fought, and unfortunately, died for America. To Mrs. Yamada, the Kumasaka's betrayal of Japanese patriotism come at the expense of their son's life, who fought in the army at his mother's direction. Following that idea, Ichiro is alive, according to Mrs. Yamada, because she was able to teach him right. However, this perspective of right and wrong that Ma appears to constantly put on display to Ichiro's mortification, is always described from Ichiro's traumatized – and unreliable – point of view. Ichiro makes a moral distinction between the Kumasakas, who cry for a child that suffered an honorable death, and his own mother, that takes pride in his shame:

The mother [Mrs. Kumaska] was crying now, without shame and alone in her grief that knew no end. And in her bottomless grief that made no distinction as to what was wrong and what was right and who was Japanese and who was not, there was no awareness of the other mother with a living son who had come to say to her you are with shame and grief because you were not Japanese and thereby killed your son but mine is big and strong and full of life. [...] Ichiro's mother rose and, without a word, for no words would ever pass between them again, went out of the house which was a part of America. (Okada 29)

The mother-son connection, already analyzed in the previous section of this chapter, influences the relation of the Yamadas with the rest of the community. Just as Ichiro finds himself unable to escape his mother's influence, Mrs. Yamada also makes an inextricable connection of mother and child's fate and their ambivalence between American and Japanese feelings:

Ichiro's mother looked at him with a looked that said I am a Japanese and you are my son and have conducted yourself as a Japanese and I know no shame such as other parents do because their sons were not really their sons or they would not have fought against their own people. (Okada 20)

When reading about the Kumasakas, one might think that the Yamadas were a rarity, and that extreme nationalism was uncommon. Other families in the Seattle Nikkei community prove the Yamadas were not alone in their loyalty to Japan. Mrs. Yamada finds solace in the Ashidas, who share their news of this alleged ship coming from Brazil to take them home. For Ichiro, who is already struggling with his mother's behavior, the replicating of her theories in other respected families brings him to the brink of a breakdown: "He wanted to get up and dash out into the night. The madness of his mother was in mutual company and he felt nothing but loathing for the gentle, kindly-looking

Mrs. Ashida” (Okada 23). In his returning home, he not only has to deal with his trauma, but with his mother and her friends’ delusions.

The diversity in the position of Japanese American families towards Japanese patriotism not only admitted those in favor, like the Ashidas, or against it, like the Kumasakas; some families, like the Yamadas themselves, were split in half. Referring to a letter with news of a supposed Japanese victory, Mrs Yamada comments to Mrs. Ashida on another friend: “Mrs. Okamoto will be eager to see this. Her husband, who goes out of the house whenever I am there, is threatening to leave her unless she gives up her nonsense about Japan. Nonsense, he calls it. He is no better than a Chinaman” (Okada 23). Positions toward Americanization and its resistance not only happened between Issei and Nisei generations, but also between marriages.

Okada’s narrative is rich in details of the life and idiosyncrasies of the Japanese nationals, and reflects the peculiar inter-racial system that somehow made Japanese, in Mrs. Yamada’s eyes, better than Chinese immigrants. I would suggest that Mrs. Yamada’s racism towards other minorities could also be related to her feeling of belonging to the, at the time recently destroyed, Japanese Empire. This antipathy for other Asian minorities adds to Mrs. Yamada’s negative description of a woman profoundly cut off from reality.

The elders’ attitude towards this new reality was conducted with animosities and disdain, but their children certainly took the feud among the Nikkei community to another level, most likely because, as Japanese Americans, they would have been forced not only to renounce to their heritage, but also to their hopes for the future. When Ichiro goes back to Seattle he soon gets in contact with friends from the days before the war.

The Club Oriental becomes the scenario for the new synergies created after the war, a place where the youngest members of the Japanese community establish their own hierarchy, making clear that no matter the bravery of their performance in the war, nobody escapes racism. “Young Japanese American men who enlisted in the war effort proved their loyalty with bravery that resulted in the highest casualty rates of any other fighting units” (Zia 248). However, when those war heroes went back home, they soon realized that their efforts amounted to nothing in the eyes of racist Americans who could only see their Japanese traits. “Despite the demonstrated patriotism of the Nisei, the attitude towards them has not truly changed and No-No boys for an indefinite present are merely

the scapegoats of the Japanese community” (McDonald 20). Veterans turned their anger toward the next link in the social hierarchy, making no-no boys pay for America’s ingratitude. In their rage, they did not realize that by making others suffer:

Nisei indicate their unqualified acceptance of the social standards established by the dominant culture, symptoms of which are their fear of not being able to differentiate themselves from Ichiro because of shared racial characteristics and their reliance on racist codes to make the differentiation. (Ling 364)

We learn through the novel that everybody, yes-yes or no-no boy, suffered dearly being of Japanese origin in white America. They all belong to a “generation of Asian Americans who didn’t know who they were” (Chin 225). At the Club Oriental we see many of these young men cross paths with one another. Ichiro goes to the club because of Kenji, an awarded veteran who lost his leg in the war, and once there he meets Bull, another veteran full of rage and bitterness for the injustices he keeps enduring no matter his efforts to assimilate:

There was a ripple of laughter and Ichiro turned and looked at the crown without wanting to. Someone said something about “No-no boys don’t look so good without the striped uniform” and that got a loud, boisterous laugh from the corner where a group of young Japanese who were too young to drink sat drinking. (Okada 69)

Bull is, like Eto at the beginning of the novel, the example of those second-generation Japanese-Americans who made no-no boys responsible for the injustices they all suffered as a community:

"No- no boys" remind Nisei how American ideals of equality were eclipsed in the shadow of racism. Although inculcated in the belief that one is judged in America on the basis of individual action and behavior, the wartime internment proved that rhetoric false. Forces outside the individual's control, such as racism, shaped how Japanese-Americans were perceived and treated. Consequently, the division between individual and community disappears. Nisei realize Japanese-Americans are not seen as distinct individuals, but only as reflections of a larger community. The actions of an individual Japanese-American, therefore, have implications for the entire group. "No-no boys" would thus be targeted because they seem to tarnish the entire community's reputation with hints of disloyalty. (Yogi 67)

Kenji, who stands in Ichiro’s eyes as the voice of wisdom, explains to him that it is only a matter of time before Nisei veterans realize that they are all the same when dealing

with white abuse. “Okada depicts No-No Boys and Yes-Yes Boys in similar ways: imperfect and troubled young men whose shared experiences with racialized trauma end up killing them either figuratively or literally” (Endo 423). Kenji is the only character that, forced to grow up even faster than the rest of them, has already grasped what others are still denying, that risking, even dying for America was not enough to make them American:

They pick on you because they’re vulnerable. They think just because they went and packed a rifle, they’re different but they aren’t and they know it. They’re still Japs. [...] The guys who make it tough on you probably do so out of a misbegotten idea that maybe you’re to blame because the food that they thought they were doing by getting killed and shot up doesn’t amount to a pot of beans. They just need a little time to get cut down to their own size. Then they’ll be the same as you, a bunch of Japs. (Okada 146)

There are two moments in the Club Oriental that point to the harshness of the relations between Nisei veterans and draft resisters. The first one is when Ichiro meets Taro at the club. Taro, Ichiro’s younger brother, has not finished high school yet and is eager to enlist as a way of escaping the family shame. Taro convinces Ichiro to go out of the club to an ambush organized by the younger brother, desperate to impress alleged white friends:

Two youths stepped between him and Taro.

‘That’s a Jap, fellas’, sneered one of them bravely. [...] ‘Does it talk?’ ‘Talks Jap, I bet.’ ‘Say something’, egged the first mouth. ‘Say no-no in Jap. You ought to be good at that’. ‘Yeah, I wanta hear’.

Ichiro wove unsteadily, the humiliation and anger intensified by the dulling effect of the liquor into a heavy, brooding madness. He strove to keep his brother in sight, catching an occasional glimpse of the now fear-stricken face.

‘It doesn’t look very happy,’ said a voice, shaky but inspired by the knowledge of being the stronger side. ‘That’s ’cause it’s homesick’. ‘It’s got a home?’ ‘Sure, on the other side the pond.’ ‘Comes from Japan, doesn’t it?’ ‘Made in Japan. Says so right here.’

A brutal kick on his behind sent Ichiro stumbling forward. His anger frothing over, he picked up momentum and lunged at the dim shape that was his brother. (Okada 73)

Taro comes to understand in that sequence that belonging is impossible, even if he is willing to pay the cost of giving up on his family. From this scene it can be inferred

common assumptions that white supremacists had in relation to the Japanese American community, some still common today. The first one would be the equation of Japanese physical traits with a foreign status. Ichiro had never set a foot in Japan, he was born and raised in Seattle and his Japanese heritage was limited to the customs of the family household. The second assumption is his knowledge of Japanese, a trait repeated all through the novel as a major difference between the Issei and the Nisei community. Ichiro and Taro barely speak Japanese, they know basic characters they use to communicate with their parents and other Japanese elders, but their mother tongue is English.

In *Club Oriental*, the reader comes to realize that the Nikkei community's suffering is unknown by the America who causes such distress and continues to dig deeper into the wound, but also by the members of the community themselves, who in their desperate acting out of their traumas contribute to victimize other fellow Japanese Americans. The novel ends precisely back at the Club, where the impossibility of working out without the common support of the community stands out. Freddie, another no-no boy "who could be of no help to anyone because he too was alone against the world which he had denounced" (Okada 47), gets into a fight with Bull. When he is trying to run away from the fight, he crashes his car against a building, losing his life as the accident "cut[s] him in two" (Okada 220). The author literalizes the metaphor of the racist division of halves, suggesting that it is impossible to live with the imposed split of the identity. The reaction of Bull shows that there are no winners among the victims of racism:

'They say he's dead', said Ichiro gently.

'So what?'

'Nothing. Just that ... that.... I'm sorry.'

Bull swung his face upward, his eyes wide with horror, the mouth twisted with rage yet trembling at the same time. The throaty roar was mixed with streaks of agonized screaming verging on the hysterical. [...] 'Agggggggghh', he screamed and, with the brute strength that could only smash, hurled the whisky bottle across the alley. Then he started to cry, not like a man in grief or a soldier in pain, but like a baby in loud, gasping beseeching howls. (Okada 221)

Surrounded by his tormented friends, Ichiro starts to recognize the damaging effects of racism, no matter your answer to the loyalty questionnaire. "In presenting both Freddie (a no-no boy) and Kenji (a yes-yes hero) as irreparably maimed by the experience of

internment, Okada effectively pictures the inhumanity of racism and the great challenge in constructing positive ethnic identification at his time” (Xu 36). Ichiro’s decision was not a mistake, because whatever his decision might have been, he would have still found himself trapped in a society that deemed him unwelcome.

When Ichiro encounters Kenji, the veteran soon becomes a source of inspiration for Ichiro, who sees in him all that could have been possible for him if only he had answered yes when he was supposed to. Ichiro cannot see the devastating effects that racism has caused on his friend, even if he bluntly says that “it wasn’t worthy it” (Okada 55). The loss of a leg appears a small price to pay for the honorable recognition of being on the right side of history: “Kenji could still hope. A leg more or less wasn’t important when compared with himself, Ichiro, who was strong and perfect but only an empty shell. He would have given both legs to change places with Kenji” (Okada 55). Even when Kenji explains the degenerative illness of his leg, Ichiro is blinded by the honorability that he has been denied: “Kenji had two years, maybe a lifetime if the thing that was chewing away at him suddenly stopped. But he, Ichiro, had stopped living two years ago” (Okada 58). It is hard at times not to judge Ichiro’s self-hatred in comparison with other characters’ traumas, such as Kenji’s. Nonetheless, in considering himself unluckier than Kenji, however self-centred, his self-loathing is genuine.

Kenji’s leg, that will ultimately cause him his death, stands for the sacrifice of the Nisei community that complied with the never-ending expectations of the racist America; “the nature of his injury, the ever-encroaching pain that requires more and more of his leg to be amputated, symbolizes the costs, both physical and psychological, of Nikkei efforts to prove loyalty” (Yogi 71). Gribben describes the missing leg as a double symbol which marked Kenji as ““American" by the sacrifice of part of a racialized body but marked so that his loyalty always shows he is "less" than "fully American"” (39). Okada thus describes the consequences of American policies on both compliant and resisting strategies, arguing that there is no potential escape from racism in America. In other words, the author:

Brilliantly shows the dark abyss between two equally devastating models—that of Freddie’s self-contempt and self-destruction and that of Kenji, who has served in the U.S. Army but whose war wound robs him of his manhood inch by inch (symbolized by the amputation of his leg) until it kills him. (Xu 35)

Kenji's tragic end shows Ichiro that all his regrets and fantasies of a different outcome to what he considers his cowardice would not have saved him, because "despite Kenji's submission to Americanization, his body decay and abandonment by the U.S. government [revokes] the insinuation that answering 'yes-yes' would guarantee one's induction as a fully-fledged American citizen" (P. Kim 5). The narrative forces Ichiro to confront his naïf dreams of honor and recognition, coming to understand yes-yes and no-no boys not as opposites but as side-by-side victims of a common racism. In fact, by the end of the novel it resonates the thought of Ichiro's decision not as a symbol of his weakness, but as way draft resisters found of protecting the American system they were later accused of abandoning:

Both [No-No Boys and Yes-Yes Boys] tried to prove themselves American, but by different means: veterans chose to demonstrate their loyalty by fighting for the U.S., while many "no-no boys" tried to live out the principles of America by confronting the government with its unjustness (Yogi p. 68).

The value of Okada's novel relies undoubtedly on its capacity to show the world the complexity of the Nikkei community. Although his depiction of female characters such as Mrs. Yamada can be considered negligent from a feminist perspective, his profound and charismatic portrayal of young Japanese American men certainly offers a glance devoid of the racial stereotypes "commonly associated with American masculinity including imagery of impotent, quiet, small and weak male figures" (Endo 425). Moreover, in his tragic description of a generation "traumatized by racism to the point that they began to exhibit outward signs of internalized oppression" (Endo 425), Okada challenges the model minority myth and forces both Asian minorities and mainstream America to confront their traumas.

### 3. The Resilient Belonging: The Hyphenated Self

You'll understand why it is that your  
mistake was no bigger than  
the mistake your country made.

John Okada

The internment period and its aftermath did not cause turmoil in the Japanese American community. There were exceptional cases of activists such as Frank Emi or Fred Korematsu, who took “his fight against the Japanese internment camps all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court” (Russian). In general, however, the mistreated community chose to deal with its trauma in silence, eager to assimilate and leave behind the nightmare. The white mainstream America took advantage of their efforts to move forward, and in the following decades, it was coined the model minority stereotype, that privileged and condemned the Asian American communities to invisibility and conformity. This stereotype allowed Asian Americans a false sense of assimilation and yet kept them confined within the limits of what was acceptable by white standards. It forced them to internalize racial prejudices and work out their trauma in a secretive and self-hating way, always scared of losing their position as the chosen ethnic minority of America:

The representation of Asian Americans as a racial minority whose apparently successful ethnic assimilation was a result of stoic patience, political obedience, and self-improvement was a critically important narrative of ethnic liberalism that simultaneously promoted racial equality and sought to contain demands for social transformation. (R. Lee 145)

The model minority status was a privilege the magnanimous American democracy gave to the Asian community in contrast with other minorities who had “miserably and collectively failed to take advantage” (Li, “Race, Gender, Class and Asian American Literary Theory” 43). In this way, the United States would disencumber itself from the burden of racist accusations, making ethnic minorities at fault for not assimilating as successfully as those of Asian origin:

We are led to believe that race has never been a factor either in the formation of the nation or the social position of the individual; it is culture that matters. With this

neoorientalist generosity, Asian Americans are invited to join not the superior races, but the competitive cultures of sovereign self-reliance, and they have become the living proof of the neoconservative meritocratic theses that daily besiege us. (Li, "Race, Gender, Class and Asian American Literary Theory" 43)

This new praising of Asian Americans' hard work came at a cost. Firstly, it put the Asian minority in a very uncomfortable competition against other ethnic groups. All of a sudden, they were no longer victims of white racism, but an example to African Americans or Latin Americans, who saw this comparison as an alliance between whites and Asians:

In 1974, the writer Frank Chin expressed it this way: 'Whites love us because we're not black.' The elevation of Asian Americans to the position of model minority had less to do with the actual success of Asian Americans than to the perceived failure—or worse, refusal—of African Americans to assimilate. Asian Americans were "not black" in two significant ways: They were both politically silent and ethnically assimilable. (R. Lee 145)

The model minority stereotype also served to trap the following generations in conformity. For a community that had just suffered all the effects of racist America, this new recognition was unsettling:

As urban ghettos from Newark, New Jersey, to Watts in Los Angeles erupted into riots and civil unrest, Asian Americans suddenly became the object of "flattering" media stories. After more than a century of invisibility alternating with virulent headlines and radio broadcasts that advocated eliminating or imprisoning America's Asians, a rash of stories began to extol our virtues. (Zia 46)

The alleged success of their assimilation process put Asian Americans at a crossroads: should they vindicate better conditions for their community and denounce racism? Even if that meant losing this recently achieved benevolent status? "Was it better to choose invisibility and a life in the shadows than to be treated as a despised enemy? Was invisibility another form of self-loathing?" (Zia 22) Accepting the model stereotype implied, for many members of the community, a life of internalized trauma. "Asian American racial trauma has been often overlooked and unnoticed by past and present major civil rights movements due to misleading 'model minority' stereotypes of 'seemingly' successful Asian American assimilation" (P. Kim 8), forcing Asian Americans to cope with the consequences of white America's racism in silence, with devastating effects on the communities' mental health.

The model minority did not only establish a poisonous patina of success in the community, but it also contributed to creating schisms among Japanese-Americans, who faced this new status with ambivalent acceptance:

John Okada's 1957 novel *No-No Boy* provides insights into these divisions. It shatters the image of a docile "model minority" and instead depicts a bitterly divided Nikkei community, plagued with self-hatred and uncertainty in the immediate aftermath of World War II. (Yogi 63)

While some resented the American government and society that had made enemies out of them, other members of the Japanese-American community chose to embrace this model status and fool themselves into thinking that they had a chance at becoming full-right American citizens.

### **The (Troubled) American Promise**

The American dream, the fantasy that made anyone in the United States a potential success on the basis of long hours and hard work, was not only a myth for most white workers, it was a scam for ethnic minorities that were never even considered within the country's official narrative. Every racial group in the country has suffered the dichotomy of being aware of the racist policies that make them the underdog, and yet being dragged by the frustrating feeling of wanting to prove them wrong and assert themselves as Americans by force of their accomplishments. Japanese Americans, in particular, "were to convince themselves to believe in the promise of the American dream while also forgiving the U.S. government for sanctioning racially motivated practices that clearly ran contrary to its core democratic values" (Endo 425). The promise that drove thousands of immigrants far from their countries in the hope of a better life had not been meant for them.

The model minority stereotype had a narcotic effect on the Nikkei community, who thought that in their model status, they were a step closer to their accomplishment of the American dream: "For them, being the "model minority" seemed to capture their aspirations and the belief that through hard work and individual merit they could achieve the American dream for themselves and their families" (Zia 205). The model minority status works, therefore, as another strategy for the American establishment to subject ethnic minorities to the trap of an impossible dream.

*No-No Boy* expresses such contradiction when it exposes the problematics of the fake American dream in the traumatized postinternment Japanese American society, and yet through its narrative, most of the characters never cease to blindly endorse the idea that the American dream is also for them, if only they prove themselves American enough:

John Okada's *No-No Boy* was probably rejected by the Japanese American press and community in the 1950s because it depicts both American society and the post-war Seattle Japanese American community in an intensely unflattering light. The characters have little in common with the "model minority" that picks itself up by the bootstraps: incapacitated by self-hatred, their relationships have been distorted by the internment experience. Parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and friends are pitted against each other in bitter conflicts caused by their collective shame. The protagonist searches desperately for a way to put together the pieces of his fragmented life. Despite his pain and alienation, he retains his profound faith in the promise of American justice and equality. *No-No Boy* is an indictment of race hatred and a testament to the strength and faith of the oppressed. (E. H. Kim 98)

As Ichiro finds himself despised both by American society and the Nikkei community, he not only blames himself for such hatred but idealizes the Americanness he feels to have lost due to his lack of good judgment:

Where is that place with the clean, white cottages surrounding the new, red-brick church with the clean, white steeple, where the families all have two children, one boy and one girl, and a shiny new car in the garage and a dog and a cat and life is like living in the land of the happily-ever-after? Surely it must be around here someplace, someplace in America. Or is it just that it's not for me? (Okada 142)

Ichiro recognizes that the American dream is not for him, but far from shattering the oppressive claws of the myth, he suffers more because he blames himself for wasting his opportunity. He never gets to recognize that he never truly stood a chance. In the following fragment, he recalls his life as an American college student before the war, and a reality that happened only four years before could not feel any more distant:

To be a student in America was a wonderful thing. To be a student in America studying engineering was a beautiful life. That, in itself, was worth defending from anyone and anything which dared to threaten it with change or extinction. Where was the slide rule, he asked himself, where was the shaft of exacting and thrilling discovery when I needed it

most? If only I had pictured it and felt it in my hands, I might well have made the right decision, for the seeing and feeling of it would have pushed out the bitterness with the greenness of the grass on campus and the hardness of the chairs in the airy classrooms with the blackboards stretched wall-to-wall behind the professor, and the books and the sandwiches and the bus rides coming and going. I would have gone into the army for that and I would have shot and killed, and shot and killed some more, because I was happy when I was a student. (Okada 49)

For Ichiro, saying no to the draft means giving up on everything that is American in him, it implies renouncing any happiness, present or future. He describes going to college in the United States as some sort of paradise that he was not mature enough to understand, but an experience certainly worth killing for. The racist internalization that makes him see himself as the enemy not only idealizes life in America but condemns Ichiro to a life of exclusion. It is only now, when he has committed all his mistakes, that he becomes aware of what he has lost, but he never comes to realize that he did not lose anything, he was robbed of a fantasy that was never his in the first place.

He recognizes in the fragment that saying yes to enlisting would have also brought some bitterness, that being willing to die for a country that had put you and your family in detention was not without spite. However, such grudges would have dissolved in the blissfulness of feeling himself on the right side of history, that for Ichiro comes in the mundane form of the campus grass, the sandwiches, and the bus rides. What Ichiro does not realize is that, in saying no to the questionnaire, he might have been actually protecting the Americanness in him. It is a perspective that does not resonate in the narrative, but that has been discussed by draft resisters themselves and scholars, “no-no boys have attempted to live out the ‘American promise’ on their own terms by squarely confronting the contradiction of American citizenship” (Yoon 49). Moreover, some draft resisters criticized the novel for depicting Ichiro as a “weakling”, unable “to articulate the American patriotism that lay at the heart of the real resistance” (Nakagawa 279). In his depiction of Ichiro as haunted by his decisions, Okada might have been influenced by his own bias as a yes-yes boy and veteran, failing to see the bravery in saying no.

Ichiro had been raised as an American and he felt so right up until the moment when he was asked to renounce his loyalty to a country that he had never set foot in. Many draft resisters felt that in saying ‘yes’ they were admitting an alliance they did not feel and answered ‘no’ precisely to prove they had been American right from the beginning. The

Department of Homeland Security did not understand it that way, and their time in Tule Lake or a federal prison turned all those young men into pariahs.

Once again, what continues to resonate through the narrative is the idea of a mistake. Ichiro cannot attain the American dream because he was not brave enough to say ‘yes’ when he should have, and now at the age of twenty-five years old, he feels condemned to a hollow life in the shadows of society. What Ichiro never fully understands is that the American dream is unattainable for Japanese Americans, no matter what they answered on the loyalty questionnaire. The reader clearly grasps this reality thanks to Okada’s accurate contrast of Ichiro and Kenji’s fates. The writer cleverly surrounds Kenji’s character with everything that Ichiro dreams of and feels he does not deserve. The enrolment back in college, the close and loving family, the house in the suburbs, and, above all, the Cadillac, epitomizes the American dream. Nevertheless, none of those things appear to matter to Kenji, who is aware that the right to belong has cost him dearly:

The Cadillac represents the all-American symbols of freedom, masculine strength, and wealth, a stark contrast to Kenji’s dire situation as a disabled and dying veteran, a contradiction that serves to highlight the ways in which the American Dream is inaccessible to even those Japanese Americans who fought for it. (Endo 422)

Ichiro, blinded by his pain and depression, cannot see that Kenji’s status is, first, an illusion, and second, clearly not worth it. Ichiro feels that in being young and alive, he must atone for his mistakes, and in his journey towards self-acceptance, he never ceases to look for ways of proving his Americanness. Although as readers we might feel that Ichiro’s quest for asserting his Americanness is a delusional rabbit hole that will not bring him any assurance, in truth, it is American society that constantly demands Japanese Americans to identify themselves as “friendly” aliens. When Ichiro comes back to Seattle, he revisits some of the places that used to bring him joy before the war. He soon finds himself back at his former college, and he even knocks the door of a professor. Professor Brown expresses his shame for what happened to the Nikkei community, but assumes that Ichiro did “the right thing” and enlisted:

‘Tough about the evacuation. I really hated to see it happen. I suppose you’re disturbed about it.’

‘No, sir. Not too much, that is.’

‘Of course you are. Who wouldn’t be? Families uprooted, businesses smashed, educations interrupted. You’ve got a right to be sore.’

‘Water under the bridge now.’

Professor Brown smiled and leaned back in his chair, relaxing. ‘Admire you for saying that. You fellows are as American as I am. And you’ve proved it’. (Okada 51)

Ichiro is constantly reminded that the American dream does exist, if only not for him because he made a huge mistake that makes him unworthy of this welcoming country that is the United States of America.

### **Self-Censoring in Aiming to Belong**

The Nikkei community believed in the need to suppress the part of themselves that felt at odds with the image America had designed for them. This self-denial had its effect both on their Japanese heritage, which was then resented, but also on their feelings of frustration and bitterness against the country’s policies, which were marked as unpatriotic. Complaining was not allowed, so in being American they had to swallow every bit of racism that made them unwanted, all to avoid any stain on the immaculate perception Americans had of themselves. With a narrative “suspended between a discourse of affirmative, patriotic sentiment and a rhetoric of negative feelings” (Entin 87), this ambivalence between their love for their chosen country, and the bitterness for what such a country had done to them, is constantly portrayed in Okada’s novel.

The censoring of traumatic experiences prevents those who suffer from working through a process of healing. Moreover, in the case of a disturbance undergone by a whole community, the silence of self-censorship translated into self-neglect: “Internalizing their invisibility, Asian Americans sometimes enforced a self-imposed silence, in a sense ‘closeting’ the community, especially when issues are tinged with a perception of shame or stigma” (Zia 237). The Nikkei community itself made its members aware that unpatriotic feelings would not be welcomed, leaving Issei but mostly Nisei generations without any safe space to deal with their troubles. In *No-No Boy* the reader can perceive the devastating effects of such hermeticism in characters such as Ichiro, Bull, Kenji, or Freddy.

In this section of the analysis, it is worth noticing the role of some characters in perpetuating such blind patriotism that made white America the only available option.

Emi, Ichiro's romantic interest, reinforces an idealized America that bluntly contrasts Yamada's experience as a pariah, to both the American and the Nikkei community. Emi underpins a vision of America as a dreamlike nation, a self-delusion that opposes her personal situation, highly affected by the Executive order. Emi's father decided to be repatriated to Japan and her husband continues to string shifts in Germany as an excuse not to go back to America and face what it means to be a Japanese American veteran. For a person who has lost so much due to the U.S. racist policies, Emi holds a patriotic sentiment that invariably condones U.S. procedures as a simple mistake. She recognizes that the American system might have been wrong when imprisoning a whole community on the basis of race, but it was kind enough to let them go and to forgive those who decided not to enlist: "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 88). Emi is not a white person oblivious to the Japanese American reality of the 1950s, she had suffered the internment herself, she had lost family members and she lives alone in a country that still distrusts her, and yet she manages to believe—or to lie to herself—that an inclusive America is possible. "Emi's rhetoric of the bigness of the country is conditioned by her belief in its capability to forgive" (Yoon 54), a forgiveness she now asks of Ichiro:

'In any other country they would have shot you for what you did. But this country is different. They made a mistake when they doubted you. They made a mistake when they made you do what you did and they admit it by letting you run around loose. Try, if you can, to be equally big and forgive them and be grateful to them and prove to them that you can be an American worthy of the frailties of the country as well as its strengths.' (Okada 88)

Emi is a problematic character, read by different scholars as a projection of John Okada's own assimilationist struggles. If some characters in the novel are willing to censor themselves in order to belong, it is worth questioning to what extent Okada was doing the same when he wrote his novel. Some elements in Emi point to Okada's comfort within white America, being the first one Emi's physical description: "Emi was several inches taller than Kenji. She was slender, with heavy breasts, had rich, black hair which fell on her shoulders and covered her neck, and her long legs were strong and shapely like a white woman's" (Okada 77). Yoon (54) and Endo (424) have compared such description of the beautiful white-like Emi with the one we can read of Ichiro's mother at

the beginning of the novel: “a small, flat-chested, shapeless woman who wore her hair pulled back into a tight bun. Hers was the awkward, skinny body of a thirteen-year-old which had tried and toughened through the many years following but which had developed no further” (Okada 12). Assimilationist Emi is graciously described while Mrs. Yamada’s portrait could not have been any less appealing. However, even if Emi is described as a white woman, she is Japanese American nonetheless, a choice for Ichiro’s romantic interest that differs from “assimilationist scripts in Asian American literature such as Asian American protagonists automatically desiring White Americans rather than people from their own community” (Endo 424). In other words, Okada’s narrative holds too many nooks to be called straightforwardly assimilationist.

Other scholars have seen in Emi’s obvious nationalistic delusion a parody of the mainstream agenda of the time. Segments such as the following: ““I can remember how full I used to get with pride and patriotism when we sang ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ and pledged allegiance to the flag at school assemblies, and that’s the feeling you’ve got to have”” (Okada 88) would point, according to Ling, to Okada’s awareness of self-censoring limitations, suggesting that:

Ichiro had not found, in his relationship with her, an adequate solution to his moral and cultural dilemma. Thus, the "hopeful" ending for Ichiro in *No-No Boy* may not represent an effort by Okada, as a veteran of the U.S. Army in World War II, to assuage mainstream concerns about the resistance implicit in the no-no boy's position, but rather Okada's awareness of the limitations of Emi's discourse and his resourcefulness in dealing with audience expectations by offering a resolution that proves to be no solution at all. (373)

Ling perceives in Okada’s treatment of Emi’s character the complex reality of Asian American writers dealing with their position in America. While today’s readers might see a problematic assimilationist bias in Okada’s defence of American lifestyle, within the context of the time this bias could be also read as Okada’s own desire to integrate his work and his persona into the culture of his country. In other words, what today might be considered a too-bland critique of America, at the time could have just been Okada’s efforts in trying to make his work publishable enough for the mainstream readership. In these terms, “on the one hand, it underscores the ongoing difficulty of formulating a genuine Japanese American voice within the dominant ideology; on the other, it points

toward the author's commitment to the healing power of love" (Ling 372); Emi reveals herself as both troublesome and enlightening.

In this opposite reading of Okada's work, this dissertation's approach gravitates toward more problematic than revealing, because in using love as a healing treatment for the racist wounds inflicted by the system, Okada is addressing forgiveness from a Christian perspective consistent with the white culture of the time. Such Christian mentality is present in the description of Ichiro's depression, "a fact which further emphasizes his Americanization and alienation from his parents" (McDonald 23). The appearance of Christian values or the description of Emi according to white patterns does not imply Okada's assimilationist agenda, but it allows the reader to infer Okada's efforts to meet not only his own needs, "but the expectations of the audience, and the era's requirements of novel production negotiated with the possibility for protest compromised" (Ling 373). Once again, these scholars consider the assimilationist apparent advocacy either as Okada's own ideology or the author's publishing agenda.

Emi is not the only character that appears to depict Okada's own —conscious or unconscious— willingness to embed his narrative within an assimilationist frame. Okada meticulously writes about racism and its effects on the Nikkei community without taking into the narrative almost any white characters. He wittingly describes the devastating effects of racism and its internalization without using the obvious device of an evil white character. However, in his description of the only white male character of importance, Mr. Carrick, he might have done just the opposite, portraying a kind and compassionate middle-class man as the standard, "the kind of American that Americans always profess themselves to be" (Okada 151). Okada describes Mr. Carrick as the white American they all should have been:

'The government made a big mistake when they shoved you people around. There was no reason for it. A big black mark in the annals of American history. I mean it. I've always been a big-mouthed, loud-talking, back-slapping American but, when that happened, I lost a little of my mind. I don't feel as proud as I used to, but, if the mistake has been made, maybe we've learned something from it. Let's hope so. We can still be the best damn nation in the world. I'm sorry things worked out the way they did'.

It was an apology, a sincere apology from a man who had money and position and respectability, made to the Japanese who had been wronged. (Okada 135)

Endo highlights in Mr. Carrick's character Okada's rupture of the traditional portrayal of the white savior. Far from following traditional narratives that extol white male figures, he presents a man "who holds surprisingly progressive views about racial justice; he is depicted as a progressive advocate who understands the nature and scope of institutional racism" (Endo 425). Okada makes a call to the America who had felt appalled by the imprisonment of Japanese Americans and makes it the standard in his book, proving that, at least in his fiction, "the character of Mr. Carrick parallels the views of many White Americans during this era who were genuinely outraged about the incarceration, but more significantly, were taking active steps to use their racial privilege to help Japanese Americans" (Endo 425). In this generous description of white America as an ideologically diverse society there is an optimistic attempt to describe a community supportive of Asian American integration.

Although the United States must have had citizens who, like Mr. Carrick, disagreed with its racist systemic policies, I would still render as problematic the paternalistic tone that surrounds who is the only white character of the novel. Considering that Okada takes pains to describe a complex and multilayered Nikkei community, it cannot be left unquestioned that the only white man in the novel is a paradigm of sensitivity. I would suggest that in depicting him in such a benevolent way, Okada is being the bigger man in the face of oppression, but he is also describing the America he wants himself to believe in.

It seems somehow unfair for Ichiro, whose depression, as described through his brooding stream of consciousness, appears to see no end, that a white stranger says what he cannot take from anybody else: "'I am sorry, Ichiro,' he said, 'sorry for you and for the causes behind the reasons which made you do what you did. It wasn't your fault, really. You know that, don't you?'" (Okada 136). It is even more unfair that, in this "man who was attempting in a small way to rectify the wrong he felt to be his own because he was a part of the country which, somehow, had erred in a moment of panic" (Okada 136), Ichiro appears to find the "real nature of the country against which he had almost fully turned his back" (Okada 138). It is both Ichiro's and Okada's goodwill to see in Mr. Carrick's kindness the truth of America. It may be cynical to point out that the only moment of interracial solidarity in the novel can be understood as the byproduct of both the author's and the character's assimilationist wish to believe in the tender-heartedness of the country, considering they both were put in detention for being Asian. In

encountering such a decent man, Ichiro hopes of finding more like him: “Surely there were others too who understood the suffering of the small and the weak and, yes, even the seemingly treasonous, and offered a way back into the great compassionate stream of life that is America” (Okada 137). In Ichiro’s reaction to Carrick, it is implied that the protagonist’s self-forgiveness can only be granted with the consent of the white society that has provoked his trauma.

Whether the author is actually questioning or in the end reinforcing racist constraints in his quest for belonging is a debate that can be extrapolated to other aspects of the novel, not only to the depiction of the characters. In line with the assumption of Christian ideas associated with Emi’s advocacy for forgiveness, some authors have pointed, as an example of Okada’s assimilationist bias, to his subordination of Japanese culture to mainstream America. Storhoff argues that the author:

Writing under the unconscious influence of American capitalism and Christianity, allows those cultural forms to shape the novel's narrative. [...] Okada unwittingly deprives Ichiro of all discernable Japanese characteristics, ignores or rejects Buddhism, and imposes on the novel's plot a specifically "Christian" design, wherein Ichiro ultimately understands that his suffering resulting from his refusal to serve in the Army is redeemed. Ichiro, at the novel's end, discovers that the benefits of American materialism offered to him should not be resisted. (2)

Storhoff contends that Okada’s efforts to integrate his novel within popular-constrained conformity is a submerged act that nonetheless calls into question “Okada’s status as an ethnic author writing social criticism” (3). This scholar finds an explanation in Okada’s commitment to racist standards in the “power of acculturative stress” (3), a subconscious force that would make ethnic writers willing to comply with the system even when depicting its unfairness. Other scholars such as Xu delve further into this abandonment of cultural heritage in pursuit of acculturation. Xu distinguishes between the “constitutional we”, “a political identity that entitles [ethnic minorities] to rights and privileges granted to all American citizens” (18), and the “ethnic we”, which tends to suffer when, placed in competition, ethnic groups resign on “foods, rituals, and family relationships specific to one’s ethnic community” (18). Xu asserts that, in his treatment of Ichiro’s mother, Okada let the reader infer his “own bitter ambivalence toward his ethnic community, an internalization of racism most Japanese Americans failed to escape

between the 1940s and 1960s" (24), that it is ultimately depicted in the relationship with the maternal.

The figure of the mother, as analyzed in the previous chapter, is problematic in that it is presented as devoid of any humane trait or sympathy. In rejecting her it has previously been argued that Ichiro is repudiating everything that is Japanese. Okada makes this election of American culture over Japanese heritage in more aspects of the novel. There is not only a lack of presence of Japanese culture, American customs are praised as the ideal. The description of the Yamada's first meal after Ichiro's comeback resounds as practical and mundane: "There were eggs, fried with soy sauce, sliced cold meat, boiled cabbage, and tea and rice" (Okada 13). Ichiro has been two years eating what he was served at the prison's canteen, and yet he describes this first meal with his family with a dehumanizing tone. By contrast, Kenji's last meal with his family transpires Americanness in every element, from the roasted chicken, and the lemon meringue pie, to the picture of the whole family watching a game. Okada's inclination toward American traditions follows Xu's discussion of the author as "held hostage by the ideology of assimilation that inculcates a myth about the racial and cultural inferiority of U.S. ethnic minorities" (21), with the happy suburban family as the only alternative.

Okada's comfort within the ideology of racist and materialistic America is further contended by scholars such as Yoon, who theorizes on the author's fantasizing of the idealized suburbs of the 1950s:

Ichiro's implied assimilation into the postwar suburb, attuned to Emi's advice of amnesia and forgiveness, is problematic because it is not so much a cultural counter-practice as compliance with an amnesic reaction to the "evacuated" history of the internment of Japanese Americans and racial overtones implicit in the postwar suburb. (59)

Although it is generally accepted that the novel's ending lacks a clear resolution, there are hints of a potentially happy future that come in connection to his relationship with Emi and their ability to accommodate white expectations: "With Ichiro's suburban fantasies and Emi's preaching of forgiveness symbolically projected onto the dance floor, an image of a suburbanite couple begins to take shape" (Yoon 58). However, it remains debatable how truly positive can such a vision of the future be when it implies an acceptance of racism as the dominant standard which forces Ichiro to keep his self-loathing in secret.

Then again, other critics have dealt with Okada's assimilationism more comprehensively. Ling, as was already stated about Emi's character, offers an explanation for Okada's choices based on the need of the writer to navigate the exigencies of his time:

Okada wrote and published the novel in an era when Cold War ideological drives toward U.S. nationalism and legitimation of material abundance promoted tendencies to embrace a common national character and a "seamless" American culture. Implicated in this political climate was an unwillingness on the part of the dominant culture to acknowledge class divisions in American society and to address grievances about economic or racial injustice, especially those suffered by Japanese Americans during and after the war. (361)

The 1950s is a time for U.S. society to look forward. The economic boost in the years following the Second World War was aligned with the system's efforts to keep the population under the conservative ideology that marked the early Cold war. The normative was considered not only the standard, but the only viable option, the Eisenhower administration was not ready for any criticism. This negligence towards the struggles of ethnic minorities contrasts with the mainstream discourse of the model minority, which brought an interest in the Asian American cultures. "In this political climate, a few American publishers began to develop a market for Japanese American and Chinese American writers willing to function as cultural mediators and to tell stories of successful assimilation" (Ling 361), which meant that, for Asian American writers to be publishable, they had to conform with the stereotypes that kept them under oppression:

Asian American writers who were published appeared to confirm the era's reigning discourse on Americanization and to avoid denunciations of racial injustice. Reflecting the cultural identity of alien but "safe" minority assigned to Asian Americans is the rigid distinction drawn by the literary establishment of the era between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" values in literature. This distinction reproduced Asian America's social marginalization in the realm of aesthetics by denying Asian American writing not only its literariness but also its rich human potential. (Ling 361)

When writing his novel, Okada was influenced by the reality of the camps and the internalization of racism he wanted to depict, but also by the kind of reader who would potentially buy his novel. In that sense, Okada both "projected the voice of one segment of his implied audience—the interned Japanese Americans— through the character of Ichiro in order to articulate a message of protest" (Ling 374), and tried to content his

white readers by projecting “an ‘official’ voice -that of the apologist for the United States and its race policies during the War- through the character of Emi in order to create a resolution acceptable to the majority of his potential postwar readership” (Ling 374). In other words, Ling contends that Okada wittingly plays with the expectations of the country toward Asian Americans and his ambitions as a writer, making Ichiro, if not an “adequate alternative discourse” (374), at least not completely dissolved “into the dominant one” (374). Although it may appear as a weak form of criticism, Okada’s efforts would resonate at his time, setting the path for other authors and that took a bolder approach in the 1970s.

Unlike other scholars who thought of Okada as a subject to his subconscious assimilation, Ling advocates for a vision of the author as a resourceful creator that “transformed the conventional novel by making it subversively unfamiliar and problematic” (375). In neither fully complying with the system nor abandoning himself to his depression and self-loathing, Okada gifts American literature with a complex character that reflects on the intense dichotomy of a whole ethnic group:

Such inconsistency prevents Ichiro's struggle from merging totally into either assimilationist impulses or Japanese isolation, maintains his painful resistance to power, and keeps his voice contradictory and problematic, even while it profoundly dramatizes both the need for a Japanese American discourse and the difficulties of finding a place to stand in order to invent one. Clearly, the ambiguous Ichiro that Okada created failed to provide a comfortable ideological stance or clear narrative guidance for mainstream readers. (Ling 375)

Ling summarizes both Ichiro and Okada’s position in society in the concept of the “limited space”. These boundaries apply to Ichiro Yamada’s literal space in society, but also the novel as a whole, with Okada navigating the limited space allowed for minorities within mainstream culture. For Asian American writers to become commercially publishable they had to conform to the oppressive stereotypes of their racist system. This self-censoring in order to belong reminds us of Spivak’s well-known concerns on whether the subaltern could have a voice of their own within the oppressor’s order (21). Is it Okada’s only choice to censor himself if he wants to be read by his fellow Americans? Is he condemned to become complicit with the system if he wants to reach popular audiences in his protest? Okada proved the difficulties of conveying the “severity of the World War II rupture in Japanese American life within the limited cultural space allowed

for Asian American literary expression” (Ling 362), but in doing so created what today is considered an early classic of the Asian American literary tradition.

Ichiro’s somber future, regardless of his potential relationship with Emi, relies on the uncertainty of Ichiro’s journey toward healing. The protagonist of *No-No Boy* is forced by his author to navigate a binary opposition in which the only two options are white assimilation over Japanese marginalization. It is certain, for any reader who approaches the novel after the civil rights movement, that the novel lacks a third path that would allow minorities to define their space without conforming:

Ichiro's problematic recovery in postwar Seattle —especially his thwarted struggle to articulate a Japanese American dissent in terms of ethnic pride— reflects both the limited range of dissent permitted in the social and aesthetic discourses surrounding Okada's literary creation and the contradictory state that such discourses create in Ichiro's consciousness, a state which prevents him from seeing and thinking about his plight outside the available social options (Ling 363)

In that sense, Okada’s novel remains a source of frustration for the pioneer it could have been in anticipating what would become characteristic elements of the American ethnic minorities’ writing, such as Bhabha’s “hybrid” (150) or Andalzúa’s “mestiza” (25). Nonetheless, Okada’s efforts were and continue to be a source of inspiration for American writers who saw in *No-No Boy* the lost trail of the Asian American literary tradition. It served as scaffolding for the next generation of writers who, in the 1970s, were in need of a standard they could feel represented and inspired by:

Ichiro's voice resonates with some of the ethnic dissents of the 1950s and implicitly calls for a breakdown of the discourse that governed the relations of Japanese Americans to the mainstream, a call that foreshadows the more explicitly confrontational strategies employed by Asian American writers in the 1970s. (Ling 363)

Okada imagined in his novel an imperfect world in which Japanese American struggles mattered. He gave voice, barely fifteen years after the end of the war, to a generation that did not give up on their dream to become Americans, not even after being jailed and forced to fight for a country that did not want them around. Okada reminded the Nikkei community and the rest of America that their traumas would not disappear, that all the suffering could not be swept under the carpet. He did so by navigating his bias, his wish to belong, and from the limited space the American narrative allowed him.

## Conclusion

At the end of this dissertation, I would suggest taking a step back to reflect on quite the journey it has been for the rights and inclusiveness of ethnic minorities in the United States. Unfortunately, in the nearly seventy years since Ichiro and Okada's time, racism has not become a problem of the past and remains deafeningly present in today's American society. Even though it was not addressed in the years after the Second World War, in the last decades the internment period has come to be considered an inextricable and shameful part of the United States' history. There is no small amount of progress in the fact that today we can finally ponder over what happened, even if injustice toward ethnic minorities continues to be an urgent problem in 21<sup>st</sup>-century America.

In the 1980s, the pressure of Japanese American activism achieved a historical apology in the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, signed by President Ronald Reagan after four years of resistance:

In 1984, shortly before his landslide reelection victory over former Vice President Walter Mondale, President Ronald Reagan was faced with an intense lobbying effort by Japanese Americans and their allies in Congress. At issue was the moral, legal, and economic redress of the forced evacuation, relocation, and internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. [...] For nearly five years, President Reagan opposed redress legislation, reversing his position only after the political pressure reached a fever pitch. (Maga 606)

The Act was the symbolic recognition of America's abuse of Japanese American families, who saw the injustice acknowledged in the form of the "Reagan administration apology, a \$20,000 stipend, and the blanket clearing of any and all Japanese-American criminal records from the internment era" (Maga 610). The Tule Lake Camp that gathered no-no internees is today a national monument that receives visitors eager to learn about America's least bright episode. History, however, proves once and again that racism resists the passing of time. America's self-consciousness toward the Nisei mistreatment did not prevent, only a few years later, the U.S. government from implementing racist policies on the American Chinese population as Communist China became the enemy during the Cold War. Successes like the AAPI heritage month contrast recent hate crime waves during and after the COVID pandemic, proving that racist attitudes have come only that far.

In going through the tragic effects of acculturative stress, we learn with Ichiro Yamada about the damaging risks of thinking in halves. The hyphenation of the self, which locates ethnic heritage in opposition to Americanness, is proved in the character of Ichiro as an impossible attempt to build national identity. Ichiro is told by the racist American society that in order to belong, he must leave behind everything that is Japanese in him. In the novel, assimilating is presented as the only option to have a future in America, but it is an impossible process since the narrow-minded mentality of the country is never going to see the Nisei community as anything but the Other. The history of Asian Americans and the experience of the Yamadas prove that assimilation is never successful because Americans appear to be unable to see past racial traits.

In the tragedy of Ichiro's narrative, the reader gets to comprehend what the character never fully grasps: Biculturalism is the solution. The only path toward happiness for ethnic minorities is managing to understand the self as the unique combination of two cultures, rather than the summary of two parts. Asian Americans are not Asians and Americans, they cannot be divided into two cultures, because their understanding of their heritage and their adjustment to American ways makes them "mestizos" (Andalzúa 25), a new race that stands for the future of America.

Even if Okada's narrative points to the author's own efforts to assimilate, at the core of his novel emanates the idea, ahead of his time, that the community needs to heal not by rejecting part of themselves, but by actually vindicating their Americanness. In Ichiro's journey, we learn that the path toward acceptance is not easy, especially when the internalization of racism makes you your own enemy. Self-hatred and shame cannot be overcome in private, the novel claims, and the strength of the community and the protection of the family are nuclear for Asian Americans to defy racism and claim their place in America.

It has been discussed the limitations of Okada's novel as criticism of racist standards against both the Asian American community and the ethnic literary canon. The efforts of Okada might sound too subtle when compared with the aggressive and blunt protest of the 1960s civil rights movements, or with ethnic writers in the 1990s. However, writers in those decades counted on the support of civil rights advocates, and society at large in the 1990s. Writers in the 1950s, the weakness of their defiance notwithstanding, had to do it without any safety net, without any community or advocacy group that would

take their side when mainstream America condemned them to ostracism, as happened to Okada's novel.

Even if Okada's critique of racist America could have been more straightforward for today's standards, his contribution should not be overshadowed, especially when taking into account its enormous influence on later authors. *No-No Boy* proves the importance of visibility for communities that have been historically forced to the margins of society. John Okada set, even if unconsciously, the foundations of a literary tradition that would make its mission bear witness to an America that fought and continue to fight for existence, demanding a more inclusive paradigm. Okada was trying in his novel to reinforce an idea of America in hope of making it inclusive for Asian Americans. The author did not realize that such a model was obsolete, and white hegemony should not be amplified to admit other ethnicities, it should be directly contested, for white supremacism would always regard ethnic minorities as inferior, no matter how "generous" some Americans as Mr. Carrick appear to be. Benevolence should not be the aspiration, but respect and inclusion.

*No-No Boy* remains a classic today because its narrative has certainly stood the test of time. As we celebrate the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its publication, the novel reflects on themes that continue to concern current authors and activists. The questioning of Asian Americans' belonging is a shameful wound that reopens with every historical event that relates to Asia, whether it is the COVID or the commercial feud between the U.S. and China. United States society continues to demonstrate its inability to distinguish racial traits from geopolitical issues. The attacks on the self, the family, and the Nikkei community are three fronts that Okada denounces in his book which continue to be the aim of white supremacist hatred. The self-questioning, the acculturative stress, and the difficulties of the community in working out its trauma are other elements of Okada's novel that can be extrapolated to today's Asian American generations. Moreover, the focus on the members of the Nisei generation as the ones responsible for negotiating their heritage and their Americanness continues to be a test second-generation immigrants continue to face these days.

Okada's work was not the first. Others tried their best before him, but *No-No Boy* and its author became pioneers in that they ignited a movement that took inspiration from Okada's efforts to create a literary tradition that both vindicated their authors and protested unfair treatment by the system. The health and strength of Asian American

studies and Asian American literary tradition are today indisputable. Like any other cultural tradition, it is neither static nor monolithic, but a changing process that grows and expands with the demands of the community. Asian American authors deal with themes that directly affect the Asian American community concerning America at large, but their literary efforts expand in multiple directions, dealing with genres, topics, and approaches that enlarge American literature as a whole. In keeping Okada's novel alive, we make amends for the injustice which allowed *No-No Boy* to remain forgotten for nearly two decades. Okada's work keeps on teaching each new generation of readers about the hardships of claiming Americanness, the devastating effects of internalized racism, and the need for strength in fighting racism in pursuit of a plural understanding of America.

## Works Cited

- Abe, Frank, et al., editors. *John Okada: The Life and Rediscovered Work of the Author of No-No Boy*. University of Washington Press, 2018.
- Adams, Bella. *Asian American Literature*. Edinburgh University Press, 2008.
- Andaluzía, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera. The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- “Behind the Wire.” *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/japanese/behind-the-wire/>. Accessed 11 Apr. 2022.
- Berry, John W., et al. “Comparative Studies of Acculturative Stress.” *The International Migration Review*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1988, pp. 491–511.
- Berry, John W. “Theories and Models of Acculturation.” *The Oxford Handbook of Acculturation and Health*, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 15–28.
- Bhabha, Homi K. “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1985, pp. 144–65.
- . *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Bowskill, Matt, et al. “The Rhetoric of Acculturation: When Integration Means Assimilation.” *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2007, pp. 793–813.
- Bulosan, Carlos. 1943. *America Is in the Heart*. Penguin Classics, 2019.
- “Children of the Camps.” *PBS*, <https://www.pbs.org/childofcamp/history/>. Accessed 11 Apr. 2022.
- Chin, Frank. “Afterword.” *No-No Boy*, University of Washington Press, 2014, pp. 223–32.
- . *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*. Howard University Press, 1974.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, pp. 1241–99.

- Davis, James. "Ichiro Is a Punk, and Other Lessons from Teaching 'The Immigrant Experience.'" *Radical Teacher*, vol. 84, no. 1, 2009, pp. 50–61.
- Elleman, Bruce. *Japanese-American Civilian Prisoner Exchanges and Detention Camps, 1941-45*. Routledge, 2006.
- Endo, Rachel. "Reading Civil Disobedience, Disaffection, and Racialized Trauma in John Okada's *No-No Boy*: Lessons Learned 75 Years after Executive Order 9066." *Children's Literature in Education: An International Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 413–29.
- . "Reading Civil Disobedience, Disaffection, and Racialized Trauma in John Okada's *No-No Boy*: Lessons Learned 75 Years After Executive Order 9066." *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 49, no. 4, Dec. 2018, pp. 413–29.
- Gribben, Bryn. "The Mother That Won't Reflect Back: Situating Psychoanalysis and the Japanese Mother in *No-No Boy*." *MELUS*, vol. Vol. 8, no. No. 2, 2003, pp. 31–46.
- Hsu, Hua. "The Asian-American Canon Breakers." *The New Yorker*, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/01/06/the-asian-american-canon-breakers>. Accessed 11 Apr. 2022.
- Huang, Guiyou. *The Columbia Guide to Asian American Literature Since 1945*. Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Inada, Lawson Fusao. "Introduction." *No-No Boy*, University of Washington Press, 2014, pp. XIX–XXII.
- Ivey, Linda L., and Kevin W. Kaatz. *Citizen Internees: A Second Look at Race and Citizenship in Japanese American Internment Camps*. ABC-CLIO, 2017.
- Jones, Paul, and Michal Krzyzanowski. "Identity, Belonging and Migration: Beyond Constructing 'Others.'" *Identity, Belonging and Migration*, vol. 17, 2008, pp. 38–53.
- Kashima, Tetsuden. "Japanese American Internees Return, 1945 to 1955: Readjustment and Social Amnesia." *Phylon (1960-)*, vol. Vol. 41, no. No. 2 (2nd Qtr.), 1980, pp. 107–15.

- Kim, Daniel Y. "Once More, with Feeling: Cold War Masculinity and the Sentiment of Patriotism in John Okada's *No-No Boy*." *Criticism*, vol. 47, no. 1, 2005, pp. 65–83.
- Kim, Elaine H. "Defining Asian American Realities Through Literature." *Cultural Critique*, no. 6, 1987, pp. 87–111, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1354257>.
- Kim, Phenix. "A PLACE IN THE PATTERN OF AMERICA: JOHN OKADA'S *NO-NO BOY* AND THE ASIAN AMERICAN BILDUNGSROMAN." *PopMeC Research Blog*, 2021.
- Lee, Erika. "The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924." *Journal of American Ethnic History*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2002, pp. 36–62.
- Lee, Robert G. *Orientalism. Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. Temple University Press, 1999.
- Li, David Leiwei. "Race, Gender, Class and Asian American Literary Theory." *Race, Gender & Class*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1997, pp. 40–53.
- . "The State and Subject of Asian American Criticism: Psychoanalysis, Transnational Discourse, and Democratic Ideals." *American Literary History*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2003, pp. 603–24.
- Ling, Jinqi. "Race, Power, and Cultural Politics in John Okada's *No-No Boy*." *Source: American Literature*, vol. 67, no. 2, 1995, pp. 359-381.
- Lugones, Maria. "On Borderlands/La Frontera: An Interpretive Essay." *Hypatia*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1992, pp. 31–37.
- Maga, Timothy P. "Ronald Reagan and Redress for Japanese-American Internment, 1983-88." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1998, pp. 606–88.
- Maggio, Joe. "'Can the Subaltern Be Heard?': Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2007, pp. 419–43.
- Manzella, Abigail G. H. "The Wartime Displacement of Japanese American Incarceration: Disorientation and Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*."

- Migrating Fictions. Gender, Race, and Citizenship in U.S. Internal Displacements*, Ohio State University Press, 2018, pp. 109–53.
- McDonald, Dorothy Ritsuko. “After Imprisonment: Ichiro’s Search for Redemption in No-No Boy.” *MELUS*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1979, pp. 19–26.
- Meca, Alan, et al. “Biculturalism and Bicultural Identity Development.” *Youth in Superdiverse Societies: Growing up with Globalization, Diversity, and Acculturation*, Routledge, 2019, pp. 41–57.
- Mori, Toshio. *Yokohama, California*. 1949. University of Washington Press, 2015.
- Nakagawa. “False Constructions of Loyalty. The Real Resistance against Incarceration.” *John Okada. The Life & Rediscovered Work of the Author of No-No Boy*, edited by Frank Abe et al., University of Washington Press, 2018, pp. 277–83.
- Okada, John. *No-No Boy*. 1957. University of Washington Press, 2014.
- Ozeki, Ruth. “Foreword.” *No-No Boy*, University of Washington Press, 2014, pp. VII–XVIII.
- Parikh, Crystal, and Daniel Y. Kim. “Introduction.” *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, edited by Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. xxi–xxiv.
- Peter, Marcelo Zaffalon, et al. “Belonging: Concept, Meaning, and Commitment.” *US-China Education Review*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2015, pp. 95–101.
- Pisares, Elizabeth H. “Do You Mis(Recognize) Me.” *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, Temple University Press, 2006, pp. 178–98.
- Rettger, John P., et al. “Trauma and Acculturative Stress.” *Psychotherapy for Immigrant Youth*, Springer, 2016, pp. 87–105.
- Robinson, Greg. “Writing the Internment.” *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, edited by Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 45–58.
- Russian, Ale. “10 Influential Asian American and Pacific Islander Activists - Biography.” *Biography*, 11 May 2021, <https://www.biography.com/news/asian-american-pacific-islander-activists>. Accessed 30 May 2022.

- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1978. Penguin Books, 2003.
- Sandeen, Eric J. "The Japanese American Relocation Center at Heart Mountain and the Construction of the Post-World War II Landscape." *Politics and Cultures of Liberation. Media, Memory, and Projections of Democracy*, edited by Hans Bak et al., vol. 7, Brill, 2018, pp. 285–306.
- Song, Min Hyoung. "Asian American Literature Within and Beyond the Immigrant Narrative." *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, edited by Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 3–16.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Revised Edition, from the 'History' Chapter of Critique of Postcolonial Reason." *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, edited by Rosalind C. Morris, Columbia University Press, 2010, pp. 21–80.
- . "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular." *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2005, pp. 475–86.
- Storhoff, Gary. "'A Prisoner of Forever': Cognitive Distortions and Depression in John Okada's *No-No Boy*." *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2004, pp. 1–20.
- Taylor, Sandra C. *Jewel of the Desert. Japanese American Internment at Topaz*. University of California Press, 1993.
- "The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act)." *Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute*, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>. Accessed 11 Apr. 2022.
- War Relocation Authority. *The Evacuated People. A Qualitative Description*. United States Department of Interior, 1946.
- Xu, Wenying. "Enjoyment and Ethnic Identity in *No-No Boy* and *Obasan*." *Eating Identities. Reading Food in Asian American Literature*, University of Hawaii Press, 2007, pp. 18–38.
- Yogi, Stan. "'You Had to Be One or the Other': Oppositions and Reconciliation in John Okada's *No-No Boy*." *MELUS*, vol. Vol. 21, no. 2, 1996, pp. 63–77.

Yoon, Seong-ho. “‘No Place in Particular’: Inhabiting Postinternment America, Articulating Postinternment Anxieties in John Okada’s *No-No Boy*.” *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2012, pp. 45–65.

Zamora, Maria C. *Nation, Race & History in Asian American Literature: Re-Membering the Body*. Peter Lang Publishing, 2008.

Zia, Helen. *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.