

**Hybridity:
Retrieving the Real-life Messiness Erased by a Reified Concept**

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Within historic Japanese American churches, few members would speak in theoretical terms about how they belong to multiple cultures and traditions. However, there is not a single person who does not know from the inside the discomfiting, challenging, creative nature of having to negotiate multiple-belonging and being caught in-between. As a practical theologian, I am concerned with how individuals in my community are formed by and enact improvised mixtures of Japanese, American, and other cultural and religious traditions, narratives, blood lines, and identities. All along the way and at every moment, people perform *being* Japanese, American, and Christian—all of which is in constant flux.

In the community in which I grew up, people have fashioned creative rituals that draw upon multiple cultures and religious heritages, while helping them to navigate communal memories and experiences of marginalization, dislocation, as well as hope. In my hometown of Sacramento, California, Japanese Americans participate in a community-wide interreligious service to observe Memorial Day at a local cemetery, a tradition that has been practiced since 1972.¹ While Memorial Day commemorates those who have given their lives to serve the United States, this is a Japanese American service to honor members of the community who have passed away, especially the *issei* (first generation) and the veterans who served while their families were interned in World War II.² Participants include Christians, Buddhists, those belonging to “new religions,” and members of Japanese American civic organizations.³ They honor the dead with either incense or flowers, in Buddhist and Christian tradition respectively. Historically local Boy Scouts and Nisei Veterans of Foreign Wars (second generation Japanese American members of VFW) participate, for example, by presenting the American flag or laying a wreath.

In 1970, members of Parkview Presbyterian Church in Sacramento observed Thanksgiving in a somewhat unusual way under the pastoral leadership of Heihachiro Takarabe.⁴ At that moment in the church’s and in the wider community’s history, many of the *issei* were passing away, which created a sense of urgency to recognize their contributions while some remained. Rather than

¹ Historically Japanese American interfaith observances of Memorial Day have been held in other cities in California such as Fresno, Selma, and San Francisco. (email from Gary Barbaree [pastor of the Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church from 1985 to 1991] to author, October 25, 2015).

² Nakamaki describes the service as “Christian worship” but I believe this is misnomer because the service has always included various religious groups representing Buddhism, Christianity and “new religions.” Hirochika Nakamaki, “The History of Japanese Christian Churches and the Consciousness of Japanese Christians in Sacramento,” in *Japanese Religions in California: A Report on Research within and without the Japanese-American Community*, ed. K. Yanagawa (Tokyo: University of Tokyo, 1983), 266. The 2015 program was sponsored by the Sacramento Japanese American Citizens League, a civic organization. “Forty-third Annual Inter-religious Memorial Service,” program bulletin.

³ In 2015, religious communities included the Buddhist Church of Sacramento, the Gedatsu Church, the Nichiren Buddhist Church, the Northern California Koyasan Temple, Parkview Presbyterian Church, Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church, Tenrikyo Sacramento Church, Tenrikyo Northern California Church, and the Tenrikyo High Sacramento Church. “Forty-third Annual Inter-religious Memorial Service,” program bulletin)

⁴ Nakamaki 1983, 277-8.

honoring the Mayflower pilgrims and a history of American colonialism, this Japanese American church held a dinner accompanied by a sermon and prayer to celebrate the *issei* who came from Japan to America. Participants honored the courage, hope, and faith of the first generation pioneers who faced racism, poverty, and unlawful internment during World War II.⁵ It was an opportunity for children and grandchildren of the *issei* to express gratitude for the foundation they built in America.

These Japanese American faith communities created or adopted practices that were neither solely Japanese nor exclusively American nor were they simply following traditions that most white religious or civic organizations practice. In the first example, honoring the ancestors is an ancient Japanese tradition that takes on new meaning when performed in the context of a patriotic American holiday, expressing a confounding mix of American civil religion, Japanese culture, Japanese American history, and multiple religious traditions. Japanese Americans are obliged to what do what “good Americans” do on Memorial Day which is to mourn the war dead. However, Japanese Americans cannot be true to the complexity of who they are and follow what members of the dominant group practice, so they must compromise. They adopt the form of this patriotic American holiday, but implicitly (and for most unconsciously) they also witness to historic communal injuries and loss that have affected all Japanese Americans—none of which is recognized by the wider culture and therefore remains latent.⁶ Their gathering across religious differences speaks to the need to bear public witness to the truth of what the community knows about hardship, prejudice, hope, courage, and loss—less in words than in symbolic actions and presence.

In the second example, a Japanese American church, for all intents and purposes, *reinvented* Thanksgiving, while still forming people in the practice of gratitude. Like Memorial Day, Thanksgiving provided an opportunity to participate in feeling American, yet to observe the holiday like white Americans (honoring the colonizers) would mean erasing the community’s memory and experiences of oppression and hope, which Japanese Americans cannot do. In this Japanese American church ritual, the faithful re-imagined their forefathers and mothers (their “pilgrims”) in more culturally appropriate ways that wrested from the dominant culture the power to define who/what is important. Both Japanese American holiday rituals suggest the uniqueness and complexity of lived experiences negotiating multiplicity, marginalization, and power, which Asian American theologians often theorize as “hybridity.”

This review essay explores some of the limitations of the ways in which theorists employ the notion of hybridity in Asian American theological discourse. Of course, I am not alone in expressing concern about the concept of hybridity.⁷ However, as a practical theologian, I not only focus on the *meanings* of the term but also the uses of the term as a *practice*. I see a paradox in the ways in which the concept “hybridity” has come to be used: In *highlighting commonalities* between and among diverse Asian American experiences (“we are all hybrid”) as potential sources of strength, the need to see the proverbial glass half full rather than half empty simultaneously *obscures the particularity, messiness, and pain* of lived experiences of negotiating multiplicity, marginalization, and power. The historic Japanese American rituals I described are dense in

⁵ Nakamaki 1983, 277-8. Heihachiro Takarabe, phone conversation with author, March 11, 2016.

⁶ My notion of “historic communal injuries” is influenced by Sharon Thornton’s references to “historical injuries” or “historically imposed injuries” in Sharon G. Thornton, *Broken Yet Beloved: A Pastoral Theology of the Cross* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2002).

⁷ For example, Rey Chow criticizes postmodern discourse about hybridity for “flattening out past injustices.” Rey Chow, *Ethics After Idealism: Theory, Culture, Ethnicity, Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 156.

meaning because they represent intersecting cultural and theological worlds that can neither be reduced to any theorizing nor easily transferred to another Asian American context. I bring to this particular discussion a healthy skepticism of how this significant concept is commonly discussed and invoked, recognizing that theories of hybridity have been forged, tempered, and honed within and for the academic context in which Asian American theologians work. Any theorizing about hybridity takes place in a culture of power and privilege that regrettably shapes how Asian Americans develop, appropriate, and wield theoretical tools.⁸ In order to succeed, Asian American colleagues make more compromises in following practices of the academy than we can allow ourselves to realize. In this essay, I will also examine how the culture of the academy has played a pivotal and less than salutary role in misshaping the meanings and uses of hybridity.

Shifting from Mother Tongues to Trade Language

One might wonder how and why Asian American theological discourse about hybridity shifts attention away from the lived rawness of it in the context of domination. In the Japanese American holiday rituals I described, one hears the haunting cries, poignant murmurs, and earnest longing of the living and the dead caught between cultures, countries, traditions, and histories, as they publicly perform strength, creativity, and hope. In theorizing such experiences in terms of hybridity, the powerful edge of danger in dangerous memories is lost and made over into something more clinical and “objective.” Although Asian American theologies are known for their contextual nature, colleagues often rush to theory and abstraction, which tends to boil away the visceral, particular details to create a solid, perhaps more manageable mass.

American theorists in psychotherapy and theology, Alvin Dueck and Kevin Reimer help me to understand that a shift happens when many Asian American theologians invoke the notion of hybridity in discourse, which unintentionally distances them from lived experiences.⁹ Before we (Asian American theorists) are able to catch ourselves in the act, we often allow the assumptions and commitments of the academy to dominate (though never entirely) how we think and write. We easily default to our training in Western cultural assumptions about and practices of research, even if we are committed to thinking and writing from the margins.¹⁰

Dueck and Reimer’s contribution comes from an unexpected professional setting as they discuss the implications of Christians providing psychotherapeutic care in a multicultural world. Though they do not use the concept “hybridity,” they do, in fact, discuss recent immigrants to the United States—people who live within and between multiple cultures and thereby pose serious challenges for practitioners of psychotherapy. Unfortunately, many if not most clinicians are generally not equipped to enter into the client’s theologically varied and culturally dense world.

⁸ In my current book project, whose working title is *Taking on Practical Theology: The Idolization of Context and the Hope of Community*, I take a similar approach, exploring critically how practical theologians use the term *context* in ways that reflect the assumptive world of the dominant culture.

⁹ Alvin C. Dueck and Kevin S. Reimer, *A Peaceable Psychology: Christian Therapy in a World of Many Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009). I am indebted to Chris Schlauch for introducing me to Dueck and Reimer’s work.

¹⁰ If, as I have suggested, the various meanings and uses of the concept of hybridity negotiate the tension of general and particular, of second-order comparative abstraction and first-order narrative expression and, in addition, negotiate the tension between (dominant and subdominant, oppressed, marginalized cultures), then it is not surprising to note that Asian American theologians have tended to express the assumptions and values of the dominant Western culture in the academy, thinking and speaking in supposedly “objective,” “neutral” terms of “universals” more than “subjective” terms, at the expense of the particular lived experiences of plural Asian American experiences.

Not only is the client's world so radically different from their own, the therapists are often preoccupied with dispensing the "objective" knowledge in which they are trained. Dueck and Reimer present a case study of Juanita, a Pentecostal refugee woman from Guatemala, who receives care from "Dr. Davidson," a fictitious, wealthy, white clinician trained at American research university.

Juanita understands and expresses her experience most easily in what Dueck and Reimer call her "mother tongue"—a term that encompasses not simply Spanish but even more especially the particular languages and practices through which Juanita constructs the world she inhabits. Dueck and Reimer describe a person's "mother tongue" as "local, ethnically freighted, emotionally laden, and capable of poetic nuance."¹¹ In Juanita's case, in order to receive care, she must manage to think in her mother tongue(s) (and perhaps English) and speak whatever English she knows. For the clinician's part, Davidson listens, interprets, and speaks through the filters of his own mother tongue(s) and multiple "trade languages." Dueck and Reimer describe "trade language" as "distant, utilitarian, contractual, and general."¹² Trade languages serve as the currency of the academy. Fluency and overconfidence in trade language reinforce the felt rightness of translating any mother tongue into terms that Davidson takes to be universal, objective, and even superior. By responding selectively to what Juanita says, the clinician slowly but surely teaches Juanita to abandon her mother tongue(s) as much as she is able and to speak in languages that Davidson understands, using words and concepts that *he* recognizes.¹³ However, he does not realize—and I believe very few people realize—what violence is done in allowing father trade languages to override mother tongues.

The shift from living experiences in mother tongues to having to convey those experiences in trade languages is a move from particularity to abstraction (and sometimes back again), from living experience from the inside to taking an outside point of view. This transition helps to explain how and why theorizing about experience evaporates the particularities, differences, and nuances of lived experiences. At that same time, it cleanses experience of impurities, capturing the outlines of what happened while at the same time erasing the (often painful) affect embedded in experience. A skeptic might appropriately argue that this is the nature of theorizing in general, but I agree with Dueck and Reimer that the cost of privileging trade language(s) is rarely recognized. Much is lost in the negotiation of languages and clash of hybridities both within the research subject and the theorist as well as between them.

Unfortunately, using the term "hybridity" often becomes an exercise in trade language. Because trade languages lend themselves to objectivism, the researcher is required to remove herself from her own lived experiences of hybridity to take a perspective that is also at a distance from the subject's experience of hybridity. The result is that the theoretical account is impoverished—often more reflective of the academic world than the real one.

¹¹ Dueck and Reimer, *A Peaceable Psychology*, 103.

¹² Dueck and Reimer, *A Peaceable Psychology*, 103.

¹³ I discuss this situation in terms of ventriloquism, which serves as a haunting metaphor for the ways in which practical theologians and other academics too often conduct research. Subjects of research are often unwittingly treated as dummies, as researchers use subjects for their own purposes without reflecting critically on the ethics of representation. Courtney T. Goto, "Experiencing Oppression: Ventriloquism and Epistemic Violence in Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 21, no. 2 (2017): 175-193. This discussion on hybridity extends my reflections on epistemic violence by illustrating the ease with which scholars of color, who have internalized colonialism, are forced to "dumbify" themselves by privileging trade language.

Tracing the Genealogy of an Elusive Concept

Hybridity is a concept that is frequently used in the trade languages of Asian American theologies (and Asian American studies more broadly), but its meaning is not easily deduced because it has multiple meanings and uses. Part of the problem is that “hybridity” belongs to a network of terms in Asian American theology that is often used to describe some of the same territory. Frank Yamada and Jonathan Tan, for example, associate hybridity with *heterogeneity*.¹⁴ Kwok Pui Lan links hybridity with *interstitial integrity*. Wonhee Anne Joh argues for the close relationship between hybridity, *mimicry*, and *interstitial integrity*.¹⁵ Simply stated, hybridity is a moving target, taking on the shades of particular terms with which it is grouped. These clusters indicate that *we should be cautious about treating hybridity as a stand-alone-term that designates anything, sufficiently well, on its own.*

My approach to examining the reification of the concept “hybridity” is to trace some of its uses and to visualize part of its genealogy within Asian American theology, recognizing that any review essay captures only a segment of a larger family tree of scholarly ideas.¹⁶ I begin with the work of two sources commonly cited in Asian American theology—Homi Bhabha and Lisa Lowe.¹⁷ They are by no means the only theorists cited in discussions of hybridity in Asian American theology, but their ideas are well known.¹⁸

In his classic essay “Signs Taken for Wonders,” examining hybridity in relation to colonialism, Bhabha argues that domination happens through a process of colonialists’ asserting—in myriad insidious cultural ways—rules that dictate what is more pure and what is less, what is closer to the “mother culture” and what is a “double.”¹⁹ The process of “splitting” off from the original or “doubling” is what Bhabha calls “disavowal,” “where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation, a hybrid.”²⁰ Bhabha writes, “Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the

¹⁴ Frank M. Yamada, “Constructing Hybridity and Heterogeneity: Asian American Biblical Interpretation from a Third-Generation Perspective,” in *Ways of being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2006), 164-177; Jonathan Y. Tan, “From Classical Tradition to Remix *Traditioning*: Revisioning Asian American Theologies for the 21st Century,” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 3, no. 2.3 (January, 2012), 1-22.

¹⁵ Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 53-66.

¹⁶ In my words, reification is the process of making an entity (in this case, hybridity) a thing in itself, as if it gave birth to itself and has a life of its own, while disavowing responsibility for creating or maintaining its power. “Hybridity” has been reified in the sense that Asian American theologians (and others) often evoke the term without critically examining the constructed nature of the concept, which makes theorists liable not to see how their use reflects their priorities, assumptions, and defenses. For more on the history of the concept of reification, see Peter Berger and Stanley Pullberg, “Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness,” *History and Theory* 4, no. 2 (1965), 196-211; Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, “Rethinking Reification,” *Theory and Society* 16, no. 2 (1987), 263-293.

¹⁷ Below I explore multiple examples of Asian American theologians who cite either or both Bhabha and/or Lowe.

¹⁸ Some Asian American theologians invoke other theorists in their discussions of hybridity. For example, Mai Anh Le Tran uses a Bhaktinian notion of “organic hybridity.” Mai-Anh Le Tran, “Narrating Lives, Narrating Faith: ‘Organic Hybridity’ for Contemporary Christian Religious Education,” *Religious Education* 105, no. 2 (3, 2010), 188-203.

¹⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 159.

²⁰ Bhabha, *Location*, 159. He also discusses “doubling” in terms of “mimicry.”

production of discriminatory identities that secure the ‘pure’ and original identity of authority.)”²¹ Colonial power is not simply an all-powerful oppressive force. Paradoxically, its contradictory nature also produces the potential for its own dismantling. By being spin-offs, hybrids are considered inferior, says Bhabha, but at the same time because they are necessary for propping up colonial claims to superiority, hybrids have their own subversive power by not exactly doubling the colonials.²²

In a later essay “Commitment to Theory,” Bhabha expands his discussion of hybridity to reflect on political discourse, continuing to address resistance and social transformation. In this essay, he conceives of hybridity as characteristic of the space of discourse, where the object under investigation is constructed in a tensive “negotiation”²³ of competing perspectives, knowledges, and commitments. The “political object” that is created on an ongoing basis is “*neither the one nor the other*,” persistently defying easy polarities or binaries that might impose unity.²⁴ The political object (represented by an idea or concept) is not simply a more evolved iteration of a prior theory, but rather engagement with a political object contributes to its continuous, contested creation that challenges and forms the perceptions of theorists. Political change happens at what Bhabha calls “hybrid moments,”²⁵ when theorists are forced to think beyond simple or reductive categories and explanations.²⁶ It is self-evident from this brief review that the concept “hybridity” is neither simple nor straightforward. More particularly, it does not refer simply and solely to the convergence and mixture between or among differing racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious communities and traditions. Rather, the concept “hybridity” refers to negotiating multiplicity, marginalization, and power in the context of domination.

A second theorist whose work is commonly cited in discussions of hybridity is Lowe. In her seminal work, *Immigrant Acts: Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996), Lowe traces the “genealogy of Asian immigrants as a genealogy of American citizenship,” discussing a history of

²¹ Bhabha, *Location*, 159.

²² An illuminating example that Bhabha gives is the “the English book,” for example, “the Bible translated into Hindi, propagated by the Dutch or native catechists.” Bhabha, *Location*, 154. From the perspective of colonizers, a Hindi bible is a mutation or a hybrid, something translated from the West. In this sense, a Hindi bible is neither fully Western nor fully Indian but a mixture of both. (Bhabha gives this example in passing, but I will elaborate on what I think he is trying to argue.) On the surface, a Hindi bible asserts the dominance of the missionaries who brought Christianity to India who came to “save” the “natives.” However, no translation into a native language is perfect. There are nuances, meanings, and tones that are both lost in translation, and more importantly, *added* in translation, no doubt creating more than the missionaries or Indian translators assumed. One can imagine that a Hindi bible has the potential to be used much in the same way that it has been used in Latin America, which is in service of liberation theology. A hybrid bible can inspire resistance to colonial power as readers leverage the text’s fluidity, its difference, and its refusal to be fixed by the language of colonizers. By extension, Bhabha uses the same analogy of the “English bible” (or a Hindi bible in this case) to identify hybrid forms everywhere, for example “hybrid time” (Bhabha, *Location*, 183), “hybrid names” (Bhabha, *Location*, 312), or “hybrid territory” (Bhabha, *Location*, 365. In a similar sense, he also uses “hybrid sites” on 37 and “hybrid location” on 248.)

²³ Bhabha, *Location*, 37.

²⁴ Bhabha, *Location*, 37.

²⁵ Bhabha, *Location*, 41.

²⁶ One such hybrid moment is the surprisingly complex emergence of women’s response to the miner’s strike of 1984-5 in Great Britain. No explanation of their unprecedented participation could be reduced to class struggle or feminist politics, but rather what they were doing was related to both but could not be fully explained by either. Bhabha, *Location*, 40-41. Bhabha writes, “...[T]he transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One* (unitary working class) *nor the Other* (politics of gender) *but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both.” Bhabha, *Location*, 41.

exclusion and degrees of disenfranchisement that Asians have suffered.²⁷ She is well known for her tripartite association of “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity.”²⁸ For her, hybridity (in conjunction with heterogeneity and multiplicity) is a comparative term, deriving meaning in opposition to Orientalist essentialism, whose adherents seek the “essence” of culture. She writes, “By ‘hybridity’ I refer to the formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations . . . Hybridity, in this sense, does not suggest the assimilation of Asian or immigrant practices to dominant forms but instead marks the history of survival within relationships of unequal power and domination.”²⁹

Lowe understands hybridity as an active, formative process rooted in empire that results in cultural objects and practices that reflect histories of unequal power. In Lowe’s materialist reading, histories of Asian immigrant suffering mark people, creating “hybrid cultural identities” that reflect their “movement between sites and the strategic occupation of heterogeneous and conflicting positions.”³⁰ She emphasizes the fluid, contested, emerging nature of Asian American culture, yet she also recognizes the need for “strategic essentialism” in the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.³¹ It is self-evident from this brief review that the concept “hybridity” does not and cannot be used to identify a circumscribed event or isolated factor but rather points to a project of survival, of coping with suffering in the midst of exclusion and disenfranchisement.

In our eagerness to appropriate their notions of hybridity, theorists often overlook some key issues. First, some colleagues often discuss either Bhabha or Lowe and sometimes both, but rarely do they reflect on the differences between their understandings of hybridity. Comparing their work reveals that hybridity has different referents. Too often authors collapse the varieties of the meanings and uses of the concept. Second, it is easy to forget Bhabha and Lowe’s respective hard labor to gain theoretical perspective on lived experiences of what they came to describe as “hybridity”—both of which are significantly different from one another. Bhabha’s discussions of hybridity are rooted in his experiences of the brutal colonialism of British India. Living in quite a different context, Lowe retrieves the experience of hybridity in the everyday lives of Asian Americans caught between cultures, their stories expressed in literature and film. In discussing works such as Louis Chu’s *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, Amy Tan’s *Joy Luck Club*, and Peter Wang’s film *A Great Wall* (1985), Lowe examines the clash of everyday cultural practices, the intermingling of cultures in hybrid spaces, the blurring of geographic boundaries, and the constant crossing of borders. In both cases, Bhabha and Lowe knew these experiences in mother tongues *before* they named it with the concept “hybridity” and before it was appropriated by various trade languages. They develop their respective notions of hybridity to open up complex, contested, painful, lived experiences of being in-between and belonging to multiple cultures. Ironically and regrettably, all we tend to remember in citing their work is the trade language they lend us.³²

²⁷ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), ix. Taking a materialist approach to her subject, she combines Asian American cultural studies, ethnic studies, critical race theory, Marxist studies, and implicitly postcolonial studies (*ibid.*, x).

²⁸ Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 60-83.

²⁹ Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 67.

³⁰ Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 82.

³¹ Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 82.

³² If we compare Bhabha and Lowe’s discussions of hybridity, we see different uses, approaches to, and shades of meaning for the concept. Lowe is interested in discussing hybridity in terms of identity in order to explain the ambiguous, fluid, precarious nature of being Asian American. In contrast, Bhabha is more focused on elucidating arguments about social and political transformation, especially in the light of colonialism. A point of contact between Bhabha and Lowe is this: Lowe is wary of hybridities being appropriated and commodified by commercial

Using the Notion of Hybridity in the Politics of Knowledge Production

The respective work of Bhabha and Lowe continues to be cited because they help us to engage in the political work of knowledge production. As minoritized scholars, Asian American theologians must legitimate what we know to colleagues with greater social power by discussing what is objectively true and therefore in some sense universal about Asian American experiences (ostensibly hybridity being one of them). We are expected to explain our uniqueness as Asian Americans, which confirms our otherness to those in the dominant group.³³ Forced to conform to what is expected of us in order to be successful in the academy, many colleagues have adopted Bhabha and Lowe's respective approaches to hybridity and extended their trajectories to conceptualize our own diverse, particular experiences of hybridity and symbolize them for ourselves and for others. However, so invested in and adept are we at transacting scholarship according to the culture and assumptions of the academy, we fail to realize that the concept "hybridity" (a seemingly objective or neutral term) actually erases uniqueness of lived experiences, especially expunging lived experiences of suffering in contexts of domination, exclusion, and disenfranchisement. It hides from view the harm done (and the responsibility for that harm), and the harm lived (and the summons to address it). A lack of critical self-awareness about how we use the term puts us at risk for continuing to inflict harm and be harmed by complicity. Without paying attention to the context of knowledge production, the reasons that we borrow from Bhabha and Lowe's work on hybridity seem straightforward.

One reason Asian American theologians draw from Bhabha's work is that it provides support for theologians' claims that there are advantages to being hybrid.³⁴ No doubt many of us are perhaps more alert not to what helps but to what hurts—that is, the painful challenges of being hybrid people, for example, coping with "holy insecurity"³⁵ (in the words of Fumitaka Matsuoka), never feeling at home in our homeland (also Matsuoka³⁶), or feeling "betwixt-and-between"³⁷ (as Peter Phan says.) Bhabha himself is acutely aware that hybridity arises from situations of unequal power, at least in the context of colonialism. However, he also recognizes that the dynamics of hybridity can catalyze social change and transformation. Because we have needed to find hope in being hybrid, some Asian American theologians have found inspiration in Bhabha's approach. For

interests, yet paradoxically also being (re)created to resist such forces. Lowe's recognition of the power of hybridity to oppose control resonates with the subversive potential that Bhabha sees in hybridity.

³³ Paradoxically, even as we are expected to explain our uniqueness as Asian Americans, we are expected to do so in ways that members of the dominant group can appreciate and understand. I am influenced here by Rey Chow's work on "coercive mimeticism." Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). For of my reflections see Courtney T. Goto, "Writing in Compliance with the Racialized 'Zoo' of the Academy," in *Conundrums in Practical Theology*, eds. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Joyce Ann Mercer (Leiden: Brill, 2016b).

³⁴ Postcolonial theologian Susan Abraham might not identify herself as Asian American. However, she also recognizes the creativity of hybridity, extending the Bhabha's discussion. See Susan Abraham, "What does Mumbai have to do with Rome? Postcolonial Perspectives on Globalization and Theology," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 378.

³⁵ Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1995), 53-84.

³⁶ Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Learning to Speak a New Tongue: Imagining a Way that Holds People Together--an Asian American Conversation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 6.

³⁷ Peter C. Phan, *Betwixt and between: Doing Theology with Memory and Imagination*, eds. Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 113-133.

example, Joh, who is influenced by his discussions of hybridity and mimicry, argues that experiences of hybridity along with mimicry equip the colonized (including Asian Americans) to be subversive. She writes, "Hybridity works to disturb the questions of the images and presences of authority."³⁸ Feminist postcolonial ethicist, K. Christine Pae and her colleague James W. McCarty III not only associate being hybrid with Asian American social identities, which is more along the lines of Lowe, they also claim that "it [hybridity] creates particular moral agents who can claim a particular form of political power within the U.S. political context."³⁹ Though they do not cite Bhabha, this latter statement about the upside of being hybrid echoes part of his argument.⁴⁰ Pae and McCarty argue that being a mix of cultural, racial, and political perspectives assists Asian Americans to discern oppression in its multiple guises, that is, as it affects for example race, gender, class and the environment.⁴¹ In other words, Pae and McCarty claim that being hybrid prepares Asian Americans to transform society. Arguing for the benefits of being hybrid, we can temper the pain and ambiguity being hybrid by reframing our experiences in a more positive light.⁴²

Asian American theologians also draw on Lowe's work on hybridity for a different purpose, namely, that of countering essentialized notions of what is Asian American. Extending the trajectory of her work, Jonathan Tan explains the trend among Asian American theologians to think critically about hybridity. He argues that while the first generation of Asian American theologians focused on issues of marginality and liminality, they unwittingly "idealized and essentialized biological notions of what constituted 'Asian' and 'American.'"⁴³ At the time, they were primarily responding to the white ethnocentrism of theology, church structures practices, and ecclesial thinking.⁴⁴ However, since the 1980s Asian American theologians have explored more seriously the variability, plurality, and tensions within Asian American theologies, identities, and experiences.⁴⁵

The notion of hybridity, especially in the way that Lowe uses it, has been an incisive way to complexify notions of Asian American identity. Asian American theologians such as Joh,⁴⁶ Matsuoka,⁴⁷ and Yamada⁴⁸ build on Lowe's notion of hybridity as a state of being fluid and multiple. Hybridity as a comparative term helps us to distinguish ourselves from what we are not, shrugging off problematic, essentialized, or monolithic assumptions about Asian Americans. Defining ourselves *via negativa* has been an important strategy, exercising the right to discern and

³⁸ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 54.

³⁹ K. Christine Pae and James W. McCarty III, "The Hybridized Public Sphere: Asian American Christian Ethics, Social Justice, and Public Discourse," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 32, no. 1 (Spring/Summer, 2012): 104.

⁴⁰ Pae and McCarty cite Kwok Pui Lan's discussion in *Postcolonial Imagination*, which cites Bhabha.

⁴¹ Pae and McCarty, "Hybridized Public Sphere," 104.

⁴² For another example of affirming hybridity as common experience to build upon, see HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Joanne Doi, "Intercultural Threads of Hybridity and Threshold Spaces of Learning," *Religious Education* 107, no. 3 (2012): 262-275. Kim-Cragg and Doi are Asian North American theologians.

⁴³ Tan, "Retraditioning," 5.

⁴⁴ Tan, "Retraditioning," 5-6.

⁴⁵ Tan, "Retraditioning," 6.

⁴⁶ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 52.

⁴⁷ Matsuoka, *Learning to Speak*, 12.

⁴⁸ Yamada, "Constructing Hybridity and Heterogeneity," 170, 173. Yamada is also guided by Bhabha's notion of hybridity as he discusses Asian Americans "re-present imposed constructs of Asian-ness and American-ness in such a way that renders the authority of the dominant culture's perception problematic" (171).

name our own experiences. In a Loweian sense, hybridity is often used as descriptor to characterize Asian American identities and social locations.

In sum, borrowing from either or both Bhabha and/or Lowe, Asian American theologians tend to use the concept of hybridity in these two ways⁴⁹—to make a case for the subversive, creative upside of being hybrid and/or to counter tendencies toward essentializing what it is “Asian American.” Using the concept of hybridity helps us to open up certain aspects of Asian American experiences to greater view, particularly the fragmented, ambiguous, fluid, contradictory nature of being Asian American.

Even when we seek to shed light on Asian American faith communities by appropriating one or another notion of hybridity, we cannot overlook the socio-political setting in which we produce knowledge. Asian American theological discourse takes place in the academy, where we must use “the master’s tools.”⁵⁰ As much as we intend be *masters* of the master’s tools, we have also been shaped by the institutional cultures of which we are a part. As a result, institutional cultures of power and privilege tend to affect how we research, theorize, and present findings whether we know it or not, even when we are discussing something as potentially subversive as the notion of hybridity. Perhaps we mistakenly expect that the increasingly common meanings and uses of the concept of hybridity will express the complex and ambiguous processes to which it originally was designed to capture. *Though we speak from places of suffering, pain, and conflict in being hybrid ourselves, we (ironically) recast what we have lived as an abstraction that ostensibly reveals something “essential” and “universal,” even though the meaning of the term contradicts essentialism and universalism.*⁵¹

Dueck and Reimer help me to understand that the privileging of trade languages over mother tongues is embedded in institutional cultures of western research universities. Davidson has incentive to interpret Juanita’s experience in terms of trade language because it allows him to make his research intelligible to colleagues. Juanita’s case becomes a commodity that he controls. His representation of her voice gives him an authoritative voice in the academy. In parallel fashion, the notion of hybridity serves political ends for Asian American theologians (and theorists in Asian American studies and religious studies). As a concept embedded in various trade language, hybridity serves as symbol that gives Asian American theologians (and colleagues) a sense of commonality and reinforces shared identity, as one theorist can speak to another about hybridity without explaining much about the term. Given the marginalization that Asian American scholars face in the academy, one cannot underestimate the value of shared symbols.⁵² Furthermore, using

⁴⁹ Of course, there are more reasons why Asian Americans appropriate the language of hybridity, but these two are important for knowledge production, given the politics of difference in the academy and the marginalization of scholars of color.

⁵⁰ Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House: Comments at ‘the Personal and Political’ Panel (Second Sex Conference, October 29, 1979),” in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983).

⁵¹ In reification, theorists use a concept like hybridity to capture complex and ambiguous lived experience, but the abstraction (which is by definition devoid of emotion) becomes the substitute for what it represents. As the concept displaces its referent, the concept erases the complexity of what it represents and distills messy, painful “existence” into some “essence.”

⁵² Although we need symbols to provide a sense of ourselves and to refer to the complexity of reality in a shorthand way, over time and with repeated use we (Asian American theologians) tend to reify symbols so that they become fixed. This is true of how human beings use symbols—religious and otherwise. Ideally, a symbol points a territory so vast and complex that it can never be fully captured. One can only gesture toward the fullness of territory by invoking the symbol. However, when a symbol becomes essentialized or “idolized” (in the words of Robert

the trade language of hybridity in discussions with colleagues from the dominant group serves the purpose of “strategic essentialism,” addressing the need to assert Asian American identity given the politics of difference. At the same time, however, and this is the point I have sought most to emphasize—these positive functions may mute awareness of how “shared symbols” eclipse differences between and among lived experiences of hybridity, as well as how our uses of the concept reflect the need to conform to the culture and assumptions of the academy.

The Domestication of a Concept: A Case Study

I began this essay with examples of lived experiences of hybridity that are particular to my own Japanese American community. I return to these examples to recall the feel of one’s hometown as well as lived experiences of hybridity because I wish to contrast these memories with a case of writing about hybridity in the abstract, showing how easily it loses connection to what hybridity looks and feels like from the inside.

I focus on the work of systematic theologian Julius-Kei Kato, who has written one of the few extensive studies that address hybridity and Asian American theology.⁵³ Kato focuses on making a contribution to Asian American hermeneutics, based on experiences of what he calls “diasporic hybridity.” He conceives of hybridity as a “*tertium quid*” (“a third thing that is indefinite and undefined but is related to two definite or known things”⁵⁴) implying a state of being or a social location of Asian Americans. He adds to this the notion of diaspora, distinguishing Asian American hybridity by associating it with experiences of migration.⁵⁵ Assuming that all Asian Americans are hybrid, Kato focuses on what they have in common.

Though he draws on many theorists for his study, Kato’s work is shaped by Bhabha and Lowe in specific ways. From Bhabha, Kato borrows the notion that hybridity upsets traditional hierarchical binaries such as center/margin, colonizer/colonized, or hegemony/subaltern.⁵⁶ Like other Asian American theologians, Kato is interested in the subversive power of hybridity, to which Bhabha attests. In addition, Kato acknowledges the importance of Lowe’s work, invoking (as so many others have) the “holy trinity” of “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity.”⁵⁷ He too wishes to complexify an essentialist approach to understanding who and what is Asian American. Kato is like Lowe in using hybridity (or more precisely diasporic hybridity in Kato’s case) as a descriptor for Asian American identity. Like Lowe, Kato invokes the precedent of

Neville), it hardens into something in and of itself. In other words, the symbol displaces the symbolized. I discuss Neville’s notion of “broken symbols” in my current work on context. Robert C. Neville, *The Truth of Broken Symbols* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

⁵³ Julius-Kei Kato, *How Immigrant Christians Living in Mixed Cultures Interpret their Religion: Asian-American Diasporic Hybridity and its Implications for Hermeneutics* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012).

⁵⁴ *tertium quid*. Oxford Dictionaries. Oxford University Press.

http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/tertium-quid (accessed October 25, 2015).

⁵⁵ Kato writes, “Diasporic hybridity...refers to a complex of experiences involving being uprooted from a homeland and moving, either willingly or unwillingly, to a new, often inhospitable place, where one acquires a hybrid identity over time due to one’s location ‘in-between and in-both’ two (or more) cultural worlds to which one can claim some affiliation.” Kato, *Diasporic Hybridity*, 310. Ien Ang would find the linking of diaspora and hybridity confusing and contradictory. Ang argues that diaspora assumes ethnic identity across national boundaries. For example, the notion of the “Chinese diaspora” refers to people of Chinese descent living in multiple countries. He proposes that hybridity is an alternative term that refers to the multiplicity of people. Ien Ang, “Together-in-Difference: Beyond Diaspora, into Hybridity,” *Asian Studies Review* 27, no. 2 (June, 2003), 143-44.

⁵⁶ Kato, *Diasporic Hybridity*, 26-27.

⁵⁷ Kato, *Diasporic Hybridity*, 106.

“strategic essentialism” (in the tradition of Spivak), which gives him license to treat Asian Americans as a group.⁵⁸ His claim is that the hybrid social location of Asian Americans equips them to contribute in fresh, maybe even radical, ways to the task of hermeneutics. In this latter sense, he takes up the trajectory that Bhabha argues.

In my judgment, Kato’s major contribution is to review the work of six Asian American theologians in light of diasporic hybridity. To his credit, he starts with their lived experiences of diasporic hybridity wherever possible. Kato’s stated intention is to consider “the particular context of diasporic hybridity out of which their theological reflections emerge.”⁵⁹ Following David Tracy’s model of hermeneutics, he takes lived experience as a starting point, which I appreciate as a practical theologian. Because the six theorists do not use the same language, Kato reflects on their work through the single lens of diasporic hybridity, allowing us to appreciate their work anew.

Unfortunately, Kato’s discussion of the six theorists misses the spirit of the trajectory of Tracy’s work, especially as Don Browning and others in practical theology have developed his ideas.⁶⁰ Tracy and practical theologians who follow his way of thinking approach experience not simply as the *background* from which theological reflection emerges but as embodied theology, treating it as the *foreground* of the theologian’s task. The interpretation that Tracy proposes is to unearth the implicit theology within experience itself. While Kato tries to be faithful to Tracy’s model of hermeneutics, I find that he relegates the lived experiences of the six theorists to a litmus test, proving that because they have experienced hybridity, they possess the appropriate pedigree for discussing what he understands as diasporic hybridity.⁶¹ Furthermore, he unwittingly glosses the differences among his theorists’ lived experiences of hybridity, dwelling primarily instead on how these theorists’ work support his notion of diasporic hybridity.⁶²

In a sense, Kato’s proposal both solves problems and unintentionally creates others. He articulates a conceptual tool that promotes a sense of shared identity (“we are all hybrids”) and highlights the unique contributions that Asian Americans can make to hermeneutics. I agree with Kato that Asian Americans are bound to approach hermeneutics differently than others. Like Kato, I would like colleagues to understand what hermeneutical contributions I and other Asian American theologians might offer. However, one wonders if Kato strains the limits of invoking “strategic essentialism” by generalizing about experiences of hybridity and what Asian Americans know because of them. Erasing difference, particularity, and tension between and among Asian Americans not only does harm by not being true to lived experiences but also by defanging and domesticating hybridity. Kato’s use of the notion of hybridity leads into an all-too-common pitfall in the politics of knowledge production: The concept “hybridity” becomes mainstream and codified, conforming to a traditional, Western analytical frame (found in Tracy’s work) that then defines the boundaries of where and how the hermeneutical work takes place. Discussing “diasporic hybridity” becomes the occasion for practicing an Asian American version of the way that colleagues in the dominant group approach hermeneutics, which undermines the potentially subversive power of the concept. I question what we take as methodologically normative and a *de facto* starting point for Asian American hermeneutics.

⁵⁸ Kato, *Diasporic Hybridity*, 3. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 82.

⁵⁹ Kato, *Diasporic Hybridity*, 150.

⁶⁰ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

⁶¹ This is apparent for example, in his framing remarks about Peter Phan’s context. Kato, *Diasporic Hybridity*, 176.

⁶² After surveying Phan, Matsuoka, and Rita Nakashima Brock, Kato concludes “clearly every one of them is the embodiment of what we described as diasporic hybridity...” *Diasporic Hybridity*, 229.

Kato does what most of us might do with the concept of hybridity, which is to use it uncritically as an analytical tool, an identity descriptor, or a symbol. While using trade languages undoubtedly advances careers in the academy, it also covers over dangerous memories of hybridity that originally brought us to try to write prophetically about what we have lived.

Implications

As minoritized scholars, Asian American theologians (and Asian American colleagues in other disciplines) know firsthand the difficulty of being hybrid in a mostly white academy. As hybrids, we are constantly at risk for not being aware of the compromises we make, which is not unlike the situation of faith communities in Sacramento. While they work within the traditions of all-American holidays, we are working within the traditions of the academy, practicing respect for norms that many white colleagues take for granted because their social location affords privilege. Asian American theologians resist these norms as much as possible, making creative contributions (like Kato does with diasporic hybridity). However, sometimes we unwittingly hide from ourselves complicity with power dynamics in the very ways we theorize and produce scholarship. Asian American theologians need greater critical awareness of the extent to which we have unknowingly adopted cultural assumptions and practices of the academy (e.g., the privileging of trade languages over mother tongues) and how easily we tidy up and make intellectually respectable lived experiences of marginalization through theorizing shaped by the “master’s tools.”

We are in a thorny situation of needing to invoke the concept “hybridity” because it helps us to describe Asian American identity, but needing to use it in ways that do not eclipse particularity, difference, and ambiguity as well as power, oppression, harm, conflict, and suffering. Despite the feeling of comfort or security that the abstraction *hybridity* gives us, it freezes the ephemeral, mercurial nature of lived experiences of hybridity.⁶³ Lived experiences of hybridity are sufficiently varied that they cannot fit into a conceptual category called “hybridity.” (Recall that hybridity assumes non-uniformity.) However, lived experiences of hybridity are similar enough to be comparable.

I propose that we adopt Robert Neville’s strategy of making a category (in our case “hybridity”) sufficiently “vague.”⁶⁴ He writes, “[A vague comparative] category constitutes the respect in which two or more positions might be compared, and is unbiased to the extent it can accommodate the expressions of the various positions without reducing one to another or any position to its own theoretical elements. The category is vague in the logical sense that it can accommodate positions that contradict one another.”⁶⁵ Vague comparative categories have multiple advantages. Neville argues that a category can be made solid or “specific” enough to bring what is being compared in relation to one another, but open-ended or “vague” enough to see them

⁶³ Supporting my concern, Susan Abraham returns us to Bhabha’s emphasis on hybridity as a moment of “negotiation” as he says, rather than being a fixed or permanent state. She argues that Bhabha dissuades us from essentializing the notion of hybridity to something “more than a negotiation.” Abraham, *What does Mumbai have to do with Rome? Postcolonial Perspectives on Globalization and Theology*, 381. Abraham helpfully interprets Bhabha’s notion of hybridity as a “strategic interruption of the manner in which cultural difference is constructed and sustained in colonial contexts” (Ibid., 382).

⁶⁴ Robert C. Neville, *On the Scope and Truth of Theology: Theology as Symbolic Engagement* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 13, 105.

⁶⁵ Robert C. Neville, *Ultimates: Philosophical Theology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), 96.

“in their own, perhaps contradictory, terms.”⁶⁶ Using the concept “hybridity” in a functionally vague sense would mean having some sense of what experiences of hybridity look like while deliberately keeping one’s understanding open to difference, tensions, and particularity of lived experiences.⁶⁷

Rather than approaching hybridity primarily as an abstract concept, I find it more helpful to linger with lived experiences of hybridity within a given Asian American community and to reflect on the intersections of plural mother tongues and plural trade languages. Hybridity works less well as a universal descriptor of Asian American identity and better as a concept that primarily takes on meaning when discussed in terms of the lived experiences of members of a particular community in a certain context with all its intersecting and clashing cultures, communal narratives, and histories. *Lived experiences of hybridity exceed and unsettle the very notion of hybridity itself.* If we wish to speak more broadly about multiple Asian American communities, it would be more modest to respect the multiple mother tongues represented in discussing multiple hybridities. It would be more fruitful to negotiate particularities and differences between and among hybridities rather than to assert the generality of the concept “hybridity.” How we use the notion of hybridity needs to better reflect the meaning of the term, which is meant to resist essentialism.

In addition to rethinking how we approach the *hybridities* of Asian American faith communities, we must also deepen theological reflection. Asian Americans have often theologized hybridity by reflecting on the hybridity of Jesus, that is, his divine and human nature. Feminist postcolonial theologians Namsoon Kang, Kwok Pui Lan, and K. Christine Pae each discuss a hybridized concept of Jesus as a helpful, empowering image.⁶⁸ By rooting our experiences of hybridity in none other than Christ himself, we can find no stronger justification or perhaps even redemption for our existential situation as hybrid people. While Jesus’ hybridity may be an appropriate analogy for some experiences of hybridity, (e.g., of being mixed race), Christ’s divine/human hybridity was ordained by God, not a byproduct of unequal power dynamics and/or commodification, as Bhabha and Lowe help us to understand. One wonders the extent of the differences between Christ’s experience of hybridity and Asian American experiences that might call into question an analogy.

A potential source for theologizing hybridity is the embodied theologies of particular Asian American communities that require theorists to stay close to lived experiences and theologically rich practices rather than hastening to theory and abstraction.⁶⁹ Examples like the Japanese American holiday rituals I described are contextually appropriate for a theology of hybridity, not necessarily for all Asian American but perhaps for Japanese American Christians. Memorial Day

⁶⁶ Neville, *Scope and Truth*, 105.

⁶⁷ In making comparisons between theological traditions, Neville argues that vague comparative categories resist reductionism in two ways. First, by allowing traditions to be understood in relation to one another but in vague enough ways, the analyst can understand them in “their own, possibly contradictory, terms” (Neville, *Scope and Truth*, 105). Second, sufficient vagueness allows for ample opportunities to correct for bias as the representation of a tradition is subjected to multiple “sites of phenomenological analysis” (he names five) (Neville, *Scope and Truth*, 105-6).

⁶⁸ Pui-lan Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 183; Pae and McCarty III, *The Hybridized Public Sphere: Asian American Christian Ethics, Social Justice, and Public Discourse*, 103-5; Namsoon Kang, *Diasporic Feminist Theology: Asia and Theopolitical Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014), 123.

⁶⁹ One theorist who models this well is Rachel A. R. Bundang, “May You Storm Heaven with Your Prayers: Devotions to Mary and Jesus in Filipino American Catholic Life,” in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women’s Religion and Theology*, ed. Rita Nakashima Brock and others (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 87-15.

and Thanksgiving observances in the Sacramento Japanese American community express a theology of creative subversiveness rooted in the creativity of the Spirit.⁷⁰ They attest to a refusal to conform to ways that the dominant culture formalizes the memorialization of “its” ostensibly common history. The rituals reveal a commitment to participate in as well as subvert tradition, creating practices of celebrating these holidays that were more true to the complexity and multiplicity of the Japanese American community. Less obvious is that these rituals embody a theology of lament.⁷¹ On Memorial Day, the community grieves not only their war dead and others who have passed on but also their own suffering. Even on Thanksgiving, Parkview church members practiced recalling the courage and resilience of forebears who faced great adversity. These are laments of the marginalized who need the cover of holidays of the dominant culture to express what is painful and conflicting. In the midst of suffering, the community practices hope, which nuances these all-American holidays in ways that enrich the meaning of being American.

No doubt, other Asian American faith communities have embodied theologies of their own that could be mined as normative sources. Our own diverse narratives, practices, and contexts could potentially be rich sources for theologizing hybridity, while honoring the complexity of lived experiences.

⁷⁰ For more on humans participating in the creativity of God’s Spirit, see Courtney T. Goto, *The Grace of Playing: Pedagogies for Leaning into God’s New Creation* (New York: Wipf & Stock, 2016a). I also discuss the creativity of Asian American practical theologies in Courtney T. Goto, “Asian American Practical Theologies,” in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, eds. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 31-44.

⁷¹ For a recent work on lament by an Asian American theologian, see Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015).