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# Postcolonial Discipleship: Movement, Genius, and Uncertainty: Explorations in Contemporary 'Korean American' Theological Discourse

Michael Sungjoon Won  
*Seattle Pacific University*

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POSTCOLONIAL DISCIPLESHIP -  
MOVEMENT, GENIUS, AND UNCERTAINTY

EXPLORATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY 'KOREAN AMERICAN' THEOLOGICAL  
DISCOURSE

“Postcolonial Embodiment and Discipleship - Movement, Genius, and Uncertainty”

MICHAEL SUNGJOON WON

SEATTLE PACIFIC SEMINARY

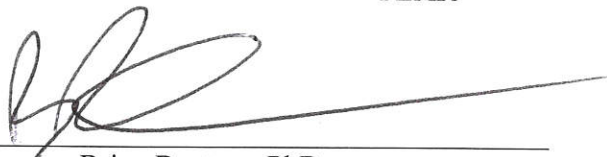
POSTCOLONIAL DISCIPLESHIP - MOVEMENT, GENIUS, AND UNCERTAINTY:  
EXPLORATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY 'KOREAN AMERICAN' THEOLOGICAL  
DISCOURSE

MICHAEL SUNGJOON WON

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE REQUIREMENTS OF  
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YEAR

Approved by:



Brian Bantum, PhD  
Associate Professor of Theology

Date: 6.15.2018

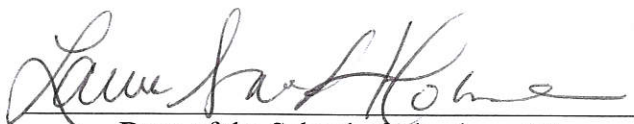
Approved by:



David Leong, PhD  
Associate Professor of Missiology

Date: 6.26.2018

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Dean of the School of Theology OR  
Associate Dean of Seattle Pacific Seminary

Date: 6/26/2018

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## Introduction

*The artists have ventured far ahead of us in their theological imagination...<sup>1</sup>*

-Kwok Pui Lan

*Hey*

*Where you from?*

*I'm Ganghis Khan*

-*Dumbfoundead*, 'Ganghis Khan', 2013

As I progressed through my first three quarters of seminary, I found myself becoming hopeful - hopeful for the ways that theological work could help me to understand my life in relationship to God, to my 'other', and to myself. Yet as my theological education progressed, I came to realize that the white authors of my required course texts spoke from a place that could not attend to the subtle nuances and particularities of my 'Korean American' identity. "Could these voices speak into my life?" "What might it feel like to read a theologian who looks like me? Eats like me? Speaks like me?" These were the questions I asked as I worked through my first quarter of seminary. From this process of questioning I chose to read, *From a Liminal Place* by Sang Hyun Lee. This decision was made in order to provide a corrective to the ways in which I was led to believe that compelling theological work has, and continues to solely be done by those whose bodies have been the standard by which all others are measured

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<sup>1</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. (1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 185.

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against - the white body. *From a Liminal Place* was my introduction to theological work done from an 'Asian American' perspective. I would then go on to read three other theological texts written by 'Korean American' theologians. These texts consisted of *The Grace of Sophia*, *Heart of the Cross*, and *Racial Conflict and Healing*. I concluded my first year of seminary experiencing a newfound excitement - excitement for the ways that these respective theological texts held certain resonances and sensibilities amongst them that caused my heart to stir.

Yet as I began my second year of seminary, this excitement became dulled. My interactions with a 'Korean American' faculty member within a different university reminded me that I would never be 'Korean' enough - that my inability to speak the language and my concurrent lack of cultural sensibilities would always be used against me in the presence of this community. This led me to question the efficacy of the 'Asian American' and 'Korean American' theological texts I had worked through the past year. "Did these literary works function to pen *my* body into existence?" - a 'Korean American' body that was and continues to be scorned by others within the 'Korean American' community for a lack of 'Koreanness'. The more I reflected on these voices that I initially perceived to hold resonances with my own, the more I became aware of my disconnection - that my reality was in fact different from theirs. Their usage of *hangul* (the Korean language), their deployment and understanding of culture, as well as their treatments of tradition and custom were all reminders that I would never be 'Korean enough'. I found myself distraught, hopeless at the realization that even a 'Korean American' theology could not adequately outline what I perceived to be a 'Korean American' existence - *my* 'Korean American' existence.

I begin this theological account with an introduction to the work of ‘Korean American’ rapper, Jonathan Park - also known as Dumbfoundead. As ‘Korean American’ theologians have written and published theological texts that seek to understand and articulate faithful modes of discipleship and ‘being’ in our contemporary moment, Dumbfoundead’s work speaks clearly to those who have felt like foreigners in multiple settings dictated by Western and Eastern norms. My appreciation for Park goes far beyond my appreciation and love for hip hop. Park portrays an observable resistance to cultural essentialisms - ultimately creating space for new modes of cultural articulation. Through his playful, provocative, and often times comedic candor, he creatively assumes and denounces stereotypical ‘Korean American’ motifs, persistently challenging and destabilizing what it means to be both ‘Korean’ and ‘American’. In Park I find hope, not because he is what I dreamt myself of becoming ten years ago (though I did often dream of becoming an ‘Emcee’), but because it is his craft, his artistry, his very existence and embodied presence that profoundly speaks to the possibilities of my own.

Park depicts the ways that the ‘Korean American’ body can be perceived as revelatory - revealing the ruptures and disjunctions that confound claims of cultural purity and authenticity. The work of Dumbfoundead has the capacity to prophetically guide ‘Korean American’ individuals and congregations into “new and promising ways of living in society, living the life of faith, and embracing the gift of hope vividly and creatively.”<sup>2</sup> As I will display throughout my work, ‘Korean American’ theological discourse imagines the formation of a ‘Korean American’ subject in disparate and conflicting ways. It is my goal to conduct an in depth analysis of these varying modes of

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel G. Groody, *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 32.



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identity formation, and to subsequently propose why *Dumbfoundead* provides us with a theologically rich understanding of what living faithfully can look like through a 'Postcolonial Korean American' discipleship - a mode of discipleship that is committed to the particularities of the historic and contemporary narratives of 'Korean American' life, but simultaneously retains an ability to imagine 'wholeness' in the lives of those who do not call Korea 'home'.

## Chapter 1

### Context for Construction

In order to provide the context from which my theological project is birthed out of, I find it necessary to provide a brief overview of four different ‘Korean American’ theologians who are representative of various approaches to ‘Korean American’ theological thought in the past 22 years. Their differing methodologies will become increasingly apparent as I work to summarize their respective theological projects.

These ‘Korean American’ theologians consist of Andrew Sung Park, Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Wonhee Anne Joh, and Sang Hyun Lee. This is by no means an exhaustive or comprehensive list of ‘Korean American’ theologians, but is representative of who I read and was drawn to more deeply analyze during my time at Seattle Pacific Seminary.

#### *Racial Conflict and Healing* by Andrew Sung Park (1996)

In his book entitled, *Racial Conflict and Healing: An Asian American Theological Perspective*, Andrew Sung Park seeks to provide ‘Korean Americans’ with a theological framework that accounts for the historical ‘Korean American’ narrative, as well as the particularities that characterize what Park understands to be the ‘Korean American’ experience.

Park introduces his book by summarizing the immigration and settlement narrative of ‘Korean Americans’. In doing so, Park introduces the Korean term, *han*, which can be defined as a holistic experience of pain and/or bitterness that results from

the injustice of oppression - it is, in many ways, an inescapable void of grief.<sup>3</sup> The first three chapters of Park's book communicates the ways that 'Korean American' people are a people of deeply seated *han*. Not only because of the ways in which the 'Korean American' narrative has been largely determined by Western colonialism and Eastern imperialism, but also in the ways that 'Korean American' people have historically been the perpetrators who cause others to experience *han*.<sup>4</sup> The beginning of Park's text communicates the importance he places on historicity and the knowledge of one's 'roots', in order to thoughtfully construct a new 'Korean American' subject. For Park, an account of history allows him to more accurately locate himself within the present moment.

Park goes on to discuss the ways that Eastern notions of the self and Confucian ideology operate within the 'Korean American' mind. This is most succinctly summarized when Mullinax and Lee state that, "the traditions of Christianity and Confucianism operate in the Korean-American Christian mind as twin gyroscopes and dual liturgies."<sup>5</sup> Park goes on to exhibit this sort of creative operation through his analysis and subsequent translation of the word, 'human'. The word 'human' in English, translates to *inn-gahn* in Korean. 'Inn' means 'person', and 'gahn' means 'between'. To be human in Korean culture is to exist between persons. In this way, the Korean notion of the self heavily revolves around the threefold self - that is, the relationship one has with their parents. This directly informs notions of filial piety, where children are to hold their parents in reverence and high honor - children are extensions of their parents' bodies.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Sung Park, *Racial Conflict and Healing: An Asian-American Theological Perspective*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 77.

Filial piety can often take on the form of abusive hierarchies within family systems, but a reimagined notion of filial piety that intersects with 'Christian love' creates the possibility to see and love one another in mutuality. This reimagined notion of filial piety is but one example Park gives in order to illustrate the ways that Confucian ideology and Christian faith can be coupled with one another from his perspective.

When discussing current 'Korean American' frameworks for understanding church and culture, Park disagrees with Sang Hyun Lee's pilgrim theology, because of the ways that it presents itself as a traditional paradoxical model.<sup>7</sup> Lee's pilgrim theology speaks to the ways that 'Korean Americans' are called to wander through the wilderness, where their true home is neither Korea nor the United States. This theology of pilgrimage views marginality as not wholly negative, but as a source of creative potential. Lee's conception of pilgrim theology would eventually develop into his theological work around the concept of 'liminality' - that is, a space of 'in-betweenness', that allows for one to exercise new modes of navigation. Park disagrees with Lee's pilgrim theology because of the ways that such an understanding of identity and mission will not allow for 'Korean Americans' to settle physically and ideologically within North America. Park states that, "We must settle in this country to establish God's society," implying that Lee does not believe in the same.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 97.

*The Grace of Sophia* by Grace Ji-Sun Kim (2002)

*The Grace of Sophia*, by Grace Ji-Sun Kim proposes a mode of Christological reflection that can be utilized for the empowerment of ‘Korean American’ Christian women. Kim utilizes a multi-faith hermeneutic in order to conduct a comparative analysis of wisdom figures, as they are present in both Christianity, and other Eastern religions.

Kim acknowledges that ‘Sophia Christology’ is not a new concept within theological discourse, but she supplements the already existing ‘Sophia Christology’ through a comparative analysis of wisdom figures, in order to present this Christology as more relevant to ‘Korean American’ women. Kim discusses the historical and contemporary experiences of ‘Korean American’ women, in order to lay a groundwork for the theology she is seeking to construct.

Kim provides a historical account of the biblical Sophia, and goes on to describe the ways that the introduction of the *logos* seemed to overtake the feminine notion of Sophia, ultimately ascribing ‘maleness’ to Christ. Kim describes the ways that the *logos* represents reason and knowledge, whereas Sophia represents intuition.<sup>9</sup> The introduction of a *logos* Christology also brought with it a new wave of justified patriarchy and sexism. Kim’s historical account of ‘Sophia Christology’ is significant in the ways that it reveals a mode of Christological reflection that is not *new*, but is historically rooted in the early church.

Kim provides the readership with the biblical and theological grounds for understanding who Sophia is, and ultimately concludes that Sophia in the Old Testament is the pre-existent Christ, subsequently enabling her to make the claim that Jesus in the

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<sup>9</sup> Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *The Grace of Sophia: A Korean North American Women's Christology*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 133.

New Testament is either the embodiment of Sophia or the replacement of Sophia.<sup>10</sup> Kim supplements a traditional 'Sophia Christology' by adopting a multi-faith hermeneutic, allowing her to explore and analyze the wisdom figures that come from Buddhism, Shamanism, and Confucianism. Through this, the readership is able to observe the ways in which the feminine character of Sophia shares many characteristics with other feminine personifications of Wisdom, such as *prajna*, Kuan-Yin, and shamans.

Kim seeks to provide hope for 'Korean American' Christian women through this 'Sophia Christology' - a mode of Christological reflection that seeks to resonate and minister to the unique circumstances commonly faced by 'Korean American' women. Kim's mode of engaging with more traditional Eastern religions reveals her commitment to upholding a sort of 'rootedness'. Kim's approach to constructing a Christology that is relevant to 'Korean American' women appears to take on similar characteristics to Andrew Sung Park's approach to constructing a broader 'Asian American' theology. Kim reaches back to the East in order to gain a semblance of identity and foundation for theological construction.

*The Grace of Sophia* provides a promising and encouraging message to 'Korean American' Christian women, and exhorts this community to release their own *han* (suffering and despair) and to subsequently liberate themselves by accepting the grace of Sophia, as well as through a rejection of the patriarchy and racism that has determined the trajectory of their lives.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 114.

*Heart of the Cross* by Wonhee Anne Joh (2006)

In her book entitled, *Heart of the Cross*, Wonhee Anne Joh presents a critical mode of Christological reflection, contending that the cross performs a ‘double gesture’, in the ways that it pays homage to the powers of repression and oppression, while it simultaneously functions as a site of liberative love - the cross is a place of both *han* and *jeong* (passionate love). In order to help the reader understand the paradoxical nature of her claims, Joh provides a critical analysis of the film ‘Joint Security Area’, and puts Jurgen Moltmann’s ‘Crucified God’ theology under critical interrogation.

With a postcolonial understanding of hybridity, Joh posits a new way of understanding ‘Asian American’ identity through her language of ‘roots vs. routes’.<sup>11</sup> Joh appears to find Lee’s theology of the ‘sacred journey’ and ‘liminality’ helpful because of the ways that such a hermeneutic for understanding exhorts ‘Asian American’ communities to forge new ‘routes’. Joh goes on to explain the ways in which postcolonial theory complicates the notion of one’s ability to journey back to the ‘authentic’. A postcolonial reality makes the journey back to a pre-colonial self impossible.

Joh contends that the cross is a site where both *han* and *jeong* are fully present - where suffering and compassionate relationality mutually coexist with one another. Joh’s analysis of the film, ‘Joint Security Area’, helps the reader to gain a more concretized understanding of this. ‘Joint Security Area’ takes place in a divided Korea, where relationships are fragmented because of a marked boundary. The film captures the ambiguity of the dividing line, and specifically follows the actions of four soldiers who build friendships with one another, despite their oppositional geographic locations. As the

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<sup>11</sup> Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*. (1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 9.

relationships develop through consistent covert encounters with one another, the viewer begins to harbor a sense of ambivalence toward the idea of a binary system that supposedly separates the two Koreas. The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is a place of immense pain, yet it simultaneously functions as the meeting point that stitches together two fragmented realities. Joint Security Area' presents itself to be one illustration of how the cross can be a site where the profound concept of 'mimicry'<sup>12</sup> takes place. The deaths of the soldiers pay homage to the oppressive powers that enforce a reality that is dictated by strictly enforced boundaries, yet their friendships and deaths simultaneously communicate the power of *jeong*, ultimately revealing the ambiguity that clouds such proposed lines of demarcation. These 'enemies', are actually brothers who long for a sense of reunification, and the DMZ is the site of both tragedy and relational possibility.<sup>13</sup>

Joh's critical questioning of Moltmann's 'Crucified God' theology is also noteworthy because of the ways that she holds the feminist critique of the cross, as well as the patriarchal tendency to 'over divinize' the cross in necessary tension. Joh opposes the ways that feminist critiques often disregard the cross because of the understanding that such a site of suffering has been used to romanticize, glamorize, and justify the subjugation and exploitation of women. Joh juxtaposes the feminist critique with the Christology of Moltmann and Andrew Sung Park. She contends that they both 'save' Jesus from the cross through 'over divinizing' the event.<sup>14</sup> As a powerful alternative, Joh allows for the cross to be a place of deep ambivalence, where *han* and *jeong* exist in mutual relationship with one another.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 31-40.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 105.



*From a Liminal Place* by Sang Hyun Lee (2010)

In his book entitled, *From a Liminal Place*, Sang Hyun Lee presents a theological framework that accounts for the very particular ways in which ‘Asian Americans’ are consistently seen as ‘perpetual foreigners’.<sup>15</sup> Lee uses the term ‘liminality’, in order to describe the marginal space occupied by ‘Asian Americans’ as a space of infinite possibility and creative potential. As ‘Asian Americans’ find themselves in a position of not being fully accepted as ‘Asian’ or ‘American’, liminality is a space of resistance where ‘Asian Americans’ can reclaim their dual narrative in a way that is empowering and resistant to dominant ideologies. The ‘liminal’ individual is free from the usual ways of thinking and acting within dominant structures and systems. The creative potential of liminality persists in its capacity to 1) Be open to what is new, 2) Generate *communitas* as an alternate form of human relatedness, and 3) Challenge and transform the existing society through prophetic knowledge and criticism.<sup>16</sup>

Lee states that those who find themselves in liminal places are more open to God’s good news. Jesus took on the liminal body by existing as a Galilean from Nazareth. Galilee was characteristically filled with marginalized individuals who were not a part of the dominant center – these are the people Jesus made His first alliance with. Galilee was liminal because of its geographic, political, and culturally unstructured nature. Its relation to Jerusalem also caused Galileans to be religiously liminal.<sup>17</sup> This is the community God invited to be His ‘first responders’ – a group of marginalized and oppressed individuals with a complex and disoriented sense of identity.

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<sup>15</sup> Sang H. Lee, *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

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Lee goes on to state that ‘Asian Americans’ must repent of 1) Avoiding the ‘liminal’ and marginalized situation, ultimately resulting in nativism or assimilation, 2) The sin of self-hatred, 3) The anti-Blackness and prejudices against other minority groups, 4) The idolization of golden calves (Ivy league schools, high paying jobs, etc.), and 5) The sexism found in Korean American communities.<sup>18</sup>

In order to construct an ‘Asian American’ identity, it is crucial to Lee that ‘Asian Americans’ decolonize their essentialized views of what it means to be ‘American’ and what it means to be ‘Asian’. To consider ‘Asian Americans’ as part of the ‘American’ ontological economy is an act of resistance to the dominant centers presupposed notion that only ‘European-Americans’ are ‘real’ Americans. With this resistant stance, ‘Asian Americans’ must reconceptualize their view of what it means to be ‘American’, in a way that is fully inclusive of ‘Native American’ narratives, ‘African American’ narratives, etc. In this way, the very membrane that appears to hold ‘Asian American’ identity together is porous, facilitating a process of ongoing intercultural communication, interrogation, and formation. Fumitaka Matsuoka calls this experience of liminality a ‘holy insecurity’ – a beautifully unresolved and ambiguous state of being.<sup>19</sup> Lee goes on to powerfully state that, “So faith is the courage to be liminal, to be in a state of “holy insecurity” of in-betweenness and to do the work of identity construction in that liminal space.”<sup>20</sup>

As an ‘Asian American’, Lee is already pushed into a peripheral space because of his racial and ethnic identity. The goal, for Lee, is not to gain acceptance by the dominant center or to adopt a spirit of nativism, but rather, to remain in the periphery

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 104-108.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 118.

as a site of resistance. This peripheral space facilitates his practice of liminality. It is here where Lee is able to experience *communitas* with others – that is, a genuine communion of ‘whole selves’.

### Theology as a Work of Identity

Common themes that mold and shape contemporary ‘Korean American’ theological discourse are notions of citizenship, belonging, sexism, racism, etc. The work of Park, Kim, Lee, and Joh highlight these themes in varying ways. These theologians pose the question, *what* and/or *who* can save the ‘Korean American’ body? Will a ‘culturally relevant’ mode of theological reflection suffice? Or perhaps a Christ that takes on the particularity of the ‘Korean American’ experience - a Christ that identifies with the perpetual foreigner? I propose these follow up questions as rhetorical devices in order to stimulate and problematize the ways ‘Korean American’ identity is conceived of in a post-modern context. If our theological reflections and understandings of the Christian faith tradition require a Christ that looks, feels, and speaks in such a way that resonates with the ‘Korean American’ body, we must do the work of identifying the constitutive marks of the ‘Korean American’ body, if such a work is possible. Park, Kim, Lee, and Joh, approach this work of identification in varying ways - ways that I will come to identify as liberationist and/or postcolonial in nature.

The processes of identification that take place within liberation theology and postcolonial criticism have significant implications for how we come to understand ‘Korean American’ identity, through a broad interrogation of how identity is formed within Marxist Oppositional Analysis - a concept that will be further expounded upon in

the following chapter. In order to conduct an in-depth reflection on the work of Park, Kim, Lee, and Joh, it is necessary to first create a theoretical framework that will function as the landscape each theologian finds themselves projected upon.

It is my intent to explore the processes of identification that are at work within their distinct forms of theological and critical reflection. When I use the term ‘identification’, I am using it in a way that is informed by Stuart Hall. In his introduction to, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Hall defines identification as a construction built on a foundational recognition of a common origin or a shared characteristic, leading to an established allegiance.<sup>21</sup> As I progress towards the increasingly constructive ends of this work, it will become clear that I will be using the terms ‘identification’, and ‘identity’, discursively, consistently reiterating the point that ‘identification’ is a process that is ongoing and open ended.

The following chapters will look at the ways liberation theology and postcolonial criticism construct identity through stationary and discursive processes. These distinctions will also be illustrated through brief reflections on Dumbfoundead’s work.

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<sup>21</sup> Stuart Hall, and Paul Du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity*. (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), 2.

## Chapter 2

### Maintaining the Boundary: Liberation Theology, Marxist

### Oppositional Analysis, and Identity

*He was always quiet keeping to himself*

*Never messed with anybody else*

*That's the Jonathan that we know*

...

*You took me as safe*

*That was your first mistake*

*Who said I was safe*

*-Dumbfoundead, 'Safe', 2016*

In this chapter, I will explore the notions of the 'poor' and 'oppressed', as commonly used by Gustavo Gutierrez, as well as Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. I will specifically look into the ways that liberation theologians follow a particular Marxist train of thought when conceiving of these social classifications. Both Gutierrez and Boff(s), speak of the condition of being 'poor', similar to the ways that Marx and Engels commonly refer to the 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat' as totalizing social classifications. 'Poor', as a totalizing classification, however, does not speak to the inherent depravity or lack of one's agency. Both Gutierrez and Boff make this clear when they both speak of how the oppressed must be the agents of their own liberation.

My desire here is to identify that though there cannot be a direct correlation between liberation theology's 'poor' and Marx's 'proletariat', there remains to be a similar process of identification that necessarily allows for an individual to be identified by a set of totalizing characteristics.<sup>22</sup> This is what Catherine Keller identifies as 'Marxist Oppositional Analysis' in her book, *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*.

### Apples and Oranges

It is necessary for me to explicitly say that it *is not* my intent to place outstanding value on either liberation theology or the emerging discipline of post-colonial theology, in my pursuit to specifically analyze the ways that identity is formed and understood within these respective theologies. To do so would be to compare 'apples' to 'oranges' in a sense. As Catherine Keller powerfully states within her introduction, "No political theology could "supersede" and in some fundamental way transcend the historic work of liberation theology."<sup>23</sup> Both theologies reject experiences of oppression and colonialism as God ordained, and further seek to equip individuals with a theological imagination that has a capacity to not accept things as they are, for the sake of a future that 'could be'.

Liberation theology grows out of a particular geopolitical situation that is largely characterized by experiences of abject poverty and political disenfranchisement. The theologians who developed this form of theology on the heels of Vatican II sought to garner the attention and acceptance of the Catholic magisterium and the church as a

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<sup>22</sup> In the very beginning of his book entitled, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Boff explicitly states, "... it is a mistake to identify the poor of liberation theology with the proletariat, though many of its critics do..." (Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 3).

<sup>23</sup> Catherine Keller, Mayra Rivera, and Michael Nausner, *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 6.

whole, for the sake of creating more livable and humane conditions for those in Latin America. Liberation theology functioned as a broad framework that sought to revolutionize the function of the Catholic church, in a way that reoriented itself towards those communities that were struggling to survive in places like Peru, Brazil, Uruguay, etc. Liberation theology does not adequately attend to the complexities and nuances of identity that postcolonial theology presently seeks to interrogate, because liberation theology was not born out of a situation that demanded this type of work. Liberation theologians, such as Gutierrez, as well as Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, highlight the imminence of the situation at hand, and the need for the Catholic Magisterium's intervention. These respective theologians provide a systematic theological account that is an appeal to the Catholic Magisterium. In this sense, Liberation theology narrates a very broad geopolitical situation, and finds itself elevated 10,000 feet off of the ground in order to adequately depict the plight of the poor to the masses.

Through a more in depth analysis of how these processes of identification play out in Marxism and liberation theology, as well as in postcolonial and cultural theory, it is my hope to show that postcolonial notions of identity are a key aspect to the overall advancement of 'Korean American' theological discourse.

In his introduction to the book entitled, *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology*, Gustavo Gutierrez acknowledges the huge changes that have occurred in our time. He states that we are entering an era that is 'post' everything, signaling a reality that marks the end of history.<sup>24</sup> Gutierrez astutely observes that there remains to be a vast amount of territory that has yet to be explored, but warns us from becoming blinded by

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<sup>24</sup> Groody, *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology*, 32.

the novelty of the moment. Though a thorough re-evaluation of many things must take place - our modes of analysis, our categorizations, and our propositions - to advance these ideas in *absolute* terms runs the risk of erasing the historical memory of the poor.

Gutierrez provides a salient reminder that, despite the complexity of our contemporary reality, we are nonetheless called to live and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup> In conducting an in depth analysis of liberation and postcolonial notions of identity, I wish to work in the spirit of Gutierrez. It is not my intention to become lost within the complexities of the postcolonial condition or to become blinded by its novelties, but to rather attend to the task of re-evaluation in a way that faithfully serves the church.

#### The 'Proletariat', 'Poor', and 'Oppressed'

Within the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels describe the historic dynamism of the 'class struggle', highlighting the ongoing arrangement of society. Marx states that, "... we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold of social ranks."<sup>26</sup> He goes on to describe his contemporary epoch as an epoch of the 'bourgeoisie'. As the reader progressively makes their way through the entirety of Marx and Engels' conception of the 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat', it becomes clear that these social categorizations are non-negotiable and all encompassing. One either belongs to the 'proletariat', or one looks down upon the 'proletariat' in the company of the 'bourgeoisie'. This is what Catherine Keller identifies as, Marxist Oppositional Analysis.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Translated by Samuel Moore. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1888), 12.



What presents itself as a point of further reflection is the way that Marx and Engels attempt to account for the possibility of individuals that may not fit into this fixed, binary model. They state that the lower-middle class (tradespeople, shopkeepers, etc.) will eventually sink into the ‘proletariat’, due to the development of new methods of production. Marx and Engels conclude this particular section by stating that, “Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.”<sup>27</sup> What this reveals is that both Marx and Engels were attuned to the reality that all members of society may not intuitively fit into one category or another. Marx and Engels attempt to account for these ‘exceptions’ by subsequently stating that all individuals who do not find themselves situated at the top of the social strata will eventually sink down to the pits of the ‘proletariat’. Without attempting to exhaustively evaluate the accuracy of Marx and Engels’ social analysis when speaking to the situation of the lower-middle class, it remains to be an interesting move to very broadly conceive of the ‘proletariat’, rather than to allow for disparate articulations of social class and ‘locatedness’ within a political and social revolution.

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels conceptualize the ‘bourgeoisie’ and ‘proletariat’ in such a way that necessitates an identification with one or the other. Catherine Keller, in her introduction to the book, *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, succinctly describes this phenomena when she describes the modern Marxist style of oppositional analysis as “... the purely oppressed revolting against the merely oppressive...”<sup>28</sup> This Marxist style of oppositional analysis leaves behind a set of looming questions unanswered. What is at stake in a process of identification that leaves

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>28</sup> Keller, *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, 5-6.

no room for life to be found in the 'in between'? Gutierrez reminds us that to play with and/or trivialize the term, 'poverty', is to not play solely with words, but also with persons.<sup>29</sup> With this in mind, I find it powerful to question how an elimination of a possible 'in-between' space (through language and social analysis) is a simultaneous evisceration of an entire people group who call this ambiguous space 'home'.

Similar to Marx and Engels' 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat' social categorizations, Gutierrez, in his book entitled, *A Theology of Liberation*, also emphasizes a sort of dualistic and non-negotiable relationship between the 'oppressor' and the 'oppressed'. In his introduction to the revised edition of this text, Gutierrez seeks to reemphasize the expansion of the notion of the 'poor', to those who not only experience economic poverty, but to all who can identify as 'dominated peoples,' 'exploited social classes,' 'despised races,' and 'marginalized cultures.'<sup>30</sup> Here, Gutierrez is resisting a one-dimensional reading of 'poverty'.

Similarly, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff also work to go beyond a purely economic notion of poverty. I find this expansion to be helpful in the ways that it demonstrates an increased mindfulness of the disparate ways and varying degrees to which different communities experience oppression and marginalization. This certainly connects back to Marx and Engels when they explain the collapse of the lower-middle class due to the development of new modes of production. Here, Marx and Engels appear to be addressing the possibility of increasingly complex social locations, but subsequently go on to group this lower-middle class with the rest of the 'proletariat'. The Boff brothers,

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<sup>29</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 164.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

Gutierrez, and Marx and Engels seek to expand their respective ‘proletariat’ and ‘impoverished’ social classifications by broadly inviting the ‘majority’ to cohabitate under the same ideological roof. For these respective theologians, thinkers, and revolutionaries, the experience of oppression and marginalization is the most significant commonality that is shared amongst those who can be rightfully identified as the ‘poor’ and/or the ‘proletariat’. This framework successfully functions to form a sense of national and international solidarity amongst all individuals who experience oppression and marginalization in some form or another.

With this being said, ‘Latin American’ theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid, in her book entitled, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*, abruptly wakes us from this lucid ‘wish-dream’ of a hollow, un-interrogated means of forming community. She explains, “Oppression is perhaps what we cannot have in common, because oppression is built in overlapping levels of multiple and contradictory elements which according to context, produce variably dense, saturated effects...”<sup>31</sup> Rather than putting a focus on the commonalities of oppression, Marcella Althaus-Reid explains that the true challenge lies in the task of unpacking the incoherence of oppression, as well as its multiple dimensions. Marcella Althaus-Reid’s analysis of oppression and power destabilizes broader notions of identity as it is conceived of within Marxist Oppositional Analysis. As Marxist Oppositional Analysis relies on the usage of categorizations and classifications in order to facilitate a process of identification, Marcella Althaus-Reid is exposing the ways that such a process of identification pigeonholes and flattens notions of personhood, leading to the erasure of particularity.

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<sup>31</sup> Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*. London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 168.

Within the context of my own theological construction, the compelling work of Marcella Althaus Reed requires me to interrogate the ways that ‘Korean American’ identity has been commonly constructed through the utilization of essentialized categories and classifications.

### Reprise

In his song entitled, ‘Safe’, Dumbfoundead addresses Hollywood’s propensity to whitewash roles in mainstream media. The music video for ‘Safe’ is worthy of critical reflection because it gestures towards a reality that is unimaginable in our contemporary moment, causing the video to seem tragically outlandish, comical, and ridiculous. Dumbfoundead’s face is photo shopped and edited into major motion pictures like ‘Titanic’, ‘Indiana Jones’, and many more, challenging white normativity as it flaunts itself on the screens of our phones, televisions, and movie theatres.

The release of ‘Safe’ in May of 2016 provoked a large response on social media upon its worldwide debut. ‘Asian American’ media outlets and cultural figures hailed it as a powerful and important work in a time of #OscarsSoWhite. Dumbfoundead powerfully challenges the disparities in representation that have become more and more apparent in major motion pictures over the past five to ten years. With this in mind, ‘Safe’ is doubly significant because of the ways that it calls out misrepresentation in mainstream media, but is even more compelling because of the ways that Dumbfoundead challenges notions of ‘safety’, as this characteristic has been commonly ascribed to ‘Asian Americans’ via the ‘Model Minority’ myth.<sup>32</sup> The release of ‘Safe’ was yet

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<sup>32</sup> The ‘Model Minority’ myth pigeonholes ‘Asian Americans’ to look, speak, think, and work in such a way that is unassuming and pietistic, perpetuating the toxic narrative that *all* ‘Asian Americans’

another anthem of Dumbfoundead's life, pledging to live beyond the confining stereotypes that have been spoken over and into his body.

Through this song, Dumbfoundead confronts the ways that he has been characterized by the discourse of white supremacy - 'safe', 'quiet', 'unassuming'. Though these characteristics appear to be benign on the surface, Dumbfoundead rejects them, excises them like a cancerous tumor on his body, because to be 'safe' is to be powerless - and to be 'quiet' is to be spoken for. Dumbfoundead illustrates a keen awareness of the ways that the 'Model Minority' myth functions to uniformly classify and identify 'Asian American' bodies. 'Safe' is a personal and tragic reflection on the ways that prescribed characteristics lead to the formation of oppositional social categorizations and classifications. Like Marcella Althaus-Reid, Dumbfoundead exposes the problematic nature that is inherited within the categorizations and classifications used to construct identity.

In the following chapter, I will go on to explore how a postmodern context increasingly complicates such fixed and totalizing notions of identity. Here, I will utilize the compelling work done by a number of postcolonial and cultural theorists, in order to examine the ways that a commitment to the 'oppressor-oppressed' binary leaves no room for the possibility of life to be found in between these respective, totalizing categorizations. In the midst of globalization and the persistence of neocoloniality, identity can no longer be understood as carrying itself on straight tracks. The labels that have become so familiar to us - 'black', 'Latina/o', 'poor', 'Asian', etc. - require interrogation - a sort of interrogation that may lead us to a place of instability and

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keep their heads down, work hard, and fulfill the 'American dream'. In this way, 'Asian American' identity is constructed singularly, and functions to homogenize 'Asian American' communities.

ambivalence. One cannot simply overlook or discount the significant implications liberation theology has had on a global scale, yet our contemporary moment requires a theology that is more properly equipped to wrestle with the problems and potentialities of our current moment. Hall states this quite clearly when he says, "... identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured, never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses..."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 4.

### Chapter 3

## Transgressing the Boundary: Postcolonial Criticism and the Construction of a New Subject

*Imma fuck around and get banned*

*Banned from the motherland*

...

*Imma get banned like Yoo Seung Jun*

*Wish a motherfucker would try to ban me*

*Wish a motherfucker would*

*Turn my motherland to Hollywood*

*-Dumbfoundead, 'Banned from the Motherland', 2016*

When I was in the second grade, there was a Korean student who had just moved to Colorado Springs from Korea. In her visitation of my second grade class, my teacher asked me if I would give this new student a tour of the school. I mostly agreed out of my perception that I wasn't allowed to deny my teachers requests, but a part of me was also excited to be in the company of someone who I perceived to be like me. However, as I walked in stride with her through the halls of my school, my seven-year-old self felt the collision of two worlds. We shared similar characteristics - jet black hair, a hue of darker skin in a sea of whiteness, and eyes that would often times be jokingly referred to as 'wide screened' - but our bodies held different stories - they were portals to different

'homelands'. "Why did she talk so differently from me?" "Why weren't we connecting in the ways that I had anticipated?" My interactions with her led me to a place of confusion and shame, for the ways that I didn't speak *hangul*, and for the ways that I did not hold resonances with Korea as 'home'.

In many ways, reading these 'Asian American' and 'Korean American' theological texts have brought up similar feelings within me. However, the work of Wonhee Anne Joh, Sang Hyun Lee and Kwok Pui-Lan have brought me to more broadly imagine the possibilities of an 'Asian American' theological project that could more effectively speak into my experience as a 2<sup>5</sup> generation 'Korean American' that grew up in the white suburbs of Colorado Springs, Colorado. My critical engagement with these three theologians ushered me into a new disciplinary space - a space where cultures, races, and ethnicities lost definitive form - a space where the interrogation of identity led to a holy instability.

Through the reading of their respective texts, my life became wrapped up and enfolded within the postcolonial. Notions of hybridity, syncretism, and ambivalence began to shade every theological idea that entered my mind. Postcolonial and cultural theory have become my sources of life, because it is only through these disciplines that I am able to conceive of my self as 'whole'. These disciplines make an articulation of identity possible for my body - a body that is often cast out for not being 'Korean' enough - a body that is estranged from the land I am often commanded to go back to - a body that problematizes any notion of cultural purity and 'rootedness'.

The disciplines of postcolonial and cultural theory provide a source of promise as we seek to gain an increasingly robust understanding of the various articulations and



dysfunctions of identity. Within Marxist Oppositional Analysis, an experience of oppression is a marker of identity that leads to the construction of social categorizations, revealing that identity is formed and upheld by the maintaining of boundaries. Through an analysis of the work done by Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Sylvia Wynter, and a number of other thinkers and literary scholars, I will demonstrate why this general mode of categorization and ‘boundary keeping’ is largely unhelpful and problematic when trying to account for identity in such a way that is constructive and adequately equipped to deal with its incoherences.

#### Chapter Outline

This chapter will be guided by a pair of questions and statements - questions and statements that have been pertinent to my own processes of self-reflection. The work of Frantz Fanon in his book entitled, *Wretched of the Earth*, will largely frame the rest of this section through an initial interrogation of the very means by which we come to understand ourselves. Fanon beckons us to ask ourselves the very simple, yet heavily implicated question, “**Who am I?**” Kelly Oliver and Kathryn Tanner will then go on to reveal the ways that we are unable to fully know ourselves, leading us to turn to another and ask, “**Who do you say that I am?**” From this, an analysis of Gloria Anzaldúa’s work in *Borderlands* will lead us to articulate the words, “**I am not my own.**” And finally, Bhabha, Said, and Wynter will conclude this moment of postcolonial inquiry by poignantly displaying that one is only made possible in the presence of many - that “**I am who we say I am.**”

Fanon as a Foundation - "Who am I?"

In his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon interrogates the efficacy of the categorizations we use in order to form our identity within the context of a colonized Algeria. Fanon draws many clear illustrations of the ways that the colonizer and colonized are bound to one another in a convoluted relational economy. Fanon describes the relationship between the French colonizer and the native Algerian as anything but fixed and concretely established. From his perspective, fixed roles cannot be assumed in every place and time, and the native Algerian must develop a dynamic and complex understanding of the 'oppressor'. He states that "Not every black or Muslim is automatically given a vote of confidence. One no longer grabs a gun or a machete every time a colonist approaches."<sup>34</sup> Fanon is pointing the reader towards a profound sense of ambivalence, where the very notion of the 'oppressor', assumes a number of different forms that may often be unrecognizable to the simple gaze. Unlike the fixed notions of identity that are illustrated through the traditional conceptions of the 'proletariat' and the 'poor' within Marxist Oppositional Analysis, Fanon is gesturing towards a reality where all identities are connected to one another through a convoluted matrix of oppression. Fanon does not do this in order to trivialize the impoverished situation of the Algerians - for he was far too familiar with the everyday brutalities faced by his people to do this - but rather, his aim is to complicate the notion that only natives could be trusted, and that only French colonists posed a threat to their national fight for sovereignty.

Fanon complicates the Native's ability to differentiate themselves from those individuals that inflict violence upon them. Colonialism, this infectious disease, has

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<sup>34</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004), 95.

reached a critical mass and has inflicted scars on every-body, leaving no-body unmarked. The colonial relationship, as Fanon describes it here, can be adequately conceptualized as a Chinese finger trap – the more effort one puts into separating their two fingers from one another, the more one becomes aware of the constricting sensation that is binding them together.

Through a Fanonian account of identity, “Who am I?” no longer elicits a simple response of self-assertion. Fanon demystifies the efficacy of categorizations by exposing the porous and interpenetrative nature of our bodies as they exist in relation to one another. In a future section, I will go on to show the ways that I believe Andrew Sung Park and Grace Ji-Sun Kim construct a ‘Korean American’ identity that is wholly constructed on the means of categorization that Fanon is putting on trial here.

Challenging Sovereignty - Body as Mystery - “Who do you say that I am?”

The work of Fanon is remarkably disturbing in the ways that he interrogates one’s ability to truly know oneself - a theme that, as we will see, runs through the work of many different postcolonial scholars and theorists. Marxist notions of identity function out of an assumption that one has an ability to accurately account for *difference* - a task that Hall, through his analysis of ‘representation’, reveals as a deeply complex process.<sup>35</sup> Fanon and many other postcolonial thinkers, complicate the assessment of one’s own social inventory by demystifying the notion of an ‘omnicompetent’ subject.

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<sup>35</sup> Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices (Culture, Media, and Identities Series)*. (London: Sage Publications; The Open University, 2013), 16.

In her book entitled, *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, Kelly Oliver expounds on the work of Fanon by specifically delving into the psychoanalytic concept of the ‘unconscious’, as well as its subsequent social implications. Oliver seeks to destabilize the notion that one has an ability to practice agency in such a way that exhibits an ‘omniscient’ awareness of one’s own self. This assumed level of awareness leads the subject to “draw lines and defend barriers,”<sup>36</sup> - a practice that both Fanon and Oliver seek to work against.

The possibility of a self-inherent ‘otherness’ makes itself present here - an ‘otherness’ that undermines colonialism’s false notion of certainty, and reinstates a sort of ambiguity and ambivalence that is foundational to human subjectivity.<sup>37</sup> Oliver contends that our words, actions, and desires are driven and motivated by parts of ourselves that we cannot ever have full access to, and this requires us to engage in a practice of ‘self-critical hermeneutics’ - a practice that will be further exhibited by Gloria Anzaldúa.<sup>38</sup>

Oliver’s understanding of the unconscious connects to the work of Kathryn Tanner, in her book, *Christ the Key*. Here, Tanner poetically speaks of the ways that humanity reflects the *imago Dei*, similar to how a mirror captures and reflects the image of the sun.<sup>39</sup> If the eternal and transcendent *imago Dei* exists within us, we are forced to face the reality that we are *mystery* to our own selves and to one another. Both Oliver and

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<sup>36</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. (1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 26.

<sup>37</sup> Here, Oliver states that, “Only when we believe that we are not transparent to ourselves will we also believe that our bodies and behaviors demand incessant interpretation” (Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xxii).

<sup>38</sup> “[The] infinite responsibility entails the imperative to question ourselves and constantly engage in self-critical hermeneutics” (Ibid., 199).

<sup>39</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*. Current Issues in Theology. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17.

Tanner seek to destabilize notions of identity through an interrogation of sovereignty and knowing. Both would contend that in order to reach a more humane and just society, we must realize that we cannot understand ourselves - that we are not sovereign human subjects, and that we can never live as exhaustively transparent beings.

In our inability to name and identify ourselves, we must turn to another and ask, “Who do you say that I am?” Such a question marks a recognition of a holy instability that allows another to refract their understandings of our body back into us. This can be observed in Christ’s interaction with Simon Peter in Matthew 16:15, when he asks the question, “But who do you say that I am?” Here, Christ thoroughly articulates the ways that his holy identity is only made revelatory in Peter’s ability to name him as such. Christ exhibits the holy instability that is characteristic of identity formation by inviting Peter into a deeply mutual process of self-description. Christ then goes on to say, “... you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...” This interaction exhibits a process of fruitful naming through mutual description occurring between two persons, as opposed to a separated and estranged naming that is an everyday occurrence in a world touched by the logic of colonialism.

Such a passage exhibits the process of identification that both Oliver and Tanner name as mysterious, ambivalent, and ultimately, mutual, always requiring the ‘other’. With this in mind, identification cannot be understood as a process that is exhaustively self-dictated, but rather requires an active and ongoing negotiation between multiple parties. Thus, ‘Korean American’ identity cannot be understood as a monolithic persona, but is only made coherent through its inclusion of multiple voices, lived experiences, and disparate articulations.

‘Self’ and ‘Other’/ ‘Other’ as ‘Self’ - Body as Occupied Space - “I am not my own”

Oliver and Tanner supplement Fanon’s work by interrogating the means by which we both understand and obtain subjectivity. In addition to this, Tanner guides us towards a deeper understanding of the implications of the imago Dei. However, in reading Fanon alongside Gloria Anzaldúa, a more salient, and perhaps more insidious and horrific aspect of Fanon’s work is highlighted. Fanon goes beyond the inherent ambivalence of the human condition that has been suggested thus far by Oliver and Tanner, and subsequently exhibits how this ambivalence is also a result of colonization that occurs at a psychopathological level.

The concept of ‘self-critical hermeneutics’ that Oliver speaks of within her text can be most evidently found in Gloria Anzaldúa’s work, *Borderlands La Frontera*. Anzaldúa critically reflects on the alienation she faces as an individual of both Spanish and Native descent, and the psychological, as well as somatic repercussions, she endures, because of such intense forms of marginalization. She saliently describes her realization that ‘some-thing’ occupies her body in a very palpable manner. This certainly goes beyond a benign recognition of the unconscious, and orients us towards an exploration of the colonial pathologies individuals have inherited from their respective ‘masters’.

Anzaldúa powerfully illustrates a self-inherited ‘otherness’, and further personifies it as the ‘Shadow-Beast’ that lives within her own psyche.<sup>40</sup> This ‘Shadow-Beast’ is

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<sup>40</sup> “I locked the door, kept the world out; I vegetated, hibernated, remained in stasis, idled. No telephone, no television, no radio. Alone with the presence in the room. Who? Me, my psyche, the Shadow-Beast?” What I find most powerful in the quote regarding the ‘Shadow Beast’, is that despite Anzaldúa’s best efforts to cut herself off from all forms of external stimuli and communication, those words that have been historically spoken over her body have injected themselves within her own psyche, such that they are now able to exist autonomously from the mouths that originally spoke them into existence (Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. (4<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), 147).

made of essentialisms and categorizations, ascribed personality traits and stereotypes, racism and colorism, sexism and misogyny, etc. Oliver would describe this as the injection of ‘unwanted affect’ into the alienated object.<sup>41</sup> Fanon similarly articulates this phenomenon through his understanding of the white man’s phobia of the Black body, and how this leads the white man to use the Black body as a container for his unwanted affect.<sup>42</sup> Anzaldúa confounds Spanish and Native understandings of personhood, leading her to become indoctrinated by the negative affect of those who cannot conceive of a body that lives beyond the boundaries that function to defend national identity.

Anzaldúa points out that isolation from these voices, media broadcasts, and even radio frequencies, does not result in the extinction of this ‘Shadow-Beast’ despite her most hopeful wishes. The ‘Shadow-Beast’ is not *out there* imposing itself onto her, but rather, has been injected into her body, subsequently calling her body ‘home’.

The work of Gloria Anzaldúa highlights a number of themes that will intuitively make a return as I come to the more explicitly constructive ends of this paper. The ways that Anzaldúa disrupts commonly held notions of national identity through her transgression of boundaries will come up again through an in-depth analysis of Wonhee Anne Joh’s, *The Heart of the Cross*. In addition to this, the ways that Anzaldúa conceives of her body as an occupied space elicits further reflection and analysis as I reflect on the implications of a mulattic discipleship, as proposed by Brian Bantum in his book, *Redeeming Mulatto*. Not only does Anzaldúa speak of her body as a space that is occupied by a menacing ‘Shadow Beast’, but she also speaks of her body as a space that

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<sup>41</sup> Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression*, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1968), 52.

is for her own refuge.<sup>43</sup> The body as ‘home’ thus holds double meaning in the ways that it reveals both tragedy and creative possibility.

Anzaldúa reveals that the formation of a ‘Korean American’ identity is not contingent upon one’s ability to self-articulate oneself into existence, but is contingent upon one’s ability to engage in a level of self-reflection that elicits a realization of the multiple and conflicting encounters that form oneself.

Identity as *Transaction*, *Translation*, and *Representation* - Body as Negotiation -

“*I am who we say I am*”

As we have come to see thus far, identity is constructed and maintained through a process that is far more complex and convoluted than ‘Marxist Oppositional Analysis’ is equipped to account for. In this section, I will show the ways that Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, and Sylvia Wynter, work to locate identity within the soils of the land, as it is caught within a complex matrix of *transaction* (Edward Said), *translation* (Homi Bhabha), and *representation* (Sylvia Wynter). These individuals show us that identity formation is dynamic and fluid in the ways that it necessitates an ongoing traversing of boundaries at a cultural, linguistic, and geographical level.

*Transaction*

In his book, *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said seeks to reveal the hybrid, mixed, and impure particularities that are characteristic of all cultures, resisting the imperial and colonial impulse to “draw lines and defend barriers.”<sup>44</sup> Said seeks to

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<sup>43</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 43.

<sup>44</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 26.



complicate our understandings of national culture as a distinctly defined entity that holds a capability of being differentiated from its necessary ‘other’.

Said’s notion of a *contrapuntal* perspective is significant in seeking to understand his argument. A contrapuntal perspective requires individuals to assess national histories as exhaustively intertwined phenomena, denying the sentiment that the history of Africa is in some way disjointed and separate from the history of Europe. The African identity can therefore no longer be understood as an essence, but is rather the result of both African history, and the study of Africa in particular parts of Europe. The ‘African identity’ is thus hybrid and mixed, formed by geographical reality as well as subjective observation. To say that the ‘Africans’ were ‘not’ until their encounter with the white man, is not a statement regarding the ontology or agency of individuals who identify as ‘African’, but rather identifies the ways that identity is largely formed through perception. Identity can no longer be understood as a set of essential characteristics, but as Said puts it, identity is “[a] contrapuntal ensemble,”<sup>45</sup> that always requires ‘opposites’ and ‘oppositions’.

Said conveys a vast sense of interdependence between realities, cultures, histories, and geographies, in order to subvert and resist the imperial impulse to, as noted above, “draw lines” and “defend barriers.” Said does not recklessly do so in such a way that levels difference and particularity, but rather seeks to destabilize and demystify notions of sovereign agency and national culture by showing that our lives and identities are always *transactional* - always being renegotiated - and are always being interpreted by a gaze that is distantly removed, yet imminently repercussive.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 52.

Translation

In, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha powerfully highlights the cultural *translation* that is always taking place within the object of linguistic science. He specifically looks at the first letter of the Hindi alphabet and subsequently describes how it is pronounced as ‘er’. He describes this as an “enunciatory process of cultural translation.”<sup>46</sup> Bhabha argues that this cultural translation is *always* and *already* taking place, further erasing the possibility for any essentialist claim of cultural authenticity and/or purity. The hybridization that is *always* and *already* taking place within language further reveals the sort of interdependence that Said also seeks to convey.

Prior to this analysis of language, Bhabha speaks to Fanon’s notion of ‘doubling’, seeking to articulate the difference between personal identity as an intuition of ontology, and the psychoanalytic problem of identification that cannot be overlooked in a world touched by the colonial and imperial gaze.<sup>47</sup> The ‘doubling’ of identity and the hybridization of language further complicate all conceptions of sovereignty and agency that function out of an assumed ‘omnicompetence’. The ‘doubling’ of identity and the hybridization of language reveal that our senses of self are *always* and *already* participating in a vast economy of translation. This is why all postcolonial theorists resist the temptation to view history in such a way that deems it as static and fixed. If our senses of self are always shifting and being renegotiated, then our understandings and interpretations of history are also subject to indeterminable change. Bhabha speaks of remembering history as “not a quiet act of introspection or retrospection”<sup>48</sup>, but rather, as

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<sup>46</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (Routledge Classics, New York, 2004), 83.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

a painful 're-membering' - that is, a putting together of limbs, appendages, and muscle tissues that characterize a dismembered past, in hopes of better understanding present trauma and suffering.

### Representation

In her essay entitled, '1492: A New Worldview', Sylvia Wynter calls for a similar sort of 're-membering', by exploring and critically interrogating the very grounds that allow for the possibility of 'discovery' to take place in a land already occupied. In critiquing Freudian psychology, Wynter references Fanon, in the ways that Fanon resisted the ontogenetic perspective that influenced Freud's mode of psychopathological thought. Rather than a solely ontogenetic perspective, Fanon called for an equally important consideration of the sociogenetic perspective that he commonly confronted, working as a psychiatrist for colonial natives.

Wynter argues that the central mechanism that is *always* and *already* at work in the process of identity formation is that of *representation*.<sup>49</sup> The historical representation of native ancestors as 'passivized objects' is what subsequently allows for Columbus to perform such magnificent and brilliant acts of discovery. The 'passivized objects' of history are waiting to be 'discovered' by the only 'subjects of history' - namely, the white man.<sup>50</sup> This deconstructionist framework interrogates the various articulations and particularities of national cultures. Are these articulations and particularities of culture an ontological phenomenon? Or rather, are they a result of a cancerous and a precisely

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<sup>49</sup> Sylvia Wynter, [Chapter 1] in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 45.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

propagandic procedure of *representation* that is at work? Kwok Pui-Lan names this predicament in a slightly different way by interrogating the efficaciousness of 'Asian' folklore in 'Asian' theology, through questioning the impact of numerous colonial regimes on 'Asian' culture.<sup>51</sup>

Like Pui-Lan, both Wynter and Fanon would contend that all cultures are a result of both ontogenetic and sociogenetic processes, and they would subsequently state that any attempt to further distinguish the two from one another is an entirely useless endeavor. Both Wynter and Fanon wish to offer the master and slave, as well as the colonist and native, a more in depth reflection on their mutual *interpositions*. It is only through a more robust account of interconnectedness that the possibility of freedom becomes available - a freedom that is undeniably dangerous, because it requires us to give up those things that we claim to know about both ourselves, and the 'others' around us.

### Synthesis

Said, Bhabha, and Wynter illustrate the ways that identity is birthed out of a transgression of boundaries. Unlike the ways Marxist oppositional analysis seeks to form and maintain its categorizations through an act of 'boundary keeping', these three individuals, as well as the others that have been reflected upon in this section of postcolonial inquiry, reorient our understandings of identity by highlighting the ongoing process of 'boundary crossing', blurring notions of 'home', 'authenticity', and 'essence'. Marxist oppositional analysis conceives of identity in such a way that necessitates a

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<sup>51</sup> Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 41.

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maintaining of boundaries - proletariat and bourgeoisie, purely oppressed and merely oppressive - and this intuitively shapes the ways that liberation theologians would then go on to conceive of the 'poor', 'oppressed', and 'marginalized'.

As I have shown, identity is only made possible in an encounter with an 'other'. Identity is therefore not solely contingent upon one's ability to self-assert or self-describe - a practice that inevitably leads to the estranged naming of an 'other' - but instead requires an ongoing posture of, and radical commitment to deep self-reflection or rather, 'self-critical hermeneutics' - both mourning and celebrating the ways that we are birthed out of encounter. This can be seen in the ways that the works of Kelly Oliver and Frantz Fanon gesture towards a new reading of Matthew 16:15, the 'self-critical hermeneutics' Anzaldúa deploys in order to conceive of her body as a space of both tragedy and possibility, and the ways that Said, Bhabha, and Wynter focus on the fluidity and dynamism of identity formation.

Interpreted within the context of 'Korean American' identity, these individuals reveal that 'Korean American' identity cannot be deployed in a prescriptive manner because it retains no solid foundation to prop itself up against. The myths of 'essence', 'authenticity', and 'Asianness' are thus put on trial. These are the myths that I felt working against my body at the young age of seven, and are the same myths I encounter in my visitations to 'Korean American' churches, and in my interactions with 'Korean American' faculty on university campuses.

Reprise

“Go back to where you came from!” - the words that have been spoken over all who don the veil of the ‘orient’ on their bodies. In his song entitled, ‘Banned from the Motherland’, Dumbfoundead challenges commonly held perceptions about ‘Asian Americans’ and their ties to a distant ‘home’. In the song, Dumbfoundead parallels himself to Yoo Seung Jun - a prominent K-Pop star in the early 2000’s that dodged the mandatory Korean military draft, resulting in him never being allowed to enter Korea again. Unlike Yoo Seung Jun, Dumbfoundead exhibits no hesitancy towards the idea of being banned from entering Korea, because he is a *gyopo* - a person of Korean descent born outside of Korea - and contends that he will turn Hollywood into his ‘motherland’.

‘Banned from the Motherland’ is an interesting point of postcolonial reflection because of the ways that Dumbfoundead problematizes notions of ‘Korean American’ identity by rejecting the notion of Korea as ‘home’. In the same ways that these postcolonial and cultural theorists conceive of identity as a construct that is birthed out of transgression and encounter, ‘Banned from the Motherland’ leads us to a similar set of conclusions regarding identity through the presentation of a new ‘Korean American’ subject (Dumbfoundead) - a subject that demystifies notions of ‘purity’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘essence’. Dumbfoundead can only understand himself through these rhythmic utterances - articulations of a postcolonial self that confounds the logic of boundaries and categorizations, beautifully existing in a space of ambivalence and fluidity.

Through ‘Banned from the Motherland’, Dumbfoundead reveals the capacity to which the ‘Korean American’ body can expose and humiliate the logic of colonial and imperial powers. Dumbfoundead reveals the possibilities of a postcolonial embodiment

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that speaks to the formation of a 'Postcolonial Korean American' discipleship. His creative and subversive praxis perpetually reveals the complexities and intricacies of identity, going far beyond the ways that Marxist Oppositional Analysis requires a maintaining of boundaries, moving us toward a 'holy instability' that speaks hope into the lives of all those that find themselves traversing the boundaries of many different worlds.

## Chapter 3.5

### Understanding Markers of Identity - Deployment Strategies

*I'm a hyung, since I was young*

*Get your bread up I ain't playin'*

*With you crumbs*

...

*I'm on my hyung shit*

*You ain't a hyung*

*Pockets are young, you haven't done shit*

*But fuck all that hyung shit*

*Fuck all that hyung shit*

*-Dumbfoundead, 'Hyung', 2017*

Thus far, we have observed the ways that postcolonial theory complicates Marxist Oppositional Analysis and its modes of identity formation through the usage of categorizations and classifications.

Postcolonial theory not only warns us of the danger of essentialisms, but brings to our attention the ways that our identities and conceptions of self are always subject to change due to processes of transaction, translation, and representation. As noted above, both Wynter and Fanon offer the master *and* slave the tools needed in order to conduct a more in depth reflection on their mutual interpositions. In recognizing this dialectical and



fluid relationship, claims of sovereignty and 'omnicompetence' are demystified and further labeled as 'impossibilities'.

What we have learned from this cross analysis of liberationist and postcolonial understandings of identity is that markers of identification are used in Marxist Oppositional Analysis, and subsequently liberation theology, while they are seemingly absent from postcolonial discourse. In liberationist texts, we can see that particular markers of identity, specifically, experiences of oppression, lead to the formation of a social classification that is readily distinguishable from its necessary 'other'. Labels such as 'the poor', 'the oppressed', and 'the proletariat', use experiences of oppression as a common identifying marker that allows for individuals to enter into community with one another, under the assumption that they are formed out of similar lived experiences.

However, postcolonial theory has shown us that oppression as an identifying marker is ineffective and largely unhelpful, because it functions in contradictory, incoherent, and variably dense ways. Postcolonial theory goes even further to say that *all* identifying markers are problematic when they are used in such a way that leads to the formation of essentialist social categorizations - when they are used in such a way that to uphold rigid boundaries for the sake of a stabilized sense of self, negating the possibility of 'boundary crossing'.

With this in mind, perhaps our only point of similarity is, in fact, our infinite difference. This claim is supported by Fanon in his illustration of the ambivalence that characterizes the relationship between the 'colonizer' and 'colonized'. For Fanon, what makes the 'colonizer' and 'colonized' similar to one another is their respective lack of sovereignty - namely, the possibility for otherness and differentiation to exist within

one's own self. One cannot simply differentiate themselves from the 'other', because there is no capacity to take an exhaustive inventory of oneself.

In light of this, are markers of identification rendered entirely useless? Are they only useful insofar as they serve to form totalizing categorizations and classifications? I contend not, and that markers of identification can, in fact, be used in ways that are subversive and disruptive to daily claims on identity. In her book entitled, *Heart of the Cross*, Wonhee Anne Joh alludes to this in her explanation of 'strategic essentialisms', as they function to contend for heterogeneity and also work to debunk notions of false essences.<sup>52</sup> In the following chapter I will expand on Joh's brief explanation of strategic essentialisms, by analyzing the ways that 'Korean American' theologians utilize and deploy markers of identification in order to attain a sense of subjectivity. Through a more in depth analysis, it will become clear that Andrew Sung Park and Grace Ji-Sun Kim deploy markers of identification such as Confucianism, filial piety, notions of family, etc. in order to uphold a notion of 'Korean American' subjectivity. From this perspective, the 'Korean American' subject is properly grounded in Eastern custom, and can be distinctly differentiated from its broader 'American' counterpart. This mode of theologizing 'Korean American' identity carries liberationist tendencies in the ways that it uses particular marks of identification for the formation of a group that can be readily differentiated from its respective 'other'. In addition to this, Wonhee Anne Joh and Sang Hyun Lee will demonstrate a different mode of deploying markers of identification - a mode that is more representative of the postcolonial propensity to highlight ambiguity and ambivalence. In completing this comparative analysis, it is my intention to reveal the

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<sup>52</sup> Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 2.

different ways 'Korean American' theologians approach the process of identification, specifically by way of utilizing what they understand as the constitutive marks of the 'Korean American' body.

### Reprise

In 'Korean culture', to be recognized as a *hyung* is to be recognized as a male that is worthy of respect by another male due to one's older age. In his song entitled, 'Hyung', Dumbfoundead deploys a cultural sensibility in such a way that destabilizes both American and Korean conceptions of identity and culture. 'Hyung' is a subversive song that injects a common theme within hip-hop (notions of 'respect') with Korean particularity, and simultaneously challenges and critiques ageist tendencies within Confucian culture.

Dumbfoundead poses a significant challenge to the claim that hip-hop must look, feel, and speak in a particular way, in order for it to be received by a Western audience as 'authentic'. As Dumbfoundead participates within the economy of hip-hop, he challenges and subverts notions of authenticity when a song like 'Hyung' is widely recited and sung by individuals that do not identify with the 'Korean American' narrative.

Dumbfoundead's deployment of *hangul* and other cultural sensibilities communicate new idioms and characteristics to what is commonly perceived as 'American Hip-Hop' - forever changing and inscribing new possibilities onto this subculture.

In addition to this, 'Hyung' is also significant in the ways that it challenges the problematic notion that respect is purely reserved for those who are older in age. This can be readily observed when Dumbfoundead states, "I'm a *hyung*, since I was young." Such

a statement is illogical when one takes into account the traditional definition of *hyung* - that is, a male that is worthy of respect because of his older age, from the perspectives of his younger male counterparts. To be a *hyung* since a young age, conflicts with the traditional conception of what it means to be a *hyung* in the first place, and thus marks the beginning of Dumbfoundead's critique of ageism as it veils itself within traditional Confucian values. Dumbfoundead claims to be a *hyung* all of his life, and subsequently states that those who haven't "...done shit..." are not worthy of such a title.

Dumbfoundead goes on to exhort the listener to disregard the notion of a *hyung*, because of its problematic implications within a culture that uses age as a means of discrimination and oppression. The listener's understanding of *hyung* is reoriented away from its traditional definition, and the listener is subsequently ushered into a space where *hyung* holds new meaning.

The song, 'Hyung', by Dumbfoundead presents itself as a perfect example for what Joh calls 'strategic essentialisms'. Dumbfoundead asserts a level of particularity within the economy of hip hop, inscribing new possibilities onto it, but does so in such a way that does not essentialize the 'Korean American' identity, but instead problematizes it by critically reflecting on the precarious nature of particular cultural tropes and motifs. Dumbfoundead's 'Hyung' commits a double gesture, where it inscribes 'Korean' particularity onto what is understood to be an 'American' cultural economy, while it simultaneously problematizes notions of 'Korean American' identity through a critique of problematic cultural codes. All of this leads to new possibilities of embodiment and participation. This deployment strategy makes itself present in varying ways in the

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following chapter - specifically through Joh's conception of the cross, and Lee's notions of *communitas* and structure.

## Chapter 4

### Analyzing Park, Kim, Joh, and Lee

Through a fuller understanding of the processes of identification that take place within Marxist Oppositional Analysis and postcolonial criticism, we can observe the ways that markers of identification are either utilized or disregarded when functioning to form essentialized social categorizations.

A reflection on Dumbfoundead's, 'Hyung', reveals the ways that markers of identification can, in fact, be deployed in ways that subversively contend for heterogeneity while they simultaneously work to demystify notions of false essences. Dumbfoundead's, 'Hyung', is doubly efficacious in this way, gesturing towards the possibilities of a postcolonial embodiment that can function to outline the beginnings of a 'Postcolonial Korean American' discipleship.

In order to construct the foundation of a 'Postcolonial Korean American' discipleship, it is necessary to revisit the four theologians I began this work alongside, to more thoroughly reflect upon and analyze the ways that they provide the building blocks for new ways of 'being' in this world. I will first analyze Andrew Sung Park and Sang Hyun Lee as they seek to form new understandings of faithfulness and discipleship, and I will then go on to analyze the work of Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Wonhee Anne Joh as they provide distinct forms of Christological reflection as they work to theorize identity.

## Faithfulness and Discipleship

### God's Desire for the Authentic Asian - Andrew Sung Park

In his book, *Racial Conflict and Healing*, Park clearly articulates a desire to locate 'home'. His desire to call America 'home', must also be juxtaposed with his desire to draw upon Eastern origin when constructing and understanding 'Korean American' identity. Park's usage of filial piety, as well as notions of the extended conjugate family pervade his argument as he seeks to construct a faithful 'Korean American' subject. Park's hybridity is one that seeks to cut and subsequently suture those aspects of Eastern and Western culture that he sees as naturally articulated through the lived experience of 'Korean American' individuals, and congregations alike. Park invokes an ideological return to 'home' when he speaks of Eastern tradition and Confucian practices.

In the section of his book entitled, 'Koreanness and Christianity', Park states that, "God's purpose for Koreans is to make them true Koreans in the image of God."<sup>53</sup> Park subsequently goes on to use language such as 'genuine', and 'authentic' when describing the sort of 'Koreanness' that God calls forth in 'Korean American' people. As Park strives to realize an authentic 'Korean American' identity, Park deploys particular markers of identification, such as Confucianism and Eastern tradition, in order to discreetly establish an authentic 'Korean American' self. Park's mode of constructing 'Korean American' identity is largely reminiscent of the ways that identity is constructed within liberationist texts, as they are informed by Marxist Oppositional Analysis. Park proposes a new mode of theological reflection that can more 'authentically' speak to 'Korean Americans', yet in doing so, Park simultaneously essentializes 'Korean

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<sup>53</sup> Park, *Racial Conflict and Healing*, 114.

American' identity in such a way that it can be readily differentiated from its necessary 'other'.

Park does not fully acknowledge the many ways that culture, tradition, and 'home' are not, in fact, static phenomena. When thinking about food, it is not uncommon for individuals to commonly make the statement, "Well that's not how they make it in Korea..." Yet such a statement blatantly ignores the reality that one's memory and idealization of Korean food is *not* in fact rooted in a stable and perennial moment. Eastern tradition and Confucian values are *always* and *already* (to use the language of Sylvia Wynter) changing, because their continuity is contingent upon the participation of individuals who choose to dynamically engage with such practices.

Though Park does not explicitly exhibit an understanding of culture and identity that robustly accounts for the variability and fluidity that is theorized by postcolonial and cultural scholars, Park rightfully asserts the need to maintain particularity. However, Park does this work in such a way that is overly prescriptive, failing to leave space for new modes of cultural articulation. Park deploys essentialisms in order to contend for heterogeneity and difference, but his deployment of these markers do not also function to debunk notions of false essences - both of which are very necessary components in Joh's conception of 'strategic essentialisms'.

Park's desire to locate 'home', though similar to Dumbfoundead's claim of turning Hollywood into his 'motherland', is born out of a contrasting motive. This is made apparent in Park's contentions with Sang Hyun Lee's theology of 'pilgrimage' and 'liminality'. Lee invokes a need to remain forever 'alien', and Park struggles to find this theology liberating. Park's desire to locate 'home' comes from a place of desiring



stability, whereas Dumbfoundead deploys notions of America as ‘home’ in order to deform national identity. Though Park’s particular understanding and deployment of ‘home’ is not seemingly helpful in the construction of a ‘Postcolonial Korean American’ discipleship, he nonetheless reminds us that ‘home’ is a very necessary point of inquiry that can either lead to a harmful means of alienation, or more significantly, a subversive means for interrogating identity.

*Communitas and Structure - Sang Hyun Lee*

Unlike Park, Sang Hyun Lee does not seek a sort of geographical stability. Lee’s methodology for understanding ‘Asian American’ identity is far less prescriptive than Park’s, and retains a sense of openness to consistent re/interpretation.

Lee illustrates the complex and nuanced characteristics of ‘Asian American’ identity by calling for an exhaustive reconceptualization of what it means to be both ‘American’ and ‘Asian’. Lee clearly communicates that, in order to identify as ‘American’, we must realize that our identity is caught within a vast social economy which consists of many different cultures and communities - African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, etc.<sup>54</sup> None of these people groups and cultures are exempt from informing what it means to be ‘Asian American’. In this way, an exploration of ‘Asian American’ identity is a task that seeks to reconstruct the very meaning of ‘America’ itself.

Along with this, Lee goes on to explore ‘Asia’ as the other primary factor of ‘Asian American’ identity. Where Park wishes to use ‘Korean American’ markers of

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<sup>54</sup> Lee, *From a Liminal Place*, 113.

identification in order for the realization of an authentic 'Korean American' self, Lee rejects the notion of a 'real Asian', and does not provide a set of guiding mores and practices for an 'authentic' self-realization to take place.

From Park's perspective, God calls the 'Korean American' subject into a process of realizing their authentic 'Korean' self, and this is done by an ideological return 'home' - a return to the practices of one's ancestors. Lee, on the other hand, conceptualizes 'Asian American' markers of identification in such a way that more thoroughly speaks to the disparate articulations of culture and ancestry through embodied lives. Lee states that, "... Asia is still a part of them in small and yet real ways: in their diet, in their physical appearance, in the stories their parents and grandparents tell them or in yet other ways."<sup>55</sup> Unlike Park, Lee appears to be making the statement that the authentic 'Asian American' is not something to be realized through a process of historical remembering, but is something that is *always* and *already* embodied within the lives of 'Asian Americans' in dynamic ways. For Lee, the embodied 'Asian American' self, demands incessant reinterpretation and redefinition as it works to persistently change and reframe understandings of cultural 'authenticity'.

While gaining visibility and a sort of social accreditation is the liberative task of Park, Lee imagines the participation of the 'Asian American' subject within the Western social economy in a different way. Lee utilizes 'liminality' as an 'Asian American' marker of identification that describes a state of 'in-betweeness', or rather, a prolonged state of 'exile'. While Park seeks to prescribe an authentic 'Asian American' self, Lee understands that the 'Asian American' self is undergoing consistent reinterpretation and

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 115.

redefinition through embodied lives. When speaking about the ‘Asian American’ church, Lee uses the work of Victor Turner to theorize the ways that the church can function as both *communitas* and structure.<sup>56</sup>

According to Turner, *communitas* can be understood as loving communion formed between two or more individuals who find themselves within liminal situations.<sup>57</sup> *Communitas* fully accepts ‘otherness’, and also requires a recognition of the ‘otherness’ one carries within their own bodies - a concept that has already been expounded upon through Gloria Anzaldúa, Frantz Fanon, Kelly Oliver, and Kathryn Tanner. Structures can then be understood as patterns of arrangement in a given society that are bound to both legal and practical norms and mores.<sup>58</sup> When Lee proposes the possibility of the ‘Asian American’ church functioning as both *communitas* and structure, he is envisioning a church that actively participates within a social economy, while it simultaneously creates and utilizes the tools that can undermine and subvert the dominating systems of power that it functions within.

In this model, the ‘Asian American’ subject retains a capacity to creatively engage with the Western social economy in a way that can powerfully mimic, undermine, and subvert the colonial and imperial powers that be. By attaching oneself to both *communitas* and structure, one commits themselves to a life of prophetic ministry - a ministry that is inextricably bound to cruel and unjust modalities of power, yet, in

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>58</sup> Victor W. Turner, and Edith L. B. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*. (Lectures on the History of Religions, new ser., no. 11. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 252.

drawing near to them, begins to change the language, aesthetic, and logic that function to provide it with sustenance and nourishment.

Lee reminds us that both culture and identity function fluidly, destabilizing notions of 'authenticity' and 'home'. While Park perceives a process of self-realization as an act of faithful discipleship, Lee makes clear that faithfulness is bound to the movement of one's life - to the movement between *communitas* and structure. Lee reorients our understandings of 'authenticity' away from a notion of retrieval, in order to direct us towards an understanding of 'authenticity' as embodiment - a phenomenon that is *always and already* being articulated and re-articulated by the movements and utterances of bodies within communities.

## **Christology**

### *Culturally Relevant Grace - Grace Ji-Sun Kim*

Similar to the ways that Park constructs an understanding of 'Korean American' identity through the deployment of certain cultural markers, Kim deploys 'Eastern' sensibilities in a similar way in order to reimagine a Christ that identifies with 'Korean American' women.

For Kim, a 'culturally relevant' understanding of Christ requires a knowledge of one's ancestral roots. Similar to Park, liberation is attained by embodying an increasingly 'authentic' form of theological reflection that allows one to imagine a Christ that identifies with the lived experiences of 'Korean American' women.

In the beginning of her book, Kim explicitly states that she believes Sang Hyun Lee's theology of pilgrimage does not go far enough in its liberative attempts because of

the ways that it glorifies and glamorizes the marginal space and journey - a space and journey that is doubly experienced by 'Korean American' women.<sup>59</sup> Her critique is similar to the traditional feminist critique of the cross that Wonhee Anne Joh addresses in her book, *Heart of the Cross*. If the cross is *only* a place of abject suffering, such a site of suffering will only perpetuate the violence done to female bodies. Kim's Christology stems from her belief that Jesus does not will for 'Korean American' women to remain in this doubly marginalized space.<sup>60</sup> Both Kim and Park appear to critique Lee for very similar reasons.

Kim's descriptions of Sophia, parallel Joh's conceptions of *jeong*. When describing how *prajna* is similar to Sophia, Kim states, "*Prajna* is a wisdom supremely compassionate, rescuing humans from their ignorance and suffering. She is a nurturer, sustainer, and liberator."<sup>61</sup> In her book, *Heart of the Cross*, Joh describes *jeong* as "... compassion, affection, solidarity, relationality, vulnerability, and forgiveness."<sup>62</sup>

Despite these similarities, the two theologians distinctly differ from one another, in regards to their beliefs around the functionalities of Sophia and *jeong*. From Kim's theological perspective, Sophia is the answer to *han*-ridden 'Korean American' women - the grace of Sophia has the power to excise *han* from the lives of 'Korean American' women who have been subjugated to racism and patriarchy.<sup>63</sup> Joh, on the other hand, contends that *jeong* exists in the midst of abject suffering (*han*). From Joh's perspective,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>62</sup> Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*, xiii.

<sup>63</sup> Kim, *The Grace of Sophia*, 161.

the excision of *han* is impossible in this life, because *han* and *jeong* exist in mutual relationship with one another.

Similar to Park, Kim's deployment of 'Eastern' sensibilities come across as overly prescriptive in the ways that she equates cultural relevance with Eastern ancestry. Kim's Christology will become lost in translation as generations of 'Korean Americans' become more physically and ideologically removed from notions of 'Korea' as 'home'. Despite this, Kim importantly reminds us to refrain from viewing suffering as a means of faithful discipleship.

As we will come to see in the next section, Joh rounds out Kim's Christology by emphasizing the relationship between *han* and *jeong*. This goes far beyond an understanding that a life of discipleship will always entail 'good' and 'bad', but rather, that a life of discipleship will always be characterized by one's participation within power ridden settings, making subversion a possibility in the midst of suffering, inscribing tragedy and creative possibility onto all of our lives.

*Burned Roots and Forged Routes - Wonhee Anne Joh*

In her book entitled, *Heart of the Cross*, Joh seeks to reveal the ways in which the crucifixion carries out a 'double gesture', allowing the cross to function as a site of both abjection (*han*), and liberative love (*jeong*). Similar to the work of Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Joh also deploys a Christology that functions as a marker of identification for 'Korean Americans'.

In *Heart of the Cross*, Joh posits a new way of understanding 'Korean American' identity through her language of 'roots vs. routes'. Joh appears to find Lee's theology of

‘pilgrimage’ and ‘liminality’ engaging because of the ways that such a hermeneutic for understanding exhorts ‘Korean American’ communities to explore the possibilities of their identity by forging new ‘routes’.<sup>64</sup> This commitment to instability intuitively informs her understanding of Christ’s crucifixion as a moment of vast ambivalence and uncertainty.

Joh utilizes the language of Mark Taylor as she seeks to make the differentiation between the words, ‘execution’ and ‘crucifixion’. Taylor’s advocacy of the word ‘execution’ is rooted in his belief that such language moves away from a notion of Christ’s death as a “sublime divine plan,” and more thoroughly highlights the horror and pain that characterized His death, as well as the death of many others that resulted, and continue to result from the hands of a violent, imperialistic regime.<sup>65</sup>

Joh understands Christ’s abandonment not as a sign of surrender or submission, but rather, as a sign of His *jeong* for the other, a love and compassion that leads Him to take on the fullness of the other, ultimately abandoning Himself from God. From Joh’s perspective, Christ’s abandonment is no longer understood as solely *han*, but also as *jeong*.<sup>66</sup> Joh’s critique of Moltmann and other feminist theologians is rooted in her belief that these respective understandings of the cross seek to retain too much stability, ultimately diminishing or sanitizing it in such a way that cheapens the rich and complex implications such a moment has on our lives.

Joh’s understanding and formation of ‘Asian-American’ identity is predicated on the ambivalence of the crucifixion moment. Joh resists the common temptation to

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<sup>64</sup> Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*, 9.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

valorize the 'homeland', as well as the tendency to journey back to one's 'roots'. Her call for a reimagined identity is an articulation of a similar principle to Frantz Fanon, in the ways that he calls for the reinvention of man in *Wretched of the Earth*. Joh contends for a 'reinvented' understanding of the cross - an understanding that actively resists the temptation to recapitulate historically masculinist and sadomasochistic interpretations and readings of such a symbol.

Jos utilizes the postcolonial concept of 'mimicry' in order to depict the ways that while the crucifixion moment pays homage to the imperial 'powers that be', it simultaneously confounds the very logic that puts Christ on the cross. The cross can thus be understood as a significant marker of identification because of the ways that, out of Christ's infinite *jeong* for us, Christ submits himself to the very deprived conditions of marginalization and execution (*han*) - becoming like us, and thus allowing us to become like Christ.

Joh's usage of 'mimicry' provides a corrective to Kim's argument that Sophia excises the *han* from the lives of 'Korean American' women. Joh illustrates the inextricable relationship between *han* and *jeong* in order to reveal the ways that settings of oppression, violence, and tragedy, are always being subverted through creative resistance. Faithful discipleship thus requires an entrance into settings ridden with power, inscribing tragedy and creative possibility onto all bodies.

The cross functions as a marker of identification for the postcolonial subject because of the ways that it confounds collective understandings of boundaries and borders. Joh's salient critique of the feminist interpretation of the cross works to powerfully remind us that the cross, though abused in its historically deprived



interpretations, is indeed a symbol of hope for all, and has the ability to disrupt the systems of hegemony that are predicated on binary modes of thinking. Joh's conception of the cross, as a marker of identification, reveals to us the ways that such markers can be used to strategically challenge notions of power and colonial identity.

### **Foundations of a 'Postcolonial Korean American' Discipleship**

In their respective modes of understanding faithfulness and discipleship, Park and Lee differ from one another in the ways that Park seeks to locate faithful rhythms of discipleship through an expression of 'home' as a stable phenomenon. Conversely, Lee's theology of liminality presses into a life of instability through a commitment to both *communitas* and structure. Through this, modes of faithfulness and discipleship require a willingness to traverse boundaries and borders. Lee's theological perspective demystifies all notions of 'authenticity' by highlighting the ways that embodied lives always reinterpret and redefine what cultural 'authenticity' means in particular moments. This can be juxtaposed to Park's more traditional understanding of 'authenticity', and the ways that he seeks to prescribe an 'authentic' 'Asian American' self as a way towards faithful living, riding the line and eventually crossing into the territory of essentialisms.

Similarly, both Wonhee Anne Joh and Grace Ji-Sun Kim propose new modes of Christological understanding in ways that connect with Lee and Park's notions of faithfulness and discipleship. In her theorizing of Sophia, the Christic figure that can more authentically speak into the lives of 'Korean American' women, Kim proposes that the grace of Sophia excises *han* from the lives of 'Korean American' women - members of the 'Korean American' community who are doubly marginalized. Kim makes a very

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necessary point in highlighting the ways that suffering and alienation cannot be conceived of as acts of faithfulness, yet in doing so, she neglects to explore the ways that *han* and *jeong* are connected to one another, resulting in a Christology that is all too stable and stationary. Conversely, Joh highlights the inextricable relationship between *han* and *jeong* through her understanding of the crucifixion moment, resulting in a Christology that inscribes tragedy and creative possibility onto all of our lives. Joh's Christological interpretation displays a dynamism and spirited activity that speaks to the possibilities of embodied life.

All four theologians have already begun to do the work of constructing a 'Postcolonial Korean American' discipleship, through their explorations of 'home', exilic patterns of life, as well as movement and notions ambivalence. Though the work of Joh and Lee hold the most resonances with postcolonial sensibilities through their conceptions of 'liminality' and 'mimicry', both Kim and Park highlight very necessary pieces that must be included in the construction of a 'Postcolonial Korean American' discipleship - that hybridity within this mode of discipleship must remain particular to the 'Korean American' body, and that suffering cannot be valorized and subsequently conceived of as a marker of faithfulness.

## Chapter 5

### **Building Towards a ‘Postcolonial Korean American’ Discipleship: Movement, Genius, and Uncertainty**

“For they can no longer return to their former people for they speak with a new accent, their lives are marked by new rhythms, enemies have become friends, and friends have become enemies.”<sup>67</sup>

-Brian Bantum

As I move forward in my theological construction, I reject the notion that there is something to be culturally recovered for ‘Korean Americans’ in order to live faithfully, but I also do not wish to fall into the trap of subsequently proposing that a literal and ideological defense of one’s culture is of no value. As noted in my introduction, Dumbfoundead confounds ‘Korean American’ identity by persistently disrupting and destabilizing conceptions of ‘Korean’ and ‘American’ personhood. Dumbfoundead can thus be understood as revelatory, in the ways that he makes known the incoherence of claims that support notions of cultural purity. Dumbfoundead deploys ‘Korean American’ markers of identification, such as stories of immigration, the Korean language (*hangul*), and other satirical symbols of the ‘Orient’, in a way that does not seek to stabilize the ‘Korean American’ self in the Western social economy, but does so in a way that

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<sup>67</sup> Brian Bantum, *Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 184.

challenges notions of citizenship and the myth of the 'American' subject through creative agency.

Rhythms of identification and differentiation can be found throughout the entirety of Dumbfoundead's music. In certain moments he shrouds himself with the American flag, where in other moments he stands with no shirt, proudly flaunting a tattoo that says 'Korea Town' across the entirety of his chest. The music of Dumbfoundead portrays the many ways that postcolonial notions of hybridity, mimicry, and doubling, can very tangibly disrupt what Emilie M. Townes describes as the 'fantastic hegemonic imagination' in her book entitled, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*.<sup>68</sup>

While Park and Kim's particular conception of hybridity seeks to stitch together the 'right' parts of Eastern tradition, Christianity, and Western culture, Anne Joh necessarily reminds us that hybridity is not in fact an accumulation of the 'right parts', but is an energy field of different forces.<sup>69</sup> This energy field that Joh describes infers dynamism, recurring movement, and a notion of ambivalence as one finds themselves situated within a complex matrix of social, political, and economic power. Dumbfoundead appears to exist within this energy field, defying and subverting cultural expectations, redefining 'Korean' and 'American' personhood through his deployment of creative agency. Dumbfoundead's music is an example of cultural production that reveals the possibilities of agency within the realities and limitations of a confining system - a subversive mode of participation that confesses *jeong* in the midst of *han*.

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<sup>68</sup> This 'fantastic hegemonic imagination', as described by Townes, is the inescapable mark that has touched all bodies, perpetuating the involvement of all bodies in the cultural production of evil. Townes proposes 'everydayness' as a way to daily work against the cultural production of evil, always acknowledging the ways that we exist in an inextricable relationship with evil. (Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. Black Religion / Womanist Thought / Social Justice. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 159).

<sup>69</sup> Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*, 59.

The Instability of Symbols and the Fluidity of Power

Here, I find it necessary to return to Stuart Hall's conception of identification, in order to highlight the importance of representation. In speaking to representation, Stuart Hall states, "... identities are about... how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation."<sup>70</sup> Without delving too deeply into Hall's work around representation, it is necessary to highlight the importance of it, as it pertains to identity. Hall views material and symbolic resources as necessary components that will sustain processes of identification. If we then look into Hall's work around representation, we can see that his constructionist approach to representation allows for the variability of meaning by asking the question, 'Who makes meaning mean?' Hall makes it clear that symbols do not simply reflect meaning, but rather, meaning resides in the 'we' who naturalize it.<sup>71</sup>

Similar to Fanon, Kelly Oliver, in her book entitled, *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, strives to highlight the complex power dynamics that characterize settings of oppression and domination, as well as the subsequent strategies of resistance that are born out of such toxic settings. Oliver recalls one of Fanon's essays entitled, 'This is the Voice of Algeria'. Here, Fanon speaks of the ways that the French radio represented the justification of colonialism (France's technological advancement), and was also used as a primary weapon against the Algerians.<sup>72</sup> Fanon reports that the Algerian people would commonly destroy radios as a means of resistance, but when broadcasts supporting the

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<sup>70</sup> Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression*, 74.

Algerian revolution began to air, listening to these broadcasts became a means by which the Algerian people could reterritorialize their own psychic space.

In another essay entitled, 'Algeria Unveiled', Fanon discusses the historic dynamism that characterizes the role of the women's veils in the liberation narrative of Algeria. In the initial stages of the French colonization efforts, Algerian women would don the veil in order to assert tradition. As their colonial reality ensued, Fanon reports that women realized that unveiling themselves would allow them more agency to freely roam the streets of the city, further enabling them to deliver messages and small arms. The final stage of this historic dynamism is characterized by the Algerian women retaking up the veil, granting them a new capacity to hide ammunition and guns while roaming the streets. Oliver powerfully states that, "The veil is a mobile site of discipline and resistance; it's significance changes with shifting power relations."<sup>73</sup>

The Algerian veil and the French radio are both excellent examples of the ways that both symbols of power (the French radio), and symbols of marginalization (the Algerian veil) function in dynamic and fluid ways. The tools of oppression and the tools of the oppressed are not powerful because they are characteristically rigid and unchangeable, but rather, they are powerful because of their malleability and commitment to serve the one who yields them most creatively.

In telling the story of the Mirabal sisters in the novel entitled, *In the Time of Butterflies*, Julia Alvarez portrays the Mirabal sisters as four female subjects who undermine patriarchal values and institutions within the trappings of femininity. Their femininity is used to fuel revolution in such a way that is both personal and political, in

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 76.

the face of the Trujillo regime.<sup>74</sup> Alvarez utilizes long hair, flowing ribbons, diaries, and pageants as a location of power and revolution against the patriarchal dictatorship, as well as the patriarchal conventions found within their more mundane relations to fathers, brothers, and husbands. Alvarez presents the genius of the Mirabal sisters as an everyday genius, as well as a female genius - “the genius of penmanship, hair ribbons, feeding schedules, and girls’ diaries.”<sup>75</sup> Contrary to Freudian conceptions of ‘genius’ - namely that which is solely reserved for men, Alvarez resists the temptation to deify and/or mystify the Alvarez sisters by presenting their story as profoundly ordinary. By expanding our imaginations to everyday genius, Alvarez presents a new possibility for agency and empowerment that does not restrict itself to gendered categories.

#### ‘Everyday Genius’

As I have demonstrated in the three examples given above, symbols are not inherently powerful, but rather, symbols are *made* powerful by those who creatively administer meaning to them. The French radio symbolizes the technological superiority of the French rendering the Algerian as subordinate, the Algerian veil symbolizes the cultural deficiencies of Algerian culture supporting the cultural superiority of the French, and the feeding schedules of the Mirabal sisters symbolize the ongoing subjugation of women in a patriarchal society perpetuating the ‘fixed’ roles of women in the household.

However, what we see through the respective works of Fanon, Oliver, and Alvarez is the creative potentialities that lie within those that find themselves trapped within oppressive situations. In his book, *From a Liminal Place*, Lee also seemingly

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 170.

alludes to a sort of creative potentiality that exists within marginalized spaces, but does not thoroughly parse out what creative and liberative praxis looks like in such settings. This is why I find the examples of the French radio, the Algerian veil, and the feeding schedules of the Mirabal sisters to be of particular importance here. They reveal that the very material means that perpetuate marginalization and oppression can be refashioned and re-appropriated in such a way that they become the very sites of liberative praxis itself.

The 'Korean American' markers of identity that render Dumbfoundead as 'perpetual foreigner' are the very markers he uses to actively disrupt Western hegemony. His yellow skin, his rhythmic deployment of *hangul*, and his immigration story - the symbols that have routinely been used to degrade his body and sense of personhood in a Western social economy - become the very means by which he liberates himself from the discourse of white supremacy, confounding the very logic that renders him as 'other'.

Despite its many criticisms for being overly 'lofty' and 'impractical', postcolonial theory presents itself as an *embodied phenomenon* that can be observed in the lives of those individuals who are situated at a grassroots level. Julia Alvarez seeks to surgically remove Freudian notions of genius from the global psyche by highlighting a notion of 'feminine genius' that can be readily observed in the Mirabal sisters through a set of particularly ordinary and mundane means. In doing so, she demystifies the claim that 'genius' is only for a select few.

I wish to expound upon Alvarez's conception of an 'everyday genius' that is thoroughly exhibited by individuals and communities that are subject to situations of marginalization and oppression. Dumbfoundead, the Mirabal sisters, the Algerian women



during the French occupation, and the native Algerians who fought for national liberation are only a few examples of individuals and communities that alter discourse around power by creatively subverting the perceptions of 'fixed' and 'static' identities through the utilization of symbolic resources. The 'everyday genius' that is exhibited in their lives and the lives of their respective community's gestures towards a reality of postcolonial embodiment that is comprehensively at work in our contemporary moment.

Marginalized and disenfranchised communities embody a sort of creative movement that disallows the colonial gaze to fix itself upon them. The Native Algerian can be found smashing radios in one moment, but can be found frantically gathering other listeners in order to more widely disseminate a liberative broadcast just moments later. The genius that is this form of creative movement emphasizes a reality of liberative praxis through postcolonial embodiment. Bodies can then be understood as creative spaces that birth creative and revelatory possibilities.

### Bodies as 'Locations'

The creative movement I have described thus far is found in Lee's theology of liminality as he succumbs to the counterpoint melodies of *communitas* and structure, and can also be seen in Joh's analogy of the cross to the film 'Joint Security Zone', where North and South Korean soldiers traverse the boundaries of their country's respective borders for the sake of kinship. From this, I contend that notions of 'home' and 'authenticity' are found neither here nor there, as both Park and Kim defend in their respective theological propositions, but rather, in *this body* - this body that is both *located*

within the interstices of multiple cultures, and this body that is the very *location* that houses numerous cultural interpenetrations.

In his book entitled *Redeeming Mulatto*, Brian Bantum states, “Yet, Jesus occupies or *becomes* this space so as to create a communion of neither/nor where those who are refused are refused because they have become new creatures, members of a new family.”<sup>76</sup> Here, Bantum is speaking to a sort of ontological rebirth that is made possible through Jesus’ mulatto body. Bantum saliently speaks of Jesus’ body as a *space* that *becomes*, ultimately proposing that Jesus’ body is the site for an inter-existence. Gloria Anzaldúa also seemingly alludes to this notion of the body as *location* when she states rather playfully, “I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry “home” on my back.”<sup>77</sup> Anzaldúa exhibits a deeply Christological understanding of her body through an acknowledgement of her body as a location - a necessary site for inter-existence. Both Bantum and Anzaldúa expound upon this notion of the body as *location*, through their particular language of ‘space’ and ‘home’, as opposed to an overemphasis on the locatedness of the body, which I will go on to indicate as a key theme in Lee’s theology of liminality.

Unlike Bantum, Lee speaks of Christ’s ‘in-betweenness’ and ‘hybridity’ predominantly in terms of his alignment with the Galilean people. Lee describes the ways that the Galileans were a historically marginalized and culturally displaced people - they were ruled by foreign conquerors, retained no official traditions, and lacked sociopolitical structure.<sup>78</sup> For Lee, Jesus’ body occupies a space that is neither/nor, and this is the foundation of his understanding of ‘Asian American’ hybridity. Lee’s notions of ‘Asian

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<sup>76</sup> Bantum, *Redeeming Mulatto*, 129.

<sup>77</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 43.

<sup>78</sup> Lee, *From a Liminal Place*, 45.

American' hybridity, interstitiality, and liminality do not claim an ontological rebirth, but rather attempt to account for the 'in-between' space that 'Asian American' bodies occupy. Lee can be found describing the liminal situation of the Galileans by highlighting the *distance* between Galilee and the Jerusalem temple, making clear that liminality is very much connected to notions of spatial locatedness for Lee.<sup>79</sup>

Conversely, Bantum draws connections between mulatto/a identity and the definition of Chalcedon, which emphasizes Christ's holistic divinity and humanity. For Bantum, Christ's hybridity signals an ontological rebirth. Unlike Lee's notion of 'Asian American' bodies in light of Christ's body, mulatto/a bodies are characteristically interstitial as they seek to claim a real space within society.<sup>80</sup> Notice here that Bantum describes the mulatto/a body as *the* site for interstitiality, as opposed to Lee's notion of the 'Asian American' body occupying an interstitial space.

Bantum gestures towards a more holistic theology of hybridity and 'otherness' that exhorts 'Korean American' communities to interrogate the possibility of Christ's body as a site of ontological rebirth, as opposed to a tool for social navigation. The work of Brian Bantum presses the 'Korean American' theological imagination to consider Korean American bodies as *locations* to be further explored and navigated.

In her book, *Heart of the Cross*, Joh powerfully portrays the distinction that I am discussing here through an in depth analysis of the crucifixion moment. For Joh, the cross is not a symbol that is located between and betwixt realities of submission and liberative revolution, but rather, the cross is the site out of which submission and liberative revolution have the possibility of co-existing with one another. Put differently, the cross

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>80</sup> Bantum, *Redeeming Mulatto*, 40.

does not occupy an interstitial space, but rather, it is a revelatory means of grace that signals to a reality of liminal and interstitial possibility. In the same way, 'Korean American' bodies are not 'liminal' or 'hybrid' because of their occupation in an in-between space, but rather, 'Korean American' bodies are revelatory bodies in the ways that they signal a possibility of liminal and interstitial existence that actively confounds notions of cultural purity and authenticity. I wish to push Joh's claims even further in contending that every moment of Christ's life, not only the crucifixion moment, is revelatory in the ways that Christ exhaustively embodies a liminal and interstitial existence that is inherent to God's own self. This resists Lee's notion that liminality is a result of a social and geopolitical displacement, ultimately presupposing an existence of social and geopolitical purities. Instead, this highlights the ways that interstitiality and liminality are, in fact, a key aspect of Christian discipleship that is presupposed by a God that embodies liminal and interstitial existence.

## Conclusion

This piece of work was initially birthed out of nothing more than a feeling of dissatisfaction with my seminary education - a feeling that led me to a book, a book that led me to a set of questions, a set of questions that led me to a mentor, and a mentor that led me to a theological world of critical inquiry. As a 'Korean American' within a predominantly white seminary, seeking out the voices of those who looked like me presented itself to be the most viable means for survival in an institution that sought to suffocate my theological imagination through an excessive load of coursework narrated by whiteness. My desire to seek out 'Korean American' and other 'Asian American' voices was well-intentioned, but resulted in a sense of disappointment and discouragement, for the ways that these voices prescribed a sense of personhood that I could not identify with.

As I have gestured towards the construction of a mode of discipleship that is expansive enough to speak to the 'Korean American' diaspora, I have clung closely to postcolonial scholars, as well as cultural theorists. These individuals and their respective disciplines provide a body of work that is prophetic in the ways that they are able to theorize identity, personhood, 'wholeness', and through my contextual interpretation, 'faithfulness', in a world undergoing rapid change. As I have articulated through this chapter, which functions as a summation of my thoughts and theological propositions, a 'Postcolonial Korean American' discipleship must be undergirded by the themes of 'movement', 'genius', and 'uncertainty'.

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The work of 'Korean American' rapper, Dumbfoundead, is the common thread that is woven throughout the entirety of this theological work, and this has been done because Dumbfoundead exhibits a model of 'faithfulness' in the ways that he presses into these three key themes. Dumbfoundead embodies 'movement' in the ways that he crosses national and cultural lines through his songwriting, problematizing the boundaries and barriers used to assert notions of national identity. The 'movement' that Dumbfoundead embodies calls for a perpetual re-evaluation of what it means to be both 'Korean' and 'American', revealing the porous nature of both terms. Dumbfoundead embodies 'everyday genius' in the ways that he creatively deploys and subsequently challenges the cultural and racial tropes used to cast his body off as 'other', not to essentialize 'Korean American' identity, but to disrupt Western hegemony, interrogating the efficacy of claims made about 'whiteness' and its connections to America as 'homeland' - a land that Dumbfoundead now claims as his own. Lastly, Dumbfoundead embodies 'uncertainty' in the ways that he consistently highlights the ambivalent nature of claims made towards cultural purity. In a postmodern moment that often requires certainty as a presupposition for one's ability to assert their own sense of self, Dumbfoundead is the 'uncertain' body that walks among us, revealing that presence and embodiment is not solely contingent upon one's ability to assert those parts of themselves that they hold on to as certain.

Though I am not a rapper or a cultural icon, the work of Dumbfoundead helps me to understand that I need not be either of those things in order to embody a subversive and faithful mode of discipleship - a discipleship that has a capacity to reorient the daily hegemonies that dictate Western life. Though I may not have 'Korea Town' inscribed upon the entirety of my chest, Dumbfoundead reminds me that my body is also a location

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- a location that perplexes colonial and imperial logic, disrupting notions of identity and personhood through presence.

As modes of discipleship for 'Korean American' individuals and congregations are theorized in the future, theologians and academics must pay close attention to the work being done by the artists of our respective communities. Though the works of Andrew Sung Park and Grace Ji-Sun Kim are more dated in their approaches to understanding culture and identity, they both provide us with the necessary language and tools to further formulate and construct theologies that remain particular to the 'Korean American' experience. Conversely, Wonhee Anne Joh and Sang Hyun Lee theorize embodiment in a way that is helpful for me to understand the expansive possibilities of discipleship with the 'Korean American' diaspora in mind.

The work of Dumbfoundead presents itself as a significant point of conclusion, because it is in his work, where every theory and thinker coalesces - his embodiment of cultural particularity, his rejection of cultural essentialisms, his songwriting which inscribes ambivalence on notions of 'Korea' and 'America', as well as the ways that he destabilizes traditional understandings of identity, all point towards the construction of a 'Postcolonial Korean American' discipleship that outlines new ways of living faithfully in this world.

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