LIBERATION THEOLOGY UNBOUND

An Asian American Theology of Liberation

[DRAFT]

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Acknowledgments

In a critical reading of acknowledgments in academic historical works, Emily Callaci writes that acknowledgments, at their best, "dismantle the myth of the lone, self-contained genius-at-work, and instead expose the messy interplay of institutional support, finances, intellectual genealogies, and interpersonal chaos that shape how an idea is brought into the world."[1] They reveal truths we intend to share, as well as many that we do not. One can often read between the lines to find privileges of citizenship, financial sponsors, mobility, or heteropatriarchy, such as in men thanking their wives for typing, for childcare, for their longsuffering, for footing the bill of social reproduction costs. In contrast to these are those that instead recognize their abundant care networks as having performed work, signaling, "I had help. If you are going to do this, you will need help." (In Callaci's field of history, those who admit this are reportedly disproportionately women of color.)

I had help. Lots of it. While most of this book is written in a historical and theoretical style, its underpinnings and motivations arise from experiences that I have come to think of as informal ethnographic fieldwork or say what anthropologist Clifford Geertz called "deep hanging out."[2] From regularly attending Ming's family's Taiwanese church in Flushing to Grace's family's Korean churches in Valley Stream and Long Island City to the Ascension community in Forest Hills, I came to be a part of the Asian American Christian experience primarily from immigrant communities in New York City in the time of Occupy and BLM, while getting glimpses into Filipino communities through Kay's family, Kirk and Chauncey; South Asian communities through Jess, Shemon, and Amna; and Hong Kong communities through the Lausan Collective. I'm grateful to the mostly online PAAC community that flourished from Liz Lin's lamentation on the loneliness of being a progressive Asian American Christian, through which I found support in Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Joe Cheah, and Grace Kao who helped me navigate the academic venture, Esther who rounded up the Vancouver folks for an early testing of ideas, and the Detroit Metro folks who gave us a place to land on the final leg. Through all of these, I have to a degree "gone native," which from the point of view of standpoint epistemology or situated knowledge, is quite a useful thing; yet my secure attachment to family and friends in Malaysia grounds my commitment to not successfully assimilate into the settler colonial fabric of the United States.

One can already read in these acknowledgments a high degree of mobility, but also with the interruption of the coronavirus lockdown: this book was written mainly through Massachusetts, Vancouver, and now Michigan. So the deepest, most obvious thanks go to Grace, for the ability to go along with all of it, for the social reproduction, for the decade of intellectual and spiritual growth that we experienced alongside each other. To paraphrase Walter Rodney's acknowledgments in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, not all the mistakes in here are my own. They are committed in imperfect community, struggle, and love. All the people who never gave a word of feedback on the manuscript, you know who you are, I have no doubt you would have made this book better. I also had no funding. But what I did have was institutional access through being a mathematician embedded in the academy, and personal networks through the generosity of friends and strangers. If you see yourself in any and all of this, then this book is a love letter—and call to arms—to you and the communities you belong to.

Introduction: Liberation theology: For such a time as this

When he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" The dead man came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." — John 11:43–44

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo. — Karl Marx[3]

The dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. — Frantz Fanon[4]

Here is a book that should have been written long ago. It should have been written by any of the theologians or activists or laypersons who articulated an "Amerasian" or "Asian American" theology of liberation in the early 1970s, whose writings have instead been relegated to archival documents in libraries and seminaries.[5] Methodist Bishop Roy Isao Sano, director of what was then the Asian Center for Theology and Strategies (ACTS) in Berkeley compiled two readers on the nascent subject, with contributions from dozens of Japanese, Filipinx, Chinese, and Korean American Christians reflecting on the growing consciousness around their personal identity and cultural heritage. They connected it with the new Black theology that was being developed alongside the Black Power movement and Third World Liberation Front, against the backdrop of White racist domination at home and military imperialism abroad.[6] Copies of the readers were distributed but never published, unlike *Roots: An Asian American Reader* (1971), the first publication of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press. The press was created to address the "lack of appropriate materials in readily accessible form," as the field of Asian American studies was newly established after the 1968 strikes for Ethnic Studies in San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University) and UC Berkeley. In his introduction to *The Theologies of Asian Americans and Pacific Peoples: A Reader* (1976), Sano expressed the hope that a third edition would be sufficiently inclusive of representative voices, so that a publisher would consider printing and distributing the volume to a wider audience. As history would have it, this was not to be.

One would be hard-pressed to learn about this brief history of Asian American theology of liberation. Only a few books surveying Asian American theology or liberation theology mention it, if at all, in a few short paragraphs or as a footnote. When I learned about this, I was fortunate enough to be visiting the University of British Columbia as a postdoctoral fellow in the mathematics department, where the Vancouver School of Theology up the road held a copy of the 1976 reader. To my knowledge, only two other libraries carried copies of this reader, one in Berkeley and one in New York. It looked, as New Testament scholar Seung Ai-Yang describes as "very much like one of today's 'readers' used for a course in colleges and graduate schools. Its handwritten page numbers, ring-binding, and different typefaces for each article reveals the urgency and necessity Sano felt for this work at that time as a pioneer in this field." Most of these works remain hidden in dusty archives, their existence known only to scholars and historians, and perhaps other seekers of liberative Asian American theological traditions. The tattered, yellow pages with handwritten page

numbers document the powerful activist theological energy of bygone era. Here was a once loud, communal force that cried out for the liberation of Asians in the United States, in the Civil Rights Era, for a theology of one's own, and for solidarity with oppressed people everywhere. This is our inheritance.

While Black, Latin American, and White feminist theologies of liberation are able to point to texts which mark the inauguration of new ways of doing theology beyond the White Western male norm, such as James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969) and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1971), Gustavo Gutiérrez's *Teología de la liberación* (1971), and Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father* (1973), the concurrent reader *AmerAsian Theology of Liberation* (1973) was not followed by a similar landmark publication to inspire later generations of Asian American theologians. No mention of Asian American theologies of liberation is made in Lilian Barger's recent account of the intellectual history of liberation theology.[7] What followed this genealogy instead, I argue, was an Asian American feminist theological tradition which has remained robust to this day. While liberation theology and theology of liberation are used interchangeably, as I shall often do, it is at times useful to refer to liberation theology as the historical form that theologizing about liberation has taken, whereas the latter might be better understood as a something that is always in process, always relevant. This present book is in part a retrieval of this lesser-known history Asian American contributions to liberation theology, and at the same time a re-articulation of an Asian American theology of liberation that is urgently needed today. As such, this book is about fifty years too late, and hopefully, just in time.

Of course, any theology of liberation today must first address its own relevance in the twenty-first century. To do so, it is necessary to honestly assess the failures and the successes of earlier theologians and activists without reservation if we are to build forward. For one, theologies of liberation are now by and large the domain of academic study, rather than bottom-up, grassroots theologies of the masses they were intended to be. They have, in the sense of Marcella Althaus-Reid, become decent. According to Althaus-Reid, the Latin American Christian discourse of liberation assumed that nothing had been outside of Christianity and needed to start with "totality even if against totality," to declare the poor asexual, and not challenge women's subordination or the sexual insubordination of the favelas or shanty towns.[8] Liberation theology as such was meant to become a recognized theology, a commercial enterprise because it made theology fashionable to those on the margins, and "what is fashionable, sells." European theologians, suddenly interested in the Latin American poor, projected a colonial image of liberation theology through church tourism and theological voyeurism. The material suffering of the people, Althaus-Reid asserted, was expropriated from the oppressed classes and became the intellectual property of the owners of the intellectual system of production: the theologians.[9] Theological production obeys the laws of the market; theology is a surplus value of human suffering. "It alienates by taking possession, extorting from others what belongs to them, dismantling any relation that the workers may have with the sacred. The process gives value to human suffering as merchandise, objectified as an abstract commodity and sold for a price: the continuation of oppressive political systems in alliance with ecclesiastical ones." The suffering poor provide "creativity and questioning of theological relevance, but they do not own the means to produce their discourse, neither the end product which is a fetish (in Marx's terminology) of their labour power." Thus, theological reflection, even in liberation theology, becomes a commodity. On the other hand, liberation theology in Latin America was "bad for business" because it appealed to the Base Ecclesial Communities who were poor and so had little to contribute to the church economically, while the apologetic attempts to present liberation theology as a 'proper theology' damaged the creative movement of what started as a break with the Grand Narrative of European theologies. More recently, in assessing the state of liberation theology in the year 2000, Althuas-Reid asked:

> Whatever happened then to Liberation Theology and its position in the capitalistic theological market? A cultural shift took place. In recent years, in order to produce some difference in its analysis, especially since postcolonialism was underlying the liberationists' contradictions on issues of identity and agency, liberationists discovered the native people from the Original Nations who sometimes were not Christians. Once again the adaptation method was used. Instead of Christ and the poor, the new discourse was on Christ and the Mayan. Christianity suddenly became more plural. It was Christianity and *Mestizaje*; Christianity and *Santería* worship, or Umbanda; Christianity and Andean theology. The market was receptive to Christianity and Culture, which was more acceptable than class analysis, especially since Savage Capitalism had ruled out political alternatives, leaving only Cuba as a socialist state. European theology took up the theme of 'the future of Liberation Theology after socialism' without realising that Latin America still has, and very proudly, Cuba. Cultural Liberation Theology was relaunched, leaving the political and economical analysis aside. It was a return to idealism in the guise of the new marketable fashion product of Gospel and Culture, which tends to ignore the fact that culture is an economic and sexual variable too.[10]

Ironically, despite its trenchant critique, even Althaus-Reid's groundbreaking work on queering, or "indecenting," liberation theology remains largely confined to the domain of academic scholarship, read in classrooms and primarily legible to trained academics, and even then, incomprehensible to her peers at times. Theologies of liberation, whether willingly or unwillingly, have become irrelevant as a driving force of liberation, or even as a comrade of liberation movements, and instead become what Althaus-Reid called "theological science fiction," morally constructing its subjects as an undifferentiated and innocent mass. At least in the US, they have been effectively decoupled from the masses in all but a handful of churches. Therefore, any attempt to deploy them today must first answer the question: Why now?

Theologies of liberation: Why now?

We have been in crisis. More accurately, we are in a state of permanent emergency. The first part of this book was written before the coronavirus pandemic and the global rebellion that was ignited by the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, following the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and others. The list that started with Trayvon Martin keeps growing. Besides these, global White nationalism had been on the rise with mass shootings and White supremacist rallies throughout Europe and the settler colonies of the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. Geo-political instability and climate change are causing mass migrations — refugees from Syria and Yemen fleeing war risk death to arrive on European shores; over a million Rohingya from Myanmar fleeing ethnic cleansing form the world's largest refugee camp in Bangladesh; asylum seekers from Guatemala and the Honduras are fleeing violence and economic hardship, only to be faced with violence, family separation, and detention at the U.S.-Mexico border.[11] Millions of Muslim Uighurs are being detained and "re-educated" in China's Xinjiang province, as Han Chinese take over Tibetan homes and erase their culture. Multiple climate reports indicate that the planet will soon become largely uninhabitable in a matter of decades. Climate crisis can no longer be prevented, only mitigated, and we must instead ask after climate adaptation in the wake of the oncoming societal collapse, which itself will be unevenly distributed, disproportionately affecting poor people, communities of color, and the Third World. The more dire the climate emergency becomes, the more issues such as these will be exacerbated, each interconnected through a web of negative feedback loops and "unknown unknowns." The climate

catastrophe will press into the pre-existing fissures in the social fabric, just as the pandemic has provided us a glimpse of: from protective equipment hoarding to vaccine nationalism to unvarnished xenophobia. Frighteningly, the end of the world as we know it is no longer hyperbole but hard science.

While in some sense there is nothing new under the sun, it is also true that this is far from normal, and things are not okay. There is no ecological precedent for the future that our planet is hurtling towards, much in the way that the 2008 financial crisis could not have been predicted by mathematical models. There was simply no historical precedent. As it were, it has become fashionable for social scientists to theorize about what geologists are calling the Anthropecene, the age in which destructive human activity shall be the defining event of this geological period, where plastic is becoming a part of the rock record as *plastiglomerate*, a novel rock formation that is part plastic, part mineral.[12] Microplastics, on the other hand, have been found in the remotest regions from the Alps to the Artic, and in unborn babies.[13] The omnipresence of plastic, whose name refers to its infinite malleability, thus permeates our very being and the air we breathe: the ongoing ecological collapse and societal collapse are inseparable. And yet, as much as global crises are beginning to unfold at an alarming rate, everyday life remains business as usual for many. Until it isn't.

Numerous social movements have swept across the globe in the past decade, such as the Occupy movement, which itself finds roots in the Arab Spring, and which inspired Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the anti-extradition protests in 2019; the Movement for Black Lives, or Black Lives Matter movement against police brutality in the USA that began in 2013 and reignited in 2020; the #MeToo and subsequent #ChurchToo movements against sexual harassment and rape culture, and the annual Women's Marches worldwide since 2017; Indigenous movements in North America such as the Idle No More, the Standing Rock #NoDAPL protests, and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) movement; the Yellow Vests in Paris marching against austerity and the elite; the Extinction Rebellion concentrated in the United Kingdom; school climate strikes calling for climate action; worker strikes against tech giants Amazon, Uber, and Lyft on the one hand, and blockades on highways and ports resisting the flow of weapons, oil, and capital at large. Mass movements are now taking place with increasing frequency such as in Puerto Rico, Haiti, Sudan, Hong Kong, and Hawai'i, at such a pace that it is difficult keep up. In short, the irruption of the poor, the refugee, the queer, and the abused is here.

The social upheavals that continue to reverberate on a global scale demand an adequate and unequivocal theological response. This book focuses on struggles that link Asia and the West, such as the Hong Kong protests, the annexation of Jammu, Kashmir, and Palestine, the ICE deportation of Southeast Asian American refugees, and the international exploitation of Asian migrant labor, tracking how these variegated struggles flow and interweave through the diaspora and form networks of solidarity. The mass protests and other direct actions against authoritarian regimes, against inaction towards climate change, and against the systematic dehumanization of others are a clarion call to Christian action. Quite literally, the people are crying out. There is no ethical middle ground, no time to be lukewarm as global suffering reaches a crescendo. The coming years will see unprecedented turmoil, which the last decade has already foreshadowed. We cannot stand idly by.

White theology, or what Althaus-Reid calls Vanilla theology, and Asian American theology, inasmuch as it tries to approximate Whiteness, are not up to the task. By theology here I do not mean just the academic work of professional theologians, though theory will play a significant role in the analysis presented, but rather the "God-talk" that is done in day-to-day churches and over kitchen tables by poor lay people of color. Vanilla theology, which belongs to "the realm of decisions made for us by others," is no foundation on which the activism and action that are urgently needed can stand.[14] To be sure, it never did in North America: the blood of Native

Americans and Black Americans run deep in church history. Asian American theology, as it stands, lies more in the "Gospel and Culture" section and is ill equipped to critique and interpret neither the structural and epistemic violence that are being dealt, nor the institutional and cultural frameworks that have cultivated the present crisis. Nor is it capable of grounding and empowering the activism, solidarity, and engagement with such social movements that are waging attempts against the forces which collectively threaten human existence itself. What is commonly understood as Asian American theology in the present day largely lives in the academy, rather than on the streets and in Asian American churches. Its interlocutors often have middle-class origins and concerns, and skew East Asian. In stark contrast to this is the origin of Asian American theology, which can be traced back to Asian American liberation theology's search for a theology indigenous to Asian America, to the Black Power movement and Black theologies of liberation that inspired Asian American liberation theologies, and to Asian and Asian feminist theologies emerging out of the self-determination and nationalism of decolonial movements. What has been lost for the sake of respectability? What was given up in exchange for the wages of Whiteness, for the comfort of tenure and the riches of nonprofit grants? How are we serving the people?

We desperately need a theological framework that has the firepower to engage the events of today, to enter into the fray. The landscape of Asian America has changed dramatically from the arrival of the first Filipinos with the Spanish ships in the 1500s to the various immigration laws and refugee acts in the mid 1900s, let alone the later descendants of the post-1965 generation whose racial anxieties and dislocation have only begun to be documented and theorized.[15] The younger generation on the streets fighting for racial and economic justice, burning police cars and redistributing looted goods and providing mutual aid must guide our theological reflection, not the other way around. At the same time, in order to close the loop on the hermeneutical circle, these reflections must be communicated back to the people in plain language. In this book, I draw on *Asian American* as a social location and coalitional identity that coheres a critical discourse and deconstructive analysis, and on *liberation theology* as the interpretive structure that grounds our struggle and constructive praxis.[16] The vast heterogeneity of Asian Americanness, with the complexities of migration, belonging, and refuge that attend it provides an analytic, a vision of coalitional politics for a US future that is "majority-minority" and a global future upended by climate change. In this sense, the Asian American here is used to stand in for transnational Asians in diaspora, and for the struggle of the Global South within, against, and because of the Global North. It is no accident that the imperial and colonial violence and accumulation that have precipitated the current global disorders are also constitutive of Asian American identity. As the saying goes, we are here because you were there.[17]

On the other hand, liberation theology is the interpretive key by which we apprehend God's actions as revealed in history, and act faithfully according to this revelation. Theologies of liberation burst onto the scene in the 1960s, remaining forceful and influential until the 1980s, expanding and deepening their analyses of oppression and reflection on praxis. I use *oppression* here to mean the adverse effects of unequal power relations produced by those people or groups of people with power towards those in disadvantaged positions. In the following decades, theologies of liberation began to lose their critical edge even as they gained respect and acceptance into the theological academy and the middle-class, becoming decent theologies that had to be "indecented." Today, theologians debate the usefulness of liberation theology. But theologies of liberation have always been aware of the chasm between vision and reality, the already and not yet. The same is true of any kind of radical prefigurative politics. As Gayraud Wilmore's *A Revolution unfulfilled but not Invalidated* and Eleazar Fernandez and Fernando Segovia's volume on *A Dream Unfinished* insist, the fundamental claims of theologies of liberation have not been falsified.[18] To put a spin on Marx and Engels, the spectre of liberation is haunting us. If anything, the events of the last decade only

underscore their continuing relevance. Rather than doing away with liberation theology, as some have suggested, what is needed is a deeper commitment to the principles of liberation, and as with all activist work, to view the work as a lifelong struggle which must be passed on from generation to generation. The task at hand, I shall argue, is to realize an Asian radical tradition, learning from the past and building for the future. The poor you have with you always, Jesus pointed out. Thus, for theology to center the oppression of the poor is not simply a passing fad but rather a cornerstone of Christian theology, the grammar of God-talk. Asian American theology, in particular, must become radical, returning to its prophetic role in Asian American liberation. To do so, we must first ask what the proper sources of an Asian American theology of liberation are.

Asian American theology of liberation: sources and summary

Asian American theology finds its roots in Asian American liberation theology.[19] This historical consciousness is the first source of a radical Asian American theology. Asian theologians such as Shoki Coe, Aloysius Pieris, and Peter Phan emphasized the need to inculturate theology in Asia by excising it of the White theology that had infected and spread it, making its twisted form intelligible to poor Asians. Early Asian American theologians, too, called for producing a theology indigenous to Asian Americans. An Asian American theology of liberation cannot survive by playing by the rules of respectability and identity politics, whose rules are dictated by Whites who know nothing of the experience of Asian Americans. Neither is it primarily articulated by Asian Americans in ivory towers, who know little of the suffering of working-class migrant Asians at risk of deportation, economic precarity, and sexual exploitation. The role of Asian American theologians is to interpret the signs of times, to recognize the work of God in the liberation of poor Asians in diaspora. As the readers compiled by Roy Sano reveal, the early Asian American theology was not articulated by erudite scholars or professors chasing tenure or the next book deal, but instead by dozens of lay people and clergy personally invested in the struggles of their communities. These people saw the social movements of their time fighting for the liberation of the Third World from their colonizers and of what they saw as the internal colonies of the USA made up of disenfranchised people of color. They sought to build a theology that did not turn away from the call of these movements, from the suffering of the oppressed.

The lived experiences, migration histories, and cultural memories of the Asian American community are the primary sources for an Asian American theology built from the bottom up. It is precisely because of the distinctiveness of the Asian American experience that White theology has nothing of practical use to say to Asian Americans, and even Black and Latinx theologies can only be in dialogue with the Asian American community. They cannot determine the content Asian American theology, even if they may have a great deal to teach us. At the same time, not all Asian American experiences are equally valued. While a select group of Asians rises in prominence, such as 2020 Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang, billionaire tech executives like Sundar Pichai and Satya Nadella, actors like Constance Wu, Steven Yeun, Mindy Kaling, and so on, these narratives often fit into a model minority myth of the so-called Asian American dream and do little to interrogate or challenge the US settler colonial capitalist empire. They are easily incorporated into Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) projects which effectively promote class stratification *within* racial groupings, as opposed to the more primitive model of equating class and racial difference, with exception. Instead of this, it is the subaltern experience of Hmongs, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Bangladeshis, Nepalese, Filipinx, and similarly overlooked Asians in the US—undocumented, under-educated, and socioeconomically disadvantaged—that serves as the touchstone for a radical and grounded Asian American theology. The Asian American church cannot stay silent as the people cry

out louder and louder against sexual abuse, police brutality, economic oppression, and environmental racism. It cannot stand idle when its people are fighting and dying in the streets for freedom. Asian American theology must point to the God who is for the poor and against the rich, who speaks from the mouths of Asian children participating in strikes for climate action and protests for self-determination such as in Hong Kong, Tibet, Palestine, Jammu, and Kashmir. There is no neutral ground for Asian American theology to stand upon: it can only be against oppression and repression of any kind in any place, aligning itself with the masses, the 99%, the minjung.[20]

Another source of Asian American theology is of course Asian theology, or theologies, which have importantly given corrective insights that look beyond the borders and concerns of the US mainland. It is highly significant that many theologies generated from the Asian continent share liberation as a central theme, though they may not use such language. Whereas 'liberation' as a concept is itself European in origin, the struggle for freedom from oppression and domination is universal. Theologies of liberation are characteristically attentive to their respective social contexts, making no claim to universality as White theology does, but at the same time recognizing that each struggle is inextricably linked to one another through the interlocking forms of oppression produced by global capitalism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, and heteropatriarchy. As theological traditions in Asia continue to develop in their own distinct manner, it will be important to dialogue with these creative sources that provide a counter-hegemony to White theological traditions and a particular grounding for Asian American reflections as a kind of theological post-memory. Palestinian liberation theology, Dalit theology, and Minjung theology, for example, provide important sources of theological reflection for an Asian American theology of liberation. In the recent protests in Hong Kong beginning with Occupy Central with Love and Peace, which led to the 2014 Umbrella Movement pro-democracy protests, and later in 2019 the anti-extradition protests, churches have played an important role, such as condemning the police for their use of excessive force against largely non-violent protestors and providing moral validation through the presence of clergy in protests. For example, the hymn "Sing Hallelujah to the Lord" in Cantonese became one of the protest songs in response to the brutality of riot police.[21] The theological reflections and statements produced by Hong Kong churches show that struggles beyond the US borders can only be ignored at the cost of a narrow, myopic vision of politics. To be radically Asian American then, is an outright decolonial refusal of Asian American activism as merely a politics of inclusion and representation circumscribed by the nation-state, and instead to be fiercely internationalist in outlook and identity.

Besides working against frameworks of nationalism and citizenship, Asian American theology also rejects the binaries of race, class, nationality, religion, and gender that structure US cultural politics. Liberation theologies draw upon social analyses in order to sharpen their theological critique of power, without allowing themselves to be subsumed into totalizing theories. It was the fear of this totalization that led the Vatican to condemn the early Latin American liberation theology's use of Marxism. The same fear also animates conservative Christian anxiety surrounding post-modernism, leading to reductio ad absurdum arguments, followed by more recent strawman arguments against critical race theory. Asian American theology cannot afford to ignore the insights gained from Asian American studies, postcolonial studies, Marxism, settler colonial studies, and Afropessimism; it is also strengthened by dialogues with Black, Latine, feminist, queer, and Indigenous theologies.[22] An insistence on praxis demands that Asian American theologies be grounded in Asian American churches and movements, whereas building an intentional and coalitional politics requires paying attention to other theologies, building power and solidarity across these lines. While the particularity of liberation theologies is easily mistaken for a kind of narrow-minded theological identity politics or tribalism, in reality the shared struggle for collective liberation must be waged through the richness of particular contexts and solidarities between struggles, without ignoring the real differences and tensions between groups.

Unbeknownst to many, Asian American theologies of liberation had existed in the past, inspired by Black theology and Third World revolutionary movements. They sought to establish a theology relevant to the Asian American experience of White racist domination and US empire, to interpret God's work of liberation in their own communities. Today, the social upheavals witnessed worldwide in the last decade and the deepening crisis calls for a renewed Asian American theology of liberation, for such a time as this. A theology that learns from past theologies of liberation, especially those arising out of struggles in Asian contexts such as Palestine, India, and Korea, and leverages the complicated nature of Asian American identity to reveal the many forms of violence that are produced by ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and nation. A radical approach to Asian American theology renews the commitment to the liberation of working-class, migrant, and colonized Asians, whilst expanding the view to include queer and refugee Asians, especially those from outside of Northeast Asia and India. This book is concerned about the lived experiences of Asians in relation to structures of power and domination. As theology is a reflection on praxis, or what Latin American liberation theologians called *la caminata*, the see-judge-act hermeneutic circle of suspicion exemplified by the Indigenous Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico by questioning while walking, *preguntando caminamos*, we will do theology by reading social theory in subway trains and marching in protests on the streets. Any Asian American theology of liberation will be necessarily grounded in the histories of Asian struggles; the Asian and Asian American liberation theologies of the 1970s will also serve as the ground zero of our endeavor, though of course, Asians have been in the Americas centuries earlier. In fact, I shall argue that liberation theology is better said to be reflection *through* praxis, to emphasize that it is in love and struggle that we realize what is liberation theology. There is no such thing as "liberation theology for armchair theologians," as in the book of the same time, Miguel de la Torre insists that the very ethos of being a liberation theologian is the *doing* of liberation theology.[23] And I would add that all those who *do* liberation theology are liberation theologians.

Chapter 1 begins with the canonical question of who is "Asian American" and who are the subjects of Asian American theology, considering views both from the state and from below. The former is intimately related to representational politics, how Asians are discussed and portrayed in the public sphere. Indeed, Lisa Lowe's foundational work has shown how immigration law, foreign policy, and international relations structure the Asian American imaginary as citizens and subjects of the nation-state.[24] The process of Asian racial formation is thus not only punctuated but dialectically shaped by the legal and diplomatic spheres. The second, complementary viewpoint invokes an insurgent politics, Asian Americans farmers, garment workers, and others who have in the past organized around labor, against racial discrimination and exploitation in the workplace; whereas in the present moment attention is shifted towards ICE deportations of Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese refugees and victims of sex and labor trafficking from East Asia, which often go sight unseen as sex work is criminalized and Asian labor is viewed as an expendable form of alien capital, in the sense of Iyko Day.[25] Despite various attempts at historiographies of Asian America, there remains a persistent questioning of and searching for the content of Asian American identity, the contours of the conversation shifting in accordance with migration patterns and immigration policies, along with generational tectonics—the inheritance of loss and assimilation into new cultural spheres, racial anxieties that develop into what psychoanalysis now identifies in Asian Americans as a unique trait of racial melancholia and racial dissociation. A hauntology of Asian America, so to speak, in the sense of Derrida, in which the ghosts of the past live in the present.[26] This interrogation, both intuitive and academic, remains as long as there are Asians who struggle to find their place in an ostensibly Black and white society—though the prevailing conversation has now broadened to include the ambiguous category of "Brown" people, which operationally seems to indicate dark-skinned, non-Black, non-White people, and in particular leaving out Asians writ large,

or more perhaps mainly East Asians (Yellow).[27] Indeed, anxieties around the positionality of Asians in popular discourse around such epidermal identifiers precisely manifest the generalized sense of psychic and geographic dislocation felt by many Asians in the US.

The canonical construction of Asian American identity, particularly in popular and activist discourse has several touchstones, which are arguably worn-out. Its genesis is invariably located in the fight for ethnic studies in San Francisco and Berkeley in the late sixties, against the historical backdrop of the Japanese incarceration during the Second World War and before that, the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. On the other side of the 1965 Immigration Act, it is the murder of Vincent Chin and the later LA riots that underpin most attempts to outline a hagiography of Asian American existence through a narrative of legal and extra-legal exclusion. Indeed, in the wake of the coronavirus, anti-Asian violence returned, invoking repressed cultural memories of the Yellow Peril and, to a lesser extent, the anti-Muslim violence in the wake of September 11, 2001 attacks. These events are unified by a thread of victimization and, one might argue, resilience; in some versions of this telling, one might read between the lines a moralistic parable of overcoming adversity, of attaining success in spite of discrimination; the immigrant American dream par excellence. While these violent ruptures indeed define Asian America in important ways, not least in its own self-conception and narration, they also elide alternative genealogies of Asian resistance and radicalism in the forms of labor organizing, anti-imperial and anti-colonial struggle, anti-racist coalitions, and the assertion of worth through the mere fact of survival. Such subaltern histories offer possibilities of locating Asian American identity within the larger matrix of the US empire, settler colonial violence, racial capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. Even then there remains the risk of only looking at the great men and women of history, the Yuri Kochiyamas and Larry Itliongs whose lives offer inspiration to activists, but still confine the imagination to individualized conceptions of resistance and liberation. With this in mind, the work of Chapter 2 turns from historical and temporal events to the fraughtness of Asian American identity, drawing from Kandice Chuh's notion of subjectlessness of Asian American identity. At a certain point this will seem to be an overly academic endeavour and having nothing to do with the liberation of human beings, but from a theological standpoint the question of who and what we are is a central one, one that will be taken up again in Chapter Four through the intersection of postcolonialism, Afropessimism, and Dalit theology. Furthermore, the combination of psychoanalytic and critical race theoretic analyses of David Eng and Shinhee Han propose racial melancholia and racial dissociation as the psychoaffective character of Gen X and Gen Y Asian Americans respectively, suggesting that the subjectlessness that Chuh proposes as a theoretical intervention is also an accurate diagnostic of a subgroup of Asian Americans.[28] The thrust of these considerations is that we must acknowledge the tentativeness of Asian American identity, and in doing so we are freed to weaponize it for both critique and coalition building. As David Graeber, one of the founders of the Occupy Wall Street movement, asserted in a different context: the ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently.[29] The same, I contend, is true of the malleable and fluid thing that is Asian American identity.

With these contours of Asian American theological subjectivity in place, I turn in Chapter 3 to a retrieval of Asian American theologies of liberation, which can be found in the archival material of the early seventies, squarely within the zeitgeist of Asian America's traditional becoming. While this might at first appear to be ironic given the preceding discussion on Asian American historiography, particularly of that era, the purpose of doing so is twofold. First, the retrieval of this theological tradition in fact uncovers a genealogical link with Asian American feminist theology, which is arguably the most robust form of Asian American theology that currently exists, an intellectual descendant of not only Asian feminist theologies but also, as I argue, Asian American liberation theology. Second, by locating Asian American liberation theology in direct co-lineage with

Asian, Black, and Latin American theologies of liberation, this project is thus shown to be resonant with a particular theological tradition of liberation, even as it takes into account historical, theological, and intellectual developments in the intervening time, rather than being an attempt to construct something entirely new, or less charitably, an opportunistic act in a moment of resurgent interest in anti-racist activism and intellectual production. That is, in the wake of the George Floyd rebellion which launched into the mainstream ideas of abolition and antiracism, leading to a boom in grants and institutional funding for projects of inclusion. In another sense, this harkening towards the past should not be seen as looking for a box to retrofit our theological methodology in, but rather as an acknowledgment of the work that had been carried out by our elders, our ancestors, in the sense of an imagined community, and thus locating this work as a theological advance towards collective liberation in a world after 2020. This mode of thought stands in opposition to the requirements of academic publishing and the needs of capitalism: this is not an inherently innovative project that presents a novel theological method ex-nihilo, but neither is it one fossilized in the twentieth century that dreams of 1960s-era coalitions. Instead, our mandate as diaspora communities and descendants of our ancestors—whether biological or chosen—is to renew and reinterpret tradition in ways that preserve the memory and honor the lives of our elders. Indeed, in doing so we will make completely new mistakes of our own, which future generations will have to correct for. In fact, any theology of liberation requires such dynamism to survive: the hermeneutic circle connecting immanent reality and theological reflection is what animates it, as thesis and antithesis, allowing it to remain relevant despite its acceptance in the academy, and propel on the ground movements forward with imaginative vision and eschatological hope. Or, as Frantz Fanon wrote, "each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity."[30] To be sure, Fanon continued in the next paragraph, "for us who are determined to break the back of colonialism, our historic mission is to authorize every revolt, every desperate act, and every attack aborted or drowned in blood."

Building an Asian American theology of liberation for the future requires, first and foremost, a decolonization of contemporary Asian American theology, thus a reckoning with Asian settler colonialism, with our positionality that Hawaiian activist Haunani-Kay Trask refers to as "settlers of color," where for Native Hawaiians, Asian success is but the latest elaboration of foreign or immigrant hegemony.[31] Indigenous struggles in North America have come to prominence in the last decade through movements such as the Dakota Access Pipeline protests in Standing Rock, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) movement in Canada highlighting gendered violence against Indigenous women, and the effects of the coronavirus pandemic in indigenous communities, which again simply highlights the pre-existing inequities that they experience in a daily basis. With this in mind, Chapter 4 begins with contributions from Indigenous scholars and theologians, in particular Vine Deloria Jr. and George Tinker whose works lay out necessary parameters for any theological reflection in North America, and the realities that any form of settler or non-indigenous theology must confront. In contrast to these claims, I argue that Asian American theology is characterized by landlessness, a foreignness in perpetuity that must be in solidarity with Indigenous struggles for sovereignty and resurgence.[32] In other words, that Asian American theology must not seek to indigenize or be grounded in any physical sense, but rather embrace its inherent transnationality and dislocation. If not, Asian American theology will simply reproduce genocidal settler colonial theology. I draw from Naim Ateek's Palestinian liberation theology which, along with Native American theologians, rejects the problematic Exodus narrative as the paradigmatic text of liberation, and constructs a theology of freedom that includes a concern for the land and its stewards. This leads naturally to a theology of migration and landlessness that respects indigeneity and recognizes in struggles for self-determination solidarity through the plight of indigenous populations in Palestine, Jammu and Kashmir, Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, the

Philippines, and Japan, to name but the more prominent indigenous struggles in Asia against colonizing and modernizing forces. As with the interrogation of Asian American identity, the native-settler binary is also one that is must be problematized or perhaps even hyphenated, asking what generative ways there might be to go beyond it without diminishing the struggle and vitality of Indigenous people anywhere. This theology of landlessness is in dialectical opposition with earlier theologies of hybridity, liminality, and marginality that characterize much Asian American theologizing in sense that these latter theologies seek particular forms of belonging within the US context, whereas a theology of landlessness proposes a capitulation of any such desire. In particular, a theology of landlessness frees one from investments in the settler state and private property, whose materiality is immediately recognizable for example in Hong Kong immigrants in Vancouver and East Asian settlers in Hawai'i. There is no ultimately defensible position for inclusion in the anti-Black US settler colonial empire.

Having cleared the way for Asian American theology of migration that is in harmony with the land and its Indigenous people, Chapter 5 turns to Asian American theology as a means of critiquing Asian anti-Blackness and learning from the Black radical tradition, Black liberation theology, and Dalit theology. The incommensurability of the freedom struggles of distinct communities of color come into conflict through instances such as settler colonial erasure and anti-Black racism. This chapter attempts to remove the cancer of Whiteness from Asian American theology, manifested as the bedrock of Asian anti-Blackness and colorism, and reorient it towards the Black liberation struggle which has often led the way for Asian Americans. This in no way forgives the sins of the past, in light of Black-Asian conflicts such as the LA uprising, the Peter Liang protests, and anti-affirmative action lawsuits. While these can be properly situated in the model minority myth and the weaponization of Asians against other communities of color, rehearsals of typical critiques of White supremacy do not suffice. Historical Black-Asian coalitions, such as the Third World Liberation Front with the Black Panthers, the Ghadar Party and anticolonial movements in India, and the Dalit Panthers lay a foundation for an Asian radical tradition that would parallel Cedric Robinson's articulation of the Black radical tradition.[33] As James Cone's Black theology of liberation was built on the Black Power movement, Dalit theology in India serves as a touchstone for an Asian American theology of liberation that is able to build power and solidarity despite incommensurable differences and Afropessimist arguments. Indeed, a closer reading reveals within the resonances of Black and Dalit liberation open invitations to non-Black and non-Dalit communities to, as in Hebrews we are invited to "go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured," who "suffered outside the gate." So are we called to a kenosis of social death and non-being, to become outcaste, or as James Cone wrote, to become Black. At the same time, this process of dying does not entirely annihilate the self, nor does it eliminate the constructive theology that is the goal of this book, but rather provides another necessary orientation for liberation theology in a settler colonial white supremacist empire and undergirds the Asian radical tradition. Indeed, the overlap of Dalit theology, Afropessimism, and Fanonian theory is the problem of the human being, or the possibility of a new humanism at the horizon of decolonization, caste abolition, and the ontological rupture required by Afropessimism. Meanwhile, in the approach of the confluence of these horizons, Asian American theology must capitulate its investment in not only Whiteness but the ontology of non-Blackness and the hierarchical structure of casteism, in favor of non-being, or "beinglessness." As with the psychoanalytic dimension of subjectlessness and the material consequences of landlessness, the beinglessness that an Asian American theology of liberation calls us to finds its current praxis in the revolutionary abolition of prison, police, and caste.

With models for radical solidarity that provide a new ecclesial base community, or *communidades de base* in the tradition of Latin American liberation theology in place, Chapter 6 then turns to the means of struggle and visions worthy of revolutionary action in the current political

moment of mass movements around the world and in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. The struggles of Hong Kong serve as a crucial point of reflection for several reasons: One, because the Occupy Central with Love and Peace was a Christian initiative that sparked the Umbrella Movement and is producing an indigenous theology of freedom; Two, because the immense creativity in the tactics used by the movement to mount resistance and organize action provide rich sources of reflection and inspiration for future struggle; and three, Hong Kong plays a pivotal role in the brewing new Cold War between US and China, as it transitioned from being an administrative region of the British to China in 1997, yet maintaining a degree of political and economic independence under a "one country, two systems" principle that China agreed to guarantee for 50 years, but has effectively reneged upon with the passing of the 2020 National Security Law. These struggles connect with Korean Minjung theology and a theology of the multitude, in the sense of Kwok Pui-Lan and Joerg Rieger. Understanding Asian American theology of liberation as a grassroots theology, it is necessary to consider the multitude, the 99%, the masses which Jesus had compassion on, as the movement out of which theological reflections must be grounded in, and whose sufferings must be shared. As with complicity with anti-Blackness and settler colonialism, the uncertain location of Asian Americans with respect to economic power complicates any easy call to identify with "the masses" or the multitude. Thus, paralleling the earlier calls for disinvestment, I draw upon Rey Chow's notion of the protestant ethnic and the spirit of capitalism to locate Asian Americans within racial capitalism, and offer as an answer the revolutionary calls of Amilcar Cabral to "return to the source" and Walter Rodney's "groundings with my brothers" as the prerogative of so-called middle minorities, the petite bourgeoisie, or what Frank Wilderson calls civil society's junior partners in service of revolution. Building upon these, a theology of protest thus emerges that is able to undergird future struggles of mass movements and activists.

With this in view, I broach the question of violence in the service of revolutionary struggle and liberation, a particular difficult topic to reflect upon in the context of religion and politics. With the heightened skepticism regarding religious violence in a post-9/11 world, not to mention the long and bloody history of the Western church, clarity and careful thinking around the problem of violence is doubly important. At the opposite end of the pole is the quasi-religious adherence to nonviolence, which Ward Churchill demonstrates to be pathological and counter-revolutionary. The false moral high ground of absolute pacifism mirrors what Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang refer to as a "settler move to innocence," whereby settler identity is deflected through the homogenization of various oppressions and the privileging of the decolonization in the abstract while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land.[34] Setting aside the pathology of pacifism allows for clearer thinking around the question of violence. For that, the riddle of John Brown presents itself as a useful prism through which it might be apprehended. John Brown's use of deadly violence as a White abolitionist poses philosophical problems that are otherwise not present in considerations of Black abolitionists, or say, anti-colonial fighters. Drawing on Ted Smith's use of political theology to circumscribe the limits of ethics, in particular the frame of universalizable immanent ethical obligation, I place Smith's interpretation of Walter Benjamin's notion of divine violence and relief of law in conversation with Fanon's treatise on violence in the context of decolonization. Whereas Smith's analysis locates revolutionary violence outside the limit of ethics, Fanon's diagnosis finds violence to be all but necessary for the liberation of the colonized, closer perhaps to the assessments of Black revolutionaries in the United States. I argue that both perspectives inform the Asian American position, caricatured as timid and non-confrontational, as opposed to the rich history of militancy and protest in Asia itself. As it were, in the return to the source and the preferential option for the poor, an Asian American theology of liberation can offer no universal declaration on the use of earthly violence in every context, but divine violence provides an orientation for fighting every form of domination. Perhaps the most important contribution of Asian American theology is its

necessarily transnational outlook; the struggle that is waged must be fiercely internationalist, as the Third World Liberation Front and Bandung Conference in the past understood, and as Asians in diaspora we must hold in view the totality. We are not yet free as long as one of us is not free.

Liberation theology unbound

With each notion subjectlessness, landlessness, nothingness, and divine violence, I outline a nonlinear path for building an Asian American theology of liberation that remembers its history, works in solidarity with others, and is not afraid of the fight. In the concluding chapter, I draw all these threads together to suggest that Asian Americanness, understood through each of these refusals of rigid binaries, opens up into a queer future of liberation, where freedom is marked by indeterminacy, free response, and free identification. Such is the in-between space that is neither/nor, rather than both/and, echoing the Christian notion of the already and the not yet. For the unbounded joy at the horizon, I call this the erotics of liberation, drawing from the indecent theology of Althaus-Reid and Rowan Williams' exposition of the body's grace. Whereas the disorders of racial melancholia and racial dissociation, the psychic and geographic nowhere, the anxieties of being a racial middleman and middle-class junior partner in White society are all inscribed on the Asiatically-raced body, the resolution of these tensions—muscular tension according to Fanon and sexual tension according to Freud—is also manifested in release and liberation through the body both sexual and spiritual. The freedom in Asian American liberation is a deeply queer space. "The Borderlands," according to Gloria Anzaldúa, "are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."[35] Liberation, as with the borderlands, is a space of limitless potential and creativity, as Fanon declared, "in the world I am heading for, I am endlessly creating myself."[36]

As Patrick Wolfe wrote in the context of settler colonialism, that invasion is a structure, not an event, so is liberation also a structure, not an event.[37] That is to say that freedom, as with the Hebrew idea of shalom, is a pervasive, jubilant presence that must be built and sustained through structural means, forbidding hegemonic systems of domination to take root and requiring expansive and prophetic visions of new Jerusalems. *Liberation Theology Unbound* is a nod to Gary Okihiro's *American History Unbound*, an historical and anti-historical project that writes with and against existing representations of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States. Okihiro wrote from the perspective of ocean worlds, assigning historical significance to oceans and islands over continents, which are also islands in themselves, seas of islands connected by water. Oceans and Oceania, according to Okihiro, are decolonizing discourses and material conditions, fluid worlds untethered from the seemingly fixed, immobile continents.[38] In the unbinding of liberation theology I also mean to gesture to the complete abolition of borders and boundaries, whilst yet maintaining selfhood and integrity, as in Fanon: "When there are no more slaves, there are no masters."[39] Beyond the horizon of liberation is a new humanity—a new ontology, a fundamental transformation of every social relation, love without end.

This book is written with Asian Americans in mind, those who have found themselves theologically unmoored in the wake of the last decade's social movements. Asian Americans who are, as Nikki Toyama-Szeto put it, spiritually homeless. I write for the community of those who have found White theology to be an irredeemably bankrupt modern-day Pharisaism, and have found other liberation theologies, while inspiring and challenging, to be outdated and disconnected from the Asian American struggle. I write against armchair theologians for whom class struggle,

deportations, and poverty are abstract issues to theorize about and profit from. This is not a book for professional theologians. I write for a street-fighting Asian American theology of liberation, unapologetic and unreserved in its commitment to the liberation of oppressed and the particular suffering of Asians and Asian Americans, for a theology most concerned with the plight and freedom of the global diaspora of Asian working-class poor, migrant laborers, asylum seekers, and trafficked persons. There is a place for subtle arguments and systematic theories about theology, race, power, and so on; this is not the place. At the same time, even as I draw from academic theologies and theories to scaffold what is called an Asian American theology of liberation, this by itself is not the content of liberation theology: rather it is in the "groanings which cannot be uttered" that the Spirit of God dwells, in the riots and strikes and pueblos and slums and street corners, and the work of theology is to interpret these groanings, the negation work of divine violence according to Smith. Such reverberations can be heard in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 where the Catholic Vietnamese American community in New Orleans participated in the rebuilding process, of which gulf coast regional director of the National Association of Vietnamese Service Agencies James Bui remarked, "This is the first time I've seen the Vietnamese church practicing liberation theology."[40]

While liberation theology is meant to be theology from the ground up, theological reflections on the suffering of the poor and the downtrodden, that participates in a hermeneutic circle of reflection and praxis, it may not always immediately legible to the people that it is written for. Fanon opposes this opaqueness plainly:

> But if we speak in plain language, if we are not obsessed with a perverse determination to confuse the issues and exclude the people, then it will be clear that the masses comprehend all the finer points and every artifice. Resorting to technical language means you are determined to treat the masses as uninitiated. Such language is a poor front for the lecturer's intent to deceive the people and leave them on the sidelines. Language's endeavor to confuse is a mask behind which looms an even greater undertaking to dispossess. The intention is to strip the people of their possessions as well as their sovereignty. You can explain anything to the people provided you really want them to understand.[41]

Yet in attempting to translate and synthesize ideas from the academy in service of the people who live outside of it, and perhaps also in part due to the economic constraints and gatekeeping nature of modern publishing, this book has likely failed in this regard. At the same time, for those who have no need of academic debates or theological thought exercises, this introduction, and perhaps also the first and last chapter, will probably be enough. Liberation theology is reflection through praxis, the refrain goes, and it is only in love and struggle that our theology is realized. There is nothing new under the sun. We already know enough to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before our God. In the context of the struggle for Algerian independence, Fanon asserted:

> We would not be so naive as to believe that the appeals for reason or respect for human dignity can change reality. For the Antillean working in the sugarcane plantations in Le Robert, to fight is the only solution. And he will undertake and carry out this struggle not as the result of a Marxist or idealistic analysis but because quite simply he cannot conceive his life otherwise than as a kind of combat against exploitation, poverty, and hunger.[42]

And again:

> We would be overjoyed to learn of the existence of a correspondence between some black philosopher and Plato. But we can absolutely not see how this fact would change the lives of eight-year-old kids working in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadaloupe.[43]

James Cone similarly asserted: "It is so easy to make [Jesus'] name mean intellectual analysis, and we already have too much of that garbage in seminary libraries. What is needed is an application of the

name to concrete affairs. What does the name mean when black people are burning buildings and white people are responding with riot-police control? Whose side is Jesus on?"[44]

I myself am not a theologian, nor the child of a theologian. I write in the urgency of the now, from the social location of a Malaysian in the United States, as glaciers melt and social unrest boils over. I wrestle with my own complicity in the settler colonial state; while I do not readily claim Asian American as an identity of my own, I maintain no illusions that this is how I am categorized. While according to Thomas Szasz, in the human kingdom the rule is define or be defined, the activist roots of Asian American identity remind us that what they call us, we can also weaponize.[45] Of course, the master's tool will not dismantle the master's house, as Audre Lorde writes, but in claiming Asian America we may still assert a coalitional politics that builds power across incommensurable differences, to bring about radical change and loving resistance.[46] Paradoxically, the emptiness of Asian American identity is also its strength: it provides the deconstructive lens through which it may be apprehended that in liberation Asian Americanness will also pass away. I thus write from outside the fold of professional theology, as it were, offering an invitation to the Asian American church to struggle for the total liberation that God has redeemed us for. It is for liberation that the Messiah has liberated us. The Indigenous peoples of the Americas, Africa, and Asia have all lived through the end of the world when the Europeans arrived. Soon the climate catastrophe will bring again the end of the world to the masses, including the Europeans. As the ecological collapse begins, as we look back half a century to the political awakening of Asians in the United States and the liberation theology they had begun to build in the 1970s, we must ask if fifty years on others will look back on the 2020s and be inspired or disappointed. That is up to us. This book is not the first word on Asian American liberation theology, nor is it meant to be the last. Much will be left unsaid or poorly said. This is an opening salvo, as we follow God into the streets and rebuild a movement, working out our salvation with fear and trembling.

1. "We are here because you were there" *Asian American theology as a theology of migration*

In April 2018, the Trump administration implemented a "zero tolerance" policy along the US-Mexico border to deter immigration, informally referred to as the family separation policy under which children were separated from their parents or guardians, the adults being held in federal jails to be prosecuted, while the children were held by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. The policy was implemented in response to the increasing number of South American asylum seekers arriving at the border, many were fleeing economic instability and gang violence. While it was formally ended after two months following major public outcry and protest, thousands of children were separated as a result and less than half were eventually reunited. In part, the tragedy was manufactured as then president Donald Trump insisted on the existence of a crisis at the US-Mexico border that warranted the construction of a border wall, on which Trump based much of his 2015 presidential campaign. In June 2019, the Trump administration announced that 1,400 migrant children would be detained in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, in what used to be a Japanese incarceration camp during World War II, and before that the longtime prison of Apache leader Geronimo until his death in. The plans were eventually halted due to the public outcry that ensued. Less publicized was the fact that during the Obama administration, several hundred migrant children were also held in the same facility in 2014.

At another concentration camp in Manzanar, California, which held the over 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans from 1942 to 1945 under Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, there was an uptick in Muslim visitors following the September 11, 2001 attacks. The visitors saw clearly the parallels with the thousands of people of Arab, Muslim and South Asian descent who were swiftly detained following the attacks. Visitors again increased in 2017 when Executive Order 13769 was signed by Trump, informally referred to as the Muslim ban, suspending the entry of Syrian refugees indefinitely and severely restricting the entry of people from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. At that point, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) had already been organizing pilgrimages to Manzanar for over a decade, connecting Muslim Americans to Japanese American survivors and activists. The Muslim ban was answered with major protests, beginning at JFK airport in New York City, spreading to the rest of the country. The ban was eventually ended in January 2021 after the inauguration of Joe Biden. The confluence of these systematic forms of racial exclusion signals the interconnectedness of various struggles against state violence and racism.

The Japanese concentration camps also hold another key, the key to a historical Asian American theology of liberation. While the revolutionary movements led by the Black Power movement in the US during the 1960s were indeed joined by Asians, at the time racialized as Orientals rather than Asian Americans, it was from the painful experience of mass incarceration that Japanese American Christians found the raw material to develop a theology of struggle and suffering. These experiences, according to Anne Blankenship, encouraged lay Japanese Christians to develop new lived theologies and accelerated the evolution of new structures and theologies, building a foundation for Asian American liberation theologies articulated in the 1960s and 1970s.[47] This is not to say that Asians had not suffered under the heel of White racism on Turtle Island since the Spanish ships first landed with Filipino deck hands, some of whom deserted as early as 1763 to form the first Asian settlement of Saint Malo in Louisiana, becoming the Manilamen or Tagalas with the help of the Indigenous Americans there. Later generations of Asians seized upon Asian American identity as a political weapon, that forms the historical bedrock for building a

contemporary Asian American theology of liberation. To do so, we must first ask who its subjects are. What is Asian America?

Asian America: The view from above

To speak of Asian America is never a simple discussion. Inasmuch as Asian American identity was first established as an oppositional identity, for the purpose of politically organizing disparate groups of Asiatically-raced people in the United States, it is today largely used as a demographic label, one that overrepresents Northeast Asians and Indians. Not only does it elide the suffering of poorer Asians, the 2010 US Census definition of Asian excludes those from the Middle East and Central Asia.[48] Among these people, many prefer to identify as White rather than Asian or some other racial group, further problematizing the internal cohesion of Asian identity in the US. The "Check it right, you ain't white" campaign leading up to the 2010 US census encouraged those of Arab and Iranian descent to not identify as White. The relationship of Asian Americans to Whiteness depends in part on where ones fall on the color line—a brown paper bag test for Asians. The absorption of those of Middle Eastern, North African, and Hispanic descent into the White category reveals the flexibility and range of Whiteness, where before it was the Irish and Jews who had to be admitted into Whiteness. Nonetheless, by these standards, the Pew Research Center, using 2013–2015 survey data showed that the Asian population in the US grew from 11.9 million to 20.4 million between 2000 and 2015, the fastest growth rate of any major racial or ethnic group, the second being the Hispanic population. Undocumented Asians make up about 13% of the 11.1 million undocumented or "unauthorized immigrants" in the US, mainly coming from India, China, the Philippines, and Korea. Put together, we see that about one in every seven Asian immigrants in the US is undocumented.[49]

Economically, though the Asian population as a whole appears to fare better than average, disaggregating the data by national origin reveals that while Indians ($100,000), Filipinx ($80,000), Japanese, and Sri Lankans ($74,000 each) have the highest median income, most other groups fall below the median household income of $73,060. At the lower end of the spectrum are Bangladeshi ($49,800), Hmong ($48,000), Nepalese ($43,500) and Burmese ($36,000) households. Similarly, Hmong (28.3%), Bhutanese (33.3%) and Burmese (35.0%) had the highest poverty rates among Asian groups even as Asians overall had lower poverty rates compared to the general US population.[50] Importantly, the Southeast and South Asian populations indexed here are largely refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented, or working-class migrants. I lean but lightly on sociological data such as this, acknowledging that the limitation of large surveys for reasons such as narrow definitions of nationality, citizenship, race, and household, not to mention the inherent difficulties in producing reliable statistics. At the same time such broad outlines provide a necessary, even if inadequate grounding for interpreting Asian American theology, as we want to be talking about the real and tangible suffering of Asians, which can be measured in various ways, however inaccurately.

The census, as a tool of the state apparatus, provides a view of Asian America from the eyes of the nation-state. Whereas Filipinx and other Southeast Asians first arrived on the American continent over four hundred years ago, popular accounts often describe Asian American history as being only about 150 years old. Persons of Asian origin first appeared in the national census in 1870 with "Chinese or Mongolian," then in 1890, "Japanese." In 1860 "civilized Indians" were also first counted, meaning the Indigenous people. The 1930 census grew to include Mexican, Filipino, Hindu (South Asian), and Korean populations, indicating the need to track the changing migrant labor populations of the time. At around the same time were the first laws systematically excluding immigration according to race, beginning with the 1875 Page Act banning immigration of "cheap Chinese labor and immoral Chinese women," the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act banning Chinese

immigration entirely, the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907 in which Japan agreed to ban emigration to the US, and the Immigration Act of 1917 designating the so-called Asiatic barred zone spanning much of Asia and the Pacific Islands. The Philippine Independence Act of 1934 established the process for the Philippines to transition to independence, but at the same time limited immigration from the Philippines, and was quickly followed by the Filipino Repatriation Act of 1935 that provided one-way passage back for Filipinx in the US, similar to the repatriation of Mexicans during that time. The 1820 census first introduced the racial category "free colored," later expanded in 1890 to include Negroes, Chinese, Japanese, and civilized Indians, and by 1920 also Indian, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, Hawaiian, Malay, Siamese, and Maori. This represents the first wave of migration and exclusion of Asians to the United States, and as Lisa Lowe argued, forms the first layer of the legal structure of the racial formation of Asians in the United States through a series of immigration acts.

The exclusionary trend reversed course beginning with the 1945 War Brides Act, allowing alien spouses and children of members of the US Armed Forces to immigrate. Given the earlier Exclusion Act, this benefited Chinese women greatly, and in the following year "war brides" from the Philippines and India were also allowed to immigrate under the Alien Fiancées and Fiancés Act of 1946, amended the next year to allow for Korean and Japanese women. These together with the Page Act point toward the sexualized nature of Asian immigration, as it continues today with trafficking and other sexually differentiated forms of migrant labor. Indeed, Roy Sano's use of the term "AmerAsian theology" underscores the limitations of the vocabulary of his time: the Amerasian was a specific form of racial mixing, the product of a US military man and an East Asian woman, whereby the Asian woman's body becomes the archetypal symbol for the imperialist and colonial penetration of the United States empire into the Orient.

The second wave of immigration began with the watershed moment of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which followed the Civil Rights Act the previous year, abolishing the immigration quotas based upon the existing populations within the US. It is important to note both that the Black struggle for civil rights paved the way for Asian inclusion, hence the debt that Asian struggles against oppression and exclusion owes to the Black struggle, and also that these struggles played out in the theater of the Cold War, making geopolitically expedient certain legal concessions made to people of color. The 1965 Act, together with the 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act bringing in refugees of the United States' proxy wars from South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, transformed the Asian demographic in the US from consisting of largely migrant labor to include highly educated professionals and asylum-seeking refugees from greater portions of the Asian continent. Later, the Immigration Act of 1990 reformed the 1965 act to allow more skilled and educated immigrants in contrast to family-based immigration. These ebbs and flows of Asia migration reflect the racialized nature of labor in the US. In contrast to the slave trade through which African America was created, Asian labor is a fungible commodity—an expendable, infinitely replaceable resource, a particular form of racialized surplus labor that Iyko Day calls alien capital.[51] On the other hand, the growing class difference within Asian subpopulations points to the incommensurability of Asian American heterogeneity, foreclosing naïve forms of solidarity.

The racial formation of Asian Americanness is circumscribed by legal acts and court cases, as suggested by critical race theory, which emerged from the field of critical legal studies, including Kimberlé Crenshaw's important notion of intersectionality.[52] Intersectionality draws attention to the multiple layers of oppression such as in race and gender which produce multiplicities and inequivalent experiences that cannot be accounted for through any single approach. As a coalitional politics, Asian American theology also recognizes the intersections of Asian identity with other dimensions of class, gender, sexuality, and nation. As US legal history shows, the figure of the Asian, along with Hawaiians, Mexicans, Africans, and others, plays a crucial role in the construction and

maintenance of Whiteness in the United States. What is Whiteness, from a legal standpoint? The federal district ruling *In re Ah Yup* (1878) denied naturalization to Chinese immigrants on the basis of being non-White, and was later followed by dozens of challenges to the legal definition of Whiteness. The Supreme Court decision in *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (1922) ruled that White referred to Caucasians, and Ozawa as a Japanese man, who claimed Whiteness as defined by cultural practices and loyalty to the nation-state, was not Caucasian. Yet in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), Thind as a South Asian man argued for the identification as Caucasian based on the theory that Indians were the result of Indo-Aryan migration, and the Supreme Court ruled instead that "White" and "Caucasian" are terms of common speech and not of scientific origin, revealing the social construction of Whiteness, and its flexibility in including or excluding according to convenience. Iranians similarly share a nationalist narrative of Aryan descent, giving a pseudoscientific basis to the insistence of certain Iranian Americans on inclusion into Whiteness.[53]

Yến Lê Espiritu describes Asian Americanness as a pan-ethnicity, one that encompasses the world's largest continent's heterogeneous population, and finds itself in the United States.[54] It is hopeless to narrowly define what Asian American means. Instead, it more properly functions as a fluid and open-ended signifier, unbounded by geography, citizenship, or sociological definitions. This calls to mind the notion of the "subjectless" approach to Asian Americanness suggested by Kandice Chuh, for whom the construction and deconstruction of Asian American identity reveals the ways in which race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and nation, are discursively constructed.[55] In other words, apprehending the problems inherent in trying to establish a neat Asian American identity leads to a better understanding of the ways in which various ideologies benefits some and disadvantages others. By necessity, Asian American theology pays constant attention to whom its presumed subjects are and are not. In the tradition of theologies of liberation, this is particularly important as it compels us to seek out the nonhuman, the other, the non-being, with whom God's spirit dwells.

In practice, I shall use what postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak refers to as a strategic essentialism, which is to understand that a signifier can be at once problematic because it reifies what is fluid, but also useful because race structures everyday life in the United States and can be useful for politics. Strategic essentialism describes the unavoidable usefulness of something that is very dangerous. This tension was already understood by the early Asian American movements, but it must be held even more clearly in view now as Asian Americans form the most heterogeneous demographic in terms of household wealth, national origin, and educational attainment than any other racial group.[56] The rise of select groups of Asians into places of prominence and power, while itself presenting an obstacle to solidarity with the powerless and invisible, signals the potential value of organizing under the banner of Asian America. As Toni Morrison writes, the function of freedom is to free someone else. What trace amounts of power and liberation accrued by Asian Americans is not to be hoarded, a light hidden under a basket, but set on a hill giving light to all that are in the house. Rather than think of power-sharing as a zero-sum game, any Asian American liberation must seek the liberation of all.

Asian American churches must also be in dialogue with Asian churches, recognizing that each one's struggle against oppression is deeply interconnected with that of others. White racism and anti-Blackness are global imperial projects, as are capitalism and heteropatriarchy, so for us to have any hope of truly opposing them we must free our thinking from the confines of the national borders drawn by White Europeans or any other neo-colonial power. It is worth noting that in their later works, both James Cone and Gustavo Gutiérrez acknowledged that their respective theologies of liberation, in their first iterations, suffered from the lack of gender analyses and Third World perspectives. Hence, as important as it is for us to be well-informed about the coloniality of power,

the means by which Asian American identity is constituted in part through legal and institutional discourse, to look for the means of resistance we have to privilege the view from below.

Asian America: The view from below

Any Asian American theology of liberation must be rooted in the lived experiences of Asians in the United States and the lives of their spiritual communities. It is a grassroots theology. Indeed, any theology of liberation is measured by its praxis (I will show you my faith by my works), its preferential option for the poor (therefore incompatible with model minority aspirations and honorary Whiteness), and its capacity to free the oppressed and marginalized amongst our own communities. That this is not clearly happening in Asian American theologies and churches is an indictment of Asian American theology, that despite its intellectual roots in Black theology and historical roots in the Asian liberation movements, it is safe to say that Asian American theology is a decent theology.

To place ourselves in the viewpoint of the oppressed, as Gutiérrez's Latin American theology of liberation begins, I return to the Filipino crewmembers, called Indians, sailing from Manila to New Spain on the Mexican Atlantic Coast as early as 1565. The crew on these Spanish ships were made up of mostly Filipinos and Chinese sailors, but there were also Japanese and South Asians. The ones that survived the treacherous voyage were underpaid compared to Spanish crewmembers, and often deserted ship after arrival.[57] As the Indigenous populations were being decimated through war and disease, slaves made up the next largest group of Asians arriving in the so-called New World, with Portugese slave ships carrying slaves from Africa stopping over in Malacca and Manila, colonies of the Portugese empire, bringing along hundreds of slaves from Macao, the Malabar Coast of India, Myanmar, Malacca, Java, India, and the Philippines. Slaves ranged from skilled to unskilled workers, men and women, some of the women being sold as sex slaves. As historian Erika Lee writes, Manila became a center of transpacific slave trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, until in 1672 when Asian slaves were emancipated in New Spain, and in 1700 a royal Spanish order prohibited the Asian slave trade.[58] Of course, any history from below must often resort to official reports and documentation, which only tell an incomplete story. The prerogative is to perform a retrieval of the subaltern, or in other words, an Asian American history told through sex, labor, and war.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, hundreds of thousands of migrant or indentured laborers travelled from South Asia as coolies to British West Indian plantations in Guyana, Trinidad, and Jamaica, and from China to Cuba and Peru, for example. These movements of Asian labor were spurred by the end of African slavery in those places, recruited through kidnapping, coercion, or deception, often arriving on the same crowded and unsanitary ships previously used in the African slave trade.[59] By 1891, South Asian indentured laborer made up over 80 percent of the workforce on British Guyana sugar plantations, often working alongside free Africans. Female South Asian indentured laborers were also sexually exploited, whether by plantation managers, or, as in one estate, were brought in by a South Asian overseer to serve as prostitutes for the male South Asian workers.[60] At the same time, planters and colonial officials wanted only "virtuous women," either widowed or having husbands or parents, who would be able to tame the mostly male population. These interlocking forms of oppression require us to remain attentive to the dynamics of sexual and power relations. Despite the intentions of the owners, South Asian workers proved to be militant, conducting work strikes, mass marches, violent demonstrations, mass desertions, throughout the labor system in the West Indies. By one estimate, one hundred strikes occurred between 1886 and 1889 alone, and another 141 erupted between 1900 and 1913.[61]

Also of note is the Ghadar Party, formed in 1913 by a coalition of Punjabi migrant workers and Punjabi intellectuals and students in San Francisco, and many of its Punjabi Sikh male members were veterans of the British Indian army, seeking to overthrow the British empire through armed revolution. Claiming members and branches around the world, the Ghadar Party circulated its newspaper *Ghadar* in India where it was immediately banned, and also in China, Japan, South Africa, and throughout Southeast Asia.[62] Though the Party mobilized nearly eight thousands Indians in diaspora to return to India to overthrow British rule, with hundreds arrested by British officials even before arriving, the Ghadarites were not so well received by Indians in India. Leaders of the Indian National Congress, priests of important Sikh gurdwaras, and other nationalist leaders in India denounced the Party.

The Chinese, on other hand, migrated in the wake of the Opium Wars, civil unrest, and natural disasters in the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese laborers began arriving in Cuba and Peru in *la trata amarilla*, the yellow trade, bringing Chinese coolies together with African slaves to work in plantations, mines, cities, or on railroads. In response to similarly exploitative work conditions, they often slowed the pace of work, sabotaged equipment, stole from plantations, committed suicide, and even joined Cuban anticolonial insurgents.[63] Large numbers of Chinese coolies also sought passage to California during the Gold Rush, beginning in 1849. During this era, Asians organized around labor rights in notable events such as the 1867 Chinese railroad worker strike in the Sierras involving thousands of Chinese working on the transcontinental railroad, ending after supplies and food were cut off from the workers, and the 1920 Oahu sugar strike from January to July, involving thousands of Filipino and Japanese laborers. The significance of this latter multiethnic coalition lies in the fact that laborers were brought to Hawai'i from various regions, particularly the Philippines, Japan, and Korea, to prevent solidarity amongst the workers, where if one ethnic group went on strike, the others worked as strikebreakers, defeating the strike. Also, in 1965 was the Delano Grape Strike in California, lasting almost five years, led by Flipino farm workers such as Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz, and soon after joined by Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerte, and other Mexican farm workers.[64] This period also saw the formation of the Japanese-Mexican Labor Association (JMLA), one of the first multiracial labor unions in the United States.[65]

Asian women, though fewer in number, similarly organized in areas such as in the garment industry. In 1938, over a hundred Chinese women garment workers organized against unfair labor practices at Joe Shoong's National Dollar Stores sewing factory, forming the Chinese Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and going on strike for fifteen weeks. It was the longest strike in the history of San Francisco Chinatown at the time. Later in 1974 was the Jung Sai garment workers strike in San Francisco consisting of over a hundred Chinese women conducting strike activities leading to sixty-four arrests and court injunctions.[66] The strikes were a part of the Third World workers struggles that were taking place at the time in the United States. In the summer of 1982, twenty thousand workers from union garment factories in and around Canal Street in New York City Chinatown flooded the streets to demand a fair contract, after union contract negotiations were blocked by a small group of Chinatown employers, organized by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, made up of largely immigrant women. In the realm of sex work, in San Francisco in 1910 Donaldina Cameron joined local police on brothel raids to "rescue" Chinese immigrant sex workers and take them into her mission home, called Nine-twenty. At Nine-twenty, the women were made to cook and clean and sew in preparation for being Christian wives, and many of the rescued women eventually escaped their rescuers.

According to the historiography of Asian American identity, Asian American subjectivity was first claimed in the revolutionary movements of the 1960s, what some historians refer to as "the Long Sixties." In echoing Simone de Beauvoir that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, Karen Ishizuka contended that one is not born but willfully becomes Asian American. The creation

of Asian American as a political identity can be understood as an attempt to unite the struggles of various Asian American communities for common goals of racial justice and equity. In the words of Jeff Chang's foreword to Ishizuka's account of the making of Asian America, there was a time when the word 'Asian American' was not merely a demographic category, but "a fight you were picking with the world."[67] While the initial movement beginning in 1969 was mainly realized through agitating for the establishment of Asian American studies programs in the San Francisco Bay Area, largely confined to largely elite universities and the West coast, the broader acceptance of the label was catalyzed by protests in 1982 following the death of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American working in Detroit who was beaten to death at his bachelor party by White autoworkers angered by the negative impact that the Japanese automobile industry had on the U.S. domestic market at the time.

This political moment saw the pan-ethnic Asian collaborations such as the Yellow Power movement, the revolutionary student-run magazine Gidra, and the Third World Liberation Front. These movements understood the struggles for Black, Asian, Indigenous, Chicanx, and Third World liberation as being deeply connected. As Patsy Chan wrote in an issue of Gidra, "the vicious imperialism which seeks to commit total genocide against the proud people of Indochina is the same imperialism which oppresses those of us here in the US by creating dehumanising conditions in our Asian communities, barrios, Black ghettos and reservations."[68] In invoking the people of Indochina, Chan was referring to the Vietnam war—or the American war, as it is referred to in Vietnam—and the covert wars in Laos and Myanmar, in which Black Americans served in and provided the basis for the Black Panther Party. The movement was not without its flaws, as the term Yellow Power foregrounded Japanese, Chinese and Filipinos who then made up the majority of Asians in the United States, marginalizing others such as South Asians, West Asians, Black Asians, and queer Asians.

However, Ishizuka writes, these days the term Asian American has been neutralized into a mere adjective, barely more than a census label. It is commonly understood as little more than a demographic category, its activist history lost except mostly to activists and scholars. The shifting demographics post-1965 continues to change the face of Asians in the US, with both high-skilled workers and refugees. The generational shifts in migration histories leads to differences in the psychic structure of Asians and their own attitudes towards race. Asian migrant labor continues to operate in forms rendered invisible in representations of the Asian: Filipinx domestic and trafficked workers for example, some working as nannies and housekeepers to wealthy families, who themselves were before professionals in the Philippines. Xyza Cruz Bacani, who worked in Hong Kong as a maid for nine years, and her mother in the same household for twenty years, through photography and help from nonprofits such as the Damayan Migrant Workers Association in New York City connected the invisible labor of Filipinx domestic workers in Hong Kong, New York, and New Jersey.[69] By turning the gaze onto the domestic workers, Bacani makes visible the embeddedness of migrant Asian women within the larger structure of racial capitalism, in contrast to prominent, high-achieving upper and upper-middle class Asians with elite educations that fulfill the role of the model minority.

Besides migrant workers, refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, many of whom were infants in refugee camps are deported on the basis of having been convicted of a criminal offence, hence bad immigrants. In the prison to deportation pipeline, the incarcerated persons are transferred to immigration authorities immediately upon release from prison. While Asian deportations typically number only in the hundreds, it is crucial to view this within the framework of the expansion of the United States Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and White nationalism at large. While ICE has focused its deportations and raids on Central and South American communities, we cannot view the struggle of Southeast Asian refugees and migrants as separate from that of Latine and

Chicane workers and families, if for no other reason than the fact that ICE does not see these communities as separate, but rather all deserve to be equally deported.

A particularly vulnerable group are migrant Asian women working in service industries. Not bound to a specific trade, they often move between working in restaurants, nail salons, grocery stores, dry cleaners, and massage parlors. Over Thanksgiving weekend in 2017, 38-year-old Yang Song jumped off the third floor of a massage parlor in Flushing, New York during a Vice Enforcement Unit police raid, and died in the hospital shortly after. Song, who was from Shenyang, China, had been working in illegal massage parlors for several years and had been arrested four times before. Song's death led to the creation of the organization Red Canary Song, supporting the grassroots organizing of migrant sex workers, focusing on the Chinese community of massage parlor workers in New York City, and organizing internationally with Butterfly, a group of over two hundred Asian sex workers in Toronto, and Les Roses D'Acier, a group of with over five hundred Chinese migrant sex workers in Paris. As Red Canary Song's work shows, police raids against and deportation of migrant sex workers again reveal the nexus of power, borders, sexuality, and race working in concert, and the ways in which sexualized and racialized forms of migrant labor are expropriated by capitalism.

Asian American theology must not only pay attention to these forms of struggle, but in fact center these experiences and communities if we are to be serious about Asian liberation. Throughout this book I will explore many historical dimensions as they relate to Asians in the United States, but this is not to give a nostalgic or romantic view of the past. As Fanon wrote in the context of the struggle of Blacks and against White colonials, "disalienation will be for those Whites and Blacks who have refused to let themselves be locked in the substantialized 'tower of the past.' For many other black men disalienation will come from refusing to consider their reality as definitive." Fanon looked to Vietnamese resistance for guidance: "the Vietnamese who die in front of a firing squad don't expect their sacrifice to revive a forgotten past. They accept death for the sake of the present and the future.[70] If we are not serious about Asian liberation, then the status quo that we maintain will only perpetuate the model minority myth about Asian success, and Asian American theology will play the role of an honorary-White theology supporting the elite and middle-class Asians comfortable in their proximity to Whiteness and power, as was seen in Asian Americans such as Nikki Haley and Elaine Chao who played important roles in the Trump administration. Theology can cover over many sins, including those of class oppression, sexual violence, racism, and genocide. Or it can fight back. Liberation theology is a theology that belongs in the streets, the favelas, the ghettoes, and the slums of the world. Any theology of liberation, when confined to the academy and middle-class homes, dies of internal contradictions and sterilization. We seek instead a theology of the subaltern Asian, the migrant sex worker, the indentured laborer, the convicted refugee.

The histories of Asian Americans can be told in a multitude of ways. They are constituted by racial exclusion, migratory flows, and resistance. Asian American theology naturally looks to migration as a crucial source of theological reflection, and in particular the configurations of power, mechanisms of capital, histories of colonization and resistance. In this sense, Asian American theology as a theology of migration finds points of contact with Latinx theologies, which similarly grapple with questions of racial identity, military interventionism, labor exploitation, and belonging. The idea of Latin America, Walter Mignolo argued, is a colonial project of Europe in the way that Valentin Mudimbe argued concerning the invention of Africa, and Sun Ge's question of "How does Asia mean?" As Sun argues, Asia had for a long time not been treated as a "self-contained geographical concept, but has only been put forward ideologically in opposition to Europe." It was only when Italian Jesuit Mateo Ricci presented a world map to officials in the Ming Dynasty in the 1580s, Mignolo writes, that "the people inhabiting China and Japan 'learned' for the first time that

they were living in a space called Asia, just as the Indigenous people and African slaves transported to America learned, also in the sixteenth century, that there was a continent named 'America.'"[71] If this brief retelling in this chapter of Asian migration histories can be seen as the material construction of Asians in the United States, the next chapter then turns to their discursive construction.

2. "Where are your people from?" Deconstructing Asian American theological subjectivity

"The category of Asian American sprawls: sixth-generation toddlers and undocumented teens; crazy-rich coeds chilling on Rodeo Drive or in Singapore Air first-class and couples on public assistance packing their meager belongings under eviction notices; architects and oncologists, nannies and bus drivers, seamstresses and factory bosses; class divisions that reflect the displacements of the Cold War and congressional preferences for the not so tired and not so poor; innumerable histories colliding, even in a single family. Yet here you are, the evidence of American warfare and familial risk and survival, making yourselves through panethnic coupling and an emergent culture of image, story, song, food. A tiger clan, a model fucking minority, a blueprint for multicultural democracy." — Jeff Chang[72]

We believe the juxtaposition of the black and white races has resulted in a massive psycho-existential complex. By analyzing it we aim to destroy it. — Frantz Fanon[73]

"Who is us?" Jeff Chang asked, pondering the "impossibility of Asian Americanness." In a New York Times essay on the death of college student Michael Deng by hazing at an Asian-American fraternity in 2013, Jay Caspian Kang declared that "Asian American" is a mostly meaningless term.[74] "Nobody grows up speaking Asian-American," Kang explains, "nobody sits down to Asian-American food with their Asian-American parents and nobody goes on pilgrimages back to their motherland of Asian-America." An oft-contested term, "Asian American" cannot be assumed to be immediately understood or to have an accepted definition. Before embarking upon a study of Asian American theology, the problematic of Asian American theological subjectivity must first be addressed. In the previous chapter, I outlined a broad history of migration of peoples from a place now called Asia; in this chapter I turn to the discursive construction of Asia and Asian America and its subjects. By *discourse* I mean conversations produced from ideology and language, describing the power to know, name, and assign meaning. Race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation are such examples of structures constituted through discourse.

According to Kang, discrimination is what really binds Asian Americans together, harkening to the accepted narrative of the establishment of Asian American identity as a political tool by social movements in the late 1960s. This activist interpretation of Asian American identity forms the hagiography of the genesis of Asian American studies programs alongside ethnic studies. The latter programs served as a principal demand in Asian American organizing and remains a crucial site of struggle in universities and the academy at large. Within theological discourses, the genealogy of Asian American theology can also be traced back to a similar era, in which Third World Liberation movements inspired the development of liberation theologies in its various forms. Asian American theology is often viewed as a contextual or ethnic theology, developed amongst the proliferation of theologies of inculturation and ethnic theologies, which sought to produce theological knowledge from the particularity of non-White cultural locations. Asian liberation theologies, for example, agitated for a contextualization of Christianity in Asia and liberation from White Christianity, which had arrived in Asia through the deeply intertwined processes of missionization, colonization, and imperialism. The proliferation of liberation or contextual theologies within Asian contexts were inspired by the North and South American forms of liberation theology, producing theologies from below, such as Dalit and Palestinian liberation theologies, Minjung theology, and Aloysius Pieris' Asian liberation theology. The shared impetus between these theologies is the grounding of each respective theological method within distinctive geo-spatial contexts, sensitive to the particularities of the ways in which power is configured and the oppressive mechanisms which constitute what is

identified as the oppressed group. This forms the social location, or *locus theologicus*, that generates liberation theology as a theology from below.

Some have argued that the emphasis of liberation theologies on "the oppressed" leaves it vulnerable to a romanticization of the poor, a critique similarly levied upon Marxism with respect to the working class or proletariat. This potential flattening of the variegated forms of oppression, is not unrelated to the pitfall in intersectional politics of devolving into an "oppression Olympics." But such critiques fail to appreciate the hermeneutic circle of suspicion critical to the method of liberation theology. That is, the continual reflection through praxis that allows for fine analyses and responses to interlocking oppressions. At any rate, the liberation theologies of the 1960s, together with the Asian feminist theological modes of interpretation, mostly articulated by East Asians and influenced by postcolonial and feminist theologies, registers a palpable influence in the later theological discourse that is commonly called Asian American theology.

One of the outgrowths of contextualized Asian feminist theology is the conception of women as the "minjung within the minjung," signifying the multiple layers of oppression that produce a "double-bind," articulated for example by Chung Hyun Kyung, and also Wai-Ching Wong's "poor woman," interpreted as a referential locus for an Asian feminist Christology. It is possible here to transpose Althaus-Reid's critique of Latin American liberation theology, where 'the poor' and 'the poor woman' were "fetishisations, reified phenomena extrapolated from the reality of people's lives, concepts which lost any relation to the context which produced them," so that liberationists produced "a discourse of the native woman, successfully sold as 'the poor mother', 'the poor but strong Christian woman' fitting the patriarchal romantic idea of womanhood in Latin America."[75] Perhaps more importantly, feminist theology in Latin America lacked a historical material analysis, and offered no explanations or challenges to the "dialectical praxis between economy and genderised culture in Latin America," in line with "Gospel and Culture theological fashion which seems to think that cultural realms are outside sexual economic ones" and following "liberationist decency based on tight sexual constructions."[76] In other words, in building on Asian and Asian American feminist theologies it is necessary to be cautious of obscuring class difference and reproducing heterosexual binaries.

Asian American theology can be historically understood as arising concurrent with Asian American identity, against the backdrop of Third World revolutions, particularly in Asia, and of Asian feminist and liberation theologies. But what is Asian? Nami Kim has argued that the term "Asian" and "Asianness" in their current categorical and representational usages in theological discourse are inadequate for a pertinent and liberative feminist theology in the face of increasing forces of globalization.[77] Tracing the genealogy of the term "Asian" reveals that the category was deployed as an oppositional identity through the resurgence of anticolonial nationalist movements beginning in the nineteenth century, reappropriating its representational use in Orientalist discourse, which also used descriptors such as "Oriental" and "Eastern." According to Wong, the very history of colonialism discursively gave rise to the conception of a contextual theology of a "vaguely unifying Asia."[78] Thus "Asia" signifies less a bounded geological formation and more a discursively constructed Other in relation to the Western epistemological subject. Thinking beyond a reductive East/West binary, Kim notes that this rhetoric was also used by Japan as an ideological justification for imperialism and colonization of its neighboring countries under the banner of "Pan-Asianism," even as anti-Asian sentiment in the United States intensified following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Nonetheless, the wide acceptance of Asian as a self-referential marker was registered by the 1955 Bandung Conference between African and Asian nations, which indicted Western racialism and colonial exploitation. The conference, according to Franklyn Balasundaram, highlighted the challenges from the Asian context to theology and inspired further theological development later at

the East Asian Christian Conference, the Christian Conference of Asia, and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians.[79] Distinctive Asian and Asian feminist theologies were articulated such as by Aloysius Pieris, Virginia Fabella, Sun Ai Lee Park, and Chung Hyun Kyung, with emphases on the linguistic heterogeneity and religious plurality of the Asian context. Invoking Spivak's strategic essentialism, Kim proposes the strategic use of "Asian" as a persistent critique with the acknowledgment of "the unavoidable usefulness of something that is very dangerous," for example in the use of "Asian" within U.S. contexts as a political denominator based on a common history of oppression and struggle against U.S. imperialism in Asia. Recognizing that struggle against racism is never static nor complete, an ongoing examination of the effectiveness of the use of the term "Asian" is therefore necessary, more so given the continuously changing demographics of migrations from Asia.[80]

At the same time, a feminist theological approach must move beyond a portrayal of Asian religions and cultures as relatively unchanging practices and beliefs, frozen in time and space. The imperative for such an anti-essentialist critique becomes clear when considering the works of Asian American theologians drawing from East Asian religious and cultural symbols such as Tao, Chi, Han, Jung, as critical reflection is necessary in their theological explorations in North American contexts. There is no need to make caricatures of ourselves. Postcolonial feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan's attention to the uneven economic development in Asia and in particular among Asian women, points to the possibility of conceptualizing "Asian" not in binary opposition to the monolithic category "Western" but rather as changing and multiple "Asias," in terms of the complex interactions within, between, and across national boundaries under a transnational capitalist market economy. Thus, as with Asianness, the proper use of "Asian American" in theological discourse should not be a simple racial ethnic affiliation but a "willingness to engage in a critical theological discourse that unceasingly challenges the dominant racist, nationalist, and colonial discourse, and that, simultaneously, can provide a theological vision for a better world."[81] Interrogations of the "Asian" lead to questions about the "Asian American," and in particular the subjects of Asian American theology.

Asian American theological subjectivity

Asian American theology often proceeds from the vantage point of localizing White theological methodologies to Asian American contexts, and therefore falters for the inadequacy of the former in addressing the latter. But it is precisely because the task of contextualization is understood to be the inculturation or indigenization of theology, locating Asian American theology within the contextual frame of "Asian America" tacitly assumes the stability of the Asian American theological subject, despite elaborations on its positionality as that of a marginalized, liminal, or hybrid people group. The common interpretation of Asian American theological subjectivity is essentially as citizen-subjects who claim Asian ethnic origins thus awarded the authority to construct Asian American theology as it were. The ongoing struggle to articulate an Asian American theology—or Asian American Christian ethics or Asian American biblical interpretation—is rationalized in two ways. First, through the failure of White theology, which sustains the self-delusion of being universal and context-free, to address the Asian American experience, and secondly, through the need for confronting the multiplicity and heterogeneity of Asian American identity, a theological project parallel to the coalescing of Asian Americans for the purposes of consolidating political power and representation. It is in this sense that the failure of Asian American studies to address the fragility and instability of the Asian American subject is also a failure of Asian American theologies. Asian American theological identity is often constructed unproblematically as a historical subject and

marginalized race. Decentering Whiteness from our theology requires no longer seeing ourselves as being on the margins. Asian American theology must stake its claim as theology that is self-referential, not marginal or liminal to anything.

Many works by Asian American theologians have pivoted upon images which, while possibly valuable symbols within specific ethnic cultures, only serve to further entrench caricatures of Asian and Asian American identity when viewed outside of these culturally specific frames. Without discrediting the important intellectual and theological contributions contained within the pages of these works, titles such as *Off The Menu*, *Making Paper Cranes*, and ideas such as Bamboo Theology and Waterbuffalo Theology inadvertently reproduce stereotypes about Asian and Asian American cultures and reinscribe Asian American theology within an orientalist framework.[82] In a similar vein, the Asian American imaginary is often constructed as one that is marginal, in-between, or interstitial. While this may be empirically consonant with the emotional experiences and lived realities of certain Asian Americans and captured in the amalgamation two differently constructed geolocative identities: Asian and American, an emphasis on marginality belies the process of marginalization. Restricting attention to the marginal obscures the unequal power relations and racist hegemony by which the condition of marginality is produced. Written as "Asian-American," the hyphen is semantically overburdened with the anxiety of being unable to conform to either of the uniformized Asian or American subjects. Identity is reduced to a hyphen.

W.E.B. Du Bois' color line is the dividing line between Black and White, a monochromatic lens through which popular U.S. politics is interpreted, but the Black-White dichotomy is a reductionist representation of the nation-state and its imperial history. This binary thinking is deeply ingrained into the U.S. psyche and manifests in other spheres of social and political life: one is only ever one of two things, having little imaginative capacity for those who are both or neither. The U.S. imaginary thus suffers from not only the problem of essentialized, reified categories, but also the poverty of choices produced by this ideological tunnel vision, which carries material and psychic ramifications due to nonconformity to the false binary. Within this context, categories such as Asian American, mestizaje, and mulatto serve as disruptions to the racial binary, not by simply producing a third subjectivity or even triangulating the discourse as Claire Jean Kim argues, but more importantly by critiquing it through revealing the discursive constructions of race itself.[83]

The interpretation of the Asian American condition as marginal or liminal is in part a product of seeing oneself as a protagonist within the drama of immigration and assimilation. The desire of Asian immigrant parents for the success and security and prosperity of their children is a Faustian deal—the correlations of the racial and class stratifications of White-dominant societies require that conventional success is constituted by a "sociological Whitening," whereby socio-economic power and class privileges are maintained by the performance of Whiteness, being allowed assimilation through neo-liberal ideologies of multiculturalism and diversity that center Whiteness or the performance thereof, and of which anti-Blackness and settler colonial violence is foundational. And besides the generational trauma of immigration and war, there is the disconnect between first and later generations produced by the vastly different structures of sentiment and linguistic modes of expression, or generational liminality. This Whitening manifests in processes of shedding negative markers of Asianness, including large portions of the cultural and linguistic practices of previous generations, generating a persistent anxiety regarding this "already and not yet" transmutation of the racial self, and surfaces in prolific narrations of this angst, a major theme in Asian American cultural production. This forms the basis of the diagnoses of racial melancholia and racial dissociation that I shall return to below.

Besides marginality, another key theoretical conception of Asian American subjectivity is the use of notions of hybridity, such as by postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha. In practice, Asian American hybridity crudely manifests almost as an "Asian fusion," with Asian American theologies

being articulated through anthologies of by theologians of Asian descent, so as to produce a seemingly united front, due in part to the enduring need for asserting a legitimacy against the hegemony of White theologies. Such collaborations, nonetheless, have potentially inclusive and open boundaries that invite contributions from groups underrepresented in Asian American theologies, such as Southeast Asians and South Asians. Hybridity also finds a physical basis in interracial and interethnic marriages, and transnational adoptions. While the need for Asian American theological voices has been consistently argued, the common response has been articulations of theology from a racial particularity, rather than the critical theological discourse suggested by Kim. Moreover, the constant negotiation between "Asianness" and national origin prevents a critical negotiation of difference for reason of emphases on an approximate uniform subjectivity in Asian American theological discourse. The methodology of narrative theology in Asian American contexts, nonetheless, remains indispensable to the project of constructing Asian American theologies and contributing to Viet Nguyen's "narrative plenitude," or Chinua Achebe's "balance of stories," facilitated by "not copycats but those able to bring hitherto untold stories, along with new ways of telling."[84] Nguyen, commenting on the celebrated but problematic Crazy Rich Asians movie in 2018, observes that we "live in an economy of narrative scarcity, in which we feel deprived and must fight to tell our own stories and fight against the stories that distort or erase us." The real test of whether an economy of narrative plenitude is achieved, Nguyen writes, is when "we have the luxury of making mediocre movies. And after having made mediocre movies, we would be rewarded with the opportunity to make even more mediocre movies."[85] The same remains true of Asian American theology; the present narrative scarcity demands that such "Asian fusion" anthologies be continually produced, to work towards a balance of stories. How should Asian American theologies move beyond producing a narrative theological plenitude, to generative and critical theologies?

To be Asian is meaningless in Asia. It is only outside of Asia that being Asian takes on semantic potential, as an oppositional and globalized identity constructed through difference and the will to self-determination. In reflecting on Father Emmanuel Katongole's "I didn't know I was Black until I came to America," Jonathan Tran writes, "I didn't know I was Asian American until I started going to church," describing the experience of attending a Chinese American church in the Midwest.[86] As with Blackness, to be Asian outside of Asia is to be othered, where "Asian" is a generic marker of otherness that was at first applied rather than asserted. In this light, Kang's whimsical motherland "AsianAmerica" is a disruption to nationalistic approaches to Asian American identity construction: the tendency to emphasize national origin over an equally abstract Asianness reveals the primacy of nationalist discourse. Asian Americanness is an attempt at self-realization by asserting an identity that mediates between what Fumitaka Matsuoka called the particularity of being and the commonality of being.[87] Especially with regards to people groups often rendered invisible or exterior to the Asian American category, national origin is held in tension with "Asianness," revealing the fraught nature of Asian American identity. The anthology of Asian American theological voices entitled *Realizing the America of Our Hearts*, recalling the novel of early Filipino American author Carlos Bulosan *America is in the Heart*, might be corrected to "realizing the AsianAmerica of our hearts," where this mythical "AsianAmerica" reveals the fact that "America" has never stood to represent simply a concrete geographical location, but a geo-social territory, in this case an imaginary homeland for the Asian American imaginary.[88] Yet the futility of such a project—and its settler colonial implications—must be held in tension with its necessity. Kandice Chuh's reading of Bulosan together with Bienvenido Santos' work *Immigrant Blues* displaces the privileged centrality of race as the category by which one understands and investigates the formation of Asian America, and recognizes that conceiving of Asian American studies as simultaneously studies of sexuality, and of anti-heteronormativity as antiracism, is necessary to the project of developing a politics of heterogeneity.[89] Aligning Asian American theologies with Asian American

studies, this calls for a conception of the former as theologies of sexuality, whereby the interpellation of the Asian American body as a citizen-subject of empire intertwines with heteronormative theological discourse. Indeed, this agrees Marcella Althaus-Reid's notion of indecent theology as a response to liberation theology, and the notion of sexual theologies which we shall attend to later.

In what other ways have Asian American theological subjects been conceived? The activist interpretation of Asian American identity is the operational viewpoint in the recent volume on *Asian American Christian Ethics* edited by Ilsup Ahn and Grace Y. Kao, which seeks to establish Asian American Christian ethics as a proper subfield of Christian ethics by "invoking the social activist origins of the term Asian American in our characterization of Asian American Christian ethics as work in Christian ethics written by those who specifically adopt a pan-ethnic Asian American consciousness, identity, or set of concerns therein." They circumscribe the shared experiences of racialization and racial discrimination in the U.S. as one corner of the Wesleyan quadrilateral, alongside scripture, tradition, and reason as sources of theological and ethical reflection.[90] Their work attempts to "signal politically in a nonessentialist fashion 'Asian American' in Asian American Christian ethics," parallel to Kim's conceptualization of the "Asian" in Asian theology, and also Kwok Pui-lan's assertion that most Asian male or female theologians retain their diverse understandings of what constitutes being Asian, while deploying the term to signify a collective consciousness against the theological hegemony of the West and to affirm that God's revelations and actions could be discerned through the histories and cultures of Asian peoples. Yet, despite this expression of commitment to non-essentialism, Kao and Ahn expressly conceptualize Asian American identity as a demographic category according to the definitions of the U.S. Census Bureau, carefully excluding Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders who contest attempts to subsume them together with Asian Americans and also those outside of South and East Asia, for example Central and Western Asia, and the Middle East, whose exclusion "generally goes uncontested."

These seemingly contradictory assertions risk mutual negation and leave open the question of the nature of Asian American theo-ethical subjectivity, thus requiring a closer analysis. It is not simply the mutability of the census label that underscores the instability and therefore the inadequacy of relying on state-sanctioned definitions of the "Asian American," but a closer look at the long history of violence perpetrated by the nation-state against Asiatically-raced bodies within its borders and colonies reveals the material risks involved in allowing the terms to be defined primarily by empire. On the other hand, while recourses to the activist origin of "Asian American" continue to animate important work both in the academy and communities, which remain sites of struggle for reason of invisibility to the institutional gaze, the grounding of Asian American theologies in the social activism of the past generation also requires further interrogation. The shift in semantic content over time, in this case through reappropriation and protest, makes clear the simultaneous possibility and fluidity of identity construction.

The temptation to essentialize Asian American theological identity for the purpose of producing a multiplicity of Asian American voices that easily cohere into accepted models is foregrounded by considering the ontology of Blackness, which has also been challenged, particularly with regards to James Cone's theological interpretation of Blackness in Black liberation theology. According to Victor Anderson, Black theology as formulated by Cone "risks self-referential inconsistency when it sees itself as radically oppositional to White racism and White theology," and "Whiteness appears to be the ground of Black experience, and hence of Black theology and its new Black being."[91] Said otherwise, Black theology understood as such requires Whiteness, White racism, and White theology for its legitimacy. We must therefore be careful to avoid this transgression when considering Asian American theological subjectivity in the context of liberation. The express method of classical liberation theologies has primarily been from the theological viewpoint of a minoritized identity, particularly in the context of North American identity politics, which proliferated as a

corollary to the agitations for self-determination and representation of different groups, and the generative experiences of suffering. The ontology of the common Asian American theological subject must thus also be persistently re-examined, both within marginalized and hegemonic theological discourses in order to uncover the particularities of the presumed universal subject and the social construction of the racialized or gendered theological subject. To resolve the problem of Asian American subjectivity, I turn first to Eng and Han's diagnoses of racial melancholia and racial dissociation in a particular cross-section of Asians in the United States, supplemented by Fanon's psychoanalytic reflections on race, and secondly to Chuh's critique of Asian American uniform subjectivity within Asian Americanist discourse, which can be mapped onto Asian American theological discourse. The former describes the affective dimension of one's racial identifications within the larger social structure, and the latter describes the discursive and material constructions of the racial formation itself.

Racial melancholia and racial dissociation

In David Eng and Shinhee Han's study of racial melancholia and racial dissociation, they identify the respective conditions of racial melancholia and racial dissociation in second-generation Asian immigrants come of age in a post-Cold War and Civil Rights Era (Generation X), and first-generation Asian immigrants come of age in the time of neoliberalism, globalization, and colorblindness (Generation Y). Building on Freud's notion of melancholia as unresolved grief, in the sense of knowing *whom* but not *what* one has lost, racial melancholia is a series of failed and unresolved assimilations into the United States and exclusion from Whiteness. Within the context of Asian America, racial melancholia can be identified in the model minority subject as the partial success and partial failure to mourn one's identification with both Whiteness and "Asian cultures." It also occurs in the transnational adoptee who identifies with the White adoptive parents' race, but whose White parents to not identify with the Asian adoptee's race. Racial melancholia "indexes the considerable social as well as psychological pressures associated with successfully approximating the model minority stereotype of the hard working, self-effacing, and perpetually agreeable Asian American immigrant child.[92] The ambivalence, anger, and rage produced by racial melancholia are "the internalized refractions of an institutionalized system of whiteness as property bent on the exclusion and obliteration of the racial object."[93] Institutional oppression and exclusion is introjected within to produce what W. E. B. Du Bois called double consciousness, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."[94]

In an attempt to depathologize melancholia, Eng and Han adapt D. W. Winnicott's theory of transition to conceive of race as a transitional space. Winnicott refers to the "first possession" of an infant, such as the thumb or doll, as a transitional object that opens up a transitional space, an intermediate area between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived. Transitional space exists between internal and external, between subjective and objective, and provide a third space between inner and outer worlds, making negotiable now what was before thought to be mutually exclusive categories. And unlike the lost object in racial melancholia that is mourned, the transitional object is never lost, instead undergoes a gradual decathexis, meaning that emotional investment is withdrawn from it. As Winnicott writes, it loses meaning as the transitional phenomena become diffuse, spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and the 'external world as perceived by two persons in common.'[95] This negotiation between inner psychic reality and external world properly captures the process of racial formation as both an intersubjective and intrasubjective experience. In place of Winnicott's notion of object relations in

the context of Freudian notions of transference, it is in the field of racial relations—the relations through which race is constituted—that "racial transitional objects" function. Race as a transitional space then opens to the possibility of racial reparations, in which the psychic splitting of differently racialized objects into either good or bad objects can be healed: both good and bad are allowed to inhabit and transit across once segregated racial divides, where White is purely good and Asian is purely evil.

Racial dissociation, on the other hand, draws on Phillip Bromberg's notion of adaptive and pathological forms of dissociation, shaped by one's early infantile experiences. Dissociation, defined as the loss of the capacity for self-reflection and the ability to process emotionally charged mental conflicts. It acts as a defense to preserve a sense of selfhood and self-continuity, becoming pathological to the degree that it limits and forecloses one's ability to hold and reflect upon different states of mind with a single experience of "me-ness." Adaptive dissociation, on the other hand, is the ability to "feel like one self while being many" and the psychic capacity to "stand in the spaces between opposing realities without losing any of them." Importantly, this psychic stability is not predicated on seamless integration but rather on the adaptive "illusion of cohesive personal identity."[96] Existing contradictions are not resolved but rather allowed to be in dialectic relationship with one another. Within the field of racial relations, the question becomes how competing racial realities, such as W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of double consciousness and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, can be balanced in "a society in which it is often difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile the ways in which others see you with the ways in which you see yourself." Individual racial formation negotiates between looking versus feeling, skin versus flesh, intersubjectivity versus intrasubjectivity.

While various transnational accounts celebrate cosmopolitanism and globalization as being "at home in the world," or as the poet Nima Yushij declared, "the world is my home," Eng and Han identify in transnational Asian subjects such as parachute children a pathological racial dissociation that produces a psychic nowhere. Psychic nowhere is a condition that correlates with "the absence of a clear geographic belonging or destination."[97] In contrast to racial melancholia, that is able to project its racial discontents onto one's parents—whether biological and Asian or adoptive and transracial—that exist nearby, the psychic nowhere of racial dissociation arises from the physical dislocation and collective unconscious of a colorblind or "post-racial" neoliberal society, even if emotional attachments to faraway family persist. Whereas racial melancholia follows Freud's hysteric model of condensation, where hysteria arises from repressed identifications and desires, and the lost object demands to be analyzed and interpreted, racial dissociation, on the other hand, follows Freud's paranoid model of dispersion, where what is repressed is disavowed then projected outward into multiple spaces, thus more difficult to locate.[98] Indeed, in Eng and Han's work, race appears as the political unconscious of sexuality, and sexuality the political unconscious of race. The one arises as a conscious manifestation of the unconscious prohibitions and taboos of the other.[99] Kimberlée Crenshaw's important notion of intersectionality in critical race theory suggests attending to both in legal theory; Eng and Han suggest doing the same for psychoanalysis.

In order to move from a pathological to healthy form of racial dissociation, they adapt Winnicott's notion of the good-enough mother in psychoanalytic theory to a "good-enough" interpretation of race. The concept of the good-enough seeks to mediate the extreme dialectics of love and hate, self and other, white and black, allowing for different racial self-states, feelings, and experiences instead of forcing frozen and intransigent states of racial division and dissonance. A good-enough racial formation would "avoid creating a binary of absolute victims and perpetrators that render individual agency and responsibility of the racial subject moot in the face of larger historical and political shifts."[100] Together, the notions of racial melancholia and racial dissociation, answered by race as a transitional space and the good-enough race, offer useful descriptions of the

Asian American psyche. Yet, while Eng and Han's work provide an important convergence of critical race theory and psychoanalysis, they acknowledge that their study is limited to setting of "comparatively privileged class of Asian American adolescents and young adults in private and public US institutions of higher education," thus predominantly East Asian students in majority White elite spaces. The class dimension of their study is necessarily obscured, even if it is recognized, by the subjectivities of the students and patients. Indeed, modern psychotherapy itself is a highly lucrative practice and unaffordable option for most. Secondly, despite the emphasis on psychoanalysis, Eng and Han's work is surprisingly asexual, affording few insights into the sexual unconscious of race and leaving open the sexual nature of Asian American construction, not to mention Asian American theology.

Fanon's work, based on psychiatric work which included "students, workers, and the pimps of Pigalle and Marseille" offers something of a corrective. His stated aim was to "liberate the black man from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in a colonial situation," and elsewhere, to "liberate the black man from himself."[101] Among these complexes is the alienation arising from the desire to become white, or "lactification," as "it is commonplace in Martinique to dream of whitening oneself magically as a way of salvation."[102] The failure of resolving one's alienation through lactification produces racial melancholia. Writing in the context of the Antilles, Fanon describes the attempt at identification as follows: "The black child subjectively adopts a white man's attitude," and gradually "a way of thinking and seeing that is basically white forms and crystallizes in the young Antillean. Whenever he reads stories of savages in his white schoolbook he always thinks of the Senegalese." The collective unconscious, according to Fanon, is the repository of prejudices, myths, and collective attitudes of a particular group.[103] Through the collective unconscious, the Antillean becomes White, as moral consciousness implies a splitting, a fracture of consciousness between a dark and a light side. "Moral standards require the black, the dark, and the black man to be eliminated from this consciousness. A black man, therefore, is constantly struggling against his own image."[104] Moreover, "in the collective unconscious of *Homo occidentalis* the black man—or, if you prefer, the color black—symbolizes evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, and famine." Thus, Fanon writes, the Antillean has the same collective unconscious as the European, and it is normal for the Antillean to be a negrophobe. "Unconsciously, then, I distrust what is black in me, in other words, the totality of my being."[105]

Another complex of the colonial condition is the self-withdrawal of the ego as a defense mechanism in response to pain, wherein the only way out is the White world: "From black to white—that is the only way to go. One is white, so one is rich, so one is handsome, so one is intelligent."[106] Here it is not so much the truth as it is the aspiration of becoming White through cultural performance and economic progress. Related to this self-withdrawal, which is also described by racial dissociation, is an abandonment neurotic or "Cinderella complex" based on "the *anxiety* aroused by any abandonment, the *aggressivity* to which it gives rise, and the resultant *devaluation of self*," leading one "not to love so as not to be abandoned."[107] The way out through the White world is not simply in becoming White, but also being loved by and having sex with White people. By loving me, Fanon writes of the Black man, the White woman "proves to me that I am worthy of a white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man … I espouse white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. Between these white breasts that my wandering hands fondle, white civilization and worthiness become mine."[108] Similarly, the Black woman "has only one way open to her and one preoccupation—to whiten the race. The mulatto woman wants not only to become white but also to avoid slipping back. … it's a question of saving the race."[109] In both cases it is White love, the White body that gives value to the non-White, a perversion of Rowan Williams' notion of the body's grace, which will conclude the last chapter.

The Black self in White society is both a phobic and phobogenic object, provoking anxiety in itself and others. It is surrounded by a fearsome world of anti-Black violence, itself inducing irrational fear in non-Blacks. Negrophobes do not have the guts to hate the Black man, Fanon writes."Hatred is not a given; it is a struggle to acquire hatred, which has to be dragged into being, clashing with acknowledged guilt complexes. ... In a sense he must embody *hatred*. This is why Americans have replaced lynching by discrimination."[110] The phobic object is overdetermined; it "need not be there, it is enough that somewhere the object *exists*: is a possibility. Such an object is endowed with evil intentions and with all the attributes of a malefic power."[111] The Black man is both "genital" and the "symbol of evil and ugliness," and together "whoever says rape says black man," at the same time embodying genital power out of reach of morals and taboos. White women "see the black man at the intangible gate leading to the realm of mystic rites and orgies, bacchanals and hallucinating sexual sensations."[112]

In this respect the Asian body is a departure from that of the Black body in a White society: the Asian is a robotic and erotic object. It is robotic in the sense of beliefs of hyperproductivity and academic accomplishment, as Iyko Day draws parallels with Moishe Postone's analysis whereby Jews become the personification of "the tangible, destructive, immensely powerful, and international domination of capital as a social form" and Colleen Lye's discussion of pre-1942 expressions of anti-Japanese sentiment in California agriculture, wherein the "inorganic quality of the Asiatic body" manifests the threat of finance capital.[113] Thus, the economic conflation of Asians as the "new Jews." While Lisa Lowe argues that capitalism profited through producing racialized difference in labor forms, Day proposes that within this difference, Asians personify the abstract dimension of capitalism through labor time. That is, whereas Jews in nineteenth century Europe personified the destructive nature and abstract domination of capital, confined to financial sectors of the economy, the Chinese workers of the transcontinental railroad in the United States personified a robotic efficiency and the quantitative sphere of abstract labor, measured in time.[114] Day triangulates the settler/native binary with a third "alien" category, wherein the African American represents an undisposable alien labor force and the Asian American a disposable one, made possible through immigration controls.

The Asian body is also an erotic object, highly sexualized through the White male gaze. In the Asian woman it is both exotic sex object and evil temptress, capable of untold sexual mechanics, while the Asian man is *also* feminized, through emasculating caricatures of effeminate disposition and small penises. In Edward Said's study of the West and the Middle East in *Orientalism*, he shows that the Orient was seen as exuding "dangerous sex," that threatened hygiene and domestic seemliness with freedom of intercourse, yet containing "unimaginable antiquity, inhuman beauty, boundless distance," concealing a "deep, rich fund of female sexuality."[115] And to state the obvious connection between sexual dominance and colonialism, "the space of weaker or underdeveloped regions like the Orient was viewed as something inviting French interest, penetration, insemination—in short, colonization."[116] Again here the problem of desire makes trouble: the White male gaze that dreams an orientalist sexual fantasy desires the Asian female body—whether conscious or unconscious—is unfortunately compatible with the desire for lactification. Whereas in libidinal nature of anti-Black violence, there exists an unconscious fear that Black people will do unto the White people what the White person imagines they would do Whites if they were Black, in anti-Asian violence and Asian fetishism there is only the unconscious gratification or sadism from the expectation that this dominance—whether sexual, economic, or physical—is desired, asked for, fantasized about. In Fanon's critique of Octave Mannoni's dependency and inferiority complexes in the colonized, he quotes: "Wherever Europeans have founded colonies of the type we are considering, it can be safely said that their coming was unconsciously expected—even desired—by the future subject peoples. Everywhere there existed legends foretelling the arrival of strangers form

the sea, bearing wondrous gifts with them." To which Fanon comments, "the white man is governed by a complex of authority, a complex of leadership, whereas the Malagasy is governed by a complex of dependency. Everyone is happy."

The job of the psychoanalyst in response to the inferiority complex, Fanon prescribes, is to help "consciousnessize" the unconscious of the patient, to "no longer be tempted by a hallucinatory lactification, but also to act along the lines of a change in social structure." Faced with the dilemma to "whiten or perish," the patient must be enabled to "choose action (or passivity) with respect to the real source of the conflict, i.e., the social structure." The social structure here is one that makes the inferiority complex possible, in a society that "draws its strength by maintaining this complex" and "proclaims the superiority of one race over another."[117] To identify the Asian as both robotic and erotic object in White society implicates the violence embedded in the structure of racial capitalism in ways that diagnoses of racial melancholia and racial dissociation cannot. Fanon's analysis reveals more clearly race and sex operating as the political unconsciousness of the other: sexual desires are also racial ones, and racial relations are also sexual ones. Racial and sexual violence contain each other.

A dramatic example of this is the case of Daniel Holtzclaw, born in Guam to a White male police officer from Oklahoma and a Japanese mother. Holtzclaw joined the Oklahoma City Police Department, and was convicted in 2015 for sexually assaulting eight Black women, most of whom were sex workers, ex-offenders, and current and recovering drug addicts between 2013 and 2014. While some doubts were raised regarding the conviction using weak DNA evidence, the trial took place in the height of the Black Lives Matter movement and fueled much public outrage. Racially, Holtzclaw was coded as simply White rather than biracial, though some Asian American activists pointed out this fact, leading both to calls for collective introspection and suspicion that Holtzclaw was yet another 'fall guy' as was NYPD officer Peter Liang who was rightfully convicted for the murder of Akai Gurley earlier that year. For our purposes, what is perhaps more important than the truth of Holtzclaw's guilt is its believability. While it is not known how Holtzclaw identifies racially, it is interesting to speculate whether a stronger identification with his Whiteness over his Asianness—or indeed a need to overcompensate for his half-Asian heritage through playing football in high school and college and becoming a police officer after failing to get drafted into the National Football League—produced a libidinal drive for sexual dominance over and gratuitous violence towards vulnerable Black women. Fanon describes the "racial allocation of guilt," where "every time there was a rebellion, the military authorities sent only the colored soldiers to the front line. It is 'peoples of color' who annihilated the attempts at liberation by other 'peoples of color,' proof that there no grounds for universalizing the process."[118] Elsewhere, "in no way must my color be felt as a stain. From the moment the black man accepts the split imposed by the Europeans, there is no longer any respite, and from that moment on, isn't it understandable that he will try to elevate himself to the white man's level? To elevate himself into the range of colors to which he has attributed a kind of hierarchy? We shall see that another solution is possible. It implies restructuring the world."[119] To begin this restructuring, we turn to the deconstruction of Asian American subjectivity.

Against uniform subjectivity

Chuh proposes to reconceive of Asian American studies as a subjectless discourse, which creates a conceptual space to prioritize difference by foregrounding the discursive constructedness of Asian American subjectivity. The need for such a conception arises when attending to the fact that Asian American studies—and, as I argue, Asian American theology—has mounted sophisticated

interrogations of representational objectifications of Asian-raced peoples in the United States, but has not paid equally critical attention to the way in which the Asian American subject is conceived. In other words, Asian American theological discourse often essentialises Asian American subjectivity, taking for granted that its epistemological boundaries are static and neatly circumscribed. This can be seen in the uses of methodologies such as autobiographical theology and story theology from Asian American perspectives, which deploy narratives of ethnic or national origin as generative loci of Asian American theological reflection.[120] For example, in pursuing the construction of Asian American identity and its dialogical interaction with biblical interpretation, Mary Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan refer to "Asian American" as the experience of living in North America as a member of a constellation of racial or ethnic minority communities, "more a social and political designation than a cultural identifier," hence constituting Asian Americanness through demography.[121] Elsewhere, Fumitaka Matsuoka introduces an anthology of Asian North American theological voices as one written from the perspectives of "those who claim themselves to be Americans of Asian ancestry who reside in Canada and the United States."[122] Acknowledging that in assembling any collection of contributions from scholars self-identifying as Asian American, Matsuoka refrains from imposing a uniform subjectivity amongst the contributors to the anthology. But assertions of the heterogeneity of Asian American theologies common to prefaces on Asian American theological writings must be further pushed towards interrogations of Asian American theological subjectivity itself. What is the net effect of producing a book on Asian American theology that acknowledges the impossibility of Asian American coherence?

Ahn and Kao, on the other hand, as I have described above, choose to ground the Asian American theo-ethical subject in political activism, which has been instrumental to establishing Asian American studies in institutional spaces, but as Chuh points out, this dominant narrative has prevented a more thorough engagement of Asian American studies with the poststructural problematization of referentiality, which would facilitate the postmodern jettisoning of the authority of the meta-narrative or the theological grand narratives critiqued by Althaus-Reid. I would further argue that despite attention to the social activist history of Asian American identity and the genealogical narratives of Asian American theologians, such a conception avoids confrontation with the later historical processes that have afforded relative privilege to Asian American immigrants that live up to the model minority myth and Asian American Christian conformity to the United States imperial apparatus as citizen-subjects of the nation-state. As such, these theological projects are not generative of liberation in terms of race, class, sexuality, gender, or nation.

In order to advance the agenda of liberation, Asian American theological discourse must first be reconceived also as subjectless in order to allow for comprehensive critiques of injustice and structural violence. Relying on fixed conceptions of identity elides the constructed and tentative nature of the Asian American theological subject, and in doing so limits the methodological scope to narratives whose agents have been predetermined by ideologies of nationhood and citizenship. Following Chuh, we are led to ask: What does it mean to practitioners of Asian American theologies when the anchoring terms "Asian" and "American" seem so fatally unstable? What motivates "Asian American" in the face of infinite heterogeneity among its referents?[123] The 1965 Immigration Act dramatically altered the notion of Asian America by introducing not only an underclass of immigrant labor, but also a managerial class of professionals whose migrations may be multilateral and disinterested in formal identification with the United States through citizenship, calling into question reliance on solely immigrant or refugee narratives. This problematizes discourses on marginalization and resistance in Asian American theologies, requiring an investigation of the "scattered hegemonies" that characterize the present and a materialist critique of the complicity with oppressive economic systems through narratives of upward mobility, corporate representation, and immigrant success.[124] In view of such developments, Chuh's subjectlessness is a means of attending

to the constraints on the liberatory potential of the achievement of subjectivity, which itself maintains an enduring fascination that is manufactured by powerful demands of the U.S. nation-state's conferment of equality through identity and citizenship. In contrast with Spivak, Chuh describes subjectlessness as the ethical grounds for the political practice of "strategic anti-essentialism," whereby "Asian American" is manufactured situationally and thus enabling critiques of the various configurations of power and knowledge through which the term comes to have meaning.[125] Reconstituting Asian American theology through difference requires a consistent theological critique of U.S. nationalism and its apparatuses of power, particularly as it implicates theological institutions, and also of analytic frameworks that recursively privilege identity over difference.

Viewed thus, "Asian American" as a discursive structure provides an entry point into histories of resistance and racism. It transfers the properties of the racialized and gendered nation onto bodies—of people, of literatures, of fields of study. Far from being a transparent, objective description of a knowable identity, the term may be conceived as a mediating presence that links bodies to the knowledge regimes of the U.S. nation. "Asian American," in this sense, is then a metaphor for resistance and racism.[126] In the following, I draw upon Chuh's analyses of legal and literary texts, examining their consequences for Asian American theological discourse. In the first instance, the colonial relation of Filipino America calls for an understanding that Asian American studies must consistently mount a twofold critique: of U.S. nationalism and its promise of subjective equality, and of Asian Americanist reliance on paradigms that require uniform subjectivity for coherence—that, like U.S. nationalism, equate subjectivity with achieved justice.[127] Through Chuh's reading of Bulosan and Santos' works, one sees the U.S. militarism in the Philippines as "feminized and infantilized burdens of the White man, simultaneously to be uplifted and mastered, and the heteronormative dimensions of migration and assimilation."[128] Racial difference in this register "alibis the reaffirmation of patriarchal heteronormativity" in anti-miscegenation laws and popular discourse surrounding Filipinos; while sexuality "instruments the regulation of the racialized identity of the nation."[129] This deconstruction thus problematizes one-dimensional conceptions of Asian American theology as racial difference, whether through notions of marginality or hybridity, which feminist theologians have long sought to dismantle. The complex interactions between these two non-equivalent axes call for interrogating the discursive constructedness of both race and gender, and the ways in which their determining forces intersect.

Secondly, the Japanese incarceration required the imagination of a "nikkei transnation" to which Japanese Americans belonged, regardless of formal citizenship, out of a belief in the essential and delocalized sameness of all Japanese people in order to justify their incarceration. That is, the formal conditions of U.S. citizenship of Japanese Americans were rejected in favor of allying them alongside the Japanese nation, thereby producing a "foreigner within," rendering Japanese Americans vulnerable to the alleged exigencies of war. This state production of transnationality raises the necessity of contesting both U.S. nationalism and Asian American theological employment of nation-based paradigms that "functionally rely on a seemingly stable and knowable prediscursive identity for objective coherence."[130] Naïve definitions of transnationality such as through the statistical heterogeneity of Asian American demographics must therefore give way to more nuanced understandings of how the transnational "Asian American" is constituted, keeping in view racialization as a technology of power of the U.S. nation state. Importantly, this experience of incarceration had forged a distinctly Japanese American theology of suffering, which predated the rise of liberation theologies critiquing these exact processes, a point which I shall return to in the next chapter.

Thirdly, the conception of Asian American studies and Asian American theologies in part through the distinction between, as Sau-ling Wong has put it, "Asians in America" and "Asians in

Asia," reproduces the territorial logic of U.S. nationalism and supports a Eurocentric, "othering" way of knowing.[131] Within the context of Asian American theological discourse, a critical transnational focus disrupts received conceptions of "Asia" as "someplace and something that happens somewhere over there", and challenges us to identify the material consequences of the imagined yet militarized boundaries of the United States, and what interests are served by maintaining this distance between "Asia" and "America."[132] Following Chuh, "Asian America" ought then to be conceived of as a "heterotopic formation," that enfigures the multiple and dissimilar spaces and places of discourse and history that collectively produce what seems at first glance, terminologically, to refer to distinctly bounded sites, Asia and America. Such a stance has crucial implications for Asian American theological approaches to ecclesiastical practice, especially when considering missiological projects whether abroad to Central America or Southeast Asia, or locally to "lower-income" neighborhoods which reproduce the spatial logic of "us" versus "them" through significations of "here" and "there," consequently reinscribing the differential relations enforced by capitalist and nationalist interests.

It is the absence of a unified identity, the a priori meaninglessness of "Asian American" that collectivizes Asian American theologies, undecidability rather than identity that "provides the grounds for unity, and identifying and contesting the forces that control intelligibility, that affiliate meanings."[133] Of course, theological study remains grounded by divine subjectivity, so deconstructing Asian American identity requires attention also to the ways in which God's self-revelation, which is a divine discourse, is communicated and interpreted through time-bound cultural and sexual frameworks. Attention to the subjectlessness of Asian American theologies calls for interrogations of essentialist modes of theological anthropology, which enters into a hermeneutic circle with anthropomorphisms of God that articulate particular forms of the human. The knowability of God depends on divine self-disclosure, which reflects the discursive constructedness of conceptions of God also, interpreted through the same conditions which constitute self-knowledge. Asian American theology reconceived thus opens the way for conceiving of God through difference and problematizes identifications of nation, gender, and race with divine authority, and the instability of the Asian American theological subject demands persistent self-critique leaving open and tentative the definitions of both Asian America and God. Elsewhere, Lisa Lowe has suggested that we can afford to rethink the notion of racialized ethnic identity in terms of differences of national origin, class, gender, and sexuality rather than presuming similarities and making the erasure of particularity on the basis of unity.[134] Nonetheless, the limitations of a subjectless approach to Asian American theology also become clear if only the discursive relations are held in view, obscuring the material relations that circumscribe Asian American identity through labor differentiation and class formations. In proposing that Asian American theologies be reconceived through subjectlessness then, I do not mean an epistemological hollowing out of the signifier, but rather an explicitly political approach to notions of Asian American hybridity and multiplicity through both the constitutive *discursive* and *material* relations, recognizing the inherent instability of its definition. These relations are inscribed on the Asiatically-raced body, dehumanized as robotic and exoticized as erotic, producing affective complexes such as racial melancholia, racial dissociation, inferiority, and dependency. Subjectlessnes as a theoretical and theological approach dovetails with the psychoanalytic approach to race as a transitional space, and good-enough to depathologize the sense of psychic nowhere.

Having thus opened the way for an unbounded approach to Asian American theology, it is imperative from the point of view of liberation that deconstruction cannot be an end in itself, but rather as a means of rendering visible the racial, sexual, and nationalist discourses that produce Asian Americanness, particularly those which are consistent with the projects of empire and capital. Crucially, it is from this vantage point that solidarity not only with minoritized or marginalized

persons in North America through racial, sexual, and national technologies can be built, but also with oppressed people groups in colonial and neo-colonial societies throughout the world. In other words, the abstractness of deconstruction remains an academic exercise unless it transcends the desire for institutionalization, which has become an end rather than the means through which liberation and conscientization, to borrow from Paolo Freire, is achieved, and is perhaps symptomatic of broader aspirations to Whiteness which Asian American theology must be prepared to relentlessly critique in self-reflection.[135] The will to Whiteness or lactification is further problematized in its inherent connection to empire, which brings to mind Kuan-Hsing Chen's critique of East Asian imperialist desires; more pointedly, historian Gary Okihiro's argument that the establishment of Ethnic Studies post-1968, in response to calls for Third World studies by the Third World Liberation Front and Black Power movements, was a capitulation because of its narrow focus on national-subjectivity. Ethnic studies as such domesticated an international alliance and struggle and reduced its revolutionary potential and power, trivializing declarations of global solidarity with liberation and antiracist struggles of Third World peoples[136] Okihiro's critique also implicates Asian American theologies insofar as they are conceived as "ethnic theologies" confined to struggles of identity and inclusion within institutional and national frames. It is necessary, then, to remain attentive and resistant to the constrictive frames of nationalist significations implicitly embedded within narrations of Asian American theologies through discourses of immigration, ancestry, and citizenship, and to retrieve a historical Asian American liberation theology.

3. A History We Never Knew Was Ours: Retrieving Asian American liberation theology

What they have actually delivered when they promised assimilation is only to make asses out of the suckers who bought the line. — Roy Sano[137]

We have seen that the Asian American theological subject is best understood as perpetually determined by the constantly shifting relations of power along axes of race, gender, and nation. It follows, then, that Asian American theological projects of identity construction must be attentive to the unequal power relations that tentatively determine Asian American identity, and according to Nami Kim, articulate critical theological discourses that challenge each one. Along these lines, Wonhee Ann Joh and Nami Kim have argued for a critical theology that "considers the tasks of Christian theology in relation to critical studies of US imperialist militarism in Asia," providing a theological interrogation of United States militarist expansionism rationalized through specifically Christian language that further buttresses notions like the White man's burden, manifest destiny, and the civilizing mission by the West, and the broader role of Christianity in empire building. Drawing on Kuan-Hsing Chen's threefold notion of decolonization, deimperialization, and de-cold-war, they triangulate the problematics of militarized subject formation, Christian ideological reinforcements, and Christian practices of resistance.[138] Their anthology addresses the paucity of theological interrogations of the United States military industrial complex in Asia, which has received significant attention in Asian American studies at large. Going further, I argue in this chapter that what is typically conceived as Asian American theology has not mounted the necessary theological critiques of the multiply intersecting axes of gender, race, class, and nation that constitute United States nationalism and imperialism, which rely in part upon appropriated theological narratives as rationalizing functions, let alone self-critiques of Asian American complicity in perpetuating these relations of power through institutional churches and individual notions of piety. The first task, then, is to follow the preceding examination of Asian American theological subjectivity to the deeper deconstructive question of what are the content and tasks of Asian American theologies, illuminating the constitutive dimensions and discursive constructions of Asian American theologies, from which a critical theological methodology might emerge.

The critical stance that Asian American subjectlessness insists upon raises the necessity of grounding Asian American theological discourse within liberative methodologies, which are characterized as theologizing from the viewpoint of the oppressed. To put it differently, critical theological analyses of power and oppression are preconditions for liberation, which can therefore be understood as a constructive aspect of critical theological discourse. Liberation theology burst on to the scene in the 1960s, beginning with Latin American Roman Catholic priests inspired by the outcome of Vatican II, developing a theology of liberation whose point of departure was the Christian poor, which formed the ecclesiastical base communities in South America and suffered under the effects of globalized capitalism. Concurrently, in the United States, the rise of revolutionary movements such as the Black Power movement and the involvement of the Black church in the civil rights movement, and in particular Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. inspired James Cone to develop a Black theology of liberation which radically interpreted Blackness—Black suffering, especially—as the primary source of theological reflection in the United States, and liberation from oppression as the principal task of theology. Thirdly, riding the current of second-wave feminism was a White feminist liberation theology which interrogated the heteropatriarchal power structures deeply embedded within churches and sexist hermeneutics, challenging the maleness of God and Christ, opening the way for broader theological conceptions of

God. These movements together inspired indigenous theological movements worldwide, in conjunction with the Third World revolutions and decolonization, leading to various Third World liberation theologies, including African and Asian liberation theologies attending the transition from the colonial imperialism to primarily capitalist nation-state apparatuses. The driving force of liberation theology is the condition of freedom, or liberation, establishing an antiracist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist stance through its critiques of systematic oppression and hegemonic domination. According to Gustavo Gutiérrez, liberation theology theologizes from the viewpoint of the oppressed, hence a theology "from below" that inverts the vector of theological knowledge production and asserts the "preferential option for the poor." It is a theological reflection through praxis, asking questions while we walk, *preguntando caminamos*, and must be engaged in class struggle. Viewed as a hermeneutic circle of suspicion, theological reflection through critical interrogation and persistent action calls for conceiving of Asian American theologies again as critical theologies of difference, continuously demanding and redefining liberation as determined by context and struggle. The early emergence of an Asian American consciousness brought with it the development of Asian American theologies, initially conceived as theologies of liberation and inculturation. A review of contemporary accounts of Asian American liberation theology and Asian American theology reveal that the two have often been conflated, and articulating a contemporary Asian American theology of liberation requires retrieving this historical form of Asian American liberation theology. In order to excavate this history, a detour is necessary to outline the broad contours that distinguish inculturation and liberation theologies.

Asian American theology: Inculturation vs. liberation

Liberation theology as outlined above stands in contrast, but not in opposition to, the inculturation or identity-building projects attempted by Asian American interpretations of hybridity, marginality, and story theology. Both inculturation and liberation theologies are contextual theologies, a notion first proposed by Taiwanese theologian Shoki Coe in 1968, theological methods that attend to the cultural contexts in which a theology is articulated.[139] Inculturation, as I use the term here, is the process of localizing an apparently universal, or at least foreign, theological formation, conceived within a globalized multicultural framework as the process of translating abstract theological concepts into culturally relevant terms. Asian American theologies, and similarly other "ethnic" theologies, are commonly categorized as contextualized theologies in the sense of socio-cultural contexts, leaving intact presumptions of the universality of European or White articulations of theological concepts. This resonates with Dipesh Chakrabarty's notion of "provincializing Europe," which calls for decentering Western ideologies, of which White theology can be seen to be a part.[140] The value of autobiographical theologies that narrate from the social location of Asiatically-raced people as counter-narratives to hegemonic theological discourse notwithstanding, inculturation projects do not require as a precondition critical stances that interrogate the relations of power and difference which discursively construct Asian Americanness. It is therefore important to analytically differentiate between the two. Theological discourse generated from experiences of marginalization may implicate racism and discrimination, but only as abstract notions, echoing hollow condemnations of racism as a sin without naming the agents and structures through which the oppression is produced, reproduced, and performed. Importantly, inculturation as an identity-building project does not necessarily interrogate the bourgeois Asian American politics that have developed into a key problematic that precludes solidarity with any oppressed people. Any project of contextualization, according to Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, cannot avoid addressing the dangers of being

absorbed into the "US-led western project" of empire, and furthermore the dynamics of power and privilege that accompany other empire building projects such as those of China and India.[141]

In developing an Asian theology of liberation, Aloysius Pieris proposed a theology of inculturation in terms of Asian religiousness and a theology of liberation responding to the poverty and oppression of the Asian masses present apparently competing modes of liberation, and are reconciled in an Asian context through the (non-Semitic) "religiousness of the poor," articulating a "theology of liberation for our continent and simultaneously announce the birth of genuine local churches of Asia."[142] In doing so, Pieris uncovers interactions between inculturation and liberation theology, the latter being understood through the Latin American framework of poverty rather than say, Black or feminist liberationist perspectives, thus interpreting liberation as liberation from Western models of Christianity and spirituality. But as I have argued, the territorialization of Asia, as in Pieris' work, and America as discrete, bounded geographies ignores the complex interactions of colonialism, empire, migration, and capitalism that require non-essentialist elaborations. Viewing Pieris' Asian liberation theology as a preliminary decolonial move, this suggests the need to further reconceive of Asian American theologies also as multiply constituted and discursively constructed, paying attention to the variegated forms of non-Christian spiritual traditions that shape pre-discursive religious practices and intersect with poverty through the preferential option for the poor, but at the same time foregrounding the heterogeneity and instability of Asian American theologies, thus shifting the focus from subjectivity, for which static uniformity is an impossible condition, to difference. Moreover, in arguing against a pluralistic theology of difference, a potential pitfall of inculturation projects such as Pieris', Kwok Pui-lan has proposed instead a "postcolonial theology of religious difference" that attends to the transformation of religious symbols and institutions in migration, exile, diaspora, and transnationalism, drawing attention to hybridized religious identities in the new contexts, which cannot be pinned down by fixed and reified notions of 'religion,' and how patriarchal relations in the religious arena intersect with and are transformed by colonial and other unequal relations.[143]

In De La Torre's volume on *Ethics: A Liberative Approach*, "liberative ethics" is understood to mean a focus on orthopraxis, the correct actions required to bring about liberation, as opposed to orthodoxy, and is inclusive of non-Christian approaches.[144] In the chapter on Asian American liberative ethics by Sharon Tan presents liberation as moving from marginality to liminality, from racism to solidarity, and from imperialism to story.[145] In the first case, Tan draws upon various theological interpretations of Asian American identity: as hybridity following Joh, as interstitial integrity following Rita Nakashima Brock, and as liminality following Sang Hyun Lee, who describes it as a marginality that is open to creative possibilities. In the second case, Tan discusses the Korean notion of Han, which is "the pain of and resentment that comes through experiencing injustice on a personal, social, and structural level," and can be contrasted against Anselm Min's "solidarity of others," which Min proposes as the new paradigm that is needed to replace the old paradigm of liberation theologies which have "almost exhausted themselves."[146] In the third register, Tan draws upon Choan-Seng Song's notion of story theology which focuses on "telling the stories of people's religious experience and deriving meaning from the stories," which is closely related to autobiographical theology, which Peter C. Phan describes as theological reflections on personal experiences, invoking the experience of being "betwixt and between", and proposes that what Asian American theologians are attempting to do is to "construct an 'intercultural theology' for a new context characterized by the phenomenon of globalization."[147] The broad implications of these methodologies synthesized by Tan are constructions of an Asian American theological subjectivity, properly located as identity constructions rather than critical or liberative theological discourses. In other words, the theological methods outlined are more appropriately understood as inculturation

theologies rather than liberation theologies, which again, does not preclude creative interactions and cross-fertilizations between the two while being analytically differentiated.

Another example is Phan's articulation of Asian American theology as "Christianity with an Asian face" elaborates upon the notion of Asian American theology as an intercultural theology in a sense parallel to the mestizaje in Hispanic and Latine theologies, and drawing upon the experience of immigrants and refugees as a source of theological reflection.[148] Despite arguing that the methods of liberation theologies share a common method and tasks, Phan views liberation theology as contributing to "the emergence of a new kind of catholicity that is not a pretension to a false universalism but appreciates and promotes the particularity of each voice, especially the voices of those who have not been allowed to speak." Interpreting Asian Americanness through the opposing cultural symbols of the dragon and the eagle, Phan offers a brief construction of a Vietnamese American theology as primarily an interculturation, nonetheless proposes that "the task of socio-political and economic liberation, which is a constitutive dimension of evangelization," along with interreligious dialogue are urgent for Vietnamese Americans. In summary, the various Asian American theologies that have been articulated can be distinguished by their respective core themes: inculturation, hybridity, and liberation. While interrelated concepts, they are different in their ends. From the point of view of liberation, inculturation can be seen as the first step in decoupling Asian American theologies from the White theologies, often deemed to be universal and thus context-free. Notions of hybridity and marginality are inculturation projects, making efforts towards identity-formation in the context of Asian American communities, in harmony with autobiographical theological methods that are deployed in order to stake one's claim in contradistinction to White Christianity as such. The diversity that is celebrated through these methods often elides incommensurable differences in order to present a unified subject without delivering a critique of the external or internal power relations by which Asian America is constituted, and which are preconditions of liberation.

On the other hand, Asian American feminist theologies find their genealogies in the matrix of Third World liberation theologies, Asian feminist theologies, and Asian American theologies, thus constituted by a forceful synthesis of inculturation through narrative modes, themselves forms of resistance within heteropatriarchal systems, and of liberation through critiques of power and oppression as they cohere into both structural and cultural forms of sexual violence. Asian feminist theological voices were consolidated as early as 1989 in the collection *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women* edited by Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park, examining the intersections of poverty and religion as both Asians and women.[149] At around the same time was the Asian women's theology of Chung Hyun Kyung, who identified with the second-generation of liberation theologians in Asia who "do not spend our energy reacting mainly against the colonial legacy. We now spend our energies naming our experience with our own terms and creating alternatives that are liberative for us."[150] Kyung powerfully suggests that Asian women theologians should realize that they themselves are the text, while the Bible and traditions of the Christian church are the context of their theology. The inherently intersectional critiques mounted by the first generation of Asian American feminist theologies and interpretations provided a rich corpus of feminist scholarship upon which later generations have built upon, so much so that Asian and Asian North American feminist theological reflection now occupies a central place in contemporary Asian American theologies. In addressing postmodern critiques of liberation theology, Kwok Pui-lan suggests that the challenge will be how the option for the margin will engage postmodernity in new ways and generate new insights for theological, social, political, and economic thinking, and that the preferential option requires much unpacking if we are to avoid monolithic constructions of 'the poor.'[151] In a similar vein, the transformation of the poor Asian woman into a nationalist symbol in the context of post-World War II nation-building enterprises, and into the heroine of Asian feminist

theology has been critically examined by Wai-Ching Wong, tracing the generation of the "oppressed woman" through the politics of First and Third World feminist discourse and urging attention to the particularities and diversities of experience of Asian women which resists universalization.[152] In considering the rescue of Black theology from essentialism by womanist theologians who infused the image of the Black Christ with more fluid meanings, Kwok similarly points to Asian Christian women who find that "a rigid and stabilized differentiation between Asian wisdom traditions and Christianity often works to support colonial power, and so they suggest a much more hybridized understanding of Jesus," where this hybridization includes not only cultures and symbolic structures, but divergent claims and identity formations.[153] But in light of Wong's critique we are reminded that the Asian American feminist theological subject too, must give way to a subjectlessness that resists the imposition of uniform subjectivity and, viewed thus, Asian American feminist theologies are not separate from but complement and challenge Asian American liberation theologies in important ways. To summarize, overviews of Asian American liberation theology have largely focused instead on Asian American theologies as inculturation theologies rather than liberationist critiques along the intersections of race, class, gender, and nation, while Asian American feminist theologies can be seen as closer to the critical theological stance that Joh and Kim advocate.

Retrieving an Asian American liberation theology

The question of whether an Asian American liberation theology had existed alongside Black, Latin American, and feminist liberation theologies remains unanswered. To answer this in the affirmative, I begin with Japanese American Methodist theologian Roy Isao Sano, professor emeritus of United Methodist Studies at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. One of the early prominent Asian American theologians who emerged in the 1960s, Sano's childhood experience of the Japanese concentration camp in Poston during the Second World War shaped his theological worldview and conscientized him to the issues of marginalization and liberation. Sano became an early advocate of Asian American liberation theology, patterned after the Black liberation theology articulated by James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore who belonged to the first generation of Black liberation theologians. Theologian Jung Young Lee, on the other hand, a contemporary of Sano, believed the loneliness, alienation, and suffering experienced by Lee was due to being an immigrant, and that the "liberation of Asian Americans as a marginal people could only come about if the people at the center are liberated from their exclusivist and discriminatory worldviews."[154] An Asian American liberation theology had indeed been articulated, primarily by Japanese, Chinese, Filipinx, and Korean Americans, which constituted the majority of Asian American demographics at the time. This theology differs from other liberation theologies in that it traces its genealogy in part to the experience of mass incarceration, or internment, which forced Japanese American Christians to develop a theology of suffering, one that could speak to their trauma. In a 1986 sermon, former Postonite Jitsuo Morikawa explained how Japanese Americans' experience of rejection and collective incarceration showed them "the extravagance of God's grace, that even pain, suffering and injustice He often transforms into blessing." Another former Postonite, Paul Nagano developed a theology of marginality, concluding that his marginality within America was a permanent predicament, and that the church must "mean the humanness of the minorities as well as the majority—the majority freed from their peculiar arrogance and the minorities freed to be what God has meant them to be as persons."[155] Thus both Lee and Nagano both demonstrate that liberation involves both the oppressor and the oppressed.

What little historical remnant is left of this movement is mostly archived in a collection of twenty boxes containing documents from the Pacific and Asian American Center for Theology and

Strategies (PACTS), which had grown out of the need to re-think faith and reorient ministries in the light of the emergence of ethnic consciousness in the late 1960s, and designed to be "an ecumenical center for research, resourcing, recruiting, training, and consciousness-raising which sought to promote the fulfillment of God's mission through the ministries of the churches and the service of community groups."[156] The boxes contain the writings of many Asian Americans, revealing the intense theological activity and conscientization during that period. As the first director of PACTS, Sano compiled two unpublished readers: *AmerAsian Theology of Liberation* (1973) and *The Theologies of Asian Americans and Pacific Peoples* (1976), which Seung Ai-Yang described as "very much like one of today's 'readers' used for a course in colleges and graduate schools. Its handwritten page numbers, ring-binding, and different typefaces for each article reveals the urgency and necessity Sano felt for this work at that time as a pioneer in this field." In the preface to the 1976 reader, Sano wrote that "the 'internal colony' which we have experienced has rendered far too many of us speechless, convinced we have nothing to offer. If liberation means anything, it should release the wealth of stories, insights, vision, and courage which God has given us. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.' (II Corinthians 3:17)" From the PACTS collections, there are many insights already to be excavated, which provide historical grounding in contemporary articulations of Asian American theologies of liberation, whilst re-contextualizing them in the present and in light of intellectual and social developments in the intervening time. In the following, I quote from these texts at length as an exercise in retrieving these theological voices from a forgotten historical moment.

In the same reader, Dennis Loo posed the question: "Why an Asian American theology of liberation?" Arguing that "the type of dominance which has continued historically until the present cannot continue any longer if we claim to be the church, the body of Christ which includes all the different peoples of the world," Loo detailed the three "myths" of excessive Asian American ethnocentrism, of success as model minorities, and of being a problem-free racial group, altogether reinforcing oppression among Asians in America. There is a need for Asians in America to rethink, to articulate, and to appropriate an interpretation of the Christian faith, Loo continued, which combats rather than perpetuates oppressive thought patterns, and encourage the development of an Asian American frame of reference which can make its own unique contribution to the developing Third World theological dialogue, to the global theological task, and to liberation movements in the United States and in the world.[157] In doing so, Loo made clear the connections between the possibility of Asian American liberation theology and the struggles of Third World liberation theologies and movements internationally.

In a consultation on "ethnic minority ministries," Sano cited Harold Cruses' The *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* and Wilmore's *Black religion and Black Radicalism* as sources of reflection on oppression and "internal colonialism." Considering cultural oppression as more basic and inhumane in some ways than political and economic oppression, and in asking what are the institutions which deal with them, Sano held that "we will in every case come to the same conclusion as historians of Black communities," that "although the church has played into hands of those would subject ethnic minorities to cultural genocide, the cultural function of the church also facilitated the humanizing qualities as well." Drawing from Cone and Gutiérrez, Sano held that liberation had become the critical norm to determine the primary theology category, and that liberation is "not only the basis for reconciliation, it may unite diverse movements for liberation. The diverse colorful peoples within the United States and abroad in the Third World can find in the theme a uniting task," including "feminist, gay, poor or defrauded Whites" as those who may also find cause to combat oppression as well.[158] Signaling the characteristic grounding of liberation theology in praxis, Sano concluded the consultation with a quotation saying "there is nothing quite so practical as good theory and nothing so good for theory-making as direct involvement with practice."

In a preface to the proceedings of the Second Conference on East Asian and AmerAsian Theology held in Berkeley in 1975, Sano expressed regret in complaining at an earlier time that "ethnic minorities in the United States of America have so many pressing needs loading them down that they had no time for additional involvements in international issues in East Asia." Upon learning about Japanese oppression of Koreans, Taiwanese, Ainus, and their own Eta class, he concluded that international solidarity was not an added burden to the Asian American struggle. At the conference, Harold Hak-won Sunoo pointed out that the church "identifies with the economic and political power in the present system," having become "friends of the rich, not of the poor; friends of power, not of the oppressed; friends of the rulers, not of the ruled," revealing that the class problem of Asian American embourgeoisement is not a new one. Sunoo asked, "are we able to challenge the present-day condition of America which is dominated by giant corporations and centralized bureaucratic system, and corporate capitalism and militarization?" and suggested that the new theology, theology of liberation, theology of hope, or "whatever you might call it," is found among "social actions; no other source. Social actions simply mean serving the people—the masses of the poor, the dispossessed, and the oppressed. We, the Asian Americans, are the oppressed ones".[159] It is important to register here that these Asian Americans were less interested in liberation theology as a theoretical exercise, but rather as a vehicle of social change and revolution. In response to the American dream that has "shattered into a nightmare schizophrenia" and "the logic of industrialization," Sunoo held that we need to resist all the dehumanizing effects of the old inequality, and that "the church must arm [sic] with a new hope, a new theology of social justice. American church, [sic] in other words must have a Third World perspective, because God has revealed Himself through the masses of the poor." And finally, the concern of all the Third World people revolves around the relationship of oppression and liberation: "We, the Asian-Americans, are very much involved with this liberation movement. This historical task we must accept with joy and hope." Sunoo, in describing an ethics of liberation, pointed to the Christ who knew that "poverty, hunger, injustice, exploitation, alienation, racism and war are all products of men's greed for wealth and power. To be a good Christian, then, meant to stop such men so that all persons might benefit from the earth as God intended." And under capitalism, "being is displaced by having." According to Sunoo, the Marxist concept of "class-revolutionary consciousness" derives from "no other place than from the historical Christian vision of man," and that the "fullness of liberation" is a free gift from Christ; the meaning of total liberation is communion with God and with other men, "I cannot be a free man when my neighbor is a slave."[160]

These brief snapshots display the breadth and depth of Asian American voices seeking to establish a theology of liberation relevant to Asian American contexts. The theologies articulated drew from the biblical hermeneutics of other contemporary liberation theologies. For example, Wesley Woo invoked Gutiérrez's understanding of theology as critical reflection through praxis, indissolubly lined to historical praxis, and proposed that theologizing from an Asian American perspective must "keep integrity with faith in a God who calls us to full and authentic humanity," generate "insight-action" in the sense of providing insight that leads to, and manifests itself in, action, and thirdly, be done in a corporate context, allowing "the corporate body to criticize, validate, and enrich our theologizing." Woo noted that the new "Asian-American" identity created a tangible expression of corporate identity, but cautioned against reducing "pluralistic understandings of the Gospel to one format," and suggested that one of the characteristics for an Asian-American perspective is a prophetic message that involves the "debunking" or "de-reifying" of dehumanizing realities, realities that deny authentic humanity to peoples and that instead perpetuate oppression, which recalls the need to conceive Asian American theology through difference rather than identity.[161] Many of these theological and autobiographical writings displays what might seem today a brazenness in critiquing White racism. Sano, for example, referred to the "melting pot theory" as a

"crock of baloney," and to race relations in most Protestant settings as "nothing more than race-erasion." Relations between the colorless and the colorful, Sano argued, is an encounter and confrontation, and that "some Protestants say they have no racially separated or segregated structures" which goes to show that "they have only appealed to what students would now call bastardized ethnic minorities, or anaesthetized ethnics" and "what they have actually delivered when they promised assimilation is only to make asses out of the suckers who bought the line." But in a move revealing that the criticism is also constructive, Sano wrote, "the price Whites will have to pay to make the yellow peril into a pearl is to bury the Melting Pot theory which in practice turned out to be a crock of baloney," and addresses "the recovery of ethnicity of a lighter of the colorful ethnic minorities which has always been tempted to pass as colorless, namely the Yellows or Asians."[162] Of note here is that as with the Yellow Power movement, "Asian" and "Yellow" were often equated, rendering invisible the more current signifier "Brown" with which South Asians and Southeast Asians may more readily identify, revealing the limits of organizing based on skin color and of Asian American pan-ethnicity.

Asian American feminist perspectives were also clearly visible in these collections. For example, Eun Ja Kim Lee noted that while Christianity was a "revolutionary thing" that enhanced women's position in Korea, it was not the final solution as it "did not bring any Utopia to women. Women were still second class citizens." Lee implicated the Shintoism of Japan, Confucianism of China, Roman Catholicism of Philippines, the Buddhism of Thailand, Hinduism of India, and Islam of Pakistan as all taking negative attitudes towards women, linking in different ways women with ritual impurity, sex, and sin.[163] June I. Kimoto, on the other hand, named the "collusion of the Institutional Church as an active participant to the Asian Dilemma," zeroing in on the combination of "the Asian sense of Shame and Christianity's Guilt", presciently connecting it to the movie *Gaslight*, from which the current notion of gaslighting emerged. "There needs to be special focus on us—Asian women," Kimoto asserted, "as we are seeking commonality with other minority races, the 'three-steps behind' syndrome has also been Third World Women's entrapment." The solidarity of Asian American liberation theologies with Third World movements must continue to be grounded in Third World feminisms and decolonization, and be able to undergird the radical and revolutionary Asian American spirits that combat systemic oppression and produce meaningful solidarity with other communities of color. Kimoto on the one hand pointed to Vine Deloria Jr.'s works on Native American theology and Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee*, which "gives exhaustive documentation of the persistent and relentless pursuit of American Indians and offers Asians an insight into the workings of White thoughts," and on the other, *Black Rage* by psychiatrists Grier and Cobbs, who "expose the problems of Black Folk—there are parallels that can awaken the Asian minds."[164] Solidarity, thus conceived, is built upon shared struggles against oppression, revealing the differentiated forms of power as it relates to other groups, in a collective effort to raise consciousness.

Another contributor, Leslie Loo asked a series of questions, "Can I add that [Asian women] are also trying to come to terms with the desire of many American men of all colors to think of us as exotic dolls and sources of mystery? Can I say without hurting feelings that American women (especially in the church) think of us only as 'superb' tea pourers or subconsciously as sources of cultural education for their families?" And further, in wondering whether Asian women as second-class citizens among minority Americans have maintained an acceptable passivity in order to survive, asked, "would it be more nearly correct to say that as minority persons we have been powerless and therefore had situations such as the Japanese concentration camp era forced upon us?" linking the material consequences of oppression to the mental subjugation of internalized racism. "Do you realize that labor conditions and legislation improved for American women at a point in history when the United States began to use the labor of women and men in Third World countries? Are

you aware that Third World women make the lowest wages in American industry?"[165] Loo thus problematizes also White women's feminism through the dimensions of global capitalist extraction of Asian women's labor, and furthermore connects with the struggles of Third World women by identifying as an Asian woman. The vigor of Asian American women's theological critiques at the intersections of race, gender, and class provided a robust foundation and heritage for later generations Asian American feminist theologies.

In sum, the contributions of Asian Americans in the 1970s to an "AmerAsian" theology of liberation lay the groundwork upon which contemporary re-articulations of Asian American theologies of liberation can build. Already from this handful of excerpts we can see the rich theological imagination, drawing inspiration with the Black, Indigenous, feminist, and Third World struggles against oppression. The coming and passing of these Asian American theologies of liberation took place against the backdrop of the transition between what Timothy Tseng described as the first and second waves of Asian immigration to the United States. The first wave began in the 1850s, with Asian labor arriving in Hawai'i and California, characterized by nationalism, social support, and Roman Catholicism or mainline Protestantism; the second wave marks the post-1965 era, and amongst the growing Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu migrations, the Protestant Christian subpopulation shifted from mainline to evangelical or Pentecostal orientations, exhibiting stronger "separatist tendencies."[166] As Asians in diaspora living in settler colonies, the first task in constructing a theology of liberation today is to decolonize and unsettle our theology, which I propose through the frameworks of migration, refuge, and landlessness.

No longer oppressed? Contradictions of Asian American liberation today

Over forty years later, Asian American liberation theology has faded from the Asian American theological consciousness. On the one hand, one might point to the fact that in the 1980s, President Reagan oversaw the decimation of funding for social services, which many organizations in the Asian American movement depended upon. On the other hand, it could also be argued that the disappearance of the Asian American theologies of liberation from collective memory can be traced to the lack of material production with regards to these knowledges, in contrast to the intellectual outputs of Black, feminist, and Latin American liberation theologies, for example, whose persistence in theological imaginations find their intellectual genealogies in the landmark texts of Cone, Daly, and Gutiérrez. Indeed, no mention at all of Asian American theologies of liberation is made in Lisa Barger's recent account of the intellectual history of liberation theology.[167] Nonetheless, the theological writings of later generations of Asian Americans reflect two major streams that flowed from this historical Asian American liberation theology: theologies of inculturation that sought to build a Asian American theological identity through reflections on marginalization, hybridity, and liminality, and Asian American feminist theologies that drew upon social science critiques such as postcolonialism and feminism to produce a distinctive theological voice and important critiques. The latter, I argue, carried the fire of theological critique that speaks truth to power, perhaps due in part to the nature of the "double-bind" of being a person of color and a woman or gender non-conforming person. Moreover, given the patriarchal structures of almost all North American and Asian cultures, this places Asian American women in also another patriarchal double-bind, on top of the racist oppression which is largely inscribed upon Asian female bodies through labor exploitation and sexual objectification. In this sense, the Asian American liberation theologies articulated by Sano, Nagano, and others did not die off but influenced the next generation of Asian American theologians, whose concerns shifted in part due to shifts in the broader culture and changes in the face of Asian America post-1965. Asian American feminist theologies, nonetheless, in conversation

with Asian feminist theologies, drew heavily on postcolonial critiques, such as the works of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak. While undoubtedly valuable advances, such critiques tend to focus on the *discursive* rather than *structural* relations of power, and the lasting effects of colonization on the psychological level, and inadvertently lack firepower when deployed within the empire rather than in the Third World. Within the settler colonial empire of the United States, anti-colonial praxis is more important than post-colonial theory. Liberation theology, drawing from areas such as Marxism, critical race theory, and settler colonial studies, can deliver a more incisive critique when it engages the structural and systemic nature of power and oppression, which are required for a decolonial, rather than post-colonial praxis in North America.

At present, "Asian American" has become established as a demographic category, even as the racial group it intends to signify continues to grow in increasing complexity through immigration, transnational flows, and class difference, underscored by its status as the fastest growing racial group and with the largest economic disparity in the United States. Yet, the problems are not new: Sano had already pointed out that many ethnic minorities arrive in the promised land and forget that there can be new forms of oppression in the land of promise, drawing on Cone's reading of the book of Judges, and that they have become part of "the system of oppression not knowing that their penetration into existing White dominated structures and their success in moving up have only placed them in a position of an oppressor."[168] This is exemplified by the conflict between Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa, then president of San Francisco State University, and the Asian American community during the Ethnic Studies strikes. Later Asian American theologies largely address racism in the abstract, a fantasy of racism without racists, sexism without sexists, marginality without marginalization. Reducing Asian American theology to the single dimension of hybridity and marginality leaves intact Asian American success through participation in systems of oppression, as previous Asian American liberation theologians have already pointed out.

In relation to this, Ki Joo Choi challenged Asian American hybridity, despite its statistical reality and its possibility for creativity in the sense of Sang Hyun Lee, by pointing to intra-Asian hostilities and prejudices, and Asian Americans inhabiting new instantiations of White racism and privilege, or an "Asian American Whiteness," citing a 2012 Pew Research Center study which concluded that "Asian Americans and Blacks, in particular, appear to lack extensive contact and shared experiences that facilitate coalition building." This sociological finding stands in stark contrast to the immense influence of the Black Power movement and Black liberation theology on Asian American liberation theology. Lee suggests, on the other hand, that the moral promise of hybridity, in the sense of offering an important way of calling out and resisting Asian American reinscriptions of Whiteness, is not automatic but requires intentionality. Elaborating upon this point, Choi wrote that inattention to Asian American embodiments of conscious and unconscious attitudes and patterns of behaviors that mimic White racialized hierarchies as a consequence of their growing socioeconomic achievements, may lead Asian Americans to find themselves "sleepwalking into the very forms of life that perpetuate exclusion and marginalization, including their own."[169] A false sense of empowerment thus poses a particular obstacle to Asian American solidarity and cooperation with non-Asian Americans of color, and perhaps most importantly, not all Asian Americans would agree on the extent to which discrimination is felt, especially at the personal level, and it is therefore not immediately obvious whether Asian American identity can be "conceived in a manner that advances solidarity and cooperation between Asian Americans and non-Asian Americans of color."[170] Simply put, some Asian Americans do not *feel* oppressed. This again begs the definition of Asian American as a useful category for liberation and organizing, a question I shall continually return to.

Matsuoka also recognized this problematic: Asian American professionals, having grown up in a system in which class identification is perceived as more important than race, are often

astonished at the individual acts of racism directed against them. They expect their professional status to protect them, Matsuoka writes, and not only on the individual level—Asian American churches too have adopted the myth of power based on class identification, in other words, the view that power is gained through institutional and economic access and upward mobility. "Perhaps the severest critique we can direct upon Asian American churches is that to a certain extent they have co-opted into the very racist structure of society and thus have come to neglect the most alienated people in society, the poor and underclass, even among our own Asian Americans," and the price to be paid for middle-class advancements is found in "our alienation from the poor within the Asian American community. In our effort to overcome racial subordination, Asian American churches have come to perpetuate the very ills of the society we critique."[171] Whether moral reflection that is informed by Asian American experience can promote racial solidarity, according to Choi, depends "significantly on the kind of description and conceptualization of Asian American identity that Asian American Christian ethics assumes or adopts."[172] Whether the promise of hybridity is a realistic prospect remains an open question, in light of negative Asian American intercultural and interracial encounters, and Choi proposes a "tragic conception" of hybrid identity, which embraces a metaphoric understanding of Asian American identity that calls attention to the "discriminatory traps" of reproducing racism and inattentiveness to the persistent inequalities between Asian Americans and Whites. Tragic hybridity, in this sense, does not assume that Asian American Christian ethics is inherently liberatory by differentiating itself from mainstream Christian ethics; instead, its potential for liberation and racial solidarity arises only from a commitment to interpreting Asian American experience through sustained self-criticism, or in other words, to critical theology.[173]

In response, Jimmy McCarty contended that Choi misunderstood hybridity as a normative idea rather than a conscious naming of and living into one's hybrid existence that "can be a moral act in itself," and that Choi also conflated race and ethnicity into the category of "ethno-racial" existence which elides the "power of consciously accepting and conceiving oneself as living a hybrid existence that undermines the prevailing, often binary, racial order."[174] McCarty offered the trial of Peter Liang as a case study: in 2015, Chinese American police officer Peter Liang shot and killed Akai Gurley, a Black man in New York City. Convicted of manslaughter, thousands of protesters, the vast majority of whom were Chinese American, rallied in protest and claimed that Liang was a scapegoat in a time of heightened awareness, particularly with the Movement for Black Lives, about the killing of unarmed Black men by police officers because Liang was Chinese American and not White. At around the same time, a group of Asian Americans co-wrote a "Letter for Black Lives" after the police-shooting of another Black man named Philando Castile during a traffic stop in Minnesota, explaining to their Asian American families their support for the Movement for Black Lives. The letter claimed that the relative privilege of being a model minority required that they speak out in solidarity with Black Lives Matter in their own communities. According to McCarty this letter-writing campaign is an example of "hybridity as a normative ideal" in action; hybridity not as a descriptor but as a moral action created out of particularly Asian American experiences. But I argue that McCarty's assessment of the situation is naïve or hopeful at best given the overwhelming numbers of protestors against Liang's conviction and in contrast to the relatively few signatories of the letter, and McCarthy's notion of hybridity does not clearly address the systemic nature of Asian anti-Black racism or settler colonialism required by any self-criticism of Asian American hybridity. Indeed, the Liang protests mark one of the most pivotal moments in the Asian-American community since the Rodney King riots, when dozens of Korean American businesses were burned to the ground, and is often said to have been precipitated by the killing of Latasha Harlins, a 15-year-old Black girl who was shot in the back of the head by Soon Ja Du, a Korean store owner, after a confrontation over a bottle of orange juice. As Kang's New York Times coverage of the Liang protests pointed out, even if one believes that Liang was rightly convicted, to ignore the question of

"Why only Liang?" is intellectually dishonest. The protesters, according to Kang, were trying in their way to create a new political language for Asian Americans, "but this language comes without any edifying history — no amount of nuance or qualification or appeal to Martin Luther King will change the fact that the first massive, nationwide Asian-American protest in years was held in defense of a police officer who shot and killed an innocent Black man." Kang also described the "cultural aphasia" that comes from "decades of political silence," registering a growing anger at the lack of "Asian faces" among the marchers throughout Kang's coverage of Black Lives Matter protests across the country as a reporter. "I had long lost faith in storybook solidarity," Kang wrote, "but I had never expected to see the divide between Blacks and Asian-Americans laid out so starkly."[175]

The work of constructing Asian American theologies proper is an impossible yet crucial task. Impossible, in the sense that the fluidity and instability of the Asian American theological subject, which properly resists essentialization in opposition to the Western gaze and capitalist differentiation, requires that Asian American theological subjectivity be open-ended and porous; crucial, as Matsuoka points out that issues of "ethnically based identity" will continue to be a primary concern among Asian Americans and will remain a major theme in Asian American theological thought as long as the forces of cultural alienation and oppressive racism in American society persist.[176] Said otherwise, whether the category "Asian American," let alone any Asian American theology of liberation, is usable in the present political and racial configurations in North America remains to be answered, but the reality of its persistence as a racial signifier is clear.

Liberation theology is distinct from inculturation theology, despite the fertile interactions between the two as contextual theologies. Asian American liberation theology as a struggle for collective freedom is to be differentiated from other Asian American theologies as inculturation or identity-building projects, while drawing from and pointing to the sustained work of Asian American feminist theologians. Deconstruction of the Asian American theological subject, grounding it in difference rather than identity clears the path towards critical theological discourse, which is constitutive of liberative methodologies, and upon which Asian American theologies of liberation can begin to be reconstructed with sustained critical reflection through praxis. The goal of the remainder of this book, then, is to carry out the self-critical analyses along these multiply intersecting axes of nation, race, class, gender, and sexuality as required by any Asian American theology of liberation, or tragic hybridity in the sense of Choi, and to directly confront the issues that attend Asian American subjectivity and prevent solidarity.

4. "Go back to where you came from": Unsettling Asian American theology

If to help us is your wish then stand behind us.
Not to the side
And not in front.
— 'Imaikalani Kalahele[177]

As a mestiza *I have no country, my homeland cast me out, yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover.* — Gloria Anzaldúa[178]

Annakkili Annakkili Adi Alamarakkela Vannakkili
Nallapadi Vazhacholli Indha Manna Koduthane Poorvakudi
Kammankara Kaniyellam Padith Thirinjane Adhikkudi
Nayi Nari Poonaikundhan Indha Erikkolam Kooda Sondhammadi…
Nan Anju Maram Valarthen
Azhagana Thottam Vachchen
Thottam Sezhithalum En Thonda Nanaiyalaye
En Kadale Karaye Vaname Saname
Nelame Kolame Edame Thadame
Enjoy Enjami Vango Vango Onnagi
Amma Yi Ambari Indha Indha Mummari

Annakilli! Annakilli! Parrot sitting in the banyan tree
Blessing to lead a good life, our ancestors have bequeathed us this soil
Across the river banks and on the fertile fields
Our forefathers have sung through their life
The lakes and ponds belong to the dogs, foxes, and cats too
I planted five trees. Nurtured a beautiful garden
My garden is flourishing. Yet my throat remains dry
My sea, bank, forest, people, lands, clan, place, and track
Enjoy, my dear. Come together as one
Ride on the elephants—shower in the rains

—Arivu Dee, *Enjoy Enjaami*, on the return of Tamil Dalits from Sri Lanka after ancestors were taken there to work tea plantations two centuries ago.

In 2017, Asian Americans made up 5.8 percent of the population in the US, in contrast to Indigenous Americans who made up 1.5 percent and Black or African Americans who made up 13.4 percent.[179] Yet in 2019 a discrimination lawsuit was brought against Harvard by a group of Asian Americans, who made up about 20 percent of Harvard's undergraduate student population, represented by Edward Blum, a "longtime crusader against affirmative action." The suit was intended as a clear challenge to affirmative action policy by rightwing Republicans.[180] While arguments about representation or "diversity, equity, and inclusion" often center around the racial demographics as compared with US population data, this form of reasoning through proportional representation is inherently flawed considering that Indigenous Americans tend to make up no more than 2 percent in any such statistic. As a matter of fact, it happens that Indigenous Americans are at times *overrepresented*, albeit by a few percentage points, in some cases. Harvard eventually won the

case and neoliberal critiques were supplied by other Asian Americans such as in the New York Times, but the record of Asians being weaponized by White supremacy remains.

This episode can be placed in the larger context of Asian settler colonialism in the US, and the complicity of Asians in violence against communities of color through racial technologies such as the model minority myth and colorblindness. Settler colonialism describes the ongoing occupation of Indigenous land, such as the Americas, Israel, Australia, and Taiwan. While it is often used to describe the European settlers, the populations that arrive later in the settler colony are typically referred to as immigrants. In the United States, for example, the early British and French settlers are referred to as such, whereas the later arrivants from the Italians and Irish, to the Filipino and Japanese and Chinese later, to the Mexicans and Indians and many others today are coded as immigrants, whether legal or illegal. Rhetoric against immigrants such as in the Trump era, for example in the Muslim ban and the separation of families at the US-Mexico border, was met with the claim that the US is a 'nation of immigrants' and that 'immigrants make America great,' an equally nostalgic response to the slogan 'Make America Great Again.' Yet, Native Americans—and similarly Indigenous populations in settler colonies elsewhere—continue to be annexed, their land occupied by foreign invaders and immigrants and treaties broken.

The history of violence of early settler colonizers is a relatively straightforward one to tell, such as in the works of Tzvetan Todorov, Eduardo Galeano, and Walter Mignolo. But what about the histories of oppression and exclusion of Black folks, and other people of color who did not establish the settler colony, arriving instead through more complicated functions of slavery, indentured labor, asylum, or economic migration? While we must acknowledge that interlocking forms of oppression exist and maintain heteropatriarchal White supremacy and racial capitalism, and also that there is a key distinction to be made between forced and intentional migrations, the fact remains that all of us non-Indigenous persons live and move and have our being on occupied land. This question is increasingly relevant as extreme climate events increase in frequency, leading to a growing number of climate refugees and forced migrations. The diffuse nature of current climate crisis makes it difficult at times to pinpoint exactly when a migration is due to climate change. For reasons such as this, a robust theology that accounts for the complexities of diaspora populations, fraught with both the inherent trauma of displacement and the potential to displace others or maintain the settler colonial order, becomes increasingly necessary. On par with the psychic nowhere of Chapter 2, in this chapter I attend to the geographic nowhere that it correlates to and its relation to settler colonialism and indigeneity. Transnationality, in and of itself, is unaware of settler/native dynamics.

Asian Americans are settlers of color, in the words of Haunani-Kay Trask, leader of the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement. This label properly positions non-Indigenous people of color within the settler colonial power structure: though systematically oppressed, the struggles of non-Indigenous people of color against racism and discrimination is predicated upon the void created by the continuing genocide of Native populations and Native cultures.[181] The rhetoric of multiculturalism and immigrant rights weaponizes notions of equality, eliding this crucial difference that sets apart natives from settlers. For settlers of color, the routine disavowal of White supremacy, including its settler coloniality, is a convenient one: relegating Native populations to the past, casting them as an essentially extinct or abstract people, allows for the settler colonial society to legitimate itself as the natural heir to the land while settlers of color, on the other hand, are allowed thus to inherit this selective amnesia as they seek legitimacy from the settler colonial power, the right to reside within the settler colony and to be productive citizens thereof. Under this erasure, the oppression experienced by exogenous non-White persons come to the fore, at the cost of drowning out Indigenous struggles for land and sovereignty. In view of this, I contend that any proper theology of liberation, particularly any one that is developed on North American soil, must first

reckon with the Indigenous struggles for self-determination anywhere. From an Asian diasporic perspective, it is necessary to negotiate between theologies of migration and indigeneity.

Asian American settler colonialism is mediated by the relationship between Asian migrations and United States imperialism. While the West may have produced arguably the most hegemonic forms of domination over the global South, it does not have a monopoly on enacting oppressive systems. For this reason, it is important to identify the workings of power within structural racism and oppression and its causes, rather than naively positing a false equivalence between Whiteness and injustice. Such an equivalence ontologically demonizes Whites as the 'White devil', which is itself a failure to thoroughly understand the redemptive potential of the cross. At the same time, differentiating between power and Whiteness broadens the imagination, allowing space for the subaltern to take power, and in doing so risk the same corruption that has come to characterize Whiteness. In other words, not confining our analysis of power to Whiteness makes it possible to conceive of people of color, including Asian Americans, as existing beyond the oppressor-oppressed dialectic, as the concept of a good-enough race leads towards.[182]

Several distinct aspects of settler colonialism emerge, some of which involve the complex histories within Asia. First is the experience of colonization and neo-colonialism by the West in Asia. Following decolonization, rather than returning the land and reins of power to the Native population, some settler colonies became the inheritance of intermediary Asians, non-Indigenous peoples who were brought over by their colonial masters such as the Mindanao in the Philippines and the Chinese in Singapore. The second is settler colonialism carried out by Asian countries such as China, Israel, India, and Vietnam, sometimes called internal colonialism, independent of Western interference, and Japanese imperialism. At the present political moment, China's neo-imperialist expansion in Southeast Asia and Africa, "re-education" in Tibet and Xinjiang, and border conflicts with India are examples of such continuing developments. This leads to the third point, which is the experience of settler colonialism, that is, Asians on the receiving end. Many Palestinians, Kashmiris, Tibetans, and Uyghurs have found asylum in the United States. These considerations bring us to the key theological reflection of this chapter, namely, the ontological dilemma of capable of being both oppressor and oppressed, carrying the yin and yang of sin and sanctification. The dynamic potential carried in each individual reflects the resistance of the category Asian American to an easy definition. Some Asians carry a national or ancestral history of suffering colonization and subjugation, others find themselves descendants of settler colonizers and perpetrators of genocide, and many a mixture of the two.

This sets the stage for Asian American settler colonialism, bringing into focus the additional layer of complexity whereby Asians are at neither the top or bottom of the power structure, but so-called middle minorities. This perspective has been explored by Native American scholars and Asian settler scholars in the context of Hawai'i, where Asians have come to represent the najority racial group. The struggle of Hawaiians against first White and later Asian settlers, against militarization, incarceration, and domination provides a particularly useful framework for interpreting Asian American settler colonialism at large. Indeed, the picture is far complex in the mainland United States, where much more of the Native population remains exterminated—the socioeconomic control over Native American populations is a continuing project of the settler colonial state, so successful as to render the Native American nearly invisible, transformed into a mythological person that exists only in the narration of accepted history and racist holidays such as Columbus Day and Thanksgiving, but never fully humanized. Thus, a theology of liberation requires the humanization of the non-humans in settler society, whereby Indigenous people must be seen not first as a population to be evangelized rather than exterminated as Bartolomé De La Casas argued, but as the rightful Native stewards of the land, who most deeply understand the ways of the earth, wind, water, and trees in this continent. The concept of land as property is a feature of capitalism, whereas the

Indigenous traditions hold the land as sacred and intimate, in harmony with the concept of biblical stewardship. The earth belongs to no man: it is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Before turning to the specificity of Asian settler colonialism and Asian American theology, I first begin with the broad contours of settler colonialism and Native American liberation theology.

Settler colonialism: Theory and theology

Patrick Wolfe introduced a structural distinction between settler colonial and colonial formations: settler colonialism is not a master-servant relationship "marked by ethnic difference", which is an important aspect of postcolonial criticism, but a relationship characterized by the dispensability of the Indigenous person. He writes, "the primary object of settler-colonization is the land itself rather than the surplus value to be derived from mixing Native labour with it. Though, in practice, Indigenous labour was indispensable to Europeans, settler-colonization is not exploitation but replacement. The logic of this project, a sustained institutional tendency to eliminate the Indigenous population, informs a range of historical practices that might otherwise appear distinct—invasion is a structure, not an event."[183] Settlers are colonists who come to stay. Their primary aim is to dispossess, displace, and destroy Indigenous peoples rather than to exploit them for their labor. Settler social orders are established through complementary logics of elimination and exclusion, dispossessing natives and then attempting to police the racial, gender, and class boundaries of the settler polity.[184] Nonetheless, while the genocide of Indigenous peoples takes place in the settler colonies of the Americas, Wolfe points out that though the settler-colonial logic of elimination has manifested as genocidal, settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal, as in Kashmir and Palestine.[185] This is a crucial distinction when seeking an understanding of settlers of color who do not participate in the genocidal founding of settler society yet remain complicit in its maintenance, thus in the elimination of the native.

According to Lorenzo Veracini, "settler projects are inevitably premised on the traumatic, that is, *violent*, replacement and/or displacement of Indigenous Other," and at the same time "needs to disavow any foundational violence."[186] The disavowal of violence is aided by the myths produced through biblical narratives, in the case of European settler societies. This problematizes straightforward applications of the Exodus story in liberation theological frameworks: the freedom that Israel had gained from Egyptian slavery ended in the genocide and occupation of Canaan. The deliberate forgetting of the second half of the Exodus narrative participates in what Eiko Kosasa calls the production of blankness, whereby "acts of erasure produce an American imaginary where concepts and images of 'blankness' and blank spaces proliferate."[187] The production of blankness and disavowal of settler violence underscores the fantasy of the *terra nullius* during the 'discovery' of the Americas and similarly the settler-colonization of Australia not only at the level of physical place but also representational space. These European discoveries were sanctioned by the Doctrine of Discovery established in the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas which declared that only non-Christian lands could be colonized. The imperial Christian theologies that underwrote European colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asia continue to function in the settler colony of the United States and cannot coexist with liberation theologies.

In *Resident Aliens*, Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas, named "America's Best Theologian" by *Time* magazine in 2001, and William Willimon proposed a conception of Christians in the United States as resident aliens, members of a colony. Rather than recognizing the settler colonial structure, they define a colony to be "a beachhead, an outpost, an island of one culture in the middle of another, a place where the values of home are reiterated and passed on to the young, a place where

the distinctive language and life-style of the resident aliens are lovingly nurtured and reinforced."[188] This romantic viewpoint is problematic in two ways: first, the term "resident alien" is a play on the non-U.S. citizen category under the Immigration and Nationality Act, though the authors make no explicit connection to it. The notion of being a resident alien as a means of separating the US Christian from nationalist aspirations is at best naive, failing to interrogate the actual condition of Christians living within a settler colony, and at worst perpetuating the dispossession of Native Americans. Second, there is no way of using the term 'colony' in a positive manner, especially in a Christian context and in the presence of ongoing settler colonialism. They write, "we believe that the designations of the church as a colony and Christians as resident aliens are not too strong for the modern American church—indeed, we believe it is the nature of the church, at any time and in any situation, to be a colony." The modern American church is certainly a colony—a colony within a colony, we might say—one that is founded on genocidal violence and maintained through the logic of elimination. Settler invasion is the structural foundation upon which the White church in the United States was built. As Walter Hixson wrote concerning American settler colonialism, "born of settler colonialism, indiscriminate violence against savage foes forged an American way of war and a pathway first to continental and then to global empire."[189] From this brief examination, it already becomes painfully apparent that it impossible to take the lead from White settler theologians with regards to a constructing a comprehensive theology of freedom. Such naïve Christian ethics has little value to Asian American theology that wrestles with colonialism, imperialism, and displacement, or to Indigenous Americans whose survival is despite settler colonial elimination, or to Black and Latinx Americans who understood their position in the US as one of internal colonialism.[190]

Any discussion on the relation between Indigenous Americans, settler colonialism, and liberation theology must face the challenges posed by Vine Deloria Jr., whose work forms the foundation for most Indigenous scholars in the field of religion or theology. In the first place, Deloria contended that liberation theology assumes that the common experience of oppression is sufficient ground for solidarity, and indiscriminately classifies all minorities in a single category of people seeking liberation, eliding the specificity of the various forms of oppression and violence into a simple binary of oppressed/oppressor. This sentiment is echoed by Elaine Kim, who wrote that coalition work requires specific issues of concern such as workers' rights or educational opportunity rather than some vague notion of oppression.[191] Moreover, Deloria argued that liberation theology was "an absolute necessity if the establishment was going to continue to control the minds of minorities. If a person of a minority group had not invented it, the liberal establishment most certainly would have created it."[192] Thus the direct challenge is posed to liberation theology, its possible pitfalls of identifying all oppressed minorities as a singular entity rather than intersecting at various points of solidarity and diverging at contesting claims. Indeed, in developing a liberation theology that is comprehensive yet not reductive, one must avoid falling into the trap of participating in an 'oppression Olympics' or hierarchy of oppression by comparing each one's oppression on a linear scale. To the second challenge, one must also be constantly vigilant so as not to allow liberation theology to be co-opted by the so-called liberal establishment. Identifying liberation theology as a solely liberal or leftist ideology is reductive, though they may productively inform each other. At the same time, liberation theology had already capitulated in this exact manner, to the extent that its relevance today must be argued for and cannot be taken for granted. Keeping Deloria's critiques in sight, I propose that there remains a theology of liberation that can be productively used as a unifying principle and that it is in fact the only viable candidate for a theology for the revolution.

Arguably the most notable work of Deloria in the field of religious studies is the book *God is Red*, which launched an unflinching critique of Western thought and Christianity in the United States.[193] Deloria singles out Western Christianity as the root cause of the inability of the United

States to "win peace" in its entire history of war-making. He argued that Christianity, along with Judaism and Islam, religions of the "near east" are qualitatively different from other religions in terms of their anthropology of man and creation, in that they share the view that the planet is "not our natural home and is, in fact, ours for total exploitation."[194] This is undergirded by a deficiency in biblical hermeneutics whereby man is interpreted to have been given dominion over the planet, supplemented with a naïve and feeble understanding of stewardship. Indeed, Deloria points to theologians such as Paul Tillich who argue that the corrupted state of nature is inextricably linked to the sinfulness of mankind, which inadvertently leads to the conclusion that nature cannot be redeemed by human means.[195] Moreover, in the 1992 edition the ecological crisis that Deloria had already foresaw had grown to the point that he was able to write, "we are today reaching the 'nth' term in this sequence of exploitation and face ecological disasters of such complete planetary scope as to surpass our wildest imagination."[196] Three decades later, we are farther along than ever along this track towards ecological collapse. Revolution is more urgent than ever. Certainly, Deloria writes with this in mind in his original conclusion: "As the long-forgotten peoples of the respective continents rise and begin to reclaim their ancient heritage, they will discover the meaning of the lands of their ancestors. That is when the invaders of the North American continent will finally discover that for this land, God is red."[197]

Native American theologian George Tinker on the other hand, while building on the foundation laid by Deloria, is more optimistic about the possibility of Christianity and Native American theology despite their first encounter. Tinker argued that as with other advocates of liberation theology "American Indians must also see liberation, or freedom, as our principal goal." Tinker also drew a distinction between any Native American theology of liberation and other liberation theologies, writing that "as Indigenous communities, our notions of freedom and liberation will be necessarily different from the expressions of Christianity that have emerged, for example, from Latin American liberation theologians during the last thirty or more years."[198] Similarly, we must also ask what constitutes Asian notions of freedom and liberation, distinct from other theologies of liberation. This is a crucial point because of the genocidal role that Christian doctrine has played in the Americas, thus the Native American encounter with Christianity is one thoroughly stained by the blood of settler colonial violence and conquest. More abstractly, Tinker argued that European categories of cognition and methodologies, transposed onto a Greco-Roman interpretation of Judeo-Christian doctrine, is already in conflict with Indigenous thought. Theology itself is a European category. "For a White American to ask any Indian, 'What is your word for God?' immediately forces a near-fatal compromise in the Indian worldview from which it is difficult to recover."[199]

Moreover, the denominational doctrine, according to Tinker, requires a particular form of erasure in seeking to replicate itself in the convert, therefore an erasure of Indigenous identity. This assimilation is not a coincidence but a feature of settler colonialism, whereby the 'vanishing native' is produced through various modes of elimination, assimilation being arguably the least violent act of removal, though the cultural and literal genocide performed through the function of residential schools have slowly been brought to light. "Denominations seem to have deeply invested themselves in a politics of replicating themselves in the colonized. The missionaries want nothing more than to themselves reflected back in the faith and language of their Indian wards," a sentiment not unfamiliar to Asians subject to evangelizing missions. This missionizing assimilation immediately produced political divisions within the Indigenous American communities. Forcing the choice between Indigenous traditions and the new religious traditions brought by the settler colonizers was so successful as a part of the colonialist strategy in dividing communities and coercing compliance that missionization was further developed as a political strategy throughout the colonizing process.[200] In 1551, Bartolomé de Las Casas engaged in a public debate before the Spanish court, arguing that

the Indigenous Americans were also human beings, a position that was not patently obvious to the Spanish conquistadores. Instead, he promulgated a "gentler conquest," hoping to destroy Indigenous cultural structures by replacing them with a European value system and cultural patterns of behaviour.[201] This process became the predominant structure used by Roman Catholics in the Americas and later reproduced by Protestants in North America.[202]

Other liberation theologies in the United States, while important in their own right, come second to the need to decolonize the settler colonial structure. Part of the work of liberation is imagining such Indigenous futures. Freedom must be for all peoples. Liberation theology must not only humanize the non-human, as Gutiérrez contended, but also privilege and render visible the erased native, giving primacy to the one whose land upon which we are theologizing. More than just rendering human or visible, we must join in the fight for Indigenous sovereignty and resurgence.[203] Any liberation theology developed in settler societies that does not explicitly address the settler colonial order is complicit in the logic of elimination, and on its own is not tenable as a theology of freedom for all. What sort of theology of liberation emerges when taking seriously the task of decolonization? Radical reinterpretations of Jesus in the tradition of other liberation theologies, Tinker argued, are counterproductive because "the first proclamation of Jesus among any Indian community came as the beginning of a colonial conquest," replacing Native religious traditions with "the imposition of a one-size-fits-all euro-western Jesus."[204] Furthermore, the contemporary move to correct Jesus' ethnicity "helps little to obviate our historical experience of the way missionary preaching about Jesus was used to destroy our cultures and legitimate the theft of our property." Struggles over the racialization of Jesus—including the Asian Jesus—reveal more about how particular values and signifiers are projected onto the representation of the Messiah, whether through imagery or theology, and less about the accuracy regarding the actual historical person.[205] Race remains a social construct, as Wolfe also emphasizes, in the context of settler colonial society. The dialectic of race underwrites socio-historical arguments about the racial identity of Jesus, through which very different theologies emerge. Thus, while it may be important for Christian doctrines to have Jesus at its core, as the Messiah at the apex of salvation history, any naïve setting of Jesus as the cornerstone of liberation theology runs afoul of committing ahistorical violence, ignoring the physical, social, psychological damage done in the name of Jesus throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

Asian settler colonialism

With the broad contours of (mostly European) settler colonialism and its relation to Native American liberation theology in place, we can now turn to Asian settler colonialism. The first and possibly most instructive case is the ongoing Asian American settler colonialism in Hawai'i, articulated in the collection *Asian Settler Colonialism* edited by Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura.[206] The examination of Asian American complicity in settler colonialism in Hawai'i opens the way for thinking through the idea of Asian American immigrants, generally seen as oppressed peoples themselves, instead as participants in the settler colonialism in the United States mainland. It is worth quoting Trask at length:

> Our native people and territories have been overrun by non-natives, including Asians. Calling themselves "local," the children of Asian settlers greatly outnumber us. They claim Hawai'i as their own, denying Indigenous history, their long collaboration in our continued dispossession, and the benefits therefrom. Part of this denial is the substitution of the term "local" for "immigrant," which is, itself, a particularly celebrated American gloss for "settler." As on the continent, so in our island home. Settlers and their children recast the

> American tale of nationhood: Hawai'i, like the continent, is naturalized as but another telling illustration of the uniqueness of America's "nation of immigrants.[207]

Here, the signifier 'local' is deployed in opposition to the term 'immigrant' as a means of legitimating the presence of multigenerational Asian settlers in Hawai'i, whereby Asian settlers view themselves also as locals, even though they may not be Indigenous to the land. This belies the observation that settlers ultimately desire to have the land as they imagine an Indigenous person would, and in doing so indigenize. Once in possession of the land, settlers deny the logic of possession that enabled them to acquire it in the first place.[208] In Hawai'i, where the Asian population now represents the largest racial demographic and have in effect inherited the colonial order, the problem of settler colonialism is particularly pertinent. Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese migrants arrived in Hawai'i as the haole, White people in Hawai'i, required laborers in the sugarcane plantations set up on the lands taken from the overthrown Hawai'ian kingdom. The immigrant narrative in which one arrives both seeking economic prosperity and fleeing instability and unrest in one's home country, working hard while enduring racism and cultural loss, and finally achieving success and stability and assimilation into White normativity is the hallmark of the "immigrant hegemony" that Trask described.

Iyko Day critiqued this as a blanket attempt to enforce a settler/native binary, arguing that it is unclear whether such settler identity in Hawai'i is generalizable to the situation of Asian immigrant formations that exist elsewhere. Day acknowledged, as Fujikane did, that the initial political and economic subjugation does not exempt Asian ethnic groups from participating as settlers in a colonial system, but went on to argue that the fact that Asian settlers have attained demographic majority, political representation, and economic power in Hawai'i distinguishes them from Asian migrant settlers elsewhere. The history of Black people used as Buffalo soldiers in the wars against Indigenous people in the western United States and during the Philippine-American War, according to Day, is an example of "an oppressed group's un-witting (and sometimes unwilling) participation in settler colonialism and imperial invasion, yet the continued economic and political subjugation of African Americans seems to exempt them from most theorizing on settler colonialism, as a 'third space' or otherwise."[209] But the lack of theorizing about settlers of color does not imply that non-Indigenous people of color do not cooperate and often administer the settler colonial order, regardless of who it was that invaded in the first place. While Day insightfully argues that a core logic of the settler colonial mode of production centers on the systematic exploitation of a racialized, gendered, and sexualized alien labor force, bringing to bear a class analysis of North American settler colonialism, her insistence on this third space, which she calls the alien, is at the same time inadequate and superfluous.[210] Superfluous, because it evades the central claim of Indigenous peoples against settlers and does not address the fact of Asian settler colonial violence; inadequate, because Day triangulates between native, settler, and alien, placing African Americans and Asian Americans in the same category of analysis, whilst acknowledging the heterogeneity contained within an alien position given the divergent historical and economic contexts of Asian and African labor.[211] As I shall contend in the next chapter, the particular experiences of Asian Americans and African Americans are not only differentiated under racial capitalism, but are often at odds with one another through collusion with anti-Blackness on the one hand, and afropessimism and orientalism on the other.

Wolfe, on the other hand, maintained that "the opposition between Native and settler is a structural relationship rather than an effect of the will […] Neither I nor other settlers can will our way out of it, whether we want to or not."[212] Wolfe compared the Australian context in which unfree White convict labor was imported from Britain, but did not pass on the condition of their criminality to their offspring, with the American context in which African slaves were trafficked to the Americas, and the particularity of the Black experience is in the exclusive and transferable condition of racial slavery. Against this backdrop, Day rightly argued for proper boundaries that

distinguish between voluntary and forced migration. Yet, even as this does not absolve either party from being willing or unwitting participants in the settler colonial structure, Day also asserted that "folding them into a generalized settler position through voluntaristic assumptions constrains our ability to understand how their racialized vulnerability and disposability supports a settler colonial project."[213] But the imperative, I submit, is not so much to allow a third "alien" space that is neither settler nor native that evades Indigenous claims, but rather to attend to the complexities *within* the settler populace, including settlers of color. Race alone cannot play the role of the transitional space for Indigenous liberation, as the structure of invasion exceeds it.

In each category of analysis, a different binary is set up with respect to a given power relation, such as native and settler, east and west, rich and poor, Black and White, male and female. In United States racial discourse, the Asian American is invoked—as one might with Latinx Americans—in order to disrupt the Black and White binary, or in this case the native and settler binary, producing settlers of color that disavow their settler colonial inheritance through more complex formations such as divergent histories of slavery and oppression. Triangulating between a binary and a third space produces a ternary relationship that can be productive and yet insufficient. Andrea Smith's framework of heteropatriarchy and the three pillars of White supremacy attempts to go beyond the ternary, in which each pillar realizes a binary, and together support the superstructure of White supremacy, "constituted by separate and distinct, but still interrelated, logics."[214] Smith's three pillars are slavery/capitalism, genocide/capitalism, and orientalism/war, with arrows connecting each of the pillars together, while heteropatriarchy is the building block of the US empire and White supremacy. While the model is simplistic, it does begin to map out crucial dialectics, each an important site of struggle for liberation is its own right, intersecting with each other at various points. The key to solidarity is to be able to hold the larger picture in constant view, while at the same time maintaining a granular perspective on the particularities of each form of oppression without easily dismissing others.

Asian American settler colonialism is a corollary of White settler colonialism, located in the nexus of the transatlantic and transpacific slave trades, proxy wars in East Asia, the afterlife of European colonization, the expansion of global finance capitalism, and the "war on terror." Indeed, to write about the beginnings of Asian and Asian American church history requires a reckoning with the history of White missionary expeditions and their cooperation with colonial expansion, which not only brought the gospel and civilization to the natives by colonization and re-education, but also extracted wealth in the form of natural resources and human labor. Many flows of Asian migration into the US are inextricably linked to the US military involvement in Asia, whether through the 'mixing' of US troops with the local populace, refugees seeking asylum, or international adoption.

Asian Christians, as with Indigenous Americans, must negotiate their relation to Christianity with the violence the White man's religion has visited upon the world in a way that does not deny the agency of our communities in developing their own spiritual practices that are often syncretic and hybrid. Under the umbrella of Asian American Christianity are vibrant South Korean, Taiwanese, and Filipino church communities, immigrant churches that serve as a touchstone for immigrant communities as a place to gather when all else is foreign and unwelcoming. Functioning as community centers, they provide strong networks of social support, and in this way both an immigrant religious practice and one's home culture is passed on to the next generation. Yet, the subsequent generation that grows up enculturated in the United States is racialized accordingly, and their perspectives tend to differ widely from that of their parents, as Eng and Han's work showed. Particularly within East Asian American Christianity, there has been in recent years a trend towards conservative forms of evangelical Christianity, which tend to espouse emaciated theologies—while robust in and of themselves—with respect to the lived experiences of people of color. That is to say,

theology that is living and active and engaged requires not only hermeneutics of the past, but also of the present.

At the same time, we must also interrogate the aspects of the White man's religion that have been internalized and reproduced in Christian communities of color. In such instances the sins of White supremacy and evangelical racism are repeated, in the form of missions to Native American reservations and Central American countries such as Haiti and Guatemala, often reproducing an honorary White savior complex that manifests itself through civilizing missions and feel-good 'voluntourism' that often do more harm than good.[215] Asian American missions tend to target poorer countries, including in Asia and Africa, or 'urban areas' in much the same manner as White missionary work, reproducing a benevolent racism towards people that are seen as backward or undeveloped. In part, these programs are a confluence of the marketing of White evangelicalism and the aspirations of Asian Americans to the standards of holiness determined by White evangelicals, and it is in this way that the genealogy of White Jesus is continued in Asian American churches. Namely, the brand of Christianity that arrived in Asia brought by White missionaries from Europe, hence enculturated in European traditions and woefully ignorant of its Asian origins, despite biblical archaeology and hermeneutics. They carry White systematic and biblical theologies, whose hermeneutics study deeply the historical contexts of biblical texts and figures, but have little to say about the application of the texts to racial injustice, gender oppression, and class difference in the present day. This is deeply symptomatic of a White mythology which narrates specific facts about itself and forgets others, such as in the U.S. support of Israeli settler colonialism in Palestine through cultural exchange, direct investment, and military backing. This narrative is particularly pertinent as it is intertwined with the biblical narrative of Israel's right to inheritance and the conquest of Canaan.

Another crucial dimension of Asian settler colonialism that I will not do be able to describe in any satisfactory manner here is the fact of settler colonialism within Asia itself. To mention but a few examples, there are the Taiwanese Indigenous Gaushan people who, in the recent past, were occupied by the Chinese Nationalist Party, retreating after their defeat by the Communist Party of China in 1949. This underscores the complexities of settler colonialism, whereby the arriving population does not necessarily arrive by choice or with intent of domination, yet eventually does come to dominate the Indigenous population. More recently, the rise of China as a global superpower has invited greater scrutiny over its neo-colonial practices, ranging from the cultural genocide through the 're-education' of Tibetans and Uyghurs, a euphemism for the eradication of their distinctive cultural heritage, religious practice, and language, to its rapid expansion in Africa and Southeast Asia through investment and development, also territorial claims in the South China Sea, which brings to mind Europe's past scramble for Africa. Jammu and Kashmir, nearby, remain caught between the land claims of India and Pakistan. In 2019, Article 370 in India which granted Jammu and Kashmir special status as autonomous administrative regions was revoked in the midst of a lockdown, internet blackout, and military occupation which continued into the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the Article had prevented Indian citizens from other states from purchasing land or property there. This move angered Pakistan and drew sympathy from the international community, but their present reality remains the same. A final example are the Muslim Moro and animist Lumad people in the Mindanao region in the Philippines: following the successive colonization by the Spanish, the Americans, and the Japanese, Christian Filipinos from neighboring regions took over reigns the colonial administration and perpetuate the marginalization of the Moro and Lumad in their native land, similar to the present dominance of ethnic Chinese in Singapore. These brief vignettes display the potential for Asians themselves to exercise power in the form of imperialism and settler colonialism, a reminder that the will to power (and settle) is not an inherent feature of Whiteness, but also of the possibilities of transnational solidarity in struggles against settler colonialism.

Unsettling Asian American Theology: Towards decolonization and landlessness

Settler colonialism is the rightful term that describes the occupation of Indigenous land, the foundation of the United States. While it is often used to describe the European settlers, people who arrived in the US afterwards are referred to as immigrants. Settlers of color maintain the settler colonial structure, and their struggles against racism and discrimination are predicated on the "blank space" that is created out of the continuing genocide and suppression of Indigenous Americans. As Fujikane wrote, the rhetoric of multiculturalism and immigrant rights weaponizes notions of equality but elides the crucial difference that sets apart Indigenous Americans from settlers. As Asian American settler colonizers, it is necessary to actively fight against the amnesia of immigrant communities surrounding the centuries of pillage, subjugation, and extermination in the Americas, reproducing settler colonial domination. Asian Americans also straddle the economic divide, as the most economically unequal racial groups in the nation. In the struggle for upward mobility, propped up by a proximity to Whiteness, participation in White Christianity, and performance of citizenship and statehood, Asian Americans perpetuate the dispossession of Indigenous people with lukewarmness. As Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, all it takes is for good people to do nothing in order for evil to prevail. It is at this juncture that liberation theology becomes useful: the class analysis it requires in theologizing from the viewpoint of the poor and the oppressed, is a rebuke to the Asian Americans who have succeeded far too well at achieving the Asian American dream, assimilating into majority culture, whose default is Whiteness. The model minority myth of hard work and conformity encourages us to be comfortable with wealth, especially wealth earned through perceived merit. The myth that one can succeed in USA solely through hard work hides the systematic disenfranchisement of poor people of color, especially Black and Indigenous communities.

But more is necessary. Just as we must fight the tendency to become weaponized as model minorities against Black and brown people, we must also resist the comfortable urge to occupy Native land unproblematically, and to imagine Indigenous Americans as people of the past. Tinker had criticized the shortcomings of Black and Latin American theologies of liberation, arguing that their class analyses inadequately address the Native American condition. The visions of socialism or Marxism which have influenced these liberation theologies alone do not offer compelling futures for Indigenous Americans any more than racial capitalism does. We must look to Native American liberation theology not as just another addition to the multiculturalist project, but rather as the foundation upon which to build our theology in the Americas, in particular an Asian American theology of liberation.

It is for freedom that the Messiah has set us free. Native American theology challenges settlers to think of ourselves as never being only unto ourselves, but as being interconnected to community and to land and to creation. Thus, we are challenged to consider our freedom not as an individual but a collective spiritual condition. As in James, "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."[216] Solidarity with other communities of color in their struggles is an exercise in demonstrating our faith through works. For Asian Americans, the repentance that ecclesiastical reparations asks of us requires first the conviction of our own complicity in oppression and settler colonial systems, before we can even begin working towards the freedom first of all of Indigenous peoples, then of Black people and finally, the rest of us. Christians most of all must believe that another world is possible.

It is time to return to Wolfe's phrase "invasion is a structure, not an event." Much has been written on the structural nature of settler colonial invasion, how settler society is built upon and sustained by the logics of elimination and exclusion. The structural analysis of settler colonialism allows us to distinguish it from colonialism, which seeks to extract value from the land, oftentimes through the subjugation of the Indigenous population and exploitation of imported or trafficked alien labor. Settler colonialism invades to take over the land, to replace the Indigenous population and thus indigenize. Liberation theology—and liberation at large—is the affirmative aspect of decolonization. That is, decolonization as both a process and analytical tool in the post-colony and settler colony is an emancipatory move, which leads to liberation. But as with invasion, liberation is a structure, not an event. Liberation must come to stay. Liberation must be understood as structure to be sustained, not an event that occurs once as a rupture in historical time. As such, theologies of liberation must be worked out both in theory and in practice, as it occurs in historical processes and also in dialectical relations, in ideology.

The Protestant Reformation is often viewed as a democratization of western Christianity, in opposition to the hierarchical power structures of the Roman Catholic church. It can also be viewed as an attempt at Christian anarchy in the truest sense of the word: the Greek *anarchia* meaning 'without leaders,' though of course the reformation hardly did away with the ecclesiastical power structure in its entirety, as much as it posed a challenge to those who abused their power within the Roman Catholic church. Luther's reformation is famously known for its critique of the Roman Catholic church's extortion of its parishioners through indulgences. While not an official teaching of the church at the time, Luther's 28th Thesis was directed against Johann Tetzel, who taught that an offering of money was able to purchase an indulgence for the dead, that is, to reduce the punishment for sins that a deceased loved one may be subject to in Purgatory. Thus the saying went, "as soon as money in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory's fire springs." Borrowing a page from European church history, liberation theology might also be understood as also a democratizing move, but a far more radical one that transfers power to the people and away for the rich, the powerful, and the White. Liberation theology sides with the poor and the powerless, hence holds within itself an inherent tension: in its struggle for acceptance in the margins as a theology of the oppressed and in the academy as a respectable field of study, if it gains acceptance within ivory towers and high churches it has contradicted itself, but if it is not accepted it struggles to be passed on.

Arguably, this is the first place to start working through what Reverend Duke Kwon described as ecclesiastical reparations, which essentially means the reparations owed by the church as an institution and its members to communities whose oppression it has been complicit in. Reparations is typically discussed in the context of what is due to Black Americans for the centuries of enslavement and subjugation, recently popularized by Ta-Nehisi Coates.[217] Reparations for slavery is a crucial topic in its own right that the church needs to reckon with, but reparations for settler colonialism, I argue, has been largely ignored in conversations about justice even though the 'Land back' claim is far more tangible than reparations for slavery. Christians of color have begun to come to terms with the complicity of Christianity in the conquest of the Americas through the Doctrine of Discovery, which also justified the colonization of the Third World. Yet this continues today in the form of legal uses of eminent domain as a means of seizing land, as was used for example for the construction of Trump's border wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Additionally, the evangelistic missions by Christians of color to Native American reservations reproduces the colonial mentality, without being critical of the history that has produced the present conditions faced by Native Americans. As J. Sakai wrote, "it is the absolute characteristic of settler society to be parasitic, dependent upon the super-exploitation of oppressed peoples for its style of life."[218] In a sense, enough is already known about the settler colonial situation, even if interesting and subtle analyses

continue to be produced, interrogating for example its intersections with racial capitalism, imperialism, and gender. The challenge to all settlers has been, still is, and will be the question of land and self-determination. In other words, to "desettlerize" the colony. This challenge remains to be faced head on by settlers; according to Sakai, "Euro-Amerikan liberals and radicals have rarely dealt with the Land question; we could say that they don't have to deal with it, since their people already have all the land."[219] The same could be said of settlers of color, including Asian Americans, inasmuch as they are able to prosper into land-holding homeowners. Of course, some object that the Indigenous would not be able to properly govern the land, should it be returned to them, also that giving control to a small Indigenous population would simply lead to a kind of oligarchic rule. But the near extinction of Indigenous populations is not a coincidence, as obvious as this may seem, and if desettlerization is taken to be in conjunction with deimperialization, demilitarization, and the dismantling of capitalism, it is worth remembering that "everyone could live here who lives here, quite well, with a lot of autonomy, a lot of justice, a lot of room for expression and development."[220] From a theological standpoint, Kwon invoked the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, who in repentance offered to give half his possessions to the poor and repay four times what he had stolen from others.[221] Paying ecclesiastical reparations is not conditional upon the moral character of the one who has been stolen from, but rather an imperative on the part of the thief. Land back does not need to know how the Indigenous nations will steward the land.

Decolonization is not a metaphor, Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang insist.[222] Carelessly calling to decolonize things like schools and other such institutions too quickly metaphorizes decolonization in the context of a settler colony. To do so kills the very possibility of decolonization and re-centers Whiteness; it is yet another form of settler appropriation. What would it mean to decolonize something like theology, such as Asian American theology? I want to suggest that decolonizing Asian American theology requires giving up the search for physical belonging, the mythical land of AsianAmerica, instead replacing it with a theology of landlessness and be in solidarity with Indigenous struggles for sovereignty. To talk about decolonizing anything on Turtle Island, we have to start with settler colonialism, with the invasion of sovereign lands whereby the invaders come to stay. This is in contrast with extractive colonialism whereby the colonizer arrives to plunder and rape the land and its peoples in order to enrich the colonizer's place of origin. This second kind of exploitative colonialism is the story of Europe in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands in the twentieth century, and in many cases the decolonization that followed was a violent, historical event. At least up until 1965, most Asians arrived in the US through US military and colonial interests in Asia. We are here because you were there, the saying goes. But we often forget, or worse, ignore the fact the US is a settler colony that sits atop of stolen land.

The first task in decolonizing is to understand ourselves as settlers of color. Trask implicated Asians who reject the label "haole" in favor of terms like "local" or "immigrant," through which Asians tell a model minority fairytale of success, of overcoming hardship and exploitation and racism, while to Native people, Asian success is "but the latest elaboration of foreign hegemony."[223] Immigration foregrounds movement across state borders for permanent residency, whereas migration points to the geographies of labor and capitalism. Settlers are not immigrants. Immigrants have permission to enter and stay; settlers squat on land they pretend is uninhabited. Asian American theology today is a theology of hybridity, marginality, and liminality.[224] It looks for the possibility of becoming settled in a place that has viewed Asians as perpetually foreign, of becoming comfortable in one's own skin. In a sense, Asians in the US have always been looking for a home that was never there, from the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act to the 1935 Filipino Repatriation Act to the 1942 Japanese internment to the 2017 Muslim Ban. The wrong kind of Asians have never been welcomed by the United States; the right kind, of course, being people like the CEO of Google or Microsoft. An Asian American theology of liberation, on the other hand, is a theology from the

viewpoint of migrant, undocumented, refugee, and working-class Asians. Asians who fall below the poverty line or whose children struggle to stay in school. The dominance of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans in the popular Asian representation means that the rest of us are further marginalized, not to speak of the intersections of class, sex, and gender. Either way, Asian American theologies are by necessity *landless* theologies, for Asian America is a country that has no soil. But if we are to decolonize our theology, or properly liberate it, we cannot be hoping to settle on stolen land. That is to say, Asian American theology cannot become yet another form of settler theology. Indigeneity and struggles for sovereignty are not foreign to Asians. Palestine, Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet, Hawai'i, and Mindanao are all fighting to be free. At the same time, decolonization in Asia has almost always led to the transfer of power from White to Brown and Yellow colonial masters. The ongoing oppression and colonization of Indigenous peoples and minority groups are made possible only by the collaboration of our own people, the colonized intellectuals and petite bourgeoisie. Narrow-minded nationalisms led to conflict and further bloodshed that the West conveniently washed their hands of as the new world order came into being. They divided and conquered us, and we have and continue to pay the price for being divided.

The struggle of Indigenous peoples everywhere is deeply connected because water does not separate land, but instead joins it together as Okihiro's concept ocean worlds shows. Besides the Third World, First Secretary of the Tanzanian High Commission Mbuto Milando said, "when Native peoples come into their own, on the basis of their own cultures and traditions, that will be the Fourth World."[225] We cannot support the freedom struggles in the Third World such as Hong Kong and Palestine without also fighting to dismantle of the settler colony that is the United States. "Indian country" is a term used by the US military to refer to enemy or foreign territory.[226] That is what they called Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The United States as an imperial force does to Asia what it does to Turtle Island as settler colony. Indeed, the counterinsurgency tactics used in Iraq were deployed against water protectors in Standing Rock and Ferguson, and Israeli suppression of Palestinians was taught to anti-riot police in response to Black Lives Matters protestors in the United States. If we were to truly attempt to decolonize, we would be called terrorists. The United States has been in a state of perpetual war from the very beginning: against Native Americans, Africans, and all over the Third World. To set ourselves against imperial violence in North America, we must continuously hold in view the ongoing war—and resistance—that began here over five hundred years ago. If the military views all these disparate geographies as 'Indian country,' how dare we not see our struggles as interconnected?

In articulating a Palestinian liberation theology, Palestinian theologian Naim Ateek turned to the historical Jesus who lived in Rome-occupied Palestine as the hermeneutic key to connect with the present-day Israel-occupied Palestine.[227] Tinker's critique of Jesus notwithstanding, Ateek read the metaphor of Jesus as the Temple as signaling a move away from an attachment to the land of Palestine, Jerusalem, and the Temple, which itself was destroyed in 70 CE by the Roman military.[228] This, however, does not relieve the land of its holiness but, through the immanence of the Messiah, reminds us that *all* land is sacred and we must live in right relation to it. A proper theology of land that calls for the liberation of occupied lands such as Palestine directly conflicts with settler theologies such as Christian Zionism in the United States that justifies the taking of that land. Most visibly, Trump's border wall along the U.S.-Mexico border—which is Native land—was built in part by an Israeli-owned defense manufacturer, also tear gas manufactured in the United States was found to be used against Hong Kong protestors between 2019 and 2020. So even if we did not think our struggles were connected, the capitalists sure know that these business opportunities are. Indeed, the locus of Palestine as a means of connecting struggles will reenters in the next chapter through abolitionism that connects the prison industrial complex, the military industrial complex, and policing at large as various means of preserving state power.

To unsettle Asian American theology is to accept our landlessness here as we fight for Indigenous sovereignty everywhere. Decolonizing the Americas means all land is repatriated and all settlers become landless, Tuck and Yang write.[229] As some Indigenous activists and scholars will argue, this does not mean that all non-Native persons are repatriated to their ancestral lands, but rather that the First Nations will be sovereign and settlers will live in a new relation to the land and to their hosts.[230] The reorganization of material realities goes hand in hand with the transformation of not only social but also ecological relations. In practice, this means fighting for the rights of Indigenous communities such as in Standing Rock, honoring the treaties that continue to be broken as the Trail of Broken Treaties demanded in 1972, and working towards the resurgence of Indigenous peoples and the return of stolen land. This is not a theoretical exercise. Many small but significant instances of land return have been initiated such as the nonprofit groups Planting Justice and the women-led Sogorea Tè Land Trust which, in 2018, facilitated the return of a quarter-acre of Ohlone land in East Oakland, California to Ohlone stewardship. One and a half acres of land was returned to the Nimíipuu by the Wallowa Lake Camp in Oregon, facilitated in part by the United Methodist Church. While symbolic and important, we must put this in the perspective that the coalition of American Indian and First Nation organizations, which participated in the Trail of Broken Treaties caravan protest to Washington, DC, included in their demands that the United States Federal Government restore a permanent Native American land area of no less than 110 million acres by July 4, 1976. Still, as we strive to build a coalitional politics through Asian American organizing and with other people of color, there will be an incommensurability to decolonizing our theology as irreducible differences arise in the process of struggling together if, for example, advocating for civil rights only means inclusion into the settler state. To unsettle ourselves requires us to give up our immigrant identity as a purely virtuous one and to risk a coalitional politics that is sometimes unfriendly as we reckon with Asian settler colonialism.

Such unsettling can be violent as well. Those who prefer the metaphor must remember that "decolonization is always a violent event," as one translation of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* paraphrased. It "fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor."[231] It is the verification of Jesus' proclamation that "the last shall be first." There is no way the land will be given back, the prison system abolished, and the military disarmed without a fight. Fanon continues: "In its bare reality, decolonization reeks of red-hot cannonballs and bloody knives. For the last can be the first only after a murderous and decisive confrontation between the two protagonists."[232] As Psalm 137 asked, how can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? Under the captivity of Babylon, the psalmist concludes: "Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks." If Christians prefer to skip over the cursing Psalms, perhaps it is because they simply have not suffered the same. To begin to decolonize Asian America requires that we hold the complexity of being both oppressed and oppressor, victims of racial discrimination and still complicit in systems of domination. Psalm 137 is both directed by us and against us. Finally, Trask puts the challenge to settlers of color thus:

> Non-Natives need to examine and re-examine their many and continuing benefits from Hawaiian dispossession. Those benefits do not end when non-Natives begin supporting Hawaiians, just as our dispossession as Natives does not end when we become active nationalists. Equations of Native exploitation and of settler benefit continue. For non-Natives, the question that needs to be answered every day is simply the one posed in the old union song, "which side are you on?"[233]

Blessed are the wretched, for they shall inherit the earth.

5. Searching for an Asian radical tradition: *Asian American liberation, Dalit theology, and the Black radical tradition*

Every time I wanna go get a fuckin' brew
I gotta go down to the store with the two
Oriental one penny countin' motherfuckers
That make a nigga mad enough to cause a little ruckus
Thinkin' every brother in the world's out to take
So they watch every damn move that I make
They hope I don't pull out a gat and try to rob
They funky little store, but, bitch, I got a job
"Look, you little Chinese motherfucker
I ain't tryin' to steal none of yo' shit, leave me alone!"
So don't follow me up and down your market
Or your little chop suey ass'll be a target
Of a nationwide boycott
Juice with the people, that's what the boy got
So pay respect to the black fist
Or we'll burn your store right down to a crisp
And then we'll see ya
Cause you can't turn the ghetto into Black Korea
— Ice Cube, *Black Korea*

If we are to be honest with ourselves, we must admit that the "Negro" has been inviting whites, as well as civil society's junior partners, to the dance of social death for hundreds of years, but few have wanted to learn the steps. They have been, and remain today—even in the most anti-racist movements, like the prison abolition movement—invested elsewhere. This is not to say that all oppositional political desire today is pro-white, but it is usually anti-Black, meaning it will not dance with death. — Frank Wilderson[234]

The Martinican is a crucified man. The environment which has shaped him (but which he has not shaped) has torn him apart, and he nurtures this cultural milieu with his blood and his humors. The blood of a black man, however, is a fertilizer much appreciated by the experts. — Frantz Fanon[235]

The movement for Black lives came roaring back into action at the end of May 2020, at the height of the coronavirus lockdown in the United States, following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade. What began as protests against police brutality against Black people in the United States exploded into a worldwide movement, expressing solidarity with the protests while calling attention to police brutality and anti-Black racism locally. Asians in the United States spoke out in solidarity with the movement, drawing attention to anti-Blackness in their communities and writing open letters in their ethnic languages explaining their support, building on the same Letters for Black Lives from 2016.[236] This wave of activism and introspection was fueled in no small part by the fact that Hmong American Tou Thao was among the police officers involved in Floyd's killing, his face captured in the video and spread widely on social media. Thao's complicity, in holding the crowd back as Chauvin held his knee to Floyd's neck turned into a metaphor for Asian America keeping watch as White America crushed the life out Black America. Many explainers on Asian anti-Blackness in the United States appeared in the aftermath, connecting this moment back to the 1992 L.A. Riots and the model minority myth, first used in 1966 to describe Japanese

immigrants and denigrate African Americans, and more broadly couched in the context of the racial logic of the Cold War.[237]

At first glance, this might be seen as an improvement from public discourse in 2014 when the Black Lives Matter movement first began, which saw a lack of Asian participation in protests and even protests from the Chinese American community against the conviction of NYPD officer Peter Liang in 2017 for the murder of Akai Gurley. At the same time, the current moves to critique Asian anti-Blackness and the model minority myth suggest on the one hand a collective amnesia about the history of Asians in the Americas and its connection with Black struggle internationally, and on the other hand a deep-seated anxiety about the place of Asian Americans within the United States racial hierarchy. To be clear, this is by no means a tale of "storybook solidarity," but a long history full of tensions and alliances. The responsibility of Asians in this revolutionary moment is not only to address anti-Blackness, but to reinsert ourselves into the long history of Afro-Asia, which, according to scholar Bill Mullen, signifies "the imperative to imagine a 'new world' grounded upon two great ancient worlds as well as a radical and revolutionary anti-imperialist tradition."[238] Whereas the transatlantic slave trade triangulated Africa, Europe, and the Americas since as early as 1501, the slave trade was a more general international phenomenon. European colonization of Asia began around the time the transatlantic slave trade began: Christopher Columbus had "discovered" the Caribbean in search of India, and by the 1600s Manila was the center of the transpacific slave trade. Ships arrived not only with African slaves, but also slaves from Macao, India, Myanmar, Malacca, Java, and other areas. From there, ships carried these slaves to the Americas, along with the Filipino and Chinese sailors. While Asian slaves were emancipated in New Spain in 1672, and in 1700 a Spanish royal order prohibited the Asian slave trade, slavery in the US only ended in 1865, and even then, it evolved into racial segregation for a hundred years, and then into mass incarceration since.

As slavery formally ended in the 1800s, settler colonizers throughout the Americas found the replacement for enslaved African in Chinese labor, indentured and free. Among these grew a Chinese community such as in the Mississippi Delta, living in Black neighborhoods and often inter-marrying.[239] Later, in the wake of Chinese exclusion, South Asians immigrated to New Orleans and moved into Black neighborhoods, again becoming a part of the community there. Indeed, the mixture of Asian, Indigenous, and Black populations since centuries ago should serve as a reminder to guard against essentialized, dualistic forms of identity politics. During the time of racial segregation, Asians were seen as neither Black nor White, the racial middleman. But it was not long until the Chinese grew into the "Yellow Peril," leading to a string of exclusionary laws. In the United States, it began with the 1875 Page Act and the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. The anti-Chinese sentiment was not limited to the United States, and the acts inspired similar bans on Chinese immigration throughout the rest of the Americas. As Chinese labor began to dry up, they were replaced with influxes of Japanese, then Korean, then Indian labor, which altogether led to the Asian Exclusion Act in 1924, banning all immigration from Asia. This is Day's alien capital, the surplus alien labor force that is infinitely exploitable, disposable, replaceable through the use of immigration quotas and undocumented workers.[240] The early history of Asians in the Americas is thus intertwined with the histories of African slavery and Black freedom.

The Civil Rights Era, spanning the 1950s and the 1960s, culminated in the Civil Rights Act in 1964, outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. This opened up the way for the 1965 Immigration Act, which repealed previous restrictions on immigration. This was the turning point in Asian American history that saw an influx of largely upper- and middle-class Asians into the United States. This was also the time that saw the most prominent alliances between Black and Asian radicals that forms the basis of considerable nostalgia in the present moment. Malcolm X argued that no African American movement would flourish unless it was "tied in with

the overall international struggle," himself visiting Palestine in 1964. At the meeting of representatives from 29 African and Asian nations, then prime minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru foregrounded the "infinite tragedy" of the transatlantic slave trade:

> When I think of it, everything else pales into insignificance; that infinite tragedy of Africa ever since the days when millions of them were carried away in galleys as slaves to America and elsewhere, the way they were treated, the way they were taken away, 50 percent dying in the galleys. We have to bear that burden, all of us. We did not do it ourselves, but the world has to bear it.[241]

The Black Panther Party, of course, was famously internationalist in their work, visiting China, North Vietnam, and North Korea, opposing the Vietnam war, and whose "survival programs" were inspired by Mao's Little Red Book. Several Asians also joined the Panthers, such as Richard Aoki, Lee Lew-Lee, and Guy Kurose. (Aoki, importantly, was revealed in 1992 to be an FBI informant.) Among the organizations that the Panthers inspired were the Dalit Panthers in India, who fought against caste-based oppression. The Dalit Panther manifesto directly connected United States imperialism, the Black struggle, and Dalit oppression:

> Due to the hideous plot of American imperialism, the Third World, that is, oppressed nations, and Dalit people are suffering. Even in America, a handful of reactionary Whites are exploiting Blacks. To meet the force of reaction and remove this exploitation, the Black Panther movement grew. From the Black Panthers, Black Power emerged. The fire of the struggles has thrown out sparks into the country. We claim a close relationship with this struggle. We have before our eyes the examples of Vietnam, Cambodia, Africa and the like.[242]

Around that time, the Third World Liberation Front was formed in 1968 in San Francisco and Berkeley as a coalition of Black, Asian, Indigenous American, and Latin American students, and during this time Asian American identity first coalesced. This was also a time when prominent activists such as Yuri Kochiyama, a close associate of Malcolm X, and Grace Lee Boggs, who worked with activists James Boggs and C. L. R. James, were active. The Black Power movement also directly inspired Asians, as Amy Umeyatsu wrote in 1969 that

> Asian Americans can no longer afford to watch the Black-and-White struggle from the sidelines. They have their own cause to fight, since they are also victims—with less visible scares—of the White institutionalized racism. A yellow movement has been set into motion by the Black power movement. Addressing itself to the unique problems of Asian Americans, this "yellow power" movement is relevant to the Black power movement in that both are part of the Third World struggle to liberate all colored people.[243]

These vignettes offer a historical picture of Asians and Africans who saw the struggles of the Third World as one of social and not geographic location. The fallout from US wars in Southeast Asia between the 1950s and the 1970s, together with the 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, brought over a million Vietnamese, Lao, Hmong, and Cambodian refugees to the United States. Carrying the trauma of war and displacement with them, these communities continue to struggle to survive and adapt, and sometimes thrive. Some learned to articulate their experiences by appropriating Black genres such as Hmong American hip hop artist Tou Saiko Lee and Vietnamese American spoken word artist Bao Phi. Cultural exchange also flowed the other way: in the 1970s kung fu films drew large Black audiences in the United States, featuring the first non-White protagonists like Bruce Lee and Jim Kelly fighting oppression on the big screen. Then in 1982 came the next defining incident, the murder of Vincent Chin. Chinese Americans began organizing, joined by Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and African Americans under the name "American Citizens for Justice."

The global movements of the last decade, the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and Me Too have ushered in new era of global protest. China's rise as a global superpower has led to contentious U.S.-China relations and accusations of neo-imperialism in Africa. Solidarity continues to be expressed between the movement for Black lives, the struggles of Palestine, Kashmir, Hawai'i, Syria, and Hong Kong. In view of these histories, it is perhaps then not far-fetched to claim that the struggles of the Asian and African at home and in diaspora are connected, and that Asian liberation is tied up in Black liberation. Yet, as already suggested above, there are deep conflicts arising from anti-Blackness and orientalism that prevent any easy form of solidarity, but this shared history of international struggle against empire, racism, colonization, and capitalism suggests that the Third World may be able to come into focus again, following the Third World studies curriculum that the Third World Liberation Front envisioned which "subscribes to that species of positivism for the imperative of pointing to privilege and poverty, exploitation and oppression, revolution and liberation."[244] While the dream of Afro-Asia may not have been realized as Fred Ho, Bill McMullen, Nehru, Malcolm X, and many others may have envisioned, but new horizons appear even now.

Indeed, even as I am attempting to put forward an Asian American theology of liberation, the paradigm of the Asian American is by necessity limiting in a way that the Third World is not: as a new Cold War begins to take shape between the United States and China, it appears that new forms of solidarity and organizing that are anti-imperialist and anti-nationalist are necessary, with the requisite attention to the other structures of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In this sense the subjectlessness and landlessness of Asian American identity is not an end in itself, but a means of realizing a coalitional politics and broader critiques of the power relations through which Asian Americanness is constituted. Interrogating the racial formation, whether of Asian Americanness or Blackness, pushes against the reification and essentialization of racial categories that have contributed to the degeneration of discourses around race into shallow forms of identity politics.

The broad historical outline of above reveals the possibilities of excavating an Asian radical tradition that will serve such a purpose, whereby racial identity has neither inherent value or meaning, but is a socially constructed vessel, able to be weaponized for the work of justice. At the same time, the history of Black-Asian relations is complex, with as much betrayal as there is solidarity. Attempts to narrate this history are often either romantic and optimistic or suspicious and pessimistic. The most prominent Black-Asian conflict in the United States are the L.A. riots in 1992. While the rioters and looters were made up of White, Black, Latinx, and Asian people, the media characterized it as a Black-Korean conflict, as the LAPD left the Korean community to fend for itself. According to one account, it was a "media-fanned minority vs. minority bogus race war," in which the Black residents of South Central Los Angeles were portrayed as unproductive citizens living off welfare, while the Koreans were hard-working immigrants trying to achieve the "American Dream."[245] Once again the model minority myth was weaponized. Regardless of the role of the media in exacerbating existing racial tensions, the controversial song "Black Korea" by Ice Cube captures an undeniable sentiment within the Black community in relation to Korean businesses, and perhaps most importantly, the death of Latasha Harlins remains an incontrovertible fact of Black death at the hands of a petite bourgeois Korean shopkeeper, perhaps not dissimilar to the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020, in which the police were called by an employee at Cup Foods, a Palestinian American grocery store on suspicion of using a counterfeit bill.

Furthermore, the spectre of anti-Asian violence committed by the Black community looms as something of a taboo in liberal and left discourses, an uneasiness and unwillingness to confront the questions raised in not only in the L.A. riots, but also in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in January 2021, a viral video circulated on social media showing 84-year-old Thai man, Vicha Ratnapakdee, being shoved violently onto the ground in San Francisco by a Black

assailant, succumbing to his injuries days later. Many similar attacks were widely reported around the same time, particularly given the heightened awareness due to the political moment, such as 61-year-old Yao Pan Ma, who was attacked while collecting used cans and bottles, his head stomped on multiple times, while 31-year-old Chinese woman was struck on the head with a hammer. This suggests that not only was the animus between the Black and Asian communities never properly resolved, but continued to be reproduced as anti-Asian violence also took place in the intervening years, such as in 2010 when 83-year-old Huan Chen was beaten up by Black teenagers in San Francisco, and 59-year-old Tian Sheng Yu in Oakland a few months later. Both died from their injuries. According to Kang, the suppression of these thoughts, for upwardly mobile second-generation Asian Americans, "metastasize, not quite into a reactionary politics but into an abiding resentment that makes you question your place within the multicultural, liberal elite."[246] At the same time, Kang identifies this aphasia as a "class-bound affliction," an identity crisis that the working Asian poor and elderly do not concern themselves with. A collective psychic dissonance is generated by the choice to see oneself as "no longer oppressed" and the desire to not be counted among the oppressors, but rather amongst the oppressed. This latter identification is often attempted through the careful assembly of narratives of trauma, which Kang describes as ultimately a nation-building project that elides class difference, presumably in the hope of constructing an abject subjectivity parallel to Black and Indigenous claims.

Rather than seeking an alternative Asian American historiography of oppression, the fact of Black anti-Asianness and Asian anti-Blackness underscores the complexity and nonlinearity of the racial order, calling for more careful attention to the contradictions and complements arising in the intertwined racial formations. To build Asian American theology of liberation on a solid foundation requires not only addressing Asian settler colonial desires, but also Asian anti-Blackness, the racial register in which dialectical materialism operates in the United States. In this chapter, I turn first to the Afropessimist critique of the anti-Blackness stretching from the curse of Noah to the present afterlife of slavery, finding resonances with Cone's Black theology of liberation, and placing it in dialogue with Dalit theology and Dalit liberation, finding points of connection in the separate invitations to social death—to Blackness and to Dalitness—and shared horizons of the abolition of prisons and police with the annihilation of caste.

Afropessimism, Black theology, and the human

In reflecting on the future of Black theology, Cone emphasized the need for Black theology to be in dialogue with Third World theologians and with other minorities in the United States. According to Cone, serious dialogue between "the theology of the Black poor and with the theologies of the marginalized people of the Third World" can help to liberate churches from "enslavement to white theology."[247] And in regard to other minorities in the United States, Cone lamented the lack of coalition among "oppressed minorities," who seemed not to be able to talk to each other or with Third World peoples except through structures "controlled and financed by whites."[248] Rather than staying within the limits of each one's particularities, Cone argued that every theology ought to move towards the concrete experiences of others, that the encountering of the God of biblical faith should draw us outside of ourselves and to the poor of the world, where God is to be found. The inclusivity of Black theology and Black radicalism, the willingness to work in coalition with other oppressed peoples in a collective struggle for liberation is often lost in contemporary discourse. The Combahee River Collective, an important group of Black feminists, issued a statement in 1977 declaring that "the inclusiveness of our politics makes us concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World and working people." In Inasmuch as such forms of radical theology and

politics emanates from a thoroughly Black embodiment and experience, they often fight with open hands, welcoming whomever is also willing to lay their lives down and, following Mary Hooks' mandate for Black people in this time, avenge the suffering of Black ancestors, earn the respect of future generations, and be willing to be transformed in the service of the work.

While such platitudes and invitations exist, there remains the unavoidable work of examining and exorcising anti-Blackness in theology, particularly as it might be inherited in Asian and Asian American theologies. Sylvia Wynter located in the European renaissance a conception of "Man" as being overdetermined by secular racial ideology and its break from Judeo-Christian thought, both placing the European man as the representation of the human. According to Wynter, race was the "non-supernatural but no less extrahuman ground" for the secularizing West's answer to the "Heideggerian question as to the who, and the what we are."[249] In other words, whether through the use of race science or theological anthropology, the question of whom we should ascribe humanity to was always answered by the figurative European man. As it were, the colonization of the Americas and the enslavement of Africa were both legitimated through in such terms, eventually replacing a "Christian/Enemies-of Christ" or "Spirit/Flesh" narrative with a biological law of "natural masters/natural slaves." The colonial world, according to Fanon, is a Manichean world that dehumanizes, or rather, animalizes the native, and the church in the colonies calls the native not to God's way but to the ways of the white man.[250] While Manicheanism itself found a formidable adversary in Augustine, the same dualistic thinking persists in evangelical doctrine to this day, and according to Martinot and Sexton, manifests as a "Manichean delirium" in the United States through a dichotomy between White ethics or civil society and Black life.[251]

Wynter also traced a genealogy of anti-Blackness in the Abrahamic religions to the biblical tradition that the descendants of Ham were "cursed with blackness, as well as being condemned to slavery," and as Felipe Fernández-Arnesto noted, in as early as the fourteenth century of European expansion into the Mediterranean were Black Africans already placed in a category "not far removed from the apes, as man made degenerate by sin."[252] This resonates with Said's reading of Joseph Conrad's usage of contrasts that leads to a chain of equivalences connecting white to good and black to evil, which Said uses to mount a broader critique of Western colonial imagination and orientalism.[253] Moreover, Wynter reinterprets Dubois' color line, the central problem of the twentieth century, as a colonial line that reoccupies the places earlier occupied by the Heaven/Earth and rational humans/irrational animals premises that enable "the selected/dysselected, and thus deserving/undeserving status organizing principle that it encoded to function for the nation-state as well as the imperial orders of the Western bourgeoisie."[254] Western Judeo-Christian theological enterprises are thus deeply implicated in the genealogy of global anti-Black racism, and by extension through Said's work, orientalism.

The Afropessimist challenge is one of ontology, which might be traced back to Fanon: "There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential form which a genuine new departure can emerge. … We are aiming at nothing less than to liberate the black man from himself."[255] Building on Orlando Patterson's notion of social death, interprets the condition slavery and its afterlife as not being defined by a labor relation but rather a property relation: the slave is a commodified object, socially dead, hence "1) open to gratuitous violence, as opposed to violence contingent upon some transgression or crime; 2) natally alienated, their ties of birth not recognized and familial structures intentionally broken apart; and 3) generally dishonored, or disgraced before any thought or action is considered."[256] In an interview with C. S. Soong, Frank Wilderson asserted that "violence against the slave sustains a kind of psychic stability for all others who are not slaves." This gratuitous violence "sustains the psychic health of the people in the first ontological instance. In the second instance, it gets good sugar cane production out of them—and that could even be questioned."[257] Indeed, in Ida B. Well's work on

Black criminalization, she used data analysis to show that lynching had no consistent and hence coherent justification, though its central pretext was as the punishment for the Black man who raped a White woman.[258] As Fanon quoted a friend from the United States in his time, "the Blacks represent a kind of insurance for humanity in the eyes of the Whites. When the Whites feel they have become too mechanized, they turn to the Coloreds and request a little human sustenance"[259] Afropessimism would argue that they it is the non-Whites who turn to the Blacks to request a little human sustenance. The ontological argument rests in part on what Fanon called an "epidermal racial schema," in contrast to the "Jewishness of the Jew" that can pass undetected, "I am overdetermined from the outside. I am a slave not to the "idea" others have of me, but to my appearance."[260] For this reason, it is a "paradigm of oppression that does not offer some type of way out."[261]

Whereas post-colonial and anti-colonial theorists draw from Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Afropessimist theorists look to *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon writes in the latter, "for not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some will argue that the situation has a double meaning. Not at all. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. From one day to the next, the Blacks have had to deal with two systems of reference. Their metaphysics, or less pretentiously their customs and the agencies to which they refer, were abolished because they were in contradiction with a new civilization that imposed its own."[262] But if, as Sylvia Wynter and others have pointed out, antiblackness today has theological roots such as anti-Judaism or supersessionism, then religious traditions offer a critical response not found in Afropessimist theory.[263] Indeed, within the study Christian ethics, Vincent Lloyd and Andrew Prevot argued that genealogies of antiblackness, while providing useful analytic frameworks, are less useful as guides for ethical and political action. Studying the practices of Black communities struggling against injustice, they write, will produce better insights than studying European theologians alone and more importantly study accompanied by participating in struggle, which represents the imperative to become Black.[264] As Wilderson asserts, which I recall at length to contextualize the guiding quote of this chapter:

> Indeed, [Blackness] means all those things: a phobogenic object, a past without a heritage, the map of gratuitous violence, and a program of complete disorder. Whereas this realization is, and should be, cause for alarm, it should not be cause for lament, or worse, disavowal—not at least, for a true revolutionary, or for a truly revolutionary movement such as prison abolition. If a social movement is to be neither social democratic nor Marxist, in terms of structure of political desire, then it should grasp the invitation to assume the positionality of subjects of social death. If we are to be honest with ourselves, we must admit that the "Negro"s has been inviting whites, as well as civil society's junior partners, to the dance of social death for hundreds of years, but few have wanted to learn the steps. They have been, and remain today—even in the most anti-racist movements, like the prison abolition movement—invested elsewhere. This is not to say that all oppositional political desire today is pro-white, but it is usually anti-Black, meaning it will not dance with death.[265]

So Afropessimism is not as pessimistic as might be presumed. The way out, according to Wilderson, is a kind of violence "so magnificent and so comprehensive that it scares the hell out of even radical revolutionaries," a violence "against the generic categories of life, agency being one of them," a Black revolution that "blows the lid off the unconscious and relations writ large."[266]

I shall revisit the question of violence in more detail in the next chapter. For the moment, I note that similar threads are found in Cone's Black theology of liberation, which preceded Afropessimist theory by decades. "By white definitions, whiteness is 'being' and blackness is 'nonbeing' … 'To be or not to be' is thus a dilemma for the black community: to assert one's humanity and be killed, or to cling to life and sink into nonhumanity." Furthermore, that White Americans "decreed that blacks were outside the realm of humanity, that blacks were animals and

that their enslavement was best both for them and for society as a whole," and in an indication of the afterlife of slavery, "when black labor was no longer needed, blacks were issued their 'freedom.' The freedom to live in a society which attempted to destroy them physically and spiritually."[267] Yet again, Cone invites everyone to become Black with God, just as in the invitation to social death. Blackness stands for "all victims of oppression who realize that the survival of their humanity is bound up with liberation from whiteness," and to be black is to be "committed to destroying everything this country loves and adores."[268] The Black experience, according to Cone, is "the feeling one has when attacking the enemy of black humanity by throwing a Molotov cocktail into a white-owned building and watching it go up in flames. We know of course, that getting rid of evil takes something more than burning down buildings, but one must start somewhere." The urgency of Cone's Black theology of liberation is spelled out in no uncertain terms: "White appeals to 'wait and talk it over' are irrelevant when children are dying and men and women are tortured. We will not let whitey cool this one with his pious love ethic but will seek to enhance our hostility, bringing it to its full manifestation."[269] Black theology came into being when "the black clergy realized that killing slave masters was doing the work of God," when they "refused to accept the racist white church as consistent with the gospel of God."[270] God's revelation is "what happens in a black ghetto when the ghettoized decide to strike against their enemies. In a word, God's revelation means *liberation*—nothing more, nothing less.[271] Faith is "the existential element in revelation—that is, the community's perception of its being and the willingness to fight against nonbeing." The sin of the oppressed is not that they are responsible from their own enslavement, but rather their sin is that of trying to 'understand' enslavers, to 'love' them on their own terms. "As the oppressed now recognize their situation in the light of God's revelation, they know that they should have killed their oppressors instead of trying to 'love' them."[272] Asian American theology can only dream of operating with such prophetic clarity.

The question of being, of the human is a theme shared by Afropessimism, postcolonialism, and liberation theology. Blackness, according to Wilderson, is understood as being not only exterior to the concept of humanity, but in fact the "dark matter surrounding and holding together the categories of non-Black," the ontology of non-Blacks is underwritten by the violence of anti-Black violence, the slave/non-slave or Black/human relation.[273] Against the backdrop of anti-Black violence of police brutality, medical and environmental racism, redlining, segregation, and of course, slavery so deeply woven into the fabric of the United States, Afropessimism and Black theology deliver a withering critique of the enduring project of racial capitalism and interrogates how the 'human' is constituted, particularly in societies built upon the spoils of African slavery and its afterlives. In connection to postcolonialism or anti-colonialism more accurately, to overcome anti-Blackness requires a "program of complete disorder" such as Fanon had described of decolonization, and a "fundamental reorientation of the social coordinates of the human relation." According to Fanon, in the struggle for liberation and decolonization, not only does colonialism but so also does the colonial subject disappear. A new humanity emerges. The systematic negation and denial of the humanity of the colonial subject forces the colonized to continually question: "In reality, who am I?"[274] Thirdly, from the point of view of liberation theology, Gustavo Guttièrez saw the liberation of Latin America as not only overcoming economic, social, and political dependence, but in a deeper sense, the building up of a new humanity, a qualitatively different society in which humanity is free from all servitude.[275] The prophetic task of the church, according to Guttièrez, is to identify elements within a "revolutionary process" which are humanizing and dehumanizing, acting in both constructive and critical functions.[276] Fanon concludes, and Wynter reasserts, at the end of both *Black Skin, White Masks* and the *Wretched of the Earth*, that beyond the horizon of decolonization and at the end of anti-Blackness is the invention and discovery of a new humanity, a new Adam.

Liberation theology is a theological reflection through praxis, and indeed we find the question of the human posed more forcefully still among mass movements. Besides the simple assertion of the value of Black life through the Black Lives Matter movement, we can detect resonances in the 2020 Thai protests against the monarchy, in which the People's Party 2020 or Khana Ratsadon 2563 directly posed the question "Are you still human?" in an attempt to question those condemning the pro-democracy movement in the name of protecting Thainess and the police brutality against protestors. Thainess, according to scholar Saichol Sattayanurak, is a discourse that enforces a hierarchical social and political order, insisting that Thai people are naturally unequal and that each should know their place and behave accordingly, from the family to the monarchy.[277] This question played on the earlier question "Are you Thai?" popular among right-wing Thai protestors around 2005 and the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) around 2013. The epistemic shift towards a broader conception of the Thai imaginary created space for Malay Muslims, sex workers, queer people, and other marginalized groups not typically welcomed in Thainess. The popular hashtag at the time, 'decrease Thainess, increase humanness' signaled a delinking of the Thai ethnoclass with belonging and a move towards a broader humanity, compatible with that envisioned by Fanon, and a signal to Asian American liberation theology to remain guarded against tribalism and the limits of identity politics.[278]

Interactions with Dalit theology: Abolition of caste and prisons

That the Black struggle and the Dalit struggle are connected has been gestured at in the historical snapshot above, with the Dalit panthers and expressions of solidarity amongst leaders of the respective movements at different points in time. One such is the brief but famous correspondence between Du Bois and B. R. Ambedkar in 1946, where Ambedkar expressed that there is "so much similarity between the position of the Untouchables in India and of the position of the Negroes in America that the study of the latter is not only natural but necessary," and Du Bois in response expressed "every sympathy with the Untouchables of India." Despite continuing expressions of solidarity, the valences of these struggles remain distinct despite continuing attempts to collapse the two notions of caste and race, including Isabel Wilkerson's recent book *Caste*, which has been properly criticized for repeating old arguments that have been long refuted beginning with Oliver Cromwell Cox's 1948 work *Caste, Class, and Race*. Indeed, Ambedkar had asserted long before that the caste system is not a racial division. Instead, it is a social division of people of the same race.[279] It may be worth noting here that pseudo-scientific theories such as invoked by Bhagat Singh Thind in claiming Whiteness, that North Indians were in fact descended from Aryans, posits a racial difference that complicates Ambedkar's claim and produces a distinct racial hierarchy amongst South Asians that indeed reminds us of the one with Whiteness at the top and Blackness at the bottom, yet embedded within an entirely different set of politics. But reasoning by analogy does not require the two be identified, as Wilkerson suggests that "in the process of defining Negro caste we have defined Negro race, and the final accomplishment is a substitution of words only." Echoing Cox's critique of his contemporary Gunnar Myrdal, Charisse Burden-Stelly argued that Wilkerson "recapitulates the representational function of the Black elite, whereby their political and social agenda stands in for the Black community as a whole," obscuring class difference in favor of racial difference, engendering a "desire for empathy, acceptance, and meritocracy as the generalizable solution for the structural and material violence of modern U.S. racial capitalism."[280] That said, let us turn to consider Dalit theology more closely, its relation to Black theology, and what how it can inform an Asian American theology of liberation.

What is commonly referred to as caste in India conflates the concepts of *jati* and *varna*. The vedas divide society into four varnas according to function: the brahmins, kshatriyas, vaishyas, and shudras, corresponding to the priestly, warrior, trader, and servant classes respectively, with hierarchy arranged in that order from highest to lowest. Outside of this social stratification are the avarnas or atishudras, the subhuman and casteless ones, arranged in hierarchies of their own: the Untouchables, the Unseeables, the Unapproachables, whose very presence and shadow are considered polluting to privilege-caste Hindus. Jati, on the other hand, describes a social division of people according to birth and can be thought of as sub-castes. The approximately four thousand endogamous jatis determine hereditary occupation, and are divided amongst the four varnas. This identification of work and caste is an inversion of Marx's theory of alienation, whereby the worker is separated from their labor and its fruit. Each region of India, Arundhati Roy writes, has lovingly perfected its own unique version of caste-based cruelty, based on an unwritten code that is much worse than the Jim Crow laws.[281] The Marathi word "Dalit" now most commonly refers to the avarnas as a whole, where in Sanskrit the term 'dal' refers to the state of being broken and down-trodden. It is worth noting here that 'Dalit' thus operates as a coalitional identity, bringing together a large number of sub-castes across geographical and linguistic divides in common struggle against caste oppression, and the act of self-naming brings to mind the forging of Asian American identity.

Untouchability is marked by religious and cultural notions of pollution, and can be contrasted against the touchability of Jesus. Dalit feminist theologian Prasuna Gnana Nelavala explores this relation in the gospel account of the woman with the "flow of blood," also considered ritually unclean according to Jewish law, who in touching the hem of Jesus' robe is healed, rather than corrupting.[282] Similarly we find Jesus' encounter with the "sinful woman" who anoints his feet open to Dalit feminist readings, as another Dalit feminist theologian Surekha Nelavala points out, finding sinfulness and womanhood to be correlated in the text, as pollution is identified with Dalitness.[283] As theologian Chung Hyun-Kyung the described the struggle of Asian women as that of "the minjung within the minjung," the struggle of Dalit women is similarly described as that of the Dalit within the Dalit.

The root of Dalit oppression, according to Ambedkar, is Brahmnism, or what we might relate to what is today called Brahmin supremacy. Brahminism makes it impossible to draw a clear line between victims and oppressors, because of what Ambedkar called the "infection of imitation" that produces a hierarchy of "graded inequality" so that "every class is interested in maintaining the system" due to the relative privilege of every caste, except the one at the base of the social pyramid. Brahminism, according to Roy, precludes the possibility of social or political solidarity across caste lines.[284] Moreover, we see that caste oppression blends only too easily with racial oppression, as can be seen both in the history of Mohandas K. Gandhi's early years in South Africa (1893–1914), serving as the "stretcher bearer of empire" and who developed his strategy of nonviolent protest, satyagraha or "soul-force," in fighting for the rights of Indians to be segregated from Black Africans.[285] Indeed, Gandhi, as did Thind in the United States in 1923, invoked the Aryan invasion theory to argue for common cause with the British colonizers in South Africa. Gandhi's method of satyagraha, while deeply resonant in nonviolent movements across the world, most notably Martin Luther King Jr.'s involvement in the Civil Rights Era, was a moral appeal to authority and thus had no interest in abolishing the prevailing power structures. Incidentally, Gandhi prescribed such methods to the Jews of Germany, and discouraged Dalits from it.[286]

Yet, inasmuch as caste oppression may be rooted in Brahminism, it is not confined to it. It is certainly not limited to what is now called Hinduism, where, as Ambedkar notes "the name Hindu itself is a foreign name," imposed by the British, who also reified and coopted caste as a tool of colonization. The problem of caste arises in other religious communities, most notably in Christian, Sikh, and Muslim communities in India, but also Muslim-majority Pakistan and South Asian

diaspora in the US. It remains that the problem of caste finds resonances in other forms of oppression and social stratification, for example according to Ambedkar, the problem between Ulster and Southern Ireland during his time, between Catholics and Protestants, was in fact a "problem of caste."[287] Caste thus holds a unique yet generalizable frame of analysis for liberation theology and social revolution at large. Ambedkar questioned Indian socialists who sought after a proletariat revolution that did not also seek the annihilation of caste. The assurance of socialists that they do not believe in caste was insufficient, according to Ambedkar, as the social order prevalent in India is one that must be dealt with, whether before or after any socialist revolution. More strikingly, "turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path," and this monster must be killed for any political or economic reform is to take place.[288] In contrast to Marx's exhortation to the proletariat that they have nothing to lose but their chains, Ambedkar argued that the same call is useless against the caste system because of the graded hierarchy it produces, preventing any easy form of class solidarity. Caste and capitalism, as Roy puts it, have "blended into a disquieting, uniquely Indian alloy," and is exported along with its diaspora. The same question continues to be debated between race and class struggles.

The abolition of caste that Ambedkar called for means conversion, or new life. "The old body must die before a new body can come into existence and a new life can enter into it."[289] The authority and the religion of the shastras and the Vedas must be destroyed. Casteism is Brahminism, yet does not necessarily define Hinduism. Just as Ambedkar critiqued the legalism, the blind adherence to the rules and religiosity of Hinduism rather than its principles, and argued that the "idea of law is associated with the idea of change," so too does Dalit theology and any theology of liberation continuously evolve. As often as it becomes decent or intellectually respectable, it must be indecented, queered, and revolutionized according to the ground truth of the communities of faith that it purports to speak from, of, and to. Indeed, Ambedkar was India's first Minister of Law and Justice, and considered as the chief architect of the Constitution of India, lending serious weight to his understanding of law and legal ethics. According to him, the worst evil of the code of ordinances in the Hindu religion is its unchanging nature, and iniquitous for its unequal treatment, made perpetual for all generations. Such religion, Ambedkar writes, must be destroyed.[290] Indeed, Ambedkar's critique of Brahminism finds resonance in Jesus' temple cleansing and broader critique of Pharisaism and capitalist oppression.[291]

Now we turn from the broader struggle for Dalit liberation to Dalit Christian theology. Dalit theology began in the early 1980s at a 1981 address in Bangalore, where Dalit theologian Arvind P. Nirmal cautioned Dalits against contributing to the monolithic project of Indian Christian theology that was driven by nationalistic ideas of unity. Since that introduction of Dalit theology as a separate methodological approach to theology in India, Dalit theology has developed so deeply and broadly that it is impossible to properly describe briefly, so I will only offer some snapshots here. The first generation of Dalit theologians, so to speak, dealt with constructing Dalit theology from various perspectives: methodological, historical, Christological, cultural, and along the intersections of gender, class, and religion. As Dalit theology gradually grew to become an accepted form of doing theology, paralleled with the acceptance of liberation theologies in North American academies, the issues and questions raised by Dalit theologians subsequently shifted, including reconsiderations of what constitutes Dalit identity, constructing Dalitness as intrinsic and not inherently oppositional and Dalit theology as not merely a "counter-theology," reminiscent of Black liberation theology growing beyond a critique of White theology, and transnational reflections as caste discrimination follows the Indian diaspora and permeates every sphere of social and political life. Indeed, the present reconfigurations of Dalit theology reflect the demands of liberation theology at large: the pressing need to close the widening rift between activist and academic theologians, or what Gramsci saw as the difference between organic and traditional intellectuals, and on the other hand a

recognition of the limits of identity politics and instead holding a view towards coalitional politics that does not flatten the struggle of individual communities.

Dalit theology, according to Sathiananthan Clarke, is a school of Indian contextual thinking that collectively reflects on the ongoing Christian vocation of resisting oppression and advancing liberation. Included in it are reflections of "liberation-identified Dalits and Dalit-identified liberationists" on the interlocking diving and human matters that generate life now and reimagine future life for "communities pushed towards physical, social, and economic death."[292] Dalit theology is grounded in the methodological exclusivism originating from Dalit subjectivity and balanced with theological inclusiveness as all particular theological expressions offer trajectories to the universality of God. Nirmal describes this tension through the differences in pathetic, empathetic, and sympathetic knowing, allowing for the possibility of non-Dalits doing Dalit theology from a sympathetic standpoint. This sentiment continues to hold, for example, in the statement of the Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits held in Bangkok in 2009, which brought together Dalit activists and theologians together with church leaders from around the world, which stated that "Today, regardless of where we come from, which church we represent, we all become Dalits. Not only for today and during this conference, but also for our life until Dalits are liberated, we all become Dalits."[293] This move away from biologically or ontologically determined identity politics allows not only invites others into identification with Dalits, but also frees Dalits in joining other subjugated identities in solidarity.[294] At around the same time, an international conference on Dalit theology held in Kolkata in 2008 on Dalit Theology in the 21st Century recognized the need for Dalit theology to reinvent itself in order to become a theology of life for all, as some believed that there was a real danger that "even if caste is annihilated in Hindu society, it might continue to flourish among Indian Christians."[295] This expansiveness of Dalit theology resonates with the invitation of Afropessimism, both a priori built on identity politics, but in fact highly aware of its limits and welcoming those outside of their immediate interlocuters to partake in the suffering and social death that define them. How we define an inclusive theology based upon particular identities, can take notes from the insistence of both Black and Dalit communities, among others, of the specificity of their struggle and oppression, which informs their ways of doing theology, yet also holds promise for others also through an open invitation to partake in their suffering.

In attempting to construct a theology of Asian American liberation beyond the original contours of Northeast and East Asian diaspora, we can thus look towards Dalit theology as a creative and robust source of theological reflection, not least with its deep historical connections with the Black struggle in the US, which as Cone has pointed out, any theology in the US must duly reckon with in its self-understanding. Importantly, the recent movement for Black lives has found points of solidarity not only with Dalit struggles against caste oppression, but also with Palestinian struggle against the Israeli apartheid state, and the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement that is firmly anti-police in stance. On the one hand we might view these solidarities as being built through different international campaigns expressing solidarity with each other, often through their respective diaspora and refugee communities in the US, and therefore and underlying thread of present-day empire that links these struggles together, we can also on the other hand ascertain a history rich with solidarity movements and struggles linked by settler/colonialism, empire, and capitalism. At the same time, moving beyond shallow expressions of solidarity and towards collective power has proven to be an immensely difficult task, which even when carried out, has been difficult to maintain. We have seen this time again through the rise and fall of radical movements from the very beginning of Asian America, and this tentative nature to organizing for collective power should give us pause. There are many explanations that one can give for this phenomenon, some of which I have already alluded to, including the vast heterogeneity of Asian America in terms of its class and ethnic composition, migration histories, and social location within a

presumed Black-White binary. For the non-Dalits and non-Blacks amongst us, perhaps the proper theoretical intervention is to advance Ambedkarite and abolitionist theologies as direct descendants of Dalit and Black theologies, as necessary constituents of any comprehensive theology of liberation. By Ambedkarite theology here I mean a militant anti-caste theology that sees God as both Dalit and the liberator of Dalits, and grasps the theological roots of caste oppression, its complexity, invisibility, and transnationality.

Looking to the contemporary US, the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis ignited riots in June 2020, which saw the burning of a police precinct, the commandeering of a Sheraton hotel by activists for houseless people, and the temporary establishment of autonomous police-free zones that practiced community defense. The riot inspired other riots and protests throughout the country and even internationally, and by certain measures, marked the largest number of protests historically in the US. In part, this was attributed to the frustration with the three months of coronavirus lockdown and quarantine that began in early March, heightened by years the organizing and consciousness raising due to the Movement for Black Lives since 2013. While the riots and lootings polarized political opinion regarding the legitimacy of the protests, as observers condemned the destruction of private property as a response of the annihilation of Black lives, a broader call for defunding and abolishing the police began to take root. As people debated the meaning of defund or the pragmatism of abolition, the word "anti-racism" took hold as institutions moved to make statements regarding their condemnation of the series of high-profile killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and others, signaling their commitment to anti-racism. Yet on ground, the protests and riots were already composed of militant multiracial coalitions of largely young people raging at the unjust society they had inherited. Their activism and courage offered glimpses of possible worlds. Besides the commandeering of the Sheraton, lootings were often acts of anti-capitalist redistribution in a moment of particular economic duress as the US saw the highest unemployment rate in history and the economy had crashed while the rich were making record profits. In the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle, after weeks of protests and clashes with riot police involving tear gas and water cannons, the police left its East Precinct building there, leaving activists free to establish an area covering six city blocks called the Capitol Hill Occupied Protest (CHOP) and later the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ). The name change was in part a recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, and of Seattle itself as a being occupied by settlers. Community control of the area lasted over three weeks, maintaining itself as a self-organized and leaderless space with daily community meetings, protests, demands to the state, community gardens, and food distribution. In the end, the Seattle Police Department regained control and cleared out the area following a series of shootings that had occurred, and not to mention reports of sexual assault. It is important to note here the difficult but necessary questions that abolition of policing and the prison industrial complex poses to pragmatic visions of the future. While we mustn't shy away from these questions of how exactly we hope to keep our people safe in an abolitionist world, neither must we stop trying to build such a world to come. From a liberationist perspective, or even a plain Christian perspective, it must be that our eschatology is abolitionist. How could there possibly be police in any heaven? Of course, abolitionism also raises deep and important questions about hell and Gehenna, but I will not venture them here. What lessons and visions can we glean from the riots of 2020?

Rather than solidarity, I contend that contemporary abolitionist movements within Black radicalism and Black theology complements the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial dimensions of Asian and Asian American theology; they deepen each other, and in the final analysis are inextricably connected through the transatlantic and transpacific slave trade, extractive colonialism, and empire, and their joint invitations to social death. While their geographic scales and racial registers differ at first sight, with abolition being concerned with policing and prisons in the Black community on the

one hand, and anti-imperialism with US and Europe in Asian and Central American theaters of war on the other, their interrelatedness is revealed through more careful considerations such as the prison-to-deportation pipeline which affects South East Asian refugees and undocumented peoples and the long history conscription of communities of color into fighting the forever wars waged by the US state both at home and abroad, reaching back to the buffalo soldiers and Black panthers around the mid-1800s and mid-1900s respectively. Indeed, the George Floyd protests that involved the decapitation and vandalism of confederate monuments in the US also inspired renewed efforts in the UK and postcolonial nations against statues and other forms of memorialization of colonizers, one the most prominent being the Rhoades Must Fall movement that began in Cape Town 2015, which later in 2020 also inspired the Raffles Must Fall movement in Singapore. These rebellions against national memory are linked not only on the face of struggles of once oppressed peoples against the glorification of their oppressors past, but on a deeper level they are connected by the shared colonial legacies and the global configurations of race, capital, and empire.

Perhaps the most prominent example of the intersection between abolition and caste is the rise of Kamala Harris as the vice president of the US, hailed as the first Black and South Asian woman to hold such a high position. There are several points of observation here: the first being that Kamala Harris' background as being of Tamilian—and not to mention Brahmin—was raised to prominence only during after her nomination to vice presidency, before which she was read as Black. Harris mother Shaymla Gopalan was the daughter of a colonial bureaucrat, and pursued post-graduate studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and as this aspect of Harris' racial identity became highlighted so did Harris become popular within Tamil Brahmin circles. Indeed, by the embeddedness of anti-Blackness within South Asian communities it is safe to say that Harris' acceptance is qualified by her rise to power, and in spite of her shared ancestry through her Jamaican American father. The second, more important point is Harris' earlier history as the district attorney of San Francisco and then attorney general of California, where she played an active and important role in the maintaining the carceral system, styling herself as a "top cop" and "progressive prosecutor."[296] Harris' genealogies and vice presidency is a sharp reminder of the limits of identity politics, as was Barack Obama during whose presidency the Black Lives Matter movement came into being, and here now points directly to the complicated fusion of race and caste politics. Despite the interesting parallels that can be drawn, race and caste can by no means be equated or analogized, nor can solidarity between the two sites of oppression be assumed.

Of course, the vision that abolitionism puts forward is far more expansive than the focus on police and prisons often portrayed in the media. Instead, abolitionist futures seek a world beyond carceral systems and surveillance capitalism, calling for alternatives visions of justice, community care, and defense; in others words, a complete transformation of the relations of production and social reproduction. Moreover, an abolitionist future is necessarily one without empire: militarized police forces, border politics, and the military industrial complex all perform the disciplining functions that maintain state power, whether it is vulnerable communities or Third World countries that are being policed. As such, the role of policing—and hence the demands of abolition—carry us across oceans, from the Black Lives Matter movement to Israeli apartheid to the Uyghur genocide in Xinjiang to the Hong Kong anti-security law protests, which I shall return to in the next chapter. On the other hand, the anti-caste movement no less complex than abolition, as it is constituted by theological, social, and legal apparatuses, and unlike race, is has no epidermal aspect except perhaps through the brand of Brahmin supremacy that is grounded in Aryan invasion theory. Casteism is illegible according to US racial logics—or any sort of racial logic for that matter—the anti-Black racism that South Asians are accused of is often aligned with Brahminism. Yet the parallels remain: the well-known Indian author and activist Arundhati Roy's book length introduction to an annotated edition of Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* in 2014 was criticized by many Dalit anti-caste

activists for its failure to grasp Ambedkar's work and for presuming the authority to introduce the text. Telugu poet and activist Joopaka Subhadra homed in on the pain of caste, which she insists that Roy does not know as a Brahmin. But Subhadra does not foreclose the possibility of non-Dalits writing about caste pain, instead she says, "Tell the whole world about the caste system in this country. Write about caste discrimination, tell the whole world, but, engage with the pain, empathize with it and then talk about it. Talk about the intensity of the pain."[297] The pain that the Dalit body inhabits in the caste system, as with the abjection of Blackness in an anti-Black world, is precisely the difference between pathetic, empathetic, and sympathetic knowing that Nirmal describes. And yet, as Subhadra and Dalit theologians have noted, this chasm can also be bridged. "Caste has to go," she goes on to say, "work with the Dalit intellectuals, the pain has to be expressed through them in their own voices." The subaltern must speak for themselves; they must not only be represented by those who hold positions of power and privilege. Worse still, in 2020 Roy disavowed her Brahmin identity when asked in an interview, becoming the latest high-profile upper-caste person to view themselves as casteless, which is as much nonsense as white people who are "color-blind" or "do not see race." Roy's failure to properly reckon with her own privilege is far more serious than the problems that Harris' intersectional identity raises, as Roy is major figure of what views itself as the international Left. Just as Amilcar Cabral warned to claim no easy victories, so must we claim no easy solidarities.

The annihilation of caste, which Ambedkar called for, can be understood as a call for the abolition of caste, and with it the social relations that maintain caste oppression. Abolition easily accommodates a world where not only racial capitalism is destroyed, but so is caste and any other oppression like it, as the function of policing is precisely to enforce both social boundaries and physical borders. We can also draw lessons from Dalit theology, its rich history and deep reflection on the nature of oppression rooted in one's birth, complexion, and occupation, and also God's identification with the poor, the broken, the out-caste, the non-human, and the unclean. As such, we can see more clearly the pathways to liberation that theological reflection illuminates for us, regardless of the particularity of the oppressed. In other words, while Black theology and Dalit theology speak to very different communities: one arriving in the US through slavery and eventually constituting the very being of non-Blacks, yet having to convince the world that Black lives matter, and the other indigenous to the Indian subcontinent yet cast out by holy scriptures and colonial rule, both have found liberative elements in Christian theological sources, which speak to the pain of oppression and offer comfort for both the living and the dead through the possibility of a God who weeps and suffers in incarnation. These shared sources of theological reflection for both Black and Dalit communities suggests points of solidarity from which a coalitional political theology can grow. This important link that Dalit theology provides with, then, represents another touchstone alongside other Asian liberation theologies: Palestinian liberation theology and Minjung theology, for example, and not to mention other grassroots Asian and Asian American theologies that have not found the need to be named. Whether or not such attempts at building solidarity and perhaps even a coalitional theology can survive the onslaughts of change over time remain to be seen, just as all theologies of liberation have struggled for continuing relevance among lived communities as they gained acceptance within the academy, it remains that the task required of us is to keep our hands on the plow, set our faces like flint towards the liberation of all.

The invitation of the cross to social death

In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson weaves together a historical Black radical tradition through the lens of the African diaspora, the Atlantic slave trade, various Black resistances, and the works of W.

E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Richard Wright. At the heart of the text is Chapter 7, "The Nature of the Black Radical Tradition," which at times frustrates certain leftists that are concerned only with material and not metaphysical realities. In it, having recounted a history of the Black movement, Robinson seeks to understand its "ideological, philosophical, and epistemological natures." The question of what the metaphysical nature of the Black radical tradition is might seem strange to a historical materialist or Marxist, but it is entirely natural to a liberation theologian. From a theological perspective, the metaphysical is at least as important as the physical. Robinson points to a violence "turned inward"—a jihad, or dharma, one might say—the "renunciation of actual being for historical being" and the "preservation of the ontological totality granted by a metaphysical system." This revolutionary consciousness that Robinson saw as proceeding from the Black historical experience was a collective consciousness informed by historical struggles for liberation, grounded in African tradition. This harkening to an African tradition resonates, in fact, with later developments in Black theology. Here, notably, Robinson invokes the Black slave preacher Nat Turner who read the Bible and, following an encounter with the Holy Spirit in 1831, led what Robinson considered to be the only sustained slave rebellion in all of United States history.

What might an Asian radical tradition look like, and what would its relation to liberation theologies be? While its intellectual and historical debt to the Black radical tradition will be evident at certain junctures, such as in the victories of the civil rights era and the persistent challenges to anti-Black racism, any Asian radical tradition must be able to stand on its own two feet. Otherwise, we would only be parasites trying to join and co-opt other movements, rather than being able to lend power to others even as we build it. Nonetheless, it is a fruitful exercise to consider the interactions between Asian and Black radical traditions. In seeking touchstones for an Asian American theology of liberation, we can turn to not only the coalitional work of well-known activists Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs, but also the many labor strikes carried out by Asian garment workers and farmers, ever since the first Filipino sailors deserted the Spanish colonizers they arrived with on Native American land. Particularly inspiring is the story of Chinese indentured laborer Bu Tak, or José Bu, who became a celebrated Cuban freedom fighter in the 1860s, and was known for charging into battle ferociously waving a machete and shouting in Spanish, "For Cuba! Spanish go to hell!" And all this not to mention the deep histories of anticolonial resistance and struggle within Asia itself.

Asian history is marked, not by the Middle Passage, but by a torturous history of colonization, imperialism, and orientalism. Of course, these two histories are deeply intertwined, as Lisa Lowe explicates for example in the *Intimacies of Four Continents*, which connects the histories of empire, slavery, and settler colonialism. Nonetheless, we find in Asian history a highly complex tradition, drawing from numerous ancient civilizations, of which Western imperialism is but only a recent history. Past revolutionaries understood that oppression is without borders — though it may make very good use of borders — and must be resisted everywhere it manifests itself. I would argue that Afro-Asian solidarity is a *feature* of the Black radical tradition tracing back to before the first Bandung conference in 1955. Du Bois had offered "every sympathy with the Untouchables of India," in a letter to Ambedkar, who first wrote to Du Bois about the similarities of the position of Dalits with the "Negroes in America." Martin Luther King's nonviolent strategies were famously inspired by those of Gandhi, despite Gandhi's own anti-Black racism as we know from his time in South Africa. And in more recent times, we have the solidarity between Palestinians and Black lives and Indigenous people, Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement in 2014 chanting "Hands up, don't shoot" which began at protests for Michael Brown, and the explicitly anti-police nature of Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests in 2019, which in turn offered lessons for protestors in the 2020 George Floyd rebellion in the US. Such internationalism is not a new thing. It is only often forgotten, or perhaps too much to hold altogether at once. But if we are to seek an Asian radical

tradition, one that is properly nuanced and held up against capitalism, anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, and heteropatriarchy, this is what is required of us; we must all these dimensions, intersections, and contradictions together, and articulate an Asian radical tradition on its own terms. Perhaps most importantly, any Asian radical tradition would necessarily be one that is socially constructed, not born out of an anachronistic historical determinism, but rather one that weaponizes Asian American history in the precise sense that Asian American identity was intended to be as a political and coalitional strategy. This therefore represents a crucial step in laying the foundation for a renewed Asian American theology of liberation.

But liberation does not come easy. "Power concedes nothing without a demand," Frederick Douglass tells us. Any Christian, too, knows this. Black theologian James Cone understood the contradictions inherent in "the conspicuous absence of the lynching tree in American theological discourse and preaching," as the crucifixion was "clearly a first-century lynching." Of course, the parallels were already clear from Billie Holiday's 1937 song Strange Fruit. And if it wasn't clear enough, even the U.N. Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent drew an analogy between police killings of Black people in the US in 2016 and "the past racial terror of lynching," just as the Thirteenth Amendment in the US constitution makes plain the connection between mass incarceration and slavery. But in my years of attending majority White or multiethnic churches in the US, this connection had never been made, and only became obvious after reading Cone. It is imperative for any Asian American theology to recognize the cross not only in the lynching tree, but also in police killings today.

The Cross of Jesus is a fixture of evangelical theology, and Christianity at large. The call of Christ requires a dying to self. Take up your cross and follow me, he said. Or, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor imprisoned and eventually killed for his resistance to Nazi rule, "when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." At the same time, Afropessimist scholar Frank Wilderson charges that "if we are to be honest with ourselves, we must admit that the 'Negro' has been inviting Whites, as well as civil society's junior partners, to the dance of social death for hundreds of years, but few have wanted to learn the steps." It must be then, that the call of Christ to come and die must in fact include the invitation to join the dance of social death. The resonance between these two invitations is striking. Asians in the US are most certainly civil society's junior partners: we can either be for Black lives or Black death, there is no third option in this country. So even as we build an Asian radical tradition, we must live a revolutionary praxis that requires us to die many deaths. How hard is it for us to die the kind of social death that is the foundation of anti-Black society, yet all the time in churches we hear preaching about dying to self? And what about the invitation of Dalit theology to enter into untouchability?

What even does Asian social death look like? Does it mean the abolition of carceral logics or the annihilation of casteism? Does it mean the repatriation of Native land? Does it mean trading our embedded anti-Blackness and honorary Whiteness for nothingness? Does it mean becoming willing to allow our bodies to "magnetize bullets" the way that Black bodies do? Perhaps it is all these things and more. We must certainly also be about the liberation of Asians in the US and Asians everywhere: so many Asians are hidden in poverty, in community colleges, in houselessness, in prison and in detention, at risk of deportation and travel bans. The Coronavirus pandemic has revealed not only our interconnectedness on a global scale, but also the deep-seated racism and xenophobia under the pretense of fear and safety. There is no way that the liberation of all will come at no personal cost. Indeed, the invitation of Afropessimism to non-Blacks—in the US, at least—is a kenotic demand, the emptying of oneself as the Christ also did. In one translation of Paul in Philippians, "became nothing," or as John the Baptist declared, "he must increase, and I must decrease." The idea of kenosis as Christian ethic is deeply embedded within many Christian traditions, so the invitation of Blackness to ontological surrender is not, in fact, too much to ask:

Christ has already demanded it and more also. Indeed, Wilderson points out that captivity does not constitute the being of Latinx and Asian people the way it does Black people, and so offers to non-Black people that "we will be in coalitions with you," but at the same time "we will ridicule you for the impoverishment of your demands, even while we are fighting against white people on its behalf, and we will do so until you surrender your agency and authority to the end of the world."[298] In other words, to practice a broader and deeper coalitional politics that characterizes Asian American political identity, we must be willing to embrace the social death of Blackness and Dalitness that we have been invited to, and from which perhaps a new humanity will spring eternal.

And so, we must be dreadfully careful of what we wish for, including when we talk about liberation. Jesus said that whoever the Son sets free is free indeed. But Saidiya Hartman insists that "a Black revolution makes everyone freer than they actually want to be," or elsewhere, "no one in the world who suffers and who says they want to be free, wants to be as free as Blackness will make them." How rightfully damning. Do we dare to live in the dreams of the oppressed? Latin American liberation theology was concerned with the non-human, or the dehumanized, but would we be willing to join them, to become them, to empty ourselves and incarnate into nothingness? Would we truly welcome capitalism's destruction, patriarchy's dismantling, and settler decolonization? What if workers actually owned the means of production, or women the means of reproduction? What if we were really as free as the Son sets free?

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Leftovers fanon quotes:

Scientific objectivity had to be ruled out, since the alienated and neurotic were my brother, my sister, my father. [299]

It is the racist who creates the inferiorized[300]

"All forms of exploitation are alike. They all seek to justify their existence by citing some biblical decree. All forms of exploitation are identical, since they apply to the same "object": man. By considering the structure of such and such an exploitation from an abstract point of view we are closing our eyes to the fundamentally important problem of restoring man to his rightful place." Quoting Aimé Césaire, Fanon connects the colonization of Africa with the Nazi holocaust.[301]
The search for intimacy with the sufferings of the poor meant that many times the traditional borders between violent and peaceful actions were blurred.[302]

6. "Let it end in our generation": Asian American theology in a post-pandemic world

"It's important that we all understand that the main terrorist and the main enemy of the world's people is the U.S. government. Racism has been a weakness of this country from the beginning. Throughout history, all people of color, and all people who don't see eye-to-eye with the U.S. government has been subjected to American terror" — Yuri Kochiyama[303]

Having said this, I must deal immediately and at some length with the question of violence. Some of the things so far told to the Court are true and some are untrue. I do not, however, deny that I planned sabotage. I did not plan it in a spirit of recklessness, nor because I have any love of violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the political situation that had arisen after many years of tyranny, exploitation, and oppression of my people by the Whites. — Nelson Mandela[304]

I, John Brown, am quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood. I had, as I now think vainly, flattered myself that without very much bloodshed it might be done. — John Brown[305]

Was not Christ crucified. And by signs in the heavens that it would make known to me when I should commence the great work—and until the first sign appeared, I should conceal it from the knowledge of men—And on the appearance of the sign, (the eclipse of the sun last February) I should arise and prepare myself, and slay my enemies with their own weapons. — Nat Turner[306]

On March 16, 2021, fifty-three years after the My Lai massacre in Viet Nam, a White man walked into several massage parlors in Atlanta, Georgia, operated by East Asian women, where he shot and killed eight people. Six of the victims were women of Korean and Chinese descent, many of whom were employees and immigrants. The event stands as a crescendo in the wave of anti-East Asian violence that had been on the rise, particularly within the US, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that had set in a little over a year ago. In the beginning, then-president Trump referred to it as the China virus, Wuhan virus, or Kung Flu, an act that was criticized by many as it exacerbated the already latent xenophobia and renewed anti-Asian sentiment.[307] Indeed, violent attacks including stabbing, spiting, beating, and more subtle forms of discrimination against East Asians in the US appeared to be on the rise as reports emerged and efforts to document these actions as hate crimes were initiated. What followed were grassroots protests to "Stop Asian hate" and many a discussion on anti-Asian racism, in part following the zeitgeist set in place by the public discourse on anti-racism, anti-Blackness, and abolition from the previous year.[308] The contrast between Black people dying at the hands of the police and Asian women dying by a white shooter who frequented their massage parlors simply drives home the ways in which the configurations of race, gender, and nationality not only structure the lives but also the deaths of individuals. Indeed, crucial to any consideration of the Atlanta shootings is not only the pointed intersection of fetishistic orientalism, migrant labor, sex work, empire, and white supremacy, but also the fact that the shooter was found to be raised in a conservative evangelical church, claiming that his rampage was "not racially motivated" but rather because of a "sexual addiction." Two points of qualification are important: first, that the leading Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo reported an eyewitness who claims that the shooter had said "kill all Asians,"[309] and second, it is not known—nor is it of utmost importance—that the employees who were murdered were indeed also sex workers.

Regardless of the specificity of the situation, our reflections on Asian American theologies reveal themselves to be unfortunately pertinent and urgent in the present political moment. As

political scientist Claire Kim points out, anti-Blackness is structural, whereas anti-Asian racism is contingent, where in this case the precipitating event is the global pandemic. Within a theological framework, the problematic of sexual repression within conservative theologies, not least those inherited by many Asian American churches, and its interactions with the fetishization of Asian women both physical sexual domination and imperial conquest all come into sharp relief. Crucially, while often the resulting discourse turned too quickly to generic notions of "Asian hate" and the suffering of Asian American women at large, we do the victims a disservice in making the shift too quickly away from the site of their vulnerability, namely that of migrant labor and, often enough, sex work. In particular, the disavowal of the gendered labor under capitalism, and the discursive move towards more palatable forms of discrimination, such as violent attacks against elderly Asians, replays entrenched notions of shame and pollution around sex and migrant work. Indeed, within the world of migrant labor, in particular Northeast Asian flows to the US, there is little that differentiates work in grocery stores, nail salons, dry cleaners, restaurants, and of course, massage parlors and sex work. These pathways of migrant labor, at times trafficked but more often than not free-willing, are highly porous and interdependent as they are built on communal networks and personal connections, and very much gendered. As such, this falls squarely within the concerns of liberation theology in general, and Asian American theology in particular, as our task is to reflect on the struggle, survival, and vigor of these communities.

While undeniably tragic, the Atlanta shootings come as no surprise. The incident is perfectly located within the narrative of Asian exclusion from the very beginning of the US empire and its many wars in East Asia, not to mention the ongoing power struggle with China for global supremacy. The historical convergences that have led to this particular moment raises no questions about how such a horror could have occurred. More surprising, perhaps, is the rise to prominence of Red Canary Song as a representative voice speaking on behalf of massage parlor workers. Wu, identified as a member of the sex worker collective, pointed to the combinations of whorephobia, homophobia, xenophobia, racism, and sexism at work both in how the women were murdered and how certain Asians choose to discuss the issue at hand.[310] Moreover, Wu's analysis delivers a devastating critique to calls for increased policing and the prosecution of hate crimes as the key response to the rise in anti-East Asian violence. As Wu points out, increased policing does not protect sex workers from the many forms of violence that they face on a daily basis, not least because the police themselves are often the perpetrators of violence against sex workers, and often raid massage parlors regardless of any information about possible sex work taking place there. Indeed, sociologist Tamara Nopper has also noted that the attempts to address anti-East Asian violence as hate crimes are clearly in opposition to any abolitionist framework, as police departments in fact benefit from the perception of increased hate crimes as a crime wave, lending legitimacy and most likely increased funding to the police.[311] Within the US legal framework, a crime that is prosecuted as a hate crime in fact then allows for an increase in the severity of the punishment, revealing the notion of "hate crime" to be an obviously carceral mechanism, and notably, is blind to the unequal racial dynamics. A hate crime is deemed as such if there is a provable bias, or motivation on the basis of the victim's identity, most often on the basis of race. In other words, if any Asian American theology is also to be abolitionist, it must have the capacity to think beyond carceral solutions, an imperative that has highly concrete implications for the here and now, and as within now more than ever it is necessary to develop theologies and frameworks of care informed by intersectional feminisms and disability justice. Moreover, it is worth noting that the calls for prosecuting such acts as hate crimes implies the expectation that the US judiciary system has been and will be able to deliver justice and punishment in a satisfactory manner, particular through the mechanism of hate crime laws.

To be certain, the configuration of racial dynamics and its interplay with notions of contamination are global: for example, North Indians, whose facial features more resemble East Asians and are generally produced as other in India, also experienced a heightened level of discrimination, whereas Africans living in China were treated as polluting agents, being denied service and tenancy, or subject to greater scrutiny regarding coronavirus.[312] As the preceding discussion on purity and pollution within the Dalit context reveals, notions of uncleanness and virality map neatly onto those constructed as other, not least with respect to race, ethnicity, and citizenship. Throughout the lockdowns and quarantines implemented in various countries, exceptions were often given to nationals returning from foreign countries, whereas for example, spouses who were foreign citizens would be subject to unequal treatment. Together with the rising vaccine nationalism that following global efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus, especially in the months before coronavirus vaccines had been developed, it grows apparent these developments reify already entrenched notions of race and nationality. Moreover, besides vaccines developed in the US and Europe competing against those developed in China, Russia, and India, the fact of capitalism embedded in the sale and distribution of the vaccines produces a familiar mix of nationalism and capitalism, under which the Third World poor lose out in what might be seen as a new Cold War. (The Russian vaccine, for example, was self-conscious named Sputnik V, in reference to soviet Sputnik 1 satellite in 1957 that triggered the space race with the US.) Such reification stands in contrast to the subtle notions of subjectlessness of Asian American identity multiply constituted by race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality. As a case in point, popular contemporary discourse on anti-Asian violence continues to reproduce the overdetermination of Asian Americanness through Northeast Asians, generating palpable discontent through assertions of Pacific Islander, South Asian, and Southeast Asian identities. At the same time, it remains necessary to be able to work beyond the confines of nationality in order to develop a robust coalitional theology, inasmuch as inherent linguistic and cultural present challenges to solidarity that do not characterize Black and Latine organizing and theologies, for example. In this momentous historical juncture, even as the possibilities for new worlds and new ways of being glimmer through the cracks in the system, and persistent calls for solidarities suggests paths beyond the impasse of identity politics and the lack of class consciousness, care must be taken in building the new world to come. Recalling Amilcar Cabral's 1965 address in Guinea, we must practice revolutionary democracy in every aspect of life; "mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures," to be willing to confront uncomfortable histories between Asians and others, to "tell no lies" and "claim no easy victories."[313]

With these preliminary considerations in mind, this chapter attempts to consider in earnest the various reconfigurations of Asian and Asian American identity in the wake of coronavirus pandemic, on the competing levels of identity as racial subjects operating within the confines of nation states, and of the collective organizing in resistance to state power and in relation to international geopolitics. At the time of writing, our considerations include various protests movements that occurring throughout Asia between 2019 and 2020: in Hong Kong against the security law in 2019, which can be viewed as a continuation of the Umbrella Movement in 2014; in India against the Citizenship Amendment Act beginning in 2019, denationalizing Muslims and Northeast Indians, and later against a series of farming laws beginning in 2020; in Indonesia against an "omnibus law" amending more than 75 laws, whose effects included the erosion of workers' rights and environmental protections, following smaller student protests a year earlier in response to another series of laws that were passed; in Thailand against the monarchy and in support of democracy; in Myanmar against the military junta's coup. On the other hand, the Philippines continues to suffer under Rodrigo Duterte's regime, while Malaysia's coronavirus response floundered under the new ruling party installed by a bloodless coup in 2020.

In the shadow of many of these movements looms the specter of China in its rise even as the US declines as a superpower, giving birth to the social media movement known as the Milk Tea Alliance, initially formed between Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand in resistance to China's policies. This was superimposed onto the three-finger salute from the popular dystopian fiction trilogy *The Hunger Games* and its cinematic adaptation, representing struggle against authoritarianism, and first adapted in 2014 during the Thai protests against a military coup, after which the gesture was banned. This transnational solidarity soon extended to India, Myanmar, and the Philippines, as regional struggles developed, not necessary in opposition to China nor with milk tea as a common denominator, thus forging a weak yet fertile network in region often divided not only by nationality but language. The alliance allowed its members to express solidarity with struggles elsewhere through the memes and the English, both lingua franca of the internet, and indeed facilitated the exchange of strategies of protest and resistance against the police and state actors. Popular memes included Pepe the Frog, which interestingly was also used as a symbol by the US far right, and Winnie the Pooh, used to mock Chinese President Xi Jinping. Protest tactics, on the other hand, include the usage of hard hats and other such gear originating in the Hong Kong protests, and the rubber duck that also began as a symbol of protest in the 2013 Hong Kong movement, later adapted into defenses against water cannons in 2020 Thai protests. How should these resistances inform the Asian organizing and theologizing in the US? What lessons can be gained towards cooperation between radical movements within and between US and Asia, even as the contours of a new Cold War began to form? Why do we need a theology of protest?

The urgent answer to the latter question lies in observing the increasing number of protests worldwide over the last decade. Moreover, important climate reports predict that the increasingly uninhabitable earth will only destabilize societies further and warn that global suffering is set to increase exponentially with the irruption of climate refugees, faced with ethnonationalism and xenophobia. This all points to the growing unrest of the global 99% whose backs are breaking under an unsustainable system produced by the capitalist world order. Protest is the oppressed crying out and, in the absence of change, revolting through direct actions such as blockades, occupations, strikes, and riots. Jesus' cleansing of the temple has much to teach us. In the Gospel of John's account, Jesus made a whip of cords and drove out the merchants and moneychangers inside the Temple in Jerusalem while overturning tables and chairs. A theology of protest leads us straight to theologies of liberation: theologies that are produced from the consciousness of those marching and bleeding on the streets, rendered invisible in slums, favelas, and ghettos. The agitation of protest is properly understood not as simply calls for democratic choice or economic equality, but rather the freedom from oppressive forces of any kind.

With regards to the recent social and political unrest in South and East Asia, one might ask what any of it has to do with Asian Americans, and more specifically the theologies that are born from their experience of life in the US. One possible answer lies in broad arguments around shared anti-imperialisms and the struggle against US militarism in general and in relation to China in particular, but such an approach is often liable to a sort of leftist form of a Monroe doctrine. The Monroe doctrine was a US policy in the 1800s that opposed European colonialism in the Americas, whereas in this context the danger lies in committing an ideological protectionism of a geographic region which one's connection to is only imagined. The better answer to the question of what current events in Asia have to do with Asian American theologies of liberation is far more straightforward: it is the fact that migrant labor and immigration patterns continue to flow from Asia into the US in shifting yet continuous patterns. To put it plainly, the lived experiences of the Asian proletariat that our theology is built upon directly connects to these flows, and thus the social and political unrest in Asia reverberate amongst diasporic networks and form potential bases for solidarity and coalition building. After all, how could a theology claim to be from below if it had no

understanding of the concern of its people for their families and relatives wherever they may be? Asian movements in US history involved both organizing domestically around issues such as labor justice and political recognition, while also being allied with struggles abroad in Asia such as against the Park Chung Hee dictatorship in Korea, the authoritarianism of Ferdinand Marcos in the Phillippines, and of course the US wars in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in the mid- to late-twentieth century.

James Cone taught us that the Cross of Christ can only be understood in view of the lynching tree. Rather than the Cross that evangelicals wish to elevate, perhaps it is the Whip of Jesus that must inform our praxis. The Black experience, Cone writes, Black experience is "the feeling one has when attacking the enemy of black humanity by throwing a Molotov cocktail into a white-owned building and watching it go up in flames."[314] The slave bibles from the 1800s, which omitted passages that could have incited rebellion, come to mind. Maybe what is required of us is a holy insurrection, a willingness to go beyond hashtag activism, putting our own bodies and jobs on the line. Some have praised protests like the ones in Hong Kong for their lack of violent encounters, before they eventually turned violent, contrasting them to conflicts in places like Ferguson or Minneapolis where Black uprisings were deemed riots from the very beginning. But it is hard for many to see that concern over destruction of property is a value of capitalism and whiteness, which tell the oppressed that they should protest nonviolently. Legal scholar Cheryl Harris even argues for an understanding of whiteness as property, that race is entangled within an economic logic.[315] Capital has more freedom of movement across borders than dying people. The world as we know it is ending. The time is short. It is time to get righteously angry.

Hong Kong: Theologies of the Minjung and the multitude

On June 16, 2019, the song *Sing Hallelujah to the Lord* became a popular anthem of the Hong Kong protests against the extradition to China bill. The bill, it was widely believed, would provide the Chinese mainland unchecked power in detaining political dissidents in Hong Kong. To many, it represented China's authoritarian rule over the people within its reach, and what some see as a breakdown in the "one-country, two systems" method of governance that has placed Hong Kong at an arm's length of Beijing since it was handed over by the British in 1997. The annual July 1 pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong that followed saw a massive turnout. The first major anti-extradition protests occurred on June 9—not long after the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre in Beijing—with around a million participants out of a seven million population in Hong Kong. The largely peaceful protestors were met with violent anti-riot police, water guns, tear gas, and batons. The decision to use force can be seen as a preemptive strike on the part of the police, which encountered the Umbrella Movement five years ago, whose anthem then was Les Miserables' *Do You Hear the People Sing*. The Chinese government's moves in Hong Kong must be seen in light of its other acts, including its detention of over a million Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang province, its ever-expanding measures eradicating Tibetan culture and the displacement of Tibetan persons, and its neo-imperial expansions into Africa and the South China Sea. The anti-extradition protests in Hong Kong also need to be situated alongside other protest movements that preceded it, such as the Umbrella Movement, Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, and Black Lives Matter. While each one of these demonstrations differed in their goals, they shared an ideological connection in the method of mass protest and peaceful occupation of public space, sublimating a collective anger and frustration at the lack of democratic power, whether it be against dictatorial regimes or financial overlords. The anti-extradition protests were met not only with physical force but also digital attacks against activists. For example, activists used the Russian secure messaging app Telegram, which

experienced large denial of service attacks originating from China during the time of the protests. During the protests, activists purchased train fares with cash to prevent transaction tracking, and wore caps, face masks, and umbrellas (the symbol of the 2014 protests) not only to protect against tear gas and water, but also to protect them from facial recognition systems as aerial drones surveyed the streets. Certain demonstrators protested bare faced, as an act of defiance.

The Hong Kong protests, which is now often described broadly as a pro-democracy movement, continued to escalate. Numerous Hong Kongers committed suicide in protest of the extradition bill and the police brutality in response to protestors, both violent and nonviolent. On July 1, 2019, some protestors stormed the Legislative Council while it was empty, vandalizing it. Other later actions include a general strike which was supported by the Confederate of Trade Unions, a three-day sit-in at the Hong Kong International Airport, clashes with police and pro-China counter-protestors on the street and underground in subway stations. On September 4, 2019, Carrie Lam announced that the bill would be withdrawn, but protestors continued to press their Five Demands: A full withdrawal of the bill, retraction of the characterization of the protests as riots, the release of arrested protestors, an inquiry into police brutality, and the resignation of Carrie Lam. In early November, police began to clash with student protestors at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), and Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU). In particular, what became known as the siege of PolyU lasted almost two weeks, where the university was under complete lockdown by the police, and over a thousand people were arrested over the course of the siege. During the siege, the District Council election on November 24 saw a historic voter turnout and the pro-Beijing camp suffered its greatest electoral defeat in Hong Kong's history. Despite this, the COVID-19 outbreak that soon followed prevented protestors from gathering, allowing police to disperse or detain protestors under the cover of the health emergency. Finally, despite the protestors' efforts and international attention, the National Security Law was passed on 30 June 2021, and immediately caused a chilling effect on free speech and protest in Hong Kong. Subsequently, the law has been used to crackdown on and detain hundreds of pro-democracy activists, businesspeople, and lawmakers, and the present future of Hong Kong appears to be quite uncertain.

The sustained protest saw a range of tactics develop both on the side of protestors and the state, where protestors learned to communicate and coordinate safely through social media, while cyberattacks and various forms of propaganda were carried out against the protestors. Besides the physical casualties and property damage caused during the protests, the mental strain and anguish of the protests is also an immeasurable loss, glimpses of which can be seen through the suicides that were committed, the notes that activists leave for their families in the event of their detention or death, and the flight of Hong Kongers to the UK and Canada where political asylum was offered. Worthy of note is that fact that the pro-democracy movement's greatest champions were Hong Kong students, who grew up in the recent era of complete independence from British rule, and which perhaps forms a shared locus with Asians born in the US, who feel most strongly the pain of rejection when they are told to go back their own country. In contrast, first-generation Asian immigrants in the US often expect to be victims of racism and to not feel welcomed, and thus slightly complicates the question of perpetual foreignness as it relates to the Asian search for belonging, and what a theology of landlessness has to offer.

Returning to Hong Kong, the Umbrella Movement of 2014 finds its roots both in the Occupy Wall Street Movement and in the church, as it grew out the Occupy Central with Love and Peace protests in 2013, whose leaders included law professor and evangelical Christian Benny Tai Yiu-ting—eventually arrested under the security law—and Baptist minister Rev. Chiu Yiuming. As geographer Justin Tse writes, the Umbrella movement can be seen as the birth of a kind of liberation theology in Hong Kong, albeit not in the genealogy of earlier forms of liberation theologies, done in

relation mainland China rather than say, explicitly capitalist regimes.[316] Further, Tse argues that if the theology that is produced out of the Hong Kong movement is to be understood as a liberation theology, it must be understood in its own terms and not as an Asian liberation theology, presumably in the sense of Pieris, or an inculturation project. Indeed, while direct connections can be made to Rieger and Kwok's recent reflections on the Occupy movement from lens of Minjung theology, or a theology of the multitude, as they call it, Hong Kong theologians have themselves differed on the theological interpretation of the movement.[317] For example, Rose Wu reads the Umbrella movement protests as a new Pentecostal experience and a form of practical eschatology, but at the same time also deploys feminist theology to declare that redemption includes both reconciliation with God and liberation from bondage and oppression, having in mind not only the struggle against the state but the gendered violence towards female protestors, from both police and fellow protestors.[318] Female protestors were told that since they came out to protest, they should expect to be assaulted. Notably, Wu also draws from Asian American feminist theologian Rita Nakashima Brock's notion of interstitial integrity, applying to the context of Hong Kong's postcolonial position of being between Britain and China, and arguably a physical representation of being caught between East and West. Effectively, this integral identity is to be the product of the new Pentecostal experience.

On the other hand, theologian Sam Tsang applies a liberation hermeneutic in the sense of postcolonial theorist Edward Said, to point to ruptures in liberation theology's interactions with Hong Kong theological landscape. In the first case, Tsang addresses the earlier work of theologian Lap Yan Kung on liberation theology and Hong Kong's "predicament" in 1999, drawing from Latin American liberation theologians.[319] As Hong Kong's most prominent liberation theologian, Kung argued that Hong Kongers should stand up to the powerful corporate hegemony in Hong Kong and to be a church among the poor instead of for the poor, primarily constituting of upper-middle class people. At the same time, Tsang notes, there is an inherent theoretical contradiction in Kung's usage of Latin American liberation theologian Jon Sobrino and Christian ethicists Stanely Hauerwas, as a tension between an eschatological politics or activism and alternative "alien" community not necessarily immersed in the politics of this world. Though, as Tsang notes, in practice Kung's theology does not need all of Hauerwas' theological program but only the ideas of an alternative community and the priesthood of all believers.[320] In the second place, Tsang describes the Anglican Primate, the Most Reverend Paul Kwong, who opposed Hong Kong democratic reform, as an "anti-liberation liberation interpreter." Kwong draws upon Croatian American theologian Miroslav Volf's seminal work on exclusion and embrace in the wake of the Bosnian genocide to argue that Hong Kong should remain loyal to the People's Republic of China (PRC). While Volf dramatically argues that Christian theology demands that victims embrace rather than exclude their oppressors in order to break the cycle of violence, Tsang points out that Kwong perversely constructs China as the "other" that needs to be embraced while in Volf's paradigm it is the oppressed and powerless that are othered. More importantly, as Tsang notes, Volf asserts that reconciliation is not possible without justice first. Thus, while Kwong's criticism of the Umbrella Movement is accurate to the extent that it does not embrace its oppressors, it presents no liberative horizon for Hong Kongers, as can be seen in the later implementation of the National Security Law. In concluding, Tsang poses the question of whether liberation is an adequate vision for Hong Kong's theology, and suggests debate about liberation should be seen as an effort to contextualize power relationships, asking who the occupier and the occupied are.[321]

As it were, while it may not be appropriate to describe the theological reflections on the Hong Kong protest movement in the last decade as a theology of liberation, it can certainly be said that the Hong Kong church, as far as it identified with the struggles of ordinary Hong Kongers and the migrant workers that were often caught up in it, the church indeed became a church of the poor

and produced a theology from below. Moreover, as suggested earlier, the recent struggles of Hong Kong as an interstitial space might be interpreted as the first skirmish in the new Cold War between Western powers and China, where before in the first Cold War, Korea and Southeast Asia played the unwilling host to various proxy wars. Indeed, as current events unfold, Southeast Asia appears again to be a battleground as China's encroachment into the South China Sea and its influence on the regional political economy are answered by the US beginning with Obama's pivot to Asia foreign policy, followed by Trump's tough on China stance—which impressed anti-China camps including factions of the Hong Kong protest movement—and finally with Biden's execution of Obama's intentions through fostering trade, military, and diplomatic relations with Southeast Asian countries. All this notwithstanding, the Hong Kong protest movements, allied with Taiwan and Thailand, and later India, Myanmar and the Philippines to form the social media movement known as the Milk Tea Alliance, a loose transnational movement supporting localized struggles for self-determination in various forms, often against authoritarian governments, abusive monarchies, and Chinese intervention. Crucial to our considerations here is the need to forge an anti-imperialist coalitional theology that resists all forms of imperialism, including both US and Chinese forms, and is also careful that any critique of one does not implicitly endorse the other. In anticipation of these and future developments, it will be helpful to step back and reflect on past contributions of theologies from below. In particular, we turn to Minjung theology.

Developed in Korea, Minjung theology views itself as a contextual theology. Minjung can be translated to the people, or multitude, while Minjung theology can be translated simply as the people's theology. According to Minjung theologian Tong H. Moon, the term "minjung" itself first described those under the ruling Yangban class in the Yi dynasty (1392–1910), after which the Japanese occupation reduced almost Koreans to what can be interpreted as Minjung status, and after independence came to describe anyone who did not belong to the elite class. The status of Minjung is thus characterized by both class and social oppression.[322] At the core of Minjung theology is the broader Korean concept of Han. According to Minjung poet Chia-Ha Kim, Han is the anger and sadness of the Minjung "turned inward, hardened, and stuck to their hearts." It is accumulated, transmitted, and inherited, thus internalized within a collective subconscious. According to Kim, it is also "the emotional core of anti-regime action."[323] Yet, while the sublimination of Han has revolutionary potential, it is also destructive and therefore requires the dialectic tension of Dan, meaning to "cut off," which Minjung theologians view as both self-denial and the severing of the cycle of violence that Han produces. That is, inasmuch as Han allows for the articulation of collective and vicarious trauma, if the accumulated suffering of oneself, one's ancestors and community is sublimated only as pure violence, then the liberation that it provides is only partial.[324]

Indeed, the anti-Asian attacks during the COVID-19 pandemic, many of which were reportedly perpetrated by people with mental health conditions,[325] and the 2021 Atlanta massacre can both be read as involuntary expressions of a collective subconscious within the US regarding the place of East Asians, during the coronavirus in particular, and in the long durée of US colonial history at large. As it were, the psychodynamic interplay between these two forms of collective subconscious begs further reflection. The Atlanta massacre, in particular, highlights the hyper-sexualization and fetishization of Asian women within the Western imagination as the site of forbidden desire and foreign conquest. The layered suffering of Asian women under racialized and gendered forms of violence, in particular, calls to mind theologian Chung Hyun-Kyung's description of women as being the "minjung within the minjung," and with whom Christ identifies with, imaged as women, mother and shaman.[326] To Chung, the minjung are "the oppressed, exploited, dominated, discriminated against, alienated and suppressed politically, economically, socially, culturally, and intellectually, like women, ethnic groups, the poor, workers and farmers," and thus Christ is identified most strongly with racialized, poor, women workers. As theologians of the streets, we

would be want to theologize away too quickly from the specificity of the shooting deaths of migrant working-class Asian women, possibly sex workers and many mothers, to a broad feminist framework. More to the point, the theologies and theories that emanate from the academy too often have nothing to say directly to the plight of such women, and do nothing to change their material conditions.

The basic hermeneutical task of Minjung theology is to interpret the suffering of the Minjung in light of scripture. And at the risk of pressing it into the framework of liberation theology, which minjung theologians resist, it also enters into the hermeneutic circle of reflection and praxis: it must be able to interpret and act. In the wake of the Atlanta massacre, many solidarity statements were published condemning "anti-Asian hate," sometimes even supporting the decriminalization of sex work and the rejection of carceral solutions, and many panel discussions were hosted around the topic of anti-Asian violence. What material or even spiritual difference did these panels make in the lives of those like the victims? New testament scholar Ahn Byung Mu identified the *laos* and the *ochlos*, often translated from Greek as the crowd or multitude in the gospels and writings of Paul, as the minjung. The minjung whom Jesus had compassion on, and that followed Jesus during his ministry. Kwok and Rieger, writing in the wake of the Occupy Wall Street movement and borrowing from Minjung theology, propose a theology of the multitude, in which the preferential option of the poor is brought again to the forefront, as God favors the poor, the proletariat, the working-class, the 99%. Within such a theological framework, they draw on theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid's notion of a chaotic God that stands against the order of the dominant system and Mayra Rivera's link between the otherness of God and the otherness of humans, and thus locate the activity of God in the struggles of Occupy movement against finance capitalism.[327] Crucially, Kwok and Rieger argue that any theology of the multitude is unfinished in nature, in opposition to the finished character of theologies of the empire, and because it "unfolds in the movements of people encountering the movements of the divine along the way, no one person or group can ever be in control of it, no theologian can ever exhaust it."[328] It is just as well that it is so, as we can see a decade after the Occupy movement, itself born in part from the Arab Spring, that the global minjung have been on the move, and so has the capitalist order along with it.

Asian American class struggle: Racial capitalism and the return to the source

While there is no room here for a proper treatment of the subject, it is important to note the inextricable link between race and capitalism. As has already been implicit throughout this book, the racial configurations of Asian American identity and the migration flows of Asian labor and refugees are all tied to the development of the political economy. The thesis of racial capitalism, a theory developed by Cedric Robinson, goes as far as to suggest that not only is capitalism racial in the sense that racial difference was produced for the purpose of capitalist accumulation, but moreover that it effectively produced the structures of race and racialization as we know it.[329] While this concept undergirds the Robinson's construction of the Black radical tradition, and indeed informs theologian Jonathan Tran's more recent study of Asian Americans,[330] the argument of Afropessimism outlined earlier suggests instead race and in particular antiblack racism predates the advent of capitalism. But the finer points of these academic debates need not concern us: our is a theology of the streets, and our interest here is the simpler fact that the demands of global capitalism do indeed determine to a large degree the racial order, especially within the US and therefore the lives of ordinary Asian Americans. Hence, the war waged by the global Occupy movement against the forces of finance capitalism, however faltering and however problematic in name with regards to settler colonialism, demands the attention of any radical Asian American theology. Indeed, such considerations as we

have seen necessarily build upon all that we have discussed up to this point: the continuing settler occupation of the Americas, the antiblack racism that structures the ontology of non-Black society in the afterlife of slavery, the migration and refugee flows from Asia to the US through capitalism and imperialism in the form of alien capital, and finally, the combined racialization and sexualization of proletarian Asian bodies.

In the wake of the pandemic, disaster capitalism has taken advantage of the pre-existing inequalities not only within the structure of US society, but also on the global scale. Ranging from the distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves, and disinfectants in the early onset of the pandemic, to the vaccine hoarding in concentrated in the West and in capitalist networks, the collapse of capitalism that both leftists and accelerationists had hoped for during the brief economic crash in March 2020 as the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COIVD-19 pandemic appears to be nowhere in sight. Instead, what followed was a strong recovery for the stock market, inflating the wealth of millionaires and billionaires, while for the working-class population the effects of the coronavirus not only lingered but continued to worsen as evictions increased, racial health disparities were exacerbated, and many of the job losses amongst the precariat or gig workers were not recuperated. While the pandemic represents a rupture whose significance and effects can only be accurately assessed decades later, it can be confidently said that racial capitalism has survived the pandemic, and continues to barrel forward as strong as ever towards the climate apocalypse. Just as the liberation theology remains, as Wilmore described, a vision unfulfilled but not invalidated, so does the popular critique of finance capitalism advanced by the Occupy Movement and of racial capitalism by the Black radical tradition. The theologies of the minjung and multitude thus resonate deeply with any Asian American theology of liberation as a theology not only from below, but also that re-asserts the preferential option for the poor that the Latin American liberation theologians have pressed. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the multitude tautologically "contains multitudes," and is therefore by necessity complex and contradictory. There will be working-class Asian Americans will be interested in class mobility, belonging within the nation-state, and even carceral structures that protect private property and small businesses. While the work of understanding these lived realities and empathizing with them is not beyond the ambit of theologies of liberation, there can be little compromise when it comes to dealing with the oppressive structures and relations of power that define the material and spiritual conditions of these multiple realities. It has not gotten easier for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Our theology must be in the trenches of class struggle. There is no ethical alternative.

At the same time, postcolonial theorist Rey Chow warns of the potential for protest and resistance to be subverted and subsumed into the structure of capitalism itself, and in fact becoming the reasons that it flourishes.[331] Chow transposes Georg Lukács' model of class consciousness in Marxism onto a framework of ethnic consciousness, playing it against Weber's notion of the Protestant work ethic and the spirit of capitalism. In an analysis of the relation between Chinese labour exploitation and US capitalist consumption that remain highly pertinent today, Chow describes these as the "commodified relations of ethnicity," wherein the ethnic person (the "Protestant ethnic") is held captive within their own culture, and whose salvation lies in resistance rather than work, as put forth by Weber. But while such resistance might produce a race consciousness, and in fact forms the ontological basis of the ethnic person according to Chow, as "to be ethnic is to protest," its appearance of being grounded in moral universalisms such as democracy, human rights, freedom of speech—in a word, liberation—may be transfigured into a commodified spectacle.[332] Both Chineseness and Americanness within this context are produced through the configurations of global capitalism. As Chow warns, those eager to stage ethnic struggles are often not only the ethnics themselves: the most spectacular protestations of China as

an abuser of human rights are often made by those in the US with the most commercial interest in them, including politicians, missionaries, businesspeople, academics, and the media. In other words, protest generates profit. Ethnic captivity, therefore, transubstantiates into global capital's flows. As can be seen from the increase in the wealth of the 1% in the wake of the pandemic and the cottage industry on anti-racism built on the George Floyd rebellion, anything short of a complete revolution that decisively ends racial capitalism will only produce greater profits, whilst serving as what Fanon called "hibernation therapy" or "hypnotherapy for the people."[333]

Similarly, Catherine Liu offered a self-critique of the professional managerial class, or sometimes PMC, for short. First described by John and Barbara Ehrenreich as "salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations," thus a white-collar middle class parallel to the petite bourgeoisie.[334] In describing this class, the Ehrenreichs hoped that the professional managerial class would fulfill the "defining dream of the American left," namely, that "discontented members of the middle class might join the working-class majority in a political effort to redistribute both power and wealth downward," their optimism buoyed by the "New Left" of the 1970s and the movements around ecology, women's liberation, and anti-war.[335] This hope was again rekindled again at the time of the Occupy Movement, as the Ehrenreichs concluded in *Death of a Yuppie Dream* that "we expect to see the remnants of the PMC increasingly making common cause with the remnants of the traditional working class for, at a minimum, representation in the political process," hope that were not realized.[336] In contrast, Liu characterizes the professional managerial class as shamelessly hoarding all forms of secularized virtue, in that "whenever it addresses a political and economic crisis produced by capitalism itself, the PMC reworks political struggles for policy change and redistribution into individual passion plays, focusing its efforts on individual acts of 'giving back' or reified forms of self-transformation."[337] Echoing Chow's analysis, the Protestant ethnic here is manifested through virtue signaling and the performance of transgression. Liu's polemic is directed towards members of the professional managerial class such as herself, with the purpose of identifying and liquidating the "PMC values" produced by this false consciousness. Actual transgressions in the form of class treason are called for: "We must be heretics. We should blaspheme."[338]

How then should class struggle be waged from an Asian American position? While keeping in mind the gaping inequality amongst ethnic subgroups, we find ourselves again in the position of Choi's tragic hybridity, wherein Asians are widely perceived to occupy the middle rung of the US socioeconomic and racial order.[339] As it were, Asians continue to make gains in economic, political, and cultural arenas through growing representation in these areas, taking their place as civil society's junior partners or the petite bourgeoisie. While this has played out in the most extreme in Hawai'i, where Asians have ascended to the dominant position of being the primary administrators of the US settler imperial state, the same narrative arc also takes place on the mainland in lesser respects. Given this de facto position as the middle or model minority, it will be instructive to reflect on Amilcar Cabral's elaboration of the role of the "indigenous petite bourgeoisie" or "indigenous colonial elite" in the context of national liberation struggles in Africa. This elite, who emerge during the process of colonization, retain "some element of indigenous culture yet they live both materially and spiritually according to the foreign colonial culture.[340] While they may have strong links with the masses of the working class and local chiefs, they aspire to "a way of life which is similar if not identical with that of the foreign minority" They are "prisoners of the cultural and social contradictions of their lives" and cannot escape from their role as a marginal or "marginalized" class. Cabral identifies the "marginality" of this class as being responsible for the socio-cultural conflicts of the colonial elite or the indigenous petite bourgeoisie, "played out very much according to their material circumstances and level of acculturation but always at the individual level, never

collectively." This daily drama produces a "frustration complex" and a compelling need to "question their marginal status, and to re-discover an identity," and leads to the problem of the "return to the source" most acutely felt by African diasporas living in the colonial or racist metropolis, represented by movements and theories such as pan-Africanism and negritude. This diagnosis of the African colonial elites and their diasporas maps rather neatly onto the racial melancholy and anxieties of Asians Americans.

The solution, according to Cabral, is for "the return to the source," which is not on its own an act of struggle against foreign domination, to go beyond the individual and to be expressed through movements, transforming the contradiction into struggle. It is of no historical importance unless it brings "not only real involvement in the struggle for independence, but also complete and absolute identification with the hopes of the mass of the people, who contest not only the foreign culture but also the foreign domination as a whole." Otherwise, it remains a form of political opportunism, the protestant ethnic in the spirit of capitalism. This return is an uneven process that produces a minority that shares in the building and leadership of liberation movements, and that does not truly identify with the masses except through struggle. This identification requires that in the face of destructive action by imperialist domination, the masses retain their identity, separate and distinct from that of the colonial power.[341] Yet, as Cabral writes, it is not the masses who need to assert or reassert their identity, as it is not they who have been confused, but the "culturally uprooted, alienated or more or less assimilated" indigenous petite bourgeoisie that engage in the "sociological battle in search of its identity." More pointedly, it is only a minority of the latter who do this, whereas another minority asserts the identity of the foreign dominant class, "often in a noisy manner," while the "silent majority is trapped in indecision." These historical lessons from the African liberation struggles, transposed onto the Asian American context, offer both hope and warning. It should not be expected then that a majority of Asians Americans, who do not identify with the coalitional identity of "Asian American" to begin with, to willingly engage in revolutionary struggle and identify themselves with the racialized masses, or the working class "majority minority." At the same time, Cabral does not devalue the contribution of the middle-class minority: even if it is expressed in forms legible to the minority colonial power rather than the masses, it still serves to activate its own class. More importantly, Cabral locates within colonial domination an apparent contradiction posed by the indigenous petite bourgeoisie: they are simultaneously the victims of frequent humiliation by the foreigner and aware of the injustice to which the masses are subjected and of their resistance and spirit of rebellion, therefore it is from within this social class produced from colonialism itself, that arise the first important steps towards mobilizing and organizing the masses for the struggle against the colonial power.[342] To be certain, alternative interpretations and theories of change are possible, and perhaps even necessary for determining the structure of the postcolonial society brought forth from liberation struggles, but if Cabral is to be taken seriously, then this poses a monumental moral imperative for Asian Americans who view themselves as the "middle minority" within the imperial US racial capitalist order.

Elsewhere, writing in the context of the African diaspora in Jamaica, Guyanese revolutionary Walter Rodney suggests that the position of the Black educated person in the West Indies is "as much a part of the system of oppression as the bank managers and the plantation overseers.[343] The privileged position of of the so-called intellectuals and academics is one of Babylonian captivity. In order to break free of this captivity, Rodney suggests first attacking the white hegemony within one's own discipline or line of work, then moving beyond to challenge the social myth of "the multiracial society, and finally, attaching oneself to the activity of the Black masses. One of the elements of Black power, according to Rodney, is a sitting down together with any group of Black people that is prepared to sit down to talk and be listened to, to 'ground.' "We have to 'ground together.'" This inverts the power relation in a manner perfectly harmonious with the biblical narrative: out of the

mouth of babes and sucklings God has ordained strength. In doing so "you get humility, because look who you are learning from. The system says they have nothing, they are the illiterates, they are the dark people of Jamaica." Cabral's return to the source and Rodney's groundings, therefore, only reinforce the earlier imperatives of liberation theology: the preferential option for the poor, the invitation to social death, and landlessness as the capitulation of aspirations of belonging within the settler colonial empire. But unlike the African or African diasporic context, the return to the source calls for a further reconfiguration of identity that is not directly linked to any monolithic identity that the masses may possess, but rather a coalitional politics already inherent in Asian Americanness that chooses identification with the oppressed in any form.

The riddle of Brown and Fanon: Divine and decolonial violence

If Asians are to be engaged in class struggle and downward mobility, and indeed as a form of incarnational politics, how is it to be carried out? Where is the place of Asians in Black riots, class warfare, and revolutionary struggle? While complexities should be understood to exist within any multitude in mass uprising and rebellion, there also occur junctures forced by precipitating events that impose a binary logic, such has in partisan politics, revolutionary struggle, or conservative eschatologies. Will there be, as prophesied, a clean separation of the chaff from the wheat and the goats from the sheep? Whatever the case may be, there remains the more immediate question of strategy, and in particular the role of violence in the fight for liberation. The obsession with absolute nonviolence as the singular means of achieving meaningful social change is deeply ingrained within the US moral character. The most prominent example being the hagiography of Martin Luther King Jr.'s use of nonviolent protest, inspired by Mohandas K. Gandhi's satyagraha which as we have seen earlier, relies on an appeal to the benevolence of one's oppressor, and which seeks to be allowed into the master's house rather than to burn it down. Such hallowed memories of peaceful protests are often used to condemn violent ones, loosely defined, wherein the destruction of private or even state property is deemed to be never an appropriate response the destruction of Black life. Here the levers that the model minority myth pull are again activated here as only certain kinds of protests are legitimized, whereas more violent acts such as riots, looting, the burning of police cars and precincts are condemned. Peaceful protests serve the purposes of the state and racial capitalism: they allow for the expression of dissent while leaving the broader structures—and indeed the sources of structural violence— intact. Whereas the anti-Asian protests in the wake of the pandemic led to many panel discussions and legislation against anti-Asian violence, the latter legitimatizing increased policing and carceral solutions, entirely antithetical to Black life, the riots from Ferguson to Minneapolis in the name of Michael Brown and George Floyd respectively have generated a discursive shift and the entrance of anti-Black racism and police abolition into mainstream vocabulary. Both forms of protest are legitimate: they are the voice of the minjung, the oppressed, the unheard, the blood of Abel crying to God from the ground. They are the key texts upon which theologians of the streets must perform exegesis.

The question of violence in the struggle for liberation has been much grappled with by revolutionaries and organic intellectuals engaged in actual struggle. It is those who have put their lives and safety at stake that we must listen to, and not armchair theologians who pontificate from their positions of comfort. Guyanese revolutionary Walter Rodney asked, "By what standard of morality can the violence used by a slave to break his chains be considered the same as the violence of a slave master?" The violence of Blacks who have been "oppressed, suppressed, depressed and repressed for four centuries" cannot be equated with the violence of white fascists. According to Rodney, "violence aimed at the recovery of human dignity and at equality cannot be judged by the

same yardstick as violence aimed at maintenance of discrimination and oppression."[344] The point here is to not specifically advocate for armed struggle or even violence in general, but rather to prevent the question from being foreclosed. The unquestionable moral high ground afforded to non-violent forms of resistance in the US must indeed be questioned, and we must ask whom it truly serves and protects.

To broach the question of violence in the struggle for liberation, I first turn to Ward Churchill's study of the political and psychological—indeed, pathological—dimensions of pacifism. Pacifism here is understood to mean an ideology of that precludes violence dealt towards others—and in practice, inanimate objects—while not necessarily preventing violence inflicted on oneself. Whereas the emotional courage and at times costly sacrifice required by a true pacificist position is readily acknowledged, it is its effectiveness as a strategy in revolutionary struggle that is questioned. Drawing on conservative political commentator and holocaust survivor Bruno Bettelheim, Churchill first examines the extreme case of the Jewish holocaust as an example of pacifism manifested in passivity in the face of genocide, grounded in a profound desire for "business as usual" and the belief that by unobtrusively resisting by continuing normal day to day activities and "not alienating anyone," a more or less humane Jewish policy might be morally imposed on the Nazi state. Bettelheim points to the revolt of the twelfth Sonderkommando, special work units at the Nazi death camps primarily composed of Jewish prisoners, killing seventy SS officers at the cost of all 853 Sonderkommados, arguing that they did not die much differently than other Sonderkommandos, and if through armed resistance "the loss of an SS with every Jew arrested would have noticeably hindered the functioning of the police state."[345] This brings into question the moral superiority inherent to the renunciation of physical violence asserted by pacifism, which adjudicates the legitimacy of any actor solely based on the presence of violence. Notably, the holocaust was finally ended not through pacifist or nonviolent methods but through the massive application of armed forces, as the US war in Vietnam was similarly ended more as a result of Vietnamese communists than anti-war protestors. Turning to less extreme examples, Martin Luther King and Mohandas Gandhi, his inspiration, were able to win their political victories precisely because of the violence enacted upon their opponents by others, rendering their nonviolent appeals not only more reasonable, but also as the only legitimate form of protest. The essential contradiction of pacifist praxis, Churchill writes, is that for survival in any confrontation with state power, it depends on the restraint of the state in its use of violence, whereas for victory, it requires the active presence of a counterbalancing violence that renders the pacifist the more agreeable opponent. Indeed, King was aware of this contradiction and deliberately leveraged the threat of anti-state violence to advance his pacifist agenda.[346] As the events of following the George Floyd riots have similarly shown, the concessions of the state given to the pacifists—or even armed shopkeepers defending against looters—act as counter-revolutionary forces that delegitimize the more violent factions, even if the violence is merely directed toward private or government property.

With the exception of few pacifists such as self-immolating monks and quakers or militant environmentalists who risk their physical well-being, Churchill critiques the general maintenance of nonviolence as the oppositional foundation of US activism as a politics of the comfort zone rather than a truly pacifist formation. In other words, rather than asking how a revolutionary politics might be enacted without inflicting harm on others, the guiding question is what sort of politics allows one to posture as a progressive without inflicting harm on one's own self? At its height are mass demonstrations that feature an impressive lineup of speakers critiquing the state, having secured permits for lawful assembly and the cooperation of the police, or performative "non-violent direct actions" (NVDA) where specific plans are made for activists to be arrested such as through the occupation of restricted areas and refusal to disperse, in which activists are arrested in the most cooperative manner with the police and released after a short time. In exchange for not disrupting

business as usual and the functioning of the state, the general safety of the nonviolent dissenters is guaranteed. To the extent that such forms of counter-revolutionary resistance are tolerable by the state, they are in fact natural metabolic byproducts of capitalism produced through the commodification of ethnic relations, and in the final analysis produce a more functional and efficient form of capitalism. This form of ritualistic opposition, Churchill writes, can be readily sublimated within the comfort zone by the continuation of business as usual. Within these parameters set by the state, the nondisruptive dissenters are free to carry out activities that prefigure the revolutionary society, often through forms of sexual experimentation, dietary practices, and artistic expression, yet which ironically cannot be brought into being by nonviolent tactics alone. Yet, this prefiguration allows inaction in the "mother country" to be linked rhetorically and symbolically to Third World liberation struggles and from there, "solidarity" with nonwhite armed revolutionary struggles within the US itself. And in the event that positive social transformation is achieved, the prefigurative nonviolent "experts" are well-positioned to be leaders in post-revolutionary society, whereas if the colonizing state prevails, the nonviolent movement has a natural fallback position, thus preserving "the comfort zone of 'white skin privilege'" regardless of the outcome. Further, in Churchill's diagnosis of pacifism as pathology, he identifies three characteristics: delusion, regarding the efficacy of pacifism as a revolutionary agenda; racism, displacing state violence onto people of color and the Third World; and suicidal tendency, in attempting to impel nonviolence on the part of the state.[347] That violence can be avoided in revolutionary movements in Western countries like the US but not in Third World amounts to American exceptionalism, and according to Canadian activist Mike Ryan, "has become a form of catharsis, a practice that allows us to cleanse our souls of the guilt of our white skin privilege for ourselves and for each other without posing a threat either to the state or ourselves"[348]

But rather than replacing hegemonic pacifism with a "cult of terror," Churchill proposes:

> Instead, it is the realization that, in order to be effective and ultimately successful, any revolutionary movement within advanced capitalist nations must develop the broadest possible range of thinking/action by which to confront the state. This should be conceived not as an array of component forms of struggle but as a continuum of activity stretching from petitions/letter writing and so forth through mass mobilization/demonstrations, onward into the arena of armed self-defense, and still onward through the realm of "offensive" military operations (e.g., elimination of critical state facilities, targeting of key individuals within the governmental/corporate apparatus, etc.). All of this must be apprehended as a holism, as an internally consistent liberatory process applicable at this generally-formulated level to the late capitalist context no less than to the Third World. From the basis of this fundamental understanding—and, it may be asserted, only from this basis—can a viable liberatory praxis for North America emerge.[349]

In other words, to do away with the preclusion of violence does then make it a prerequisite for resistance against oppression, but rather allows it as but one of the means by which liberation may be won, thus Malcolm X's call for freedom and justice "by any means necessary," and further, that "tactics based solely on morality can only succeed when you are dealing with people who are moral or a system that is moral." The language of necessity, though, must be exercised with much caution, as such has also been used to enshrine state violence, such as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution of 1964 that allowed authorizing the president to "to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force" to assist any member of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, and the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) following the 9/11 attacks in 2001 granting the president authority to use all "necessary and appropriate force" against those determined to be involved. In

any case, these reflections should begin to clarify the nature of violence in some of the recent mass protests in Asia, including the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and the anti-coup resistance in Myanmar.

Leaving the problem of nonviolence aside, I now turn to the question of violence itself. To reflect on violence at the intersection of liberation struggles, politics, and religion requires a particular degree of care. Religious fanaticism and nationalistic jingoism have easily recruited violence as a justified means to certain ends. Justifications of violence in service of liberation, in turn, even if in self-defense, must be made with extreme care, as often the same rationalizations are employed by those on the other side. With these considerations in mind, the abolitionist John Brown can provide an interpretive key to the role of violence in struggle, particularly within the context of what might be called militant allyship. Inspired by the Haitian revolution, John Brown led a band of twenty-one raiders—including escaped slaves and three of Brown's sons—in seizing the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in West Virginia, as what seemed to have been intended to have been the first step in a guerilla war in the Appalachian Mountains against slaveholders. The raid failed, with local militia joined by federal troops, and ended with ten of the raiders killed, five escaping, and the remaining seven tried and executed, including Brown himself. Through Brown's writing, interviews, and courtroom speeches, infused with rhetorical appeals to ideals of the nation and the Bible, divided the country in two, and thus often marked as the prelude to the Civil War. Brown described both the violence that he committed and the violence committed against him as part of a process in which the land was purged of its sins—the sins of slavery—with blood, lifting the interpretive frame into a realm that requires theological reasoning about politics, or political theology. Considerations of Brown's story reveals the limits of ethics and what Ted Smith refers to as universalizable immanent ethical obligations, which might be understood to mean moral imperatives based in ethical reasoning about cause and effect. Indeed, in Talal Asad's study of the phenomenon of suicide bombing, the suicide bomber is cast as a figure through which liberal democracies work out the repressed knowledge of the lawless violence at work in their own founding and ongoing existence. As such, attempts to explain suicide bombing "tell us more about liberal assumptions of religious subjectivities and political violence than they do about what is being ostensibly explained."[350] Thus rather than seeking to explain John Brown, the prerogative here is to situate Brown's violence within Brown's own political theology and to interpret it on Brown's terms.

Brown was a polarizing figure, even in his time. The view of Brown as a fanatic later turned to debates about the possibility of mental illness, despite Brown's outright rejection of the insanity plea Brown's lawyers attempted to introduce at the trial. Viewed as a freedom fighter on the other hand, Brown's violence, placed alongside the violence of the soldiers in the American Revolution, could also be grafted on to legitimate state violence. In continuity with violent means used by the state to the end of equality of all races, Brown could also thus be construed as a national hero, as indeed present-day state-sponsored memorials at Harpers Ferry, North Elba, and Osawatomie show. Whether terrorist or heroic revolutionary, freedom fighter or fanatic, appeals to a "higher law" in either case end in religiously motivated violence, and in particular violence without state sanction. Whereas Brown's own appeal to a higher law challenged the state's monopoly on violence, it was imperative for then governor of Virginia Henry Wise, at a time when the sovereignty of the states was a central issue, to execute John Brown in a manner that enshrined the sovereignty of the commonwealth of Virginia. He did so by ensuring that Brown was protected both from vigilantes who wanted to lynch him and from sympathizers that might attempt to rescue him, and that Brown's execution would impress upon its witnesses what one commentator called the "awful majesty of the law." The law of the state was sovereign.

As Ted Smith argues, both interpretations of Brown assume that violence can be justified only in an immanent frame of moral obligations, which can contain arguments in just war traditions

and pacifism that is grounded in the belief that violence leads to more violence, but they cannot make sense of commitments to violence or nonviolence that "make no earthly sense." More importantly, both categories assume the monopoly of the state on legitimate violence.[351] Even as a freedom fighter, the figure of Brown is able to be assimilated into the state as the center of legitimate violence—it is Brown's violence that is the exception and requires justification. Smith therefore proposes political theology as the means to move beyond the frame of immanent ethics and to reason about divine violence. Separating politics from theology does not solve the problem of extralegal violence, as critics of religious violence in a post-9/11 world might argue, instead it can underwrite new forms of violence, especially violence that serves to enforce the separation of religion and politics, and also extralegal forms of state violence carried out domestically and abroad. But even attempts to employ political theology can run afoul, such as Carl Schmitt's insistence on the need for both some sovereign power beyond the system of law and some clear earthly identity for that legal power—a legal system that depends on a sovereignty that exceeds the system itself—led Schmitt to support Hitler's regime.[352]

In contrast, Benjamin Walter proposes an incomplete translation whereby the theological cannot be entirely secularized into the political. The gap between the two measures the distance between law and justice in Walter's "Critique of Violence," which interrogates what distinctions among sanctioned and unsanctioned violence reveal about the nature of violence. The circle of justification created by legal means and ends gives rise to the state's monopoly on legitimate violence, so that violence, "when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by its ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law."[353] Thus, for justified law to remain as such, it must either destroy or absorb any violence that exists outside of it. Benjamin calls this force exerted by the system "mythic violence," taking the form of lawmaking (*rechtsetzende*) and law-preserving (*rectserhaltende*) violence, combining the binding obligation of justice with the arbitrariness of law. As the ends that mythic violence seeks exist outside of the circle of justification, its character is not instrumental but rather expressive, the same which resonates in the "shock and awe" strategy employed by the US in Iraq and before that, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In its archetypal form, Benjamin writes, mythic violence is a "manifestation of the gods," not a manifestation of their will but simply of their existence. What breaks the cycle of mythic violence is divine (*göttliche*) violence. The manifestation of divine justice in this world, it destroys systems of obligation without creating new ones, as mythic violence does. "If mythic violence brings at once guilt and expiation, divine power only expiates." Divine violence opens up an incommensurability between commandment and action, inviting free response and responsibility. Rather than translating this *Entsetzung* as the "suspension" of law, Smith proposes instead the "relief" or "deposition" of law, relieving the law of its binding power enforced by mythic violence. While Slavoj Žižek encourages us to "fearlessly identify divine violence with positively existing historical phenomena, thus avoiding any obscurantist mystification,"[354] Smith argues that the task rather is to see divine violence in the negation at work in every moment, a "critical discernment that can hear the groaning of all creation."[355] Within this framework, Brown should properly be understood as what Benjamin called a "great criminal," namely one who, "in defying the law, lays bare the violence of the legal system, the judicial order itself." Such a characterization does not legitimate nor condemn Brown's actions but instead, in the relief of the law, reveals the limits of ethical reasoning about certain forms of violence.

But what of this law? Language of a higher law defined "a structured but relatively empty space that was charged with its own significance even as it was open to many different kinds of content and compatible with many different sorts of worldviews."[356] Most recently, resistance to discourse involving higher laws is bolstered by the predominance of both Islamic and Christian extremists who invoke such language. An important example is the anti-abortion activist Paul Hill, who murdered Dr. John Britton and his bodyguard James Barrett at the Pensacola Ladies Center in

1994, with the intention that the event would be to anti-abortionists what Harpers Ferry was to abolitionists. To be sure, abolitionists also often invoke a higher law. The abolitionist imagination, according to Andrew Delbanco, occurs when one identifies "a heinous evil and want to eradicate it—not tomorrow, not next year, but now," a sensibility that grates against a politics of the comfort zone.[357] Doing away wholesale appeals to a higher law does itself not remove the possibility of mythic violence and instead precludes any possibility of thinking critically about forms of higher law. Delbanco, along with others including Brown and Hill, Smith argues, assumed that this higher law takes the form of codes of obligation and prohibition, in other words, the same as earthly laws.[358] Such "code fetishism" is characterized not by a belief in a higher law or the content of any such law, but rather the sense that "the highest good could be expressed best in the form of a code," or "something like the perfection of public policy." The fulfilment of the law in this sense, then, takes the form of perfect adherence to the code rather than transcending it. In contrast, the "messianic fulfilment of the law," as Giorgio Agamben interprets Benjamin's relief of law, is best understood as the turning of the imperative of law into an indicative of divine justice. This indicative, Smith writes, serves to "negate absolute obligations in this age in ways that invite a free response in history that is permeated by the presence of God."[359] The divine violence of the higher law relativizes "the whole imperative mood;" the proclamation of the Kingdom of God does not issue a new set of commandments. The indicative of the Gospel relates to the world through negation, forming what Jacob Russelby calls a "iconoclastic utopia" as opposed to a "blueprint utopia." These considerations, Smith argues, are not able to legitimate Brown's violence through some divine code, but the notion of divine violence renders it legible: the raid was made possible by "a higher law that revealed the whole edifice of laws sustaining slavery for the organized violence that they were."[360] Divine violence can thus "break the hold of some particular ethical system and then invite but not determine responses that include ethical deliberation." It is outside the limit of ethics, "the end of visions of the normative that take it to be complete in itself,"[361] and therefore it is necessary to work in two registers: using the language of both divine and ethical violence.

Smith's analysis of John Brown is precisely complicated due to Brown's identity as a White abolitionist. Once again, Asian American positionality, whether as middle minority or racially triangulated in the sense of Claire Jean Kim,[362] precludes wholesale identification with neither John Brown nor Nat Turner. Moving laterally along Kim's foreigner/insider axis, I turn to Fanon's analysis of decolonial violence as a counterbalance to Smith. The first corrective that Fanon offers is a combined analysis of race and class: "In the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect. You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why a Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue."[363] Within the context of the settler colonial state, a theology of landlessness offers Asian Americans the possibility of carefully identifying or being in solidarity with the colonized indigenous people of the Americas. The (settler) colonial context, according to Fanon, is characterized by "the dichotomy it inflicts on the world," whereas decolonization unifies the world by "a radical decision to remove its heterogeneity, by unifying it on the grounds of nation and sometimes race."[364] When an authentic liberation struggle has been fought, there is "an effective eradication of the superstructure borrowed by these [colonized] intellectuals from the colonialist bourgeois circles." In the meantime, the colonized world is stabilized by the release of constant "muscular tension" in the colonized resulting from everyday life in the colonized world by means of fratricidal violence and internecine feuds, the fatalism of religion, and the emotional release of dance or possession.[365] In other words, violence among the people should not be understood to be absent when it is not employed in revolutionary struggle, it is merely sublimated in other potentially suicidal means. The challenge, Fanon declares, is to "seize this violence as it realigns itself. Whereas it once reveled in myths and contrived ways to commit collective suicide, a fresh set of circumstances will

now enable it to change directions." For the colonized, this violence represents "the absolute praxis." The colonized person liberates themself "in and through violence," and this praxis "enlightens the militant because it shows him the means and the end." Here, the militant is one who works, where "to work means to works towards the death of the colonist."[366] In fact, Fanon points out, the colonist has always shown them the path they should follow to liberation. "The colonial regime owes its legitimacy to force and at no time does it ever endeavor to cover up this nature of things."[367]

Thus, while Smith's deliberations of Brown's crusade led to subtle meditations on the political theology of violence, Fanon offers both an incisive and decisive assessment of what the colonized must to be liberated from their colonizer. Indeed, "the work of the colonist is to make even dreams of liberty impossible for the colonized. The work of the colonized is to imagine every possible method for annihilating the colonist." The Manichaeanism of the colonist produces a Manichaeanism of the colonized, Fanon acknowledges. "The arrival of the colonist signified syncretically the death of indigenous society, cultural lethargy, and petrification of the individual. For the colonized, life can only materialize for from the rotting cadaver of the colonist."[368] But just as the colonial condition produces the reductive binaries of Manichaeanism, so will the divine violence of decolonization break the mythic violence that sustains the colonial order. The liberation struggle, which "aims at a fundamental redistribution of relations between men, cannot leave intact either form or substance of the people's culture." More to the point, Fanon asserts that after the struggle is over, there is "not only the demise of colonialism, but also the demise of the colonized," a meeting of divine violence and decolonial violence.[369] What arises in its stead is what Fanon calls a new humanism.

The manifold contradictions of Asian American identity can be read into the Fanon's analysis of "colonized intellectuals" in the colonial setting, which function as Cabral's indigenous petite bourgeoisie and Wilderson's junior partners in civil society. This "caste," according to Fanon, invests their repressed aggression in their "barely veiled wish to be assimilated to the colonizer's world," and "call for ways of freeing more and more slaves and ways of organizing a genuine class of the emancipated, whereas the masses have no intention of looking on as the chances of individual success improve.[370] The bourgeoisie in underdeveloped countries, relative to the metropolis of the colonizer, Fanon writes, "has unreservedly and enthusiastically adopted the intellectual reflexes characteristic of the metropolis" and "alienated to perfection its own thoughts and grounded its consciousness in typically foreign notions." Indeed, Fanon asserts, "theirs is a wish to identify permanently with the bourgeois representatives from the metropolis."[371] In contrast, the masses want to take the place of the colonists, not simply to be equal to them and to sit with them in boardrooms and first-class lounges, as the project of neoliberal inclusion promises. "The colonized intellectual's insertion into this human tide will find itself on hold because of his curious obsession with detail," and so forgetting the very purpose of the struggle: the defeat of colonialism. The distractions and comforts afforded by White-adjacency and promised by the model minority myth go a long way towards disabling the return to source. "The people, on the other hand, take a global stance from the start. 'Bread and land: how do we go about getting bread and land?' And this stubborn, apparently limited, narrow-minded aspect of the people is finally the most rewarding and effective working model."[372]

Even more relevant is Fanon's diagnosis the attempts of the Black diaspora to identify with an Africa that does not exist, resonant with the nostalgia of Asian diaspora. The Black diaspora in the United States, Central, and Latin America "needed a cultural matrix to cling to," and around the time of Fanon participated in the project of negritude that unconditionally affirmed a universal African culture. But they soon realized that their "existential problems" differed from those faced by Africans, and that the only common denominator was that they all "defined themselves in relation

to the whites. But once the initial comparisons had been made and subjective feelings had settled down, the black Americans realized that the objective problems were fundamentally different." Thus, negritude, according to Fanon, came up against the limitation posed by "phenomena that take into account the historicizing of men."[373] Similarly, Asian diasporic attempts to theorize or theologize through particular Asian cultural traditions run the risk of a form of orientalization, unless sufficiently grounded also within North American contexts. Indeed, while this search may take one to "unusual heights in the sphere of poetry, at an existential level it has often proved a dead end." This "painful, forced search" is "but a banal quest for the exotic." Indeed, "the colonized intellectual who returns to his people through works of art behaves in fact like a foreigner," and "strangely reminiscent of exoticism."[374]

"In order to secure his salvation, in order to escape the supremacy of white culture," Fanon writes, "the colonized intellectual feels the need to return to his unknown roots and lose himself, come what may, among his barbaric people. Because he feels he is becoming alienated, in other words the living focus of contradictions which risk becoming insurmountable, the colonized intellectual wrenches himself from the quagmire which threatens to suck him down, and determined the believe what he finds, he accepts and ratifies it with heart and soul." But this process is a necessity, Fanon argues, for "otherwise we will be faced with extremely serious psycho-affective mutilations: individuals without an anchorage." Unwilling or unable to choose between two nationalities or two determinations, such as Algerian and French, or Nigerian and English, or Asian and American, these intellectuals "collect all the historical determinations which have conditioned them and place themselves in a thoroughly 'universal perspective.'"[375] Yet eventually, this colonized intellectual "will realize that the cultural model he would like to integrate for authenticity's sake offers little in the way of figureheads capable of standing up to comparison with the many illustrious names in the civilization of the occupier" or any other form of representational politics. But then "lucidly and "objectively" observing the reality of the continent he would like to claim as his own, the intellectual is terrified by the void, the mindlessness, and the savagery. Yet he feels he must escape this white culture. He must look elsewhere, anywhere; for lack of a cultural stimulus comparable to the glorious panorama flaunted by the colonizer, the colonized intellectual frequently lapse into heated arguments and develops a psychology dominated by an exaggerated sensibility, sensitivity, and susceptibility." This movement of withdrawal calls to mind a muscular reflex, a muscular contraction.[376] But sooner or later, Fanon asserts, the colonized intellectual realizes that "the existence of a nation is not proved by culture, but in the people's struggle against the forces of occupation." In the context of North America, the settler colonial state is precisely this occupying force, and Fanon's diagnosis of the petite bourgeoisie's dilemma of straddling multiple identities maps easily on to what Asian American theologians have theorized as liminality or marginality—individuals without anchorage.

The solution lies within the destruction of colonialism itself, requiring a divine violence that destroys the colonial order and the Manicheanism that it produces. For such a revolution to occur, it is necessary for Asian Americans, particularly those of middle or upper-middle class status to embrace a downward mobility, "groundings" that facilitate a return to the source. This source, as it were, may well be a properly imagined community for reason of the subjectlessness and instability of Asian American identity. But this need not prevent new forms of coalitional politics, through the development of both race and class consciousness and the commitment to desettlerizing, to social death, and now also, decolonization. In distinguishing decolonization from desettlerization, I mean to highlight the dual structure of US imperialism both as settler colony that continues its genocidal program of Indigenous nations and occupation of stolen land on the one hand, and as colonial ruler of so-called US territories such as Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, with military bases in places such as Hawai'i, the Philippines, South Korea, and Japan. Separating the military apparatus

according to its domestic and international deployments have proved fallacious, as the recent cooperations between ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and the National Guard overtly under the Trump presidency, and covertly at other times, has demonstrated. Attempts to do so work most effectively at the level of discourse and theory, whereas the lived experiences of those who suffer the most under these structures brings the intersections into sharp relief, such as the shootings at the Atlanta spas. Moreover, what undergirds the settler colonial and military structure is the racial capitalism, in which the Asian American imaginary is well-embedded in as a junior partner, despite the poverty faced by many Asians in the US. The structure of global capital not only determines much of the flow of migration, whether through economic dependency of post-colonial nations or exploitative labor practices. Fanon reminds us, "we must never lose contact with the people who fought for their independence and a better life."[377] But those who fought for a better life cannot be thought of in terms of the immigrant American dream, where many are called but few are chosen to partake in the spoils of capitalism. Rather, the massive violence that is required to undo capitalism itself and the complete disorder that decolonization is contingent upon must be recognized as entirely consonant with the divine violence necessary for breaking the spell of mythic violence maintained by the fusion of state, capital, and empire. Fanon, again: "we should not therefore be content to delve into the people's past to find concrete examples to counter colonialism's endeavors to distort and depreciate. We must work and struggle in step with the people so as to shape the future and prepare the ground where vigorous shoots are already sprouting."[378] To identify these vigorous shoots requires the gift of sight, as Althaus-Reid recounted in her experience at a militant Protestant church in Buenos Aires, "After two years of popular bible readings and much discussion, and before reaching a conclusive decision on our praxis, we suddenly noticed that our church was full of beggars. The subjects of our praxis were already there, ignoring our meetings and discussions; it only required from us the gift to look around us."[379]

By way of conclusion: The erotics of liberation and the end of Asian America

Not one day passes without confirmation of the availability and the willingness to use force in the Third World. It is not the province of one people to be the solution or the problem. But a civilization maddened by its own perverse assumptions and contradictions is loose in the world. A Black radical tradition formed in opposition to that civilization and conscious of itself is one part of the solution. Whether the other oppositions generated from within Western society and without will mature remains problematical. But for now we must be as one. — Cedric Robinson[380]

May man never be instrumentalized. May the subjugation of man by man—that is to say, of me by another—cease. May I be allowed to discover and desire man wherever he may be. … It is through self-consciousness and renunciation, through a permanent tension of his freedom, that man can create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world. Superiority? Inferiority? Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other? Was my freedom not given me to build the world of you, man? — Frantz Fanon[381]

The whole story of creation, incarnation and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ's body tells us that God desires us, as if we were God, as if we were that unconditional response to God's giving that God's self makes in the life of the trinity. We are created so that we may be caught up in this; so that we may grow into the wholehearted love of God by learning that God loves us as God loves God. — Rowan Williams[382]

Throughout this book I have argued for an Asian American liberation theology as a paradigm through which, on the one hand, struggles of marginalized Asians in the US—migrant, outcaste, poor, queer—become focal points of praxis and theological reflection through praxis. That is, Asian Americanness reveals more about the structures that produce it than the people it attempts to describe. The inherent dilemma of Asian Americanness can be glimpsed at first through an ahistorical sensibility produced by continuous waves of Asian arrivants or first-generation immigrants, complemented with attempts by activists and academics to construct coherent histories of Asian Americans. Further considerations of the racial formation of Asian Americans quickly reveal the instability of the imagined community, its construction through law, capital, and empire, producing a theoretical characteristic of subjectlessness and psychic condition of racial melancholia and racial dissociation, structured by the landlessness of Asians who arrive as alien capital, international students or adoptees, and refugees of colonial wars. This definition through absence is inherent, and in fact becomes a thing to be embraced when faced with the call to social death and the return to the source. On the one hand, Asian American theology is pulled outwards from itself by the calls of Black theology and Dalit theology, whereas theological reflections on mass protest, divine and decolonial violence, and abolition propose a decisive movement towards the ontological rupture that interrupts the mythic violence of the settler colonial order whose law enshrines itself as sovereign, and the binaries enforced by colonial violence. The passing away of the dualism of settler and native, colonizer and colonized, citizen and alien, master and slave, simply extend Paul's proclamation of there being neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, but unity in the Messiah. This unity of being is established through the divine violence that erases boundaries, while yet preserving individuality, so that even past the horizon of revolution or revelation (apocalypse) nonviolent boundaries remain that distinguish between self and other, not structured by unequal power relations. According to Althaus-Reid, "in theology it is not stability but a sense of discontinuity which is most valuable. The continuousness of the hermeneutical circle of suspicion and the permanent questioning of the explanatory narratives of reality implies, precisely, a process of

theological discontinuity." And as it were, liberation theology needs to be understood as a "continuing process of re-contextualisation, a permanent exercise of serious doubting in theology."[383] This serious doubting as a theological method clearly resonates with the undetermined nature of Asian American liberation theology.

Just as Wolfe asserted that settler invasion is a structure and not an event, so I propose that liberation be understood similarly. Decolonization is well-understood to be an ongoing process, one that continues to take place following the event of national independence that produces the postcolonial subject, whereas the abolitionist horizon demands on the one hand the dismantling of the prison industrial complex, all forms of policing, and the carceral system at large, it requires on the other hand the building of dual power that produces alternate systems of care and protection, which allow the well-functioning of society without policing and prisons. Such a structure of liberation would include the redistribution of wealth and any sustainable form of social adaptation in the wake of climate catastrophe, and is contingent upon the transformation of social relations. These relations include the relations of production that constitute racial capitalism and the relations of social reproduction that determine the performance of race, gender, and sexuality. To the extent that each axis of critique, whether abolition or decolonization or anticapitalism, must work towards its irrelevance in liberation, the relief of law promised by divine violence, so must the racial formation of Asian American identity see its end at the horizon of liberation, in which every oppressive power structure is annihilated. The purpose of Asian American identity, then, is to bring forth a world in which Asian Americans do not need to exist. Structures of oppression and racist violence both create and sustain what we call Asian American identity, and without them it serves no purpose. In its place is the free response in history permeated by the presence of God, where the instability of the Asian American subject is broken open and fit together with the broader dissolution of Manichean binaries.

This degree of freedom can be frightening, destabilizing, and indeed, unsettling. Whereas critical theory provides orientations towards a liberative horizon, imagining beyond the horizon requires more expansive forms of thinking, such as Afrofuturism, political theology, and queer theory. Political theology, as Smith has argued through the body of John Brown, offers ways of thinking of violence beyond the limits of ethics, where the relief of law gives way for the indicative of divine justice, the iconoclastic utopia which provides no fixed prescription of what might be prefigured in the absence of total liberation. But utopia is a no-place upon which desires and dreams are projected, a fantasy sustained by its unattainability, holding the same allure as a secret affair that lies just out of bounds. Instead of this forbidden site of unreality, Foucault's notion of heterotopia is more useful for the project of liberation. Heterotopias are counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. They are outside of all places, though it is possible to indicate their location in reality, for example cemeteries or theaters or ships, which can contain in a single real space several incompatible sites.[384] Chuh argued that Asian America should be understood as a heterotopic project, while Althaus-Reid proposes a "Project of the Kingdom" that is built upon a heterotopian model that is multiple and changing. "It may present a kind of quicksand surface where theology may walk with uneasiness, but that is the crucial element of the Project of Liberation of the Kingdom: a certain uneasiness and a community made with the juxtaposition of elements which do not belong, who are outsiders to any hegemonic definitions."[385] Whereas both Chuh and Althaus-Reid understand heterotopia in abstract, Foucault's heterotopias are to be found in reality, even if they need not be "good places" (eutopias) such as colonies or brothels, but as can as a mirror both exist in reality but give sight to a no-place. "For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." The projects of Asian America and of Kingdom, as indicatives of beyond

the horizon, need not be purely metaphysics: even if they may not be prefiguratively grounded in some spatial context, they can be embodied, inscribed in the flesh.

Queer theology is in part the revelation of queer theory that Christian theology is at its core a queering mission: the dissolution of boundaries between God and human, body and soul, spirituality and sexuality, life and death, and thus again, Paul's indication of the centripetal force of oneness in the Messiah, the creation of a new humanism—and a new divinity, so to speak—whose primary orientation is towards God. Such radical love, Patrick Cheng contends, is a love so extreme that it dissolves existing boundaries, revealing apparent binaries as ultimately fluid and malleable, making Christian theology a fundamentally queer enterprise.[386] This indeterminacy of the future, be it abolitionist or liberation or Christian, can thus be properly conceived of as a queer futurity, a queer pleasure that awaits in reward, which I refer to here as the erotics of liberation. To the extent that the free response of Smith's indicative of divine justice cannot prescribe discernible universal codes, all theology is indeed as Althaus-Reid asserts, sexual theology. Salvation is the theological place of what Derrida called "the safe and sound" and simultaneously, of what Anne Phillips describes as sensual excess, which carries with it "pleasures of insecurity, or the excitation of the unsafeness of the unknown."[387] Whereas Katherine Angel writes that in the current culture of affirmative consent, consent on its own cannot distinguish good sex from bad sex, we should acknowledge that "we don't always know what we want," in order "to allow for obscurity, for opacity and for not-knowing." Instead Angel suggests an "ideal of joyful vulnerability," as sexual desire "can take us by surprise; can creep up, unbidden, confounding our plans, and with it our beliefs about ourselves. But this giddiness is only possible if we are vulnerable to it. If asked, we might not say that what we want is sex in a hotel with a gruff stranger. It might be inaccurate to say either that we did, or that we didn't. Desire isn't always there to be known. Vulnerability is the state that makes its discovery possible."[388] The nature of liberation is thus best described by eroticism, which dialectically mediates both danger and safety, pleasure and pain, self and other. The indecenting of theology, including liberation theology, opens up a playful, creative, vulnerable space that liberation can properly inhabit.

Indecent theology and the body's grace

According to Althaus-Reid, Latin American liberation theology is for the most part a decent theology, in the sense that it is concerned with authorship and the authorization or disauthorisation of religio-political discourses of authority in Latin America.[389] "Decent theologies struggle for coherence, the coherence that sexual systems also struggle for," and "theology's permanent search for coherence is only an expression of its hegemonising objectives."[390] Based on sexual categories and heterosexual binary systems, obsessed with sexual behaviour and orders, Althaus-Reid asserts that every theological discourse is implicitly a sexual discourse, a decent one, an accepted one. "The liberationist hermeneutical circle has proved to be politically materialist and sexually idealist and is therefore a basic decent discourse."[391] This sexual idealism, which as Foucault showed to be a powerful form of social control, coordinates with decent theologies, including feminist or liberationist theologies that simply attempt to invert rather than abolish unequal power structures. In a theological materialist feminist analysis, women need to be studied in certain contexts, and not from a mere struggle of ideas about womanhood constructed in opposition to hegemonic definitions, say by reading life in opposition to the Bible, but by a process of de-abstractionism or materialist reversal.[392] The reversal that Althaus-Reid is indispensable for a material and embodied liberation. Despite its commitment to the poor, liberation theology has not been immune to such pitfalls:

> The construction of knowledge, and theological knowledge in our present world, is technologically mediated. A truly liberationist, materialistic based movement ought to know that. Where are the popular publishing houses to give voice to the voiceless? Why did liberationists need to print their book in the USA? Why did they not change the production of theology in order to produce a Chiapas' style of 'Intergalactic Flowers', that is, really a communitarian work of expression and reflection? Where were the new institutions to train poor women and give them theological degrees? Evidently, the organisational standpoint of capitalism has not been challenged.[393]

Liberation theology, in this sense, was the surplus value of human suffering, and able to be commodified and sold according to the typical market forces. As decent theologies are built upon sexual idealism, so is capitalist economics, thus the perversion or indecenting of theology also produces a challenge to capitalism. Moreover, traditional liberation theology enshrines nationalism, which as Chuh has already pointed out, is a gendered affair. As Althaus-Reid writes, the *patriota* must "fully participate in the *machista* structure of the national muths of independence and the theological *imaginaire* of my people."[394] When Gustavo Guttiérez was interviewed on Spanish television for his opinion on the vote on ordination of women in the Church of England, he answered implied that women in Latin America did not care about ordination, only about feeding their children. Here nationalism, capitalism, and sexual idealism intersect. "The homogenisation of sexuality and, specifically, the sexuality of the poor," according to Althaus-Reid, "serves as a basic pattern from which behaviour, aspirations and relationship to God and to economic systems are worked out and sacralised with an aura of immutability and eternity."[395]

In contrast, "our gods are Queer, because they are what we want them to be. There are no final definitions or models, just rubber-like, flexible identities ready to perform a divine act according to patterns of power."[396] The queerness of liberation thus presents itself as eminently natural, escaping definition and beyond imagination, as the prophet Ezekiel and the apostle John struggled to convey their apocalyptic visions through crude metaphors. Yet, queerness is not to be misunderstood as confusion: the final goal of charity work and activist organizing is to create the conditions that render oneself irrelevant; the radicalism of Asian American identity is to produce a future in which Asian Americans do not exist, or rather, the oppressive structures that create the need for Asian American identity no longer exist. As Althaus-Reid wrote concerning the disappearance of Base Ecclesial Communities in Latin America,

> I said that I was glad. BECs although very valuable at a certain time, are artificial structures. You cannot keep people in artificial structures for ever. You cannot expect people to live in restriction for the rest of their lives. Moreover, that would defeat the purpose of the very structure which is supposed to be a creative device to bring about something else that needs to happen in society.[397]

As approximations to this liberation, queerness presents itself as the space of free response, allowing for the multitudes that emerge in the passing of binary oppositions, whether it be settler/native, male/female, citizen/foreigner, or Black/White. This chaos is a productive chaos, the raw material of an earth "without form and void," as John Milton interpreted in Paradise Lost. Whereas Althaus-Reid writes, "sexual chaos and the chaos of death are the two suppressed forces of Christianity although paradoxically they constitute the Christian paradigm."[398] The basic point of liberation theology is that the "non-poor are also oppressed by the categories of structural sin which are economic, sexist and racist," and "to liberate the oppressed means also to liberate the oppressors from the sin of oppression which engulfs their lives." In this sense, Althaus-Reid argues, the option for the poor carries a latent bisexual pattern of thought, moving away from "the dichotomies presented in current epistemologies, which come from that very basic structure of sex opposition."[399] The imprecision of what Althaus-Reid calls the Bi/Christ, referring to the silence of

the Gospels concerning the sexuality of Jesus, may give way to "new perceptions of coherence, outside the coherence of binarism: good faithful women in Latin America basically mothers; men are *macho* but good, and the rest are perverts."[400]

Yet, Althaus-Reid's theological perversions and materialist reversals hover at a theoretical level with clever wordplays and unorthodox theological readings, hence remain to an extent disembodied. To properly locate a liberative heterotopia in physical reality, I draw on Rowan Williams' treatment of the body's grace. While recent discourse in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement have centered Black and Brown bodies as sites of reflection, and in Afropessimism bodies meant to be accumulated and die,[401] the body's grace is a a frontier that has been passed, and that has been and remains grace; a being present, even though this can mean knowing that the graced body is now more than ever a source of vulnerability." According to Williams, the life of the Christian community, its practical reality is the task of teaching us this: "so ordering our relations that human beings may see themselves as desired, as the occasion of joy. It is not surprising that sexual imagery is freely used, in and out of the Bible, for this newness of perception. What is less clear is why the fact of sexual desire, the concrete stories of human sexuality rather than the generalising metaphors it produces, are so grudgingly seen as matters of grace, or only admitted as matters of grace when fenced with conditions." Indeed, although Systematic Theology has been thematically contested, even if partially, the assumptions of theology as a part of a methodological knowledge persist. Indecent hermeneutics, according to Althaus-Reid, is not about tracing the path of methodological progress in our theological constructions. On the contrary, it is the art of pinpointing obscurities, twisted categories and queer details which appear in disorder, and with or without apparent continuation.[402] Systematic theology attempts to present knowledge of the divine in a clean and orderly fashion, and implicitly assumes that all that can be known is known and thus able to be catalogued. Such a taxonomy of divine revelation is most prominent in Protestant Christianity that assumes the existence of a closed canon, whereas even the Roman Catholic Church holds the doctrine of tradition as an extra-biblical source more akin to the oral traditions of the Hadith in Islam and the Mishnah and Talmud of Judaism. To the extent that liberation theology seeks to systematize itself such as through works like *Mysterium Liberationis* or incorporation into the academy, liberation theology betrays its own mission to not use general principles, or universal types or moral discourses but going to find 'what was there,' in communities of resistance.[403]

Similarly, when dealing with the body's grace we are confronted with unruly bodies: bodies that will not be policed, disabled and aging bodies, bodies that menstruate and ejaculate. Foucault's notion of biopower describes society's attempt to regulate the human body through forms of sexual control and discursive means, one crucial construction being the concept of purity. "Purity contradicts materiality," according to Althaus-Reid, and "like the Western whiteness which represents it, a single-frequency thought."[404] The concept of purity is a boundary construction: it sets up a binary of sexual dimorphism and sexual idealism, and operates according to sexual economies built on Mosaic laws in which the sin of adultery is understood as a man infringing upon another man's woman as property. It can be understood as anti-materialist in to the extent that it is sustained by fantasies of purity, the disembodiment of sexuality through spiritualization, and the disavowal of sexual deviance and abuse, not least in churches. Compulsory heterosexuality is so deeply embedded to the extent that even the terms heterosexuality and homosexuality assume the gender of the referent as being fixed assignments in a sexual dimorphism. The current proliferation of new terminologies such as sapiosexuality, demisexuality, and asexuality reflect a growing search for a more expansive vocabulary that can describe the range of sexual experiences, or lack thereof. These new forms of sexual identities point towards not only a rejection of heteronormativity, but also a recognition of the roles of both soul and body in the erotic life: intelligence and emotions are explicitly identified and prioritized as sites of arousal. In contrast, Williams suggests that it is sexual

practices that rely on the agency of a single actor or asymmetrical power relation that should be called perverse, in that that they leave one agent in effective control of the situation, who "doesn't have to wait upon the desire of the other" and as such in many cases the socially licensed norm of heterosexual intercourse might be called a perversion. More pointedly, this kind of sexual perversion is "sexual activity without risk, without the dangerous acknowledgement that my joy depends on someone else's as theirs does on mine," and distorted sexuality is "the effort to bring my happiness back under my control and to refuse to let my body be recreated by another person's perception." Alienation of the body, whether by capitalism or Christianity, forms the grounds for sexual violence and dehumanization. This suggests that sexual disorders are pervasively present in all sorts of disorders, and that it constitutes a paradigmatic case of wrongness, a distortion something that shows us what it is like to refuse the otherness of the material world and to try to keep it other and distant and controlled. It is a paradigm of "how not to make sense, in its retreat from the uncomfortable knowledge that I cannot make sense of myself without others, cannot speak until I've listened, cannot love myself without being the object of love or enjoy myself without being the cause of joy."

So we have arrived at the idea of joy at the end of liberation. Visions of abolition and revolution are longings of an eschatological nature, where various forms of salvation are attributed to the working-class and the colonized, as Revelation does to faithful Christians. Critiques of the former as an impure "social gospel" are again examples of an anti-materialist and disembodied cult of purity. In any case, while prophecies of blood and fire are common or even historically necessary in slave revolts and anti-colonial revolutions, the liberation dreams of the oppressed are much more: divine violence acts to negate, and makes way for New Jerusalems that critical theory and liberation theology has not dared to theorize or fantasize about. Considering the body's grace allows us to theorize liberation as an embodied future. Williams writes,

> All this means that in sexual relation I am no longer in charge of what I am. Any genuine experience of desire leaves me in something like this position: I cannot of myself satisfy my wants without distorting or trivialising them. But here we have a particularly intense case of the helplessness of the ego alone. For my body to be the cause of joy, the end of homecoming, for me, it must be there for someone else, be perceived, accepted, nurtured; and that means being given over to the creation of joy in that other, because only as directed to the enjoyment, the happiness, of the other does it become unreservedly lovable. To desire my joy is to desire the joy of the one I desire: my search for enjoyment through the bodily presence of another is a longing to be enjoyed in my body.[405]

The surrender of one's own joy, allowing it to be entirely dependent on the desire another, perfectly describes the liberative horizon. True love, real love, according to Fanon, requires the mobilization of psychological agencies liberated from unconscious tension.[406] The muscular tension held in Fanon's colonized subject is also a sexual tension, that finds release in liberation. In this eroticism is an anti-capitalist inefficiency, a decolonial inversion, and what Williams calls the inefficiencies of exposed spontaneity. While there is no guarantee in the encounter that joy will be, there will be an indication of where joy does instead lie. "I can only fully discover the body's grace in taking time, the time needed for a mutual recognition that my partner and I are not simply passive instruments to each other." In this sense sexual faithfulness is not an avoidance of risk, but "the creation of a context in which grace can abound because there is a commitment not to run away from the perception of another."[407] Yet, when the container for this context is heterosexual marriage as the absolute, exclusive ideal, it produces precisely the mythic violence that structures patriarchal society.

The politics of desire, as with the erotics of liberation, is an ambivalent space that is also bursting with potential. In a recent essay *Does Anyone Have the Right to Sex?* Amia Srinivasan reflects on the 2014 massacre by Elliot Rodger and the nature of desire. Rodger stabbed three Chinese male

students to death at his house, shot three White female students outside a sorority, killing two, and then injured fourteen others near the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara before killing himself. It was revealed later from Rodger manifesto that he belonged to online groups for 'incels,' involuntary celibates, which in practice describes sexless men who blame women for their condition. Srinivasan compares incels, who believed that they have the right to sex, with sex-positive third-wave feminists, in particular lesbian cis women who exclude trans women as viable sexual partners. This leads to the question of "how to dwell in the ambivalent place where we acknowledge that no one is obligated to desire anyone else, that no one has a right to be desired, but also that who is desired and who isn't."[408] Inherent in this is the recognition that sexual choices should be assumed to be free—until they are not—even whilst under patriarchy such choices are rarely free. In other words, even if attitudes such as Srinivasan lists as "the supreme fuckability of 'hot blonde sluts' and East Asian women, the comparative unfuckability of black women and Asian men, the fetishisation and fear of black male sexuality, the sexual disgust expressed towards disabled, trans and fat bodies" may be indeed desires of a free agent, they are also political facts. Sexual desires are subconsciously and dialectically formed by the political, economic, and racial structures that exert sexual control and discipline upon its subjects. That Rodger is not a specifically US phenomenon is underscored by his English and Malaysian parentage, and a more recent 2021 knife attack in Tokyo, injuring ten, by Yusuke Tsushima who, when questioned by the police said, "When I was in college, I was looked down on by women in my club activities. I also didn't get along with the women I met on dating sites, so I started wanting to kill happy women."[409] The question then becomes "whether there is a duty to transfigure, as best we can, our desires." In a nod towards the openness and promise of liberation, Srivinasa suggests that "desire can take us by surprise, leading us somewhere we hadn't imagined we would ever go, or towards someone we never thought we would lust after, or love. In the very best cases, the cases that perhaps ground our best hope, desire can cut against what politics has chosen for us, and choose for itself."

Returning to Williams, thinking about sexuality in its fullest implications involves entering into a sense of oneself beyond the customary imagined barrier between the "inner" and the "outer" the private and the shared, precisely the queering of boundaries in liberation. "We are led into the knowledge that our identity is being made in the relations of bodies, not by the private exercise of will or fantasy: we belong with and to each other, not to our "private" selves (as Paul said of mutual sexual commitment), and yet are not instruments for each other's gratification. And all this is not only potentially but actually a political knowledge, a knowledge of what ordered human community might be."[410] Sexual and political liberation are thus so intimately tied, that in order to properly understand liberation as a form of politics—liberation as structure—it is necessary to listen to what Foucault called the confessions of the flesh, how sexuality permeates socioeconomic and theological structures. With this in mind, Williams describes the challenge that same-sex love, and indeed any queer love to the meaning of desire itself.

> Same-sex love annoyingly poses the question of what the meaning of desire is in itself, not considered as instrumental to some other process (the peopling of the world); and this immediately brings us up against the possibility not only of pain and humiliation without any clear payoff', but - just as worryingly- of non-functional joy: or, to put it less starkly, joy whose material "production" is an embodied person aware of grace. It puts the question which is also raised for some kinds of moralist by the existence of the clitoris in women; something whose function is joy. lf the creator were quite so instrumentalist in "his" attitude to sexuality, these hints of prodigality and redundancy in the way the whole thing works might cause us to worry about whether he was, after all, in full rational control of it. But if God made us for joy... ?[411]

To rephrase this in the materialist framework of Marx, joy has no use-value in itself. One might argue its uses in social if not biological reproduction of the worker and its potential for commodification, but neither explains the meaning of joy itself. While Williams points out that "this sense of meaning for sexuality beyond biological reproduction is the one foremost in the biblical use of sexual metaphors for God's relation to humanity," and moreover "when looking for a language that will be resourceful enough to speak of the complex and costly faithfulness between God and God's people, what several of the biblical writers turn to is sexuality understood very much in terms of the process of 'entering the body's grace'," it is not a capitulation of the body in favour of the soul.[412] On the contrary, it is the sexual joy—the erotic—that has no recourse to reproduction that offers itself as the paradigm of liberation, the political potential for human community.

Similarly, Alexandra Kollontai describes "winged Eros" as that whose love is "woven of delicate strands of every kind of emotion" and attends a communist society built on the principle of comradeship and solidarity. Winged Eros triumphs over wingless Eros, the unadorned sexual drive that is easily aroused and soon spent, and among other things, "rests on an inequality of rights in relationships between the sexes, on the dependence of the woman on the man and on male complacency and insensitivity. which undoubtedly hinder the development of comradely feelings."[413] The bourgeois system such a division of the inner emotional world, together with the institution of property such as Mosaic and Deuteronomic law, teach that love is linked with property. "Bourgeois ideology has insisted that love, mutual love, gives the right to the absolute and indivisible possession of the beloved person. Such exclusiveness was the natural consequence of the established form of pair marriage and of the ideal of "all-embracing love" between husband and wife."[414] This wingless Eros describes the efficient, functional, teleological sex that contradicts the useless joy of entering the body's grace. In Kollontai's new and collective society, where interpersonal relations develop against a background of joyful unity and comradeship, Eros will "occupy an honourable place as an emotional experience multiplying human happiness. What will be the nature of this transformed Eros? Not even the boldest fantasy is capable of providing the answer to this question. But one thing is clear: the stronger the intellectual and emotional bonds of the new humanity, the less the room for love in the present sense of the word."[415]

The body's grace, borne on winged Eros, thus makes for the real heterotopic site of liberation, in which the dreams and discontents of Asian America may be inscribed: landless and racially dislocated aliens, called from subjectlessness to nothingness, to betray race and class for the erotic joy and risk of collective liberation. The queer futurity that Asian American theology points to is a boundless one, in the loosing of chains of all binaries that fix both oppress and oppressor in dialectic opposition, a multiverse of free responses and free associations, love without end. In assessing the legacy of John Brown for the twentieth century, W.E.B. Du Bois pointed to the backward racial progress caused by the advent of social Darwinism, at odds with Martin King Jr.'s famous understanding of the moral arc of the universe, which bent towards justice. The lesson of John Brown echoes every revolutionary that through the raising of consciousness become people of history. "The cost of liberty is less than the price of repression, even though that cost be blood. Freedom of development and equality of opportunity is the demand of Darwinism, and this calls for the abolition of hard and fast lines between races, just as it called for the breaking down of barriers between classes." The cost of liberty is thus a "decreasing cost, while the cost of repression ever tends to increase to the danger point of war and revolution. Revolution is not a test of capacity; it is always a loss and a lowering of ideals. But if it is a true revolution it repays all losses and results in the uplift of the human race."[416]

[1] Emily Callaci, "On Acknowledgments," *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 1 (February 1, 2020): 126–31, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz938.
[2] Clifford Geertz, "Deep Hanging Out," accessed January 29, 2022, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1998/10/22/deep-hanging-out/.
[3] {Citation}
[4] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 2002), 15.
[5] I use the spelling "America" here rather reluctantly throughout the book. It conflates the settler colonial state with the geological formation that Whites call the Americas, and which some of its Indigenous people call Turtle Island. I would have preferred to use the outdated "Amerika," used for example in J. Sakai's *Settlers: Mythology of the White Proletariat*. The more direct reference to the White supremacy embedded in the formation of the US can be seen in the once popular term "Amerikkka." Noam Chomsky had once suggested that "American" is used because United States of America is not easily made into an adjective. This may be a linguistic accident, but it is important to attend to semantics as we will also consider "Asia," and the overrepresentation of the Northeast Asian and Indian in the Western imagination.
[6] The capitalization of "White" in this text may appear disconcerting to some, and is certainly controversial. While this often signals notions related to White power, and some employ the lower case "white" as a way of taking this power away. In contrast to this, I choose to use the capitalized form in this book so as to denaturalize Whiteness and remind the reader of the social construction of Whiteness. See for example Allen, Theodore W. *The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control*. London, 1994.
[7] Barger, Lilian Calles. *The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
[8] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* (London: Routledge, 2001), 25.
[9] Althaus-Reid, 27.
[10] Althaus-Reid, 33.
[11] I use the term refugee in a sense broader than say, that of the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHCR), and instead as a particular kind of exile, so as to include asylum seekers, undocumented persons, and migrants who have unwillingly left their home countries. In particular, they may be on either side of the state border of the country which they seek refuge in.
[12] Corcoran, Patricia L., et al. "An Anthropogenic Marker Horizon in the Future Rock Record." *GSA Today*, June 2014, pp. 4–8. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.1130/GSAT-G198A.1.
[13] Melanie Bergmann et al., "White and Wonderful? Microplastics Prevail in Snow from the Alps to the Arctic," *Science Advances* 5, no. 8 (August 1, 2019): eaax1157, https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aax1157; Antonio Ragusa et al., "Plasticenta: First Evidence of Microplastics in Human Placenta," *Environment International* 146 (January 1, 2021): 106274, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2020.106274.
[14] Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 89.
[15] David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2019).
[16] Another possible formation is Third World liberation theology, following historian Gary Okihiro's *Third World Studies: Theorising Liberation,* but to the uninitiated the term "Third World" seem an anachronism, obscuring more than it enlightens. Admittedly, "Asian American" is also subject to this charge, though arguably to a lesser degree.
[17] The terms Global South and North perhaps obscure more than they illuminate, if viewed primarily as geographical designations. Especially as I will consider the flows of migration and transnationality whereby South and North are mutually constituted.
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[19] Kim, Helen Jin, Timothy Tseng, and David K. Yoo. "Asian American Religious History." *The Oxford Handbook of Asian American History* (2016): 362. "Indeed, in charting the intellectual roots of the subfield of Asian American religions, at least one significant stream can be traced to the development of Asian American theologies of liberation, which spawned a series of networks developed for Asian American ministers and scholars." The authors point to PACTS, founded in 1972 by Lloyd Wake and Roy Sano; the Pacific Asian North American Asian Women in Theology and Ministry (PANAAWTM), founded in 1984 by Kwok Pui-Lan and Letty Russell; and the Institute for Leadership Development and Study of Pacific and Asian North American religion (PANA Institute), began in 2000 by Fumitaka Matsuoka.
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[22] I use the suffix "e" here as a nod towards the current trend within Spanish speaking LGBTQ+ communities using the suffix such as in "Latine" as a gender-neutral alternative to "Latinx" commonly used in English speaking communities. While the use of "Latinx" has grown mainstream in the last decade, its has gained little popularity within Spanish-speaking populations itself, in part due to its difficulty in pronunciation and lack of generalizability to other words such as "amigxs" and so on, whereas the suffix "e" has allowed for smoother linguistics transitions such as "amiges" and the gender-neutral third-person pronoun "elle" interpolating the masculine "el" and feminine "ella."
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[35] Gloria Anzaldúa, Norma Cantú, and Aída Hurtado, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012).
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[37] Patrick Wolfe. Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event. Cassell, 1999. 2.
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[41] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 131.
[42] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 199.
[43] Fanon, 205.
[44] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: 50th Anniversary Edition*, Anniversary edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2020), 40.
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