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## Diasporic War Memory in Juliet S. Kono's *Anshū: Dark Sorrow*

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To photographic corroboration of the atrocities committed by one's own side, the standard response is that the pictures are fabrication, that no such atrocity ever took place, those were bodies the other side brought in trucks from the city morgue and placed about the street, or that, yes, it happened and it was the other side who did it, to themselves.

—Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

### INTRODUCTION

The year 2015 marked the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>1</sup> The politics surrounding the commemoration of these historical events, both in the United States and in Japan, reveal that the act of remembering is both selective and strategic. In Japan, the events in Hiroshima and Nagasaki have generally served to construct the country's official memory of World War II, emphasizing the uniqueness of the experience of the bombing, or *hibaku*, to create a Japanese postwar national identity based on the narrative of victimhood. Conversely, in the United States, the predominant memory of the dropping of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki has emphasized the “good” contribution of the

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magnificent scientific achievement that brought the war to an early end and saved American lives. The inconsistency of these incongruous claims typically reveals the operation of what Homi K. Bhabha calls the “pedagogical” memories of these two modern nation-states (142). Bhabha discusses the attempts of modern nation-states to construct and maintain a linear official developmental history of pedagogical remembering (142). In Japan, the perceived urgency of overcoming the disruption of the country’s national history caused by defeat in the war and the necessity of reconstructing the national subject have conditioned the production of a narrative of Japanese victimhood founded on the *hibaku* experience. Thus, from complete devastation to a “miraculous” resurrection, Japan’s official postwar history exhibits a narrative of constant development. In the United States, compared with the notoriety of the Vietnam War, World War II is remembered as a good war that ended in victory. This victory established the United States as a prominent world power and promised further national development. Thus, both countries exhibit coherent national pedagogical memories related to the ending of the war and postwar development.

It is in alternative memories constructed by minorities within the nation-state that Bhabha locates the power to bring about, from within, the intervention of Derridean *différance* in the national pedagogical memory (152-57). By presenting diasporic perspectives that extend beyond the boundary of a modern nation-state, and by questioning its dominant formation based on an (illusionary) uniformity, Juliet S. Kono in her first novel, *Anshū: Dark Sorrow* (2010), provides a more radical critique of national pedagogical memories than Bhabha’s model of the memories of minorities. In this work, Kono creatively uses and revises the genre of the bildungsroman. Samina Najmi notes that the “bildungsroman” has been considered a unique German genre and that “the bildungsroman has a long history of engagement, and even identification with, nationhood” (Najmi 211). Najmi points out that in its original formula, the representation of nationhood is manifested by the white male protagonist, and the development of his subjectivity corresponds to the linear development of the nation (211). Najmi argues that this androcentric tradition can also be found in the scholarly analysis of the English and American versions of the bildungsroman (211). In representing a nation’s development, this genre has been defined as the genre that contributes ideologically to constructing the image of an ideal citizen. Thus, revision of this genre to incorporate minority characters, notably, female protagonists, racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, and misfits, offers a crucial and challenging critique of a naturalized formation

of nationhood and enables negotiation with the dominant model of its citizens. Kono also creatively alters the original bildungsroman formula. She introduces a nontraditional protagonist, a young Nisei, or second-generation Japanese American, woman named Himiko, who was born in Hawai'i but forced to leave and relocate to Japan because of her teenage pregnancy. She is then stranded in Japan during World War II and eventually endures the US bombing of Hiroshima. Thus, in her stigmatized Otherness, she exceeds the measure of normalcy as a citizen of both US and Japanese societies. I focus on the diasporic setting of Kono's unconventional bildungsroman that extends beyond the national boundaries of both the United States and Japan. In doing so, I examine how Kono's work challenges the governance of modern nation-states that clearly delineate "us" the citizens and the Other during times of warfare. In particular, I attend to Kono's depiction of Himiko, a Japanese American *hibakusha*, or bombing survivor affected by radiation, who carries the burden of being a victim of the war. Moreover, having accidentally killed her cousin during a crisis moment of the March 1945 Tokyo air raid, she also silently bears the guilt of being a perpetrator. Thus, Kono's detailed portrayal of Himiko as a disfigured Japanese American *hibakusha* disrupts the clear lines between the binaries: we/the Other and victim/victimizer, revealing traumatic residues that challenge the symbolic order of national remembering in both the United States and Japan. In this article, I focus on the issue of the Other's suffering and discuss how Kono's graphic depiction of the Japanese American *hibakusha* disrupts the boundary between "us" and the Other.

#### AVERTED GAZE

After enduring the US atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima, where she has been evacuated from Tokyo, Himiko undergoes an extended period of suffering from severe burns, other injuries, and radiation sickness that causes continuous bleeding, nausea, diarrhea, and high fever. Confronting her physical changes, reflected in the mirror, for the first time, Himiko observes: "On the right side of my head where the scalp had been burned, a thicket of hair had grown in white as Norio's [Himiko's cousin] snow. A raw-looking red keloid scar on that side of my face clawed its way toward my eye and cheekbone, the lines of red skin tapering into my face and gripping it like the talons of a falcon" (277). All over her body, including her shoulders, arms, back, and even her genital area, she finds keloids and other scars. Furthermore, one breast and three toes on her right foot are

missing. Although she already knows, before this confrontation, that her former image as a tall, beautiful, and healthy looking young Japanese American woman will no longer look back at her from the mirror, this reflection of a *hibakusha* that she must now identify with is overwhelming.

Following Himiko's first-person narrative, readers are led to identify with Himiko's gaze and her reflected image as their own. At this point, do readers stop reading the text, experiencing the impulse to avert their gaze from the picture created in their minds? How do a reader's nationality and other markers of identity influence the degree of his or her identification with Himiko? Is the flood of affect evoked by the graphic description one of horror, pain, empathy, or shame, or does it comprise a mixture of these emotions? If readers have a sudden impulse to avert their gaze, does not this urge signify a compelling desire to cut off the contagious power of their identification with the mirrored image that reminds them of their own vulnerability?

Canadian novelist and visual art critic Kyo Maclear has studied visual images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She notes that during the American occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1952, photographs of ground zero were prohibited from being publicly circulated in Japan by Occupation authorities. This censorship was also applied to the American and international media. Indeed, in the United States, the government concealed visual records of the mass deaths and plight of *hibakushas* from the public until 1980 (37). Maclear further notes that the first visual image to appear publicly in the United States was a military photograph focusing on the mushroom cloud that was taken from the cockpit of a military jet, which excluded the image of the devastated city below (36-37). The photograph, which later became iconic of the technological advancement of the United States during the Cold War, omitted any concrete images of human suffering. By regulating the visual field through the exclusion of images of human remains and injured *hibakushas*, the United States attempted to justify the use of atomic bombs. In this official discourse, the bombs signified a breakthrough in physics, the target was military, and the bombs saved American lives and ended the war (36). The content of this discourse is very similar to that of the regulated visual field: any description of actual human pain and suffering is absent in both. As Elaine Scarry succinctly points out, "The main purpose and outcome of war is injuring. Though the fact is too self-evident and massive ever to be directly contested, it can be indirectly contested by many means and disappear from view along many separate paths" (63-64). Scarry further points out that because of the strategic application of several literary

forms, including omission and redescription, the actual damage inflicted on human bodies is never acknowledged, thus masking the actuality that “the purpose of the event described is to alter (to burn, to blast, to shell, to cut) human tissue, as well as to alter the surface, shape, and deep entirety of the objects that human beings recognize as extensions of themselves” (64). Very similar to later US censorship of visual images of the Iraq War, the tactics used to justify the use of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki concealed the effects of nuclear force on the residents of these cities. These deceptive campaigns served to delineate a clear boundary between the remote and abstract enemy and “we” Americans by preventing the creation of empathic identification with the victims. This official justification still prevailed in 1995, as evidenced by the intervention of war veterans, major US news media, and conservative politicians in the attempted historical revision by the Smithsonian Institute. Curators at the Smithsonian Institute tried to bring scholarly analysis and investigation of the historical records that registered the circumstances of the US decision to use atomic bombs in Japan and the horrific damages on the people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, they encountered massive protest by war veterans and their supporters (Hogan 203-20). The removal of ground zero artifacts to maintain the patriotic solidarity of “we” Americans is a persistent attempt to divert the gaze of the American people from confrontation with *hibakushas*. In this context, *hibakushas* have been classified as, and equated with, the Japanese or the former enemies.

In Japan, *hibakushas* have experienced stigmatization and social marginalization because of many people’s misunderstanding their physical conditions as being a contagious illness, and there have been limited opportunities for confronting their real physical images within the popular media except during the annual Hiroshima and Nagasaki commemorations. However, abstract and disembodied ideas about the victims have been intentionally used in a Japanese major historical narrative to create a particular kind of national subject after Japan’s defeat in World War II and to produce a strategic and asymmetric commemoration of the war. This has entailed persistent denial of atrocities associated with Japan’s colonial domination in Asia during the war. Conversely, Japanese victimhood has been emphasized through the commemoration of the deaths of civilian women, children, and elders during the March 1945 Tokyo air raid and the Hiroshima-Nagasaki attacks, through various forms of mediated images and lessons in history. This “Japaneseness,” constructed through *symbolic* identification with the *actual* victims, by erasing their diversity,

problematically obscures Japan's colonial domination that entailed the use of what Achille Mbembé calls "necropower" (25). This involves strategic manipulation of the enemy's health during war and colonial/neocolonial invasions and domination by devaluing the life of the Other both within and beyond the national space (25-30; Carrigan 26). For instance, the perspectives of "innocent" females or youths are frequently used to retrospectively critique the fanatical nationalism that led to the sacrifice of the lives of unprepared enlisted young men portrayed in numerous mainstream Japanese TV dramas and literary works. However, these works do not provide an alternative perspective that depicts Japanese atrocities committed in Asian countries, including the Nanjing Massacre, the cruel sexual abuse of military sex slaves from various countries including Korea and China that resulted in widespread venereal diseases and damage to the reproductive organs of the victims, deaths from illness or execution, and live human experiments conducted by the Japanese military.

The United States and Japan have each attempted to create a coherent narrative of World War II by controlling the visual field and producing homogeneous national subjects. Considering the context of visual control of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States to obscure the fact of the Other's suffering, Kono's detailed description of a Japanese American *hibakusha's* suffering body provides a challenge to this attempt to establish a clear boundary between we/Americans and the Other/enemies. The Other's suffering has been obscured and made remote through visual control and, thus, has concealed the immediacy of physical and psychic pain. Kono's realistic writing reinstates the simple and evident fact that the main purpose of the atomic bombs was, to borrow Scarry's way of expression, injuring and altering human tissues. For Himiko, her lived experience as a *hibakusha* does not resonate with the dominant US war memory discourse that celebrates the use of atomic bombs to *protect* American lives. While *Anshū* disrupts this official US remembering, the novel also challenges the Japanese government's strategic equation of *hibakushas* with Japaneseness. Himiko's American nationality reminds the reader of the heterogeneous composition of *hibakushas*, which includes Japanese Americans like Himiko as well as some of the colonized Korean people who were brought to Japan by force. As Hiroko Okuda's study has shown, *hibakushas* in Japan encompassed twenty-one different originating nationalities (40). Thus, Kono in *Anshū* critiques the problematic conception of the *hibaku* experience as being a uniquely Japanese experience that ignores the individualities of *hibakushas*. Furthermore, Kono's realistic

description of Himiko's suffering body challenges the abstractness of a symbolic equation that lacks the urgency and immediacy of physical and psychological suffering.

Himiko's alternative position vis-à-vis the dominant US and Japanese memories of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki revives the marginalized and effaced suffering of the Other. The production of the Other who can be the target of various forms of violence is not unrelated to salient forms of difference, including racial and ethnic otherness. In 1945, responding to the Hiroshima-Nagasaki events, African American poet Langston Hughes astutely observed that the United States targeted Japan and not Germany for deployment of atomic bombs because of the racial otherness of "yellow-skinned Japanese" (Stone 38). At the time of the atomic bombing by the United States, both President Truman and the Canadian prime minister, Mackenzie King, made racist remarks in relation to the decision to use atomic bombs. According to Truman, the Japanese were "beasts" and thus needed to be treated as such (Maclear 38). Similarly, King expressed his relief that the United States had unleashed the atomic bombs on the Japanese rather than a white European race (Maclear 38). Furthermore, the direct equation of *hibakushas* with "Japaneseness"/the enemy was typically observed when, during the early 1970s, Japanese American *hibakushas* sought financial support from the US government to cover the medical costs for their radiation sickness treatment. Some US legislators claimed that those Japanese American *hibakushas* were the enemy and were, thus, not eligible for any governmental support (Sodei 247). In this case, the racial otherness of Japanese American *hibakushas* barred them from receiving support to which they were entitled as American citizens. The legislators somehow equated the otherness of *hibakushas* with racial (Asian) otherness and, thus, with foreignness in general in order to maintain the illusion of a clear boundary separating them from "we Americans" who were not threatened by radiation sickness. In Japan, conversely, where the *hibaku* experience is remembered as a *national* tragedy, the fact that *hibakushas* also included Koreans who were forcibly brought to Japan has been sidelined.<sup>2</sup> According to Maclear, because of social discrimination, most Korean *hibakushas* were denied adequate medical treatment, resulting in their deaths (174).

Before further examining the issue of entangled relations between the production of the Other and the various forms of physical suffering caused by the atomic bombs and radiation, it is imperative to reflect on the critical and controversial argument as to whether *hibakushas* should be categorized

as disabled. For the complex process of the creation of the subject goes hand in hand with the production of others excluded from the category. As Clare Baker and Stewart Mulley have thoughtfully argued, while the particular subject position created by *hibakushas* as a result of their oppression, discrimination, coalition, and activism resonates with disability politics, the “disabled” label may be inappropriate for them (231). This issue is pivotal when we consider that the field of disability studies was initially developed within a Western context. Thus, instead of reductively applying the notion of disability to non-Western contexts, awareness of the local context when dealing with such embodied experiences is an unavoidable necessity.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the question of how to define disability is part of a complex ongoing assessment that requires careful examination of kinds and degrees of physical conditions and their diagnostic and prognostic definitions, the similarities and differences between chronic illness and disability, and people’s own embodied experiences of what is disabling in their particular localized and individual settings of social and cultural environment (Ingstad and Whyte 11).

Considering these arguments, and the serious problems involved with simply absorbing *hibakushas* into the category of the disabled, I direct attention toward the usefulness of critical and analytical approaches within the field of disability and illness studies for examining issues surrounding *hibakushas*. Our very desire to either include or exclude a certain category highlights the need for a discussion of how and why such desires may be generated in the delineation of a national hegemonic “us” as distinct from the Other. Disability studies on issues of stigma offers insight into how stigmas can be attached to certain embodied experiences to produce the Other and how we internalize socially coded values. According to Lerita M. Coleman, a notable scholar in the field of disability studies, the verb *to stigmatize* “originally referred to the branding or marking of certain people” (143). Stigma creates a “predominant affective responses such as dislike and disgust to include the emotional reaction of fear” (143). Coleman suggests that stigma is heavily dependent on the social context and is to some extent arbitrarily defined. Thus, all human differences are potentially stigmatizable (141). Certain differences, such as those that are physically salient, are targeted by the dominant “normal” group within society (141-42). In this way, disability studies helps denaturalize notions of health and normativity that govern various power relationships within the modern nation-state. This raises the question of how normative ideas, generated through the governance of physicality, drive our subjective and affective



ways of identifying with and differentiating ourselves from the Other.

Examining the way our identification with and differentiation from the Other leads us to the fact that not only racial or other labels of Otherness are metaphorically linked to states of disability and illness but also people labeled as Others can be targeted and thereby exposed to circumstances that make them vulnerable to states of physical danger and suffering. The circumstances leading to the particular choice of targets for atomic bomb attacks by the United States and the indifference of the Japanese people toward Koreans illustrate the precarious status of the Other. These episodes expose that both the United States and Japan devalued the lives of racial or ethnic Others and their subsequent effacement of the suffering of the Other. In their official rememberings, by looking away from the suffering Other, both the United States and Japan have strategically avoided creating empathic identification with the figure of the Other in agony that disrupts a clear demarcation between “us” and the Other.<sup>4</sup>

In light of the above evidence regarding states' control of visual fields to delete evidence of the Other's suffering, I would now like to return to Himiko's confrontation with her own physical image. Her femaleness and/or Japanese Americanness can serve as a safeguard for some readers to protect themselves from identification with her. However, Kono's graphic depiction of Himiko's body forces us to critically examine the desire to differentiate ourselves from this abjected body, which is the very reason for the practice of a politics of the visual field in both the United States and Japan. The sensory images of the suffering Other elicit a traumatic shock that reveals the gap and discrepancy in the national pedagogical memories of these countries so as to radically and violently destroy their respective self-images as hero (for the United States) or victim (for Japan).

Laura E. Tanner suggests that the exchange of gazes between a dying person and a healthy watcher troubles the very distinction between subject and object, allowing for the possibility of dissolution of the distance between the two. Thus, the healthy watcher must confront flooding feelings of pain (19-25). Tanner explores the possibility of an alternative gaze that extends beyond Laura Mulvey's psychoanalytic model, which emphasizes visual pleasure derived through sexual differences. It also extends beyond Michel Foucault's conceptualization of the medical gaze that reduces the patient to his or her symptoms, thereby failing to fully recognize the patient's subjectivity (Tanner 19-23). Tanner points out that the exchange of gazes between the dying patient and healthy watcher reminds onlookers of the vulnerability stemming from their shared mortality and upsets the distinction

between these two individuals (23). In a close parallel, Himiko's body impels us, the readers, to consider the necessity of a careful reexamination of the politics of the visual field. These politics have diverted our gaze from the issue of shared mortality and led us to avoid confrontation with the dying body of the Other, as well as ethical responsibility for the Other's suffering. Himiko's status as a transnational *hibakusha* interrogates the boundary between "us" and "the enemy" that is produced through the politics of the gaze in both the United States and Japan. Furthermore, her minority status compels the reader to consider the vulnerability of people who are socially marginalized during disabling crises and the horrifying use of necropower that has devalued the bodies and health of those considered Others within colonial and neocolonial contexts.

#### THE TRANSNATIONAL BILDUNGSROMAN

What a strange thing it was—my looking up at planes from my country that had bombed me. Which side was I on? Then again, how could I hate *either*?

—Juliet S. Kono, *Anshū: Dark Sorrow*

As mentioned in the introduction, in *Anshū*, Kono revises the traditional German genre of the bildungsroman. Lisa Lowe argues that this genre interpellates the reader as a proper citizen of a nation-state through his or her identification with the protagonist (98). Referring to the "imagined community" posited by Benedict Anderson, which is premised on a uniform national print culture, Lowe suggests that the bildungsroman's teleological developmental narrative operates to reconcile individuals with the social order of the modern nation-state by leaving their particularities behind (98). By extending Lowe's analysis, Patricia P. Chu further clarifies this genre's ideological function of assimilating subjects to the dominant culture (12).

Yet the process of assimilation is also a process of exclusion when the reader's identification with the protagonist is limited. Even in a female-focused English bildungsroman such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the ideological movements of assimilation and exclusion occur simultaneously. Referring to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's groundbreaking interpretation of this novel that identifies British colonialism as the significant backdrop of Jane's self-construction, Rey Chow and Jenny Sharpe argue that Jane's ultimate self-development as the wife of Rochester, her employer, is accomplished through the sacrifice and exclusion of his Creole wife Bertha,

the racialized Other (Chow 162; Sharpe 45-47). In this text, identification between white women and women of color cannot be achieved. The national formation, represented through domesticity, reveals simultaneous processes of assimilation and exclusion. Thus, the adoption and revision of this genre by minority writers demonstrate their construction of identities, exploration of the meanings of their identities, and negotiation of the formation of the modern nation-state (Japtok 21).

For Asian Americans, who have always been equated with foreignness because of their racially and ethnically inscribed Otherness, the *bildungsroman* operates as a site for claiming belonging to the United States that has been denied to them. Furthermore, as Xioajing Zhou suggests in *The Ethics and Poetics of Alterity in Asian American Poetry*, within Asian American literature, modification of Western genres provides a way of creating an alternative cultural realm for Asian Americans as well as a method for intervening in and interacting with the mainstream to produce a form of alterity that is richly heterogeneous. Thus, as Chu astutely points out, Asian American authors seek “both to establish their own and their characters’ Americanness and to create a narrative tradition that depicts and validates the Asian American experience on its own terms” by using the “contested site” of the *bildungsroman* (12).

In *Anshū*, however, the boundary of a nation is transcended because of Himiko’s enforced departure from Hawai‘i and her resettlement in Japan. Thus, Kono further modifies the generic boundary.<sup>5</sup> Through her depiction of Japanese *American* Himiko, who is exposed to American military attacks and eventually becomes a *hibakusha*, Kono questions the artificiality of national boundaries that create a “we and “the Other.” Moreover, in Himiko’s embracement of her identity as a *hibakusha* who is marginalized and yet holds the possibility of creating transnational commonality by evoking shared mortality, Kono questions the naturalized boundaries of the modern nation-state.

Kono’s depiction of disability and illness within a transnational setting represents both symbolic and actual conditions of the novel’s characters and societies located in Hilo in Hawai‘i and in Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Kyoto in Japan during the first half of the twentieth century. While following the symptomatic tradition of using disability and illness as problematic symbols of an unwelcoming situation or as defective psychological aspects of her characters, Kono also illustrates how a state of disability and illness is produced and linked with other factors relating to social marginality, such as transnationality, and how this also preconditions people’s lives during a

state of war.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the course of her life, Himiko exceeds the normalcy and societal standards of both the United States and Japan. As the younger daughter of Japanese immigrant parents who emigrated from Hiroshima to a Japanese American farming community in Hilo, Hawai‘i, Himiko is positioned at the social margins of US society while still enjoying a secure life. Her protected life is suddenly shattered by her father’s death from an infection caused by a leg injury he sustained while trying to protect Himiko from a stalking fireball, which is believed to carry the soul of the dead and to cause death. Her father’s death results in the loss of the “normalcy” of family life. Himiko’s mother loses the financial and emotional stability that her late husband provided, while Himiko’s sister, Miyo, whose left leg is shorter than her right leg, begins to reveal her disability in public after her father’s death. This happens because he is no longer there to adjust her shoes to enable her to pass as “normal.” Miyo’s social opportunities are further limited by her withdrawal from school, which restricts her social mobility by way of a career or marriage. Meanwhile, Himiko, left alone at home, starts to develop a romantic relationship with their neighbor’s son, Akira. In her depiction of Himiko’s forced departure from Hawai‘i because she is pregnant with Akira’s baby, Kono critiques the problematic governance of female sexuality and bodies. Teenage pregnancy is perceived as a disgrace and social disability for a woman if it occurs outside of marriage. Thus, Himiko’s transnational departure is a means of discovering an alternative space that may absorb her difference. Her failure to comply with the social code governing female sexuality makes Himiko into a subject to be excluded from a nation-state.

In her portrayal of Himiko, who eventually becomes a *hibakusha* and embraces this identity, Kono questions the ideological governance of the body in the modern nation-state. Referring to Martha Nussbaum’s work, Tanner considers the ideal citizen to be a competent and independent person who is autonomous and invulnerable (4). Therefore, through the character of the protagonist, Himiko, Kono radically challenges the figure of the exemplary citizen in the dominant formation of the nation-state. If the ideal citizen is presumed to be physically invulnerable, how is a person with an illness and/or disability situated vis-à-vis social and cultural rights of citizenship? If, in Himiko’s narrative, the process of her becoming does not conform to the predicted course of national development, the reader is inevitably encouraged to be open to an alternative form of unpredictable becoming that deviates from and exceeds the bildungsroman formula.

Himiko's transnational becoming repeats the process of differentiation or repulsion from and eventual empathic identification with disabled or "abject" characters. When she was living in Hawai'i, especially around the time of her entry into adolescence, she realized that she was beautiful and indulged in narcissistic visual pleasure derived from observing her own reflection in the mirror. Her vigorous body image allowed her to differentiate herself, in sharp contrast, from her disabled sister. However, in Japan, the "abnormalcy" of Himiko's status becomes apparent with the revelation of her lack of fluency in the Japanese language and physical anomalies such as her tall height and tanned skin that were unusual features among Japanese women at the time. Even within her uncle's home, located in a downtown ghetto in Tokyo to which the family has moved because of financial failure, Himiko finds herself occupying the lowest social status as a servant. Her former status as a protected younger daughter, who possessed the privilege of being excused from physical labor, is now lowered to that of her sister Miyo. By retrospectively identifying her current damaged self in Japan with that of Miyo, Himiko starts to discover a commonality and identification with her disabled sister, who sacrificed herself by accepting manual work and giving up her savings to pay for Himiko's diasporic escape to Japan. While Himiko's narrative unfolds chronologically, her personal growth occurs as a cyclical process rather than following a linear developmental course.

This cyclical repetition can also be enacted in the reader's own experience of reading this novel. The title page of each part includes the name of the specific location and time frame, for example, "Tokyo: November 1941–March 1945." Thus, in precise chronological order, Japan's historical World War II trauma—especially the events of the Tokyo air raid and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima—unfold before the reader. While Himiko's narrative reveals her traumatic experiences, her narration does not follow the style observed in many texts within the genre of trauma fiction such as postmodern fragments and flashbacks that mimic trauma symptoms (Gibbs 24-26). Rather, based on her own meticulous research, Kono offers the reader a realistic depiction of civilian lives in Japan from Himiko's perspective.<sup>7</sup> If the reader is familiar with the historical information, he or she inevitably predicts the ominous traumatic events that await Himiko (Sumida 16). Here, Kono's realism not only (re)informs the reader about painful historical events but also compels the reader to (re)confront and (re)experience these events by affectively immersing himself/herself within Himiko's embodied traumatic experience. Considering the politics of the visual field that is

enacted in the remembrance of the atomic bombings in the United States and in Japan, Kono's realistic and graphic depiction of war trauma challenges the absence of sensory images of embodied and actual forms of suffering endured by people.

The two significant historical events of the March 1945 Tokyo air raid and the August 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima strongly affect the process of Himiko's becoming. While escaping from the fires caused by the Tokyo air raid, Himiko accidentally kills her cousin Sā-chan, whose constant indulgence in her own physical beauty and spoiled status within the family remind Himiko of herself in the past. Irritated by Sā-chan's selfishness, and also overwhelmed by the heat of the surrounding fire, Himiko pushes her cousin toward the fire when Sā-chan refuses to run through it to reach safety. When she falls into the fire and is encompassed in flames, her body lights up like charcoal, and half of her face melts away. This horrifying image of Sā-chan haunts Himiko, who is wracked with guilt and shame, and eventually merges with her own self-image when she becomes a *hibakusha*. Thus, the two historical events of the Tokyo air raid and atomic bombing in Hiroshima shape Himiko's becoming. These events compel Himiko to realize who she was, as reflected in Sā-chan's personality, when she becomes a *hibakusha*. She undergoes very similar physical suffering to that endured by her cousin and apprehends the limit of her own humanity.

Kono's novel critiques the popular Japanese war memory, based on innocent victimhood, by describing the inhuman violence that Himiko and other people in Japan display for the sake of their own survival. These acts are followed by feelings of unspeakable guilt and shame. Gazing down at a scorched corpse, presumed to be that of Sā-chan, Himiko feels the complete loss of humanity of those who survived the air raid, including her own: "In truth, I no longer knew who we were, what we were as people, or what we were as fellow human beings. *What I was as a human being*. I didn't know how we are all connected anymore" (168). Here, the notion of humanity that is required to regulate "normal" civilian life is completely lost. Along with Himiko, many of the people who survived the air raid "committed secret acts of violence in order to save ourselves in the firestorm" (171). Filled with similar feelings of shame, people, therefore, avoid eye contact the next day.

Repeated efforts to narrate a trauma are widely believed to have healing power. However, Himiko is not allowed to confess her guilt and shame. Thus her "anshū," or dark sorrow, festers within her as a wound that is not allowed to fully heal. Several times, she tries to confess the details of her

cousin's death to her uncle Shinichi, Sā-chan's father. However, she realizes that he does not want to listen and that she, therefore, must remain silent about what actually happened. Susan J. Brison discusses the importance of the listening other who listens to the victim's narrative of trauma so as to enable the victim to return to his or her (original) self (147). Yet, Himiko's case is complex in that she is both a victim and a victimizer. Gibbs observes that the problem of trauma studies is that it produces only victims and has failed to fully address the issue of perpetrator trauma, although PTSD was included in the psychiatric diagnostic canon as a result of the political activism of Vietnam War veterans who were perpetrator trauma sufferers (165-66). Thus, Himiko's narrative cannot be fully categorized as the narrative of a trauma *victim*. Nor can it be categorized as heroic. Thus, in this novel, the narrative of her silenced confessional testimony exceeds popular war memories in both Japan and the United States.

Through her description of wartime Japan, Kono disrupts her readers' sense of normalcy in various ways. The social crisis caused by the war disrupts ideas about health in general. Civilians' lives were exposed to danger not only by the genocide inflicted on them by the US attacks but also by the governance of their bodies by the Japanese government. The widespread belief that the majority enjoyed good health and only a small minority suffered from disabilities and illness was completely reversed under the extreme wartime military dictatorship in Japan.<sup>8</sup> Except for a very small proportion of people who were wealthy, civilians were starving or ill from malnutrition or disabled like Himiko's uncle, who, like her sister, had one leg shorter than the other and was not, therefore, drafted. Like many others, Himiko finds herself constantly suffering from illness as a result of the loss of her former physical strength. Thus, Kono depicts wartime Japan as a place where states of disability and illness were the norm.

At first glance, by depicting the desperate lives of Japanese civilians, Kono's perspective seems to resonate with popular Japanese depictions of World War II. Very similar to the common formula of focusing on a young female protagonist, Kono focuses on the suffering of people *within* Japan. Thus, if Japanese readers do not fully attend to Kono's critical depiction of the relationship between transnationality, disability, and social marginality, they may reduce Himiko's Japanese Americanness to mere "Japaneseness." Yet, as I have discussed, Himiko's process of self-construction is not one of "innocent" victimhood, represented by the heroines of Japanese melodramas, that has been a product of the national memory.

Kono compels the reader to confront the impossibility of simply creating

such shared “innocent” victimhood in her description of Himiko’s initial encounter with the term *hibakusha*. One day after the war, Himiko encounters a boy who looks at the scars on her face and calls her *hibakusha* in a disdainful manner. Himiko discovers that he is also a *hibakusha*. However, because his scars are not visible, he can hide this fact and does not, therefore, identify with this status: “ ‘Don’t you dare touch me,’ he said, jumping back when I tried to keep him from running away. ‘No one can tell if I was in the bomb,’ he said” (284). There was stigma attached to the *hibakusha* because of the belief that ailments and visible physical differences, caused by the atomic bomb attack, were contagious in addition to being signs of spiritual defilement. In contrast to the shared and abstract victimhood that the postwar Japanese war memory has utilized, the *actual* embodied experience creates divisions even among atomic bomb victims. Thus, some *hibakushas*, like this fictional boy, who do not have visible keloids or other scars, discriminate against disfigured *hibakushas* like Himiko and attempt to pass themselves off as able-bodied people.

For Himiko, the *hibaku* experience completely alters her sense of herself. She is exposed to the atomic bomb attack when she steps out from a bus with her daughter and a cousin. After the event, while suffering from her own physical pain and witnessing the horrific ways in which people die—including her own daughter—scarred and covered with maggots, blood, vomit, and excrement, she counts the days from the time she stepped out of the bus as if her sense of temporality has been completely altered. Indeed, Himiko’s fiancé Kazuo, who rejects her because of her *hibaku* experience, exclaims, “[T]he Himiko I knew is dead” (308). However, Himiko rejects this declaration by deciding not to hide her visible difference and to *live* with her stigmatized identity as a *hibakusha*.

After a temporary stay in Kyoto following the war, Himiko moves back to Hiroshima “to be among the Hibakusha, my own people” (315). By accepting her scars as “the marks of distinction—the story of [her] survival as a victim of the bomb” (301), Himiko now embraces her body as evidence of her life story, even when the US Army surgeon’s investigative team examines and takes photographs of her body. Their clinical gaze reduces her to a medical symptom and a valuable medical specimen for follow-up studies on the effects of atomic bombs. Some army photographers, fascinated by her scars, even fetishize her photographs as works of art. However, Himiko regards her own body as “neither sublime nor profane” (321); rather she accepts her body as the reality of who she has become.

Whereas the image of the developed (male) protagonist at the end of a



conventional bildungsroman maintains consistency with his younger image, portrayed in the opening pages, by adding favorable maturity, *Anshū* does not provide such a consistent and narcissistic mirroring identification between the opening and concluding images of her protagonist. The sharp gap created between the healthy and youthful Himiko at the opening of the book and the image of a disfigured *hibakusha* at the end, prompts the reader to reexamine models of “normalcy” relating to health, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class that prevail within the boundaries of the modern nation-states of Japan and the United States. Through its critical engagement with the issue of transnational *hibakushas*, Kono also provides insights for a dissection of how stigma operates in the visual field to create a national official memory through dis/identification.

#### CODA

My analysis of Kono's unconventional approach to the bildungsroman has highlighted the need for a critical reexamination of how postwar developmental narratives succeed in averting the viewer's gaze from guilt and shame regarding the use of necropower to injure the Other. Kono's graphic description of a Japanese American *hibakusha* troubles any clear delineation drawn between “us,” the citizens, and the Other by prompting the reader's affective identification with, and ethical responsibility for, the Other who is in a state of pain and suffering.

Reading Kono's novel in light of Japan's current nuclear crisis caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and following tsunami in March 2011 calls our attention to the irony that Japan's postwar nation building has depended heavily on nuclear power, which has often endangered the lives and health of people living close to nuclear plants. This too is a type of necropower that devalues the lives of people living in rural areas, which are the usual locations of nuclear plants. Furthermore, we have (re)witnessed how easily social stigma can be attached to the people who are, or who are thought to be, exposed to nuclear radiation. Reading Kono's novel on the 70th anniversary of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and at this moment of nuclear crisis in Japan, offers us a critical opportunity to reexamine the politics of memory surrounding *hibakushas*.

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this article were developed from my comments as a discussant of Stephen H. Sumida's keynote speech for the Asian American Literary Association (AALA) 25th Anniversary International Forum held in Kyoto University of Foreign Studies in September 2014. My comments were published in *AALA Journal* 20 (2014). Two earlier versions of this article were presented at the AALA regular meeting that took place in Nagoya University in May 2014 and at the division meeting of Asian American studies at the JAAS annual convention held in Okinawa in June 2014. My discussion of the genre of the bildungsroman is based on the first chapter of my dissertation "Politics out of Trauma: Asian American Literature and the Subject Formation of Asian America," completed in 2010 and available through ProQuest (UMI number 3407909).

<sup>2</sup> As Lisa Yoneyama has suggested, the memories of Korean *hibakushas* are still marginalized in Japan, mainly because their presence is a reminder of the cruelty inflicted during Japan's colonial occupation of Korea, which disrupts the dominant war narrative that proclaims the Japanese as tragic victims (202–31).

<sup>3</sup> The Ministry of Labour and Welfare differentiates the category of *hibakusha* from the designation of *shogaisya* used for the disabled. However, disabled subjects in Japan emphasize the commonality of these two designations. Shuncho Hanada, a disability studies scholar who is also disabled, has included a Japanese text about *hibakushas* in the literary genealogy of the representation of the disabled in Japan (240–44). We are, therefore, in a complex situation where the state's classification intersects with *hibakushas'* own personal and collective identities and with particular sociohistorical and personal definitions of disability.

<sup>4</sup> In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag contrasts the viewing subject, who stays in a physically safe place to look at photographs depicting cruelty, and the viewed object/Other in the photographs, who is in extreme physical pain or has already become a disfigured corpse (72). Pointing to the ongoing journalistic practice of exhibiting exotic others as "zoo animals" (72), even in these photographs depicting cruelty, Sontag notes that the Other, identified as those with "darker complexions in exotic countries . . . is regarded only as someone to be seen not someone (like us) who also sees" (72). Consequently, any traits that can evoke commonality as human beings between the Other and the looking subject are stripped away.

<sup>5</sup> See Najmi's discussion of the relationship between national boundaries and the bildungsroman.

<sup>6</sup> According to Cynthia Wu, the development of disability studies as a discipline has gone through two phases. The first phase focused exclusively on the metaphorical use of disability in literary products, using depictions of people with disabilities merely to facilitate the flow of the storyline. Such people were described either in completely

negative terms to evoke “scorn, fear, or disgust” or in “redemptive” terms to incarnate childlike innocence. The disabled individual was a one-dimensional character. This focus on representation was a necessary tactic for revealing how the use of disability metaphors was damaging for the disabled. The second phase, according to Wu, calls attention more to the analysis of naturalized standards of normalcy. By revealing the ambiguity of the division between disability and ability, scholars have begun to focus more on the discursive production of the division and social and cultural governance of the body.

<sup>7</sup> In her “Interview” with Bamboo Ridge Press, Kono described the process of implementing her research in Japan.

<sup>8</sup> See Clare Barker and Stuart Murray 219–36 for a discussion of the relationship between disability and the experience of mass disablement.

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