

## Article

# Decolonial Pastoral Care for Cultural Trauma: Pastoral Theological Intervention in the Korean Context

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**Abstract:** This essay examines the connectedness between cultural trauma theory and decolonial studies in pastoral theology, demonstrating the denotation of collective trauma in South Korea and Korean Christianity from past colonial and war experiences. Although cultural trauma theory is well established in studying the case of the Holocaust and Western context, it has not yet explored the trauma of the Third World in a fully fledged manner. Rather, it still employs a Western-centered discourse that is unable to explain the disparity of power dynamics based on colonial values. Therefore, a critical analysis is essential to develop a decolonial discourse between cultural trauma theory and pastoral theology. The case of Korean cultural trauma and its relation to Korean Protestantism is a good starting point for addressing decolonial pastoral care in that the Korean church is still complicit in the colonial religious inheritances concerning its colonized ways of thinking and psyche. Throughout this essay, I argue that Korean social identity and Protestantism are reproducing the harmful reaction of in-group exclusion under the impact of cultural trauma. Finally, I provide a pastoral theological analysis of this discussion in order to suggest a new possibility of decolonial pastoral care for the traumatized Korean society and Christianity.

**Keywords:** cultural trauma; Korea; Christianity; colonialism; decolonial pastoral care; deconstruction



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## 1. Introduction

Although the discussion of trauma is one of the overarching themes in pastoral theology in addressing the denotation of woundedness and accompanying care, cultural trauma, in a specific context, has not sufficiently been covered in interdisciplinary work between pastoral theology and sociology. The term “cultural trauma” indicates a collectively constructed form of trauma that entails a loss of group identity and cultural meaning, affecting a particular group of people and their collective memories (Eyerman 2001). From the sociological perspective, in formulating a semantic idea of the sociological phenomena of trauma, underlining the meaning-making process after the traumatic event is more important than the event itself (Alexander 2004b). Contrary to the psychoanalytic interest in emotional formation and the pathological response of traumatized patients,<sup>1</sup> cultural trauma theory is fundamentally predicated on how the traumatized group members construct their narratives with their experiences and damaged identity. As pastoral theology emphasizes the recognition of relationality and communal self in sociocultural implications towards the religious self (Smith 1982), the significance of cultural trauma theory must be dealt with to identify the systemic formation of trauma among religious and intercultural identities.

However, as pastoral theology also aims to identify structural deficiencies, such as asymmetries of power in society (Ramsay 2018), the notion of cultural trauma must be examined in this framework because of its lack of understanding of the disparity of power. Although cultural trauma theory is well established in studying the case of the Holocaust and Western context, it has not yet explored the trauma of the Third World in a fully fledged manner. Rather, it still employs a Western-centered discourse that is unable to explain the disparity of power dynamics based on colonial values of the modern/colonial

world-system (Mignolo 2002). It does not consider other features of cultural trauma in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Indigenous societies in this global world.

Remarkably, the religious value of Christianity is explained as an extension of the superiority of Eurocentric culture, not illuminating the colonial difference in cultural and religious configurations on other continents (Mignolo 2000). In considering the cultural nature of religion, we see that traumatic experiences in a group's religious life can be a part of enormous cultural trauma. Meanwhile, we also must investigate how Christian values have been deployed only in the Western-based ideology even though Christianity is not only for European religion but has been contextualized in multicultural loci and foci of the Third Worlds. Emmanuel Y. Lartey states, "for centuries forms of Christian faith have been transported from these same western centres into different parts of the world in what can be termed theological globalization. As such, paradigms of pastoral theology evident in non-western contexts often bear the hallmarks of Western thinking and influence." (Lartey 2013, p. 44). Therefore, a critical analysis is essential to develop a decolonial formation of study between cultural trauma theory and religious studies, especially when discussing a set of colonial inheritances in cultural, religious, and societal contexts.

By presenting the case of cultural trauma in South Korea, this essay argues that the culturally traumatized memories in the Third World are to be dealt with in a decolonial frame in order to disclose the sanctioned discourse of colonial legacy. Korean society and Protestantism have been significantly impacted by specific cultural trauma, tethered with a series of sociohistorical events like the Japanese colonial occupation, the Korean War, anti-Communist ideology in the church, and political polarization. For example, the problem of political polarization in the Korean context severely segregates two political divisions—the conservative party advocating anti-Communism versus the progressive party supporting anti-Japanese movements—while failing to demonstrate the layer of colonial legacy underlying the trauma. Throughout this essay, I argue that Korean Protestantism continues to reproduce the harmful reaction of in-group exclusion under the impact of cultural trauma and colonial discourse. Finally, I provide a pastoral theological intervention to suggest a new possibility of decolonial pastoral care for the traumatized Korean society and Christianity.

## 2. The Process and Consequences of Cultural Trauma

To understand cultural trauma theory, it is important to connect two conceptual frameworks into a united form: cultural memory and trauma. First, cultural memory can be developed from communicative memory, which is relatively disorganized and has no fixed points in everyday conversations between individuals (Assmann 1995). When the everyday communications pass through a collective transition in a specific group, they are shifted to the normative and somewhat objectified conjuncture of memories, a collective memory that restructures the related knowledge of communicative memory to a more fixed and "immovable figures of memory" (Assmann 1995, p. 130). This transition signifies the irreversible transference of oral traditions from colloquial levels of knowledge to a collectively shaped memory, which is also developed into a form of cultural norm. When the concept of trauma is inserted into the sociological and historical knowledge of cultural memory, in understanding the characteristic of trauma as "resulting from a constellation of life experiences as well as a discrete happening, from a persisting condition" (Erikson 1995, p. 185), cultural identity is shaped and doubly reinforced by the fixed moment of a traumatic event in the past. Kai Erikson (1976) describes that collective trauma is a gradual realization that the culture or group identifies itself as damaged and even permanently changed under the influence of trauma. The shared traumatic memories become a source of kinship among the traumatized and shape a common ground of cultural identification (Erikson 1995). The transition of traumatic memory from an individual's lived experience to collective trauma in a cultural group is also irreversible insofar as the group strongly senses itself as a cultural continuum that shares consistent values and the same historical memories.

Cultural trauma theory explains the sociological denotation of a cultural group's coherent narratives based on its memories. Jeffrey C. Alexander characterizes cultural trauma as a shared experience of a horrendous event that "leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander 2004b, p. 1). As Neil J. Smelser (2004) already notes, the distinctive relationality between psychological and cultural trauma takes place by signifying how each concept of trauma understands the role of an event, affect, and memories in the consciousness of individuals or collective groups. Whereas expressing affects into words is of clinical importance in psychoanalysis (Breuer and Freud [1893] 1981), the sociological demarcation of trauma occurs when a group engages in the continuous meaning-making process of trauma narratives.

The traumatic status itself is influenced by the cultural group's work of imagination through their own memories, so the imagination can differ from what exactly happened in the past in the "successful imposition of a new system of cultural classification" (Alexander 2012, p. 15). Marianne Hirsch (2008) echoes that the descendants of trauma survivors compose their own postmemories of trauma that they have not actually experienced, and the postmemory's connection to the past is developed by the imaginative projection of the event. In this sense, this essay does not focus on how the imagination differs from the actual historical event. Instead, we are paying particular attention to how the imagination impacts the individuals of the cultural group. The description of meaning-making as an active agency enables us to offer a clear understanding of cultural/collective trauma in a value-carrier model that psychoanalysis and individual psychology have not accounted for. The collective process of cultural interpretation/imagination through traumatic memory is not formulated by individuals who consciously and unconsciously participate in the process as carrier groups (Alexander 2004b).<sup>2</sup> Alexander (2004b) notes that carrier groups are the agents of the cultural trauma process and incessantly remember, reexamine, and reinterpret the meaning of trauma they have collectively experienced as a messenger of the culture, nation, or religion. Hence, the collective memory subsumes individual memories, constituting a supra-individual level of identity formation through which the group members enunciate their cultural identity, including their emotional, geographical, historical, ideological, political, and generational constituents (Eyerman 2001).

In his study of the Holocaust and its relationship with the United States, Alexander (2004a) characterizes the cultural construction of trauma in the process of symbolic extension and psychological identification. He describes that the process of the American recognition of the Jewish mass murder as a cultural trauma is a dynamic version of forming moral universals (Alexander 2004a). Due to the prevalence of antisemitism in the United States in the early twentieth century, Americans had not regarded the Jewish survivors as the victims of the Nazi persecution before Nazism was coded, weighted, and narrated as the representation of absolute evil (Alexander 2004a). To annihilate the evil, a new narrative was created by extending the symbolic meaning of the Holocaust from the restricted experience of the Jewish to a universal form of ethics, "crimes against humanity" (Alexander 2004a). As a result, the post-Holocaust morality conceptualized a new meaning of humanitarian life in the twentieth century.

However, the trauma drama in Israel and the Jewish community has developed a divergent effect because of the culturally represented image of the traumatic Holocaust in this specific cultural context: Zionism (Alexander and Dromi 2012). By extending the symbolic meaning of the Holocaust and by psychologically identifying with the Jewish survivors, the narrative shift in the Jewish community constructed a strong ideology for protecting Jews from political threats, revitalizing a modern state of Israel in the territory of Palestine, in the name of "from Holocaust to revival/establishment" (Alexander and Dromi 2012, p. 106). It led to a catastrophic conflict between Israel and Palestine, resulting in a dichotomic opposition and the Israeli oppression of Palestinians with colonial technologies of control (Bashir and Goldberg 2019). This historical case provides the political and cultural significance of trauma on each side in explicating how the Zionists and Palestinians

are each asserting that their own damage is most painful without any empathy for the others' collective sufferings, even though they do share a similar syntax of trauma (Bashir and Goldberg 2019).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the entrenched cultural construction of post-Holocaust morality makes the United States unconditionally support Israel (Said 1986). As a result, Jewish suffering gains a moral authority over the traumatic narrative of Palestine, justifying the Israeli colonization of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Said 1986). As I will present in a later section, the Israeli nationalism represented by Zionism contains a very similar characteristic to Korean nationalism, considering both processes of formation as a result of cultural trauma. They adopt the politics of colonial nationalism by which other cultures and contexts are excluded and even regarded as objects of subjugation (Young 2016).

The abovementioned case articulates the consequences of cultural trauma. As Hirsch mentioned, the postmemory of trauma is not an idea but "a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove" (Hirsch 2008, p. 106). On the one hand, the cultural group can negotiate protective resources from its trauma drama as a result of the traumatic event. By sharing and remembering the event, the group can restore its collective woundedness and reinforce the sense of solidarity as a way of care. On the other hand, the cultural group can be stuck in its own fight/flight response vis-à-vis the cultural trauma and reproduces a harmful reaction in the form of in-group exclusion to protect itself pathologically. In somatic terms, Staci K. Haines (2019) addresses the remarkable symptoms of trauma, even in systemic and cultural conditions. She notes, "social and cultural conditions tend to accept and encourage particular survival response in certain peoples, genders, and groups, and not in others" (Haines 2019, p. 101). The fight/flight response is one of those pathological symptoms by which a cultural group represents its identity, fighting with other groups, or running away from necessary political actions it has to face. These remarkable symptoms are also the consequences of cultural trauma, as we can see in the case of the Holocaust and the Nakba—how human brutality gives rise to a new trauma formation and the trauma-laden meaning-making process in a collective consciousness.

### 3. The Case of Cultural Trauma in South Korea

#### 3.1. A Brief History and the Culture of Han

A variety of sociocultural configurations that represent the historical and geopolitical dynamics of modern Korea constructs this particular discourse of cultural trauma. In the scope of pastoral theology, Korean society and its religious systems should be discussed, considering the cultural variables as well as the sufferings of Korean individuals and their collective life experiences. With the Joseon dynasty's degradation as a Japanese protectorate in 1905, Korea lost its autonomy in diplomacy and the right to govern the land (Moon 2013). Korean people were deprived of their land, sovereignty, and the right to live as autonomous human beings in the colonized Korea. They had to experience harsh intervention and violent oppression by Japan. Many Koreans were forcibly conscripted by Japanese military as consumables for warfare. Also, many Korean women have been abused and dehumanized by the Japanese soldiers' sexual violence, rape, and torture (Chung 2017). In this historical environment, Christianity played an important role in edifying the spirit of Korean patriotism to encourage people to resist Japanese imperialism (Pak 2019). Whereas many other Asian countries have been colonized by Christian states like the British Empire, France, and the United States, Korea has been dominated by Japan, a non-Christian nation. It enabled Koreans to recognize Christianity as a valuable partner to fight together for independence (Pak 2019). During the Japanese colonial era, the Korean church was centered on the independence movement while shaping a firm commitment to Korean nationalism (Pak 2019).

Even after the national independence from Japanese imperialism in 1945, Korea was divided into two states by the harsh principles of Western ideologies: the state power of the United States and the Soviet Union. The political division provoked a terrible internecine war between North and South in 1950, and South Korea experienced the second

traumatic deprivation of the land—the Communist’s temporary occupation of the Southern part (W. B. Kim 2009). The tragedy of division is ongoing in the contemporary Korean peninsula, which is severed by the long military demarcation line. In the religious situation, the camp of Protestant nationalists in Korea has been impacted by the vicissitude of the ideological conflict, although they had been considering their political collaboration with Communists before and after the independence from Japan (Ko 2016). The Protestant nationalists ran into opposition against the Communists in planning ideal nation-building, and the Korean War made the two parties foes of each other (Ko 2016). As Protestants from the Northern part of Korea also defected to the South to avoid the persecution of Communists, the anti-Communist sentiment was reinforced in the South Korean church (Ko 2016). The Protestants from the North have played a decisive role in strengthening anti-Communism, which has been developed through their deep-rooted grudge against Communists (Ko 2016).<sup>4</sup>

The Korean people’s cultural and political trauma can be traced to this history of deprivation. Although a contemporary Korean individual may not have experienced the trauma of colonization and war, Koreans share the collective memory of trauma in their cultural and mental system. By symbolically extending the tragic memories to the collective ground of contemporary Korean narratives and by psychologically identifying the emotional pains of the ancestors, Korean people collectively reexperience the traumas in their own established form of trauma drama (Alexander 2004a). The notion of cultural trauma is reconceptualized as a Korean culture-bound term, *han* by Andrew Sung Park (1993). He defines *han* as the depth of human suffering, structured by a wide range of emotions, frustrated hope, resentful bitterness, and a feeling of letting go (Park 1993). He further classifies collective *han* as conscious and unconscious. While the collective conscious *han* is capable of constructing a corporate will to revolt against oppression, the collective unconscious *han* finds it hard to gather a cohesive voice of resistance because of its chronic condition of oppression, resentment, and hopelessness (Park 1993). In the Korean context, the people collectively conscientize their *han* of cultural trauma, which is historically and politically intrusive so long as it is an ongoing problem, especially in today’s Korean–Japanese and North–South relationships.

However, contrary to Park’s optimistic view of the collective conscious *han*, the Korean reaction to the cultural trauma has negative and even pathological aspects. It is related to the fight response of traumatic symptoms in terms of the national defense, declaring, “I will not lose my land again” (Alexander and Dromi 2012, pp. 105–6). This fight response is pathological because it perpetuates chronic anger and defense mechanisms, even when defense is unnecessary in some situations (Haines 2019). The feeling of distrust and national anxiety provoked by cultural trauma leads to relational impairment in the sense that the out-group membership differentiated from the in-group identity is regarded as dangerous and menacing. As a result, the fight response precipitated the tendency toward in-group exclusion in Korea.

### 3.2. In-Group Exclusion and Korean Christianity

Despite Korea’s brisk exchange of economic and cultural resources with other countries, the state still has a firm commitment to national defense by building a political or cultural barrier between North and South, Korean and non-Korean. The *han*-ridden characteristic of this defense mechanism entails divisions based on distrust and hatred toward out-groups, the division between “we” and “others” (Chung 2017). Jae-Ho Jeon (2019) thematizes how the anti-Japanese discourse has been developed in Korean nationalism. In modern Korean history, Japan has always been considered as an absolute evil, a perfect “other” completely separated from Korea (Jeon 2019).<sup>5</sup> The anti-Japanese discourse has not been fully covered in Korean nationalism because of the abrupt outbreak of the Korean War, which made Korean people designate another “worse enemy”, North Korea and Communism (Jeon 2019). W. B. Kim (2009) writes about the fixity of anti-communist conservatism in South Korea. He argues that the anti-communist consciousness not only came from the



ideological inculcation from the “top” (the nationalist government) to the “bottom” (the public), but it also derived from the political agreement of the “bottom”, whose lived experiences are intertwined with the fixation of traumatic memories (W. B. Kim 2009). The fear of invasion and massacre committed by communists is deeply imprinted in the generation who passed through the time of war, and the memory is reproduced in the next generation, entrenching a solid hegemony of anti-Communism in the unconscious of Korean society (W. B. Kim 2009). This notion is closely connected to the idea of cultural trauma theory in that it explains how symbolic extension and psychological identification regarding the Korean War are processed in the intergenerational dynamics of Korean collective memories.

Both themes of anti-Japanese discourse and anti-Communism stated above are the process and the consequence of cultural trauma in South Korea, prescribing each other as an enemy with no space for empathy in a shared traumatic experience. The political polarization in Korea also indicates dichotomic thinking—resulting from affective polarization between conservatism and progressivism, noting that the partisan divergence accompanies destructive effects on democracy (J. Kim 2022)—derived from cultural trauma without any consideration of liminality. Taking into account that the collective memory plays a role in structuring political movements’ self-conception, and strategies for future action (Dromi and Türkmen 2020), it is observable how traumatic memories disrupt individuals and groups to identify liminal space for dialogue in political, social, and intercultural space (Watkins and Shulman 2008). Wonhee Anne Joh (2006) marks the Korean term of this tendency as *dan*, “the practice of severing/cutting off forms of oppression” (Joh 2006, p. 23). In the end, *dan* develops a dichotomic thinking of in-group exclusion, not only in the scope of Korean nationality but also in the Korean church.

Although the Korean church has long taken an apolitical stance, while emphasizing the Gospel and evangelism, it has also colluded with Korean nationalism, considering its connection with Protestant nationalism. Kenneth M. Wells notes, “the [Korean] alliance between Protestantism and nationalism occurred extremely rapidly” (Wells 1990, p. 1). He argues that Korean protestant leaders have framed an ethical nationalism by which the tension between the nationalist values of ethnocentric nation-building and the protestant transcendental values of religious faith is resolved (Wells 1990). Through this alliance, the in-group exclusion in the Korean church precipitates hatred toward the out-group, which is labeled as others, pagans, blasphemers, communists, and homosexuals. Ji-sung Kwon (2021) denounces the exclusive system of the Korean conservative church, which reproduces binary thinking and the image of hatred toward the marginalized group of society. The church’s slogan for neighborly love is discolored when the ambience of hatred is fully fomented in the Korean church, which is complicit with the politics of nationalist in-group exclusion (Kwon 2021).

#### 4. Decolonial Intervention for Cultural Trauma

##### 4.1. Decolonial Analysis of the Western Model of Cultural Trauma

Insofar as the sociological configuration of cultural trauma is set in the never-ending expansion of cultural interpretation for collective memories, a discussion for the resolution of cultural trauma is pointless. Nevertheless, we must note that the process of cultural interpretation is not limited to a specific formula of sociological understanding, which is related to the ambiguity of culture and cultural differences. Immanuel Wallerstein (1990) speaks about how culture is a broad and ambiguous concept whose structural direction is multifaceted and hard to define. Because culture cannot be conceptualized in a singular definition or semantic formation, it can be occupied by a variety of conceptual orientations. Unfortunately, in contemporary societies, the orientation is usually designed by a dominant ideology, capitalism. Wallerstein (1990) coined the terms “world-economy” and “modern world-system” to demonstrate that the cultural interpretation of the global world is already systemized by the dominant authority of Western capitalism. No matter how the powers of sovereign states and their cultures seem equal in this global world, they are interwoven

with the hierarchical network of the capitalist world-economy to conceal the inequality of power dynamic in the name of global collaboration and universalism (Wallerstein 1990).

Racism and sexism combine with universalism to ratify the broad establishment of the modern world-system while subjugating people of color and their cultures to the Euro-centric idea of capitalism (Wallerstein 1990). By Westernization, “a universalist message of cultural multiplicity could serve as a justification of educating various groups in their separate ‘cultures’ and hence preparing them for different tasks in the single economy” (Wallerstein 1990, p. 45). Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018) echoes that the abyssal line between metropolis and colony is invisible and allows a false universalism. His work on the sociology of absences identifies the abyssal line relating to the internalization of colonial values in the subjugated subject (Santos 2018). Therefore, the ambiguity of culture is displaced to a distorted version of cultural oppression when we limit the sociological interpretation of culture within the dominant ideology of the modern world-system.

The characteristic example of this idea of the modern world-system in cultural trauma theory is Bernhard Giesen’s (2004) work on German national identity through the historic event of the Holocaust. He notes the public process of reconstruction of the collective memories of the Holocaust in Germany, describing how the narrative of national guilt has been successfully accepted and sublimated as a new German identity (Giesen 2004). By humiliating themselves and integrating the memory of cultural trauma as perpetrators, Germans could retain a more self-reflective and reconciling identity. Giesen (2004) argues that the driving force of German self-humiliation and self-sacrifice is the rooted cultural pattern of the Judeo-Christian tradition, embodied in German collective identity. To emphasize this religious implication, he further compares the German national guilt to the Japanese unapologetic attitudes toward many Asian countries that Japan has colonized. He attributes Japan’s irresponsible stance to its Confucian culture: “In contrast to this connection between collective guilt and individual innocence, the Confucian tradition can hardly conceive of collective guilt and responsibility. From a Confucian perspective, the attribution of guilt to individual and community is reversed. While war crimes committed by individual Japanese perpetrators can be easily admitted, the nation has to remain without blemishes. This cultural difference accounts for the reluctance, even refusal, of the Japanese government to admit to a national responsibility for the Nanking massacres” (Giesen 2004, p. 151).

However, Giesen fails to recognize the complexity of Japanese cultural trauma and its national identity formation, which is directly influenced by the “conflicting memories of the troubled past” (Hashimoto 2015, p. 3). He only takes into consideration the cultural differences—based on his biased understanding of Confucianism—and the German embodiment of national guilt through the trauma narrative while ignoring the collective woundedness produced by the Japanese defeat in the Pacific War (Hashimoto 2015). His statement about the Judeo-Christian tradition postulates the contextual advantage of the German Christian culture—in similarity with the winner’s culture, the Allied Nations—vis-à-vis the Japanese Confucian tradition and results in the justification of the cultural superiority of Christianity. This justification is generated by the universalized idea of the modern/colonial world-system because it only highlights the ratified shape of the global peace established by the dominant power of the Allied Nations—ab initio the colonial axis—which entrenched the new mode of universalistic identity of humanity in the contemporary global world (Giesen 2004).

The distinction in each process of cultural trauma between Germany and Japan does not result from their cultural differences but from their colonial difference (Mignolo 2011). Walter D. Mignolo (2002) coined the term “colonial difference” to signify racial hierarchies and economic disparities pervasive in the modern/colonial world-system. It resonates with Anibal Quijano’s (2000) account of the colonality of power, which constitutes the idea of “race” and cultural classification of world population. If there was no racial hierarchy between German and Japan, why did the United States more easily drop the nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, not on Nazi Germany (Bird and Lifschultz 1998; Neiman 2015)?

Was this attributed to the cultural difference? On the one hand, the colonial difference patterns the discursive distinction between Germany and Japan in a homogeneous remark of humanity by articulating the symbolic exterior border of their cultural differences in the name of Christianity and Confucianism (Mignolo 2000, 2011). On the other hand, the colonial difference enables German Christianity to illustrate religious and racial similarities with the United States and Western culture in a racially heterogeneous form distinguished from Japan and Confucianism. In so doing, the German religious and cultural identity could not only retain the undamaged image of European dignity but also recover its racial superiority to Asian Confucianism in the universalized modern/colonial world-system.

Giesen's cultural analysis makes it impossible to account for the deeper layer of cultural trauma in the Third World, including Japan and other Asian states that have experienced colonial oppression by Western colonial powers. Of course, Japan's war crimes must be interrogated to promote authentic repentance and reconciliation with other Asian states.<sup>6</sup> However, we have to transform our sociopolitical approach from the unreserved condemnation of Japanese imperialism to a decolonial analysis with a critical understanding of the universalized colonial/modern world-system so that we can see a bigger picture of the colonality of power (Quijano 2000). The decolonial invocation for cultural trauma suggests the epistemological limitation of Alexander's (2004a) idea of moral universals through trauma narratives.

#### 4.2. Decolonial Pastoral Care for Korean Cultural Trauma

Let me bring what I discussed about the decolonial analysis of cultural trauma theory to the cultural and political situation of Korea and the church. I argued that Korean in-group exclusion is not a healthy response to consciously formulated memories of collective trauma but a *han*-ridden form of fight response in terms of nationalism. In determining the colonial discourse of cultural trauma analysis, we have to admit that Korean trauma narratives partially declare collective woundedness while denying the colonality of power. It indicates that Korea is also complicit with the dynamic of the colonial/modern world-system. The rushed and violent process of the Japanese merger of Korea left an indelible mark of trauma in the colonized subject's mind. This trauma also leads to the formidable outcome of the subject's hyperalert reaction and obsessional desire for the superior power to build a nation that is based on the imperial framework and its concept, protecting the state with strong industrialized and modernized materials. Robert J. C. Young (2016) categorizes the eight primary types of ideological, political, and military resistance to colonialism, and one of those is to be analyzed along with the context of South Korean modernism and nationalism: colonial nationalism. He demonstrates that this type of nationalism has often tended to "distance themselves from postcolonial theory, and to characterize it as 'western'" (Young 2016, p. 166). Through Young's postcolonial lens, we can see how South Korean nationalism blatantly makes a coalition with colonial and imperial values. Mignolo also notes, "modernity revealed its other side, colonality, in non-European locations" (Mignolo 2002, p. 73). When taking into account that modernity is considered as endogenous to the imperial West and performing its civilizing mission (Bhambra 2014), it is reasonable to say that Korean modernity—and its sub-imperiality—is taking over the baton from the West to conduct the civilizing mission—no matter how the colonial difference hinders Korea from accomplishing that mission.

What is the role of the Korean church in this discussion? The Korean church has developed its prosperity theology, matching the neoliberal capitalism in South Korea in emphasizing the blessings of health and wealth as signs of God's salvation (Poling and Kim 2012). This understanding validates Max Weber's "Protestant Ethics", which became a groundwork of complicity between the Calvinistic faith and the capitalist virtue of wealth (Poling and Kim 2012). If we acknowledge that Korean prosperity theology is influenced by modernism and conceives modernism's connection with modernity, we can also understand that colonality is insidiously lurking in the system of prosperity theology. Since Korea has internalized Western colonialism, Korean nationalism has also accepted this trend to



raise Korea as the next agency of the modern/colonial world-system. When considering the Korean church's complicity with Korean nationalism, we can hardly deny that its theological system can also be a part of the colonial project in the name of the "prosperity of the Gospel".

The deconstruction of the Korean colonial complicity is necessary to initiate a meaningful discussion of decolonial pastoral care of the Korean cultural trauma. To resolve the problem of in-group exclusion in the Korean collective mentality, it is important to emphasize the role of mutual dialogue between "we" and "others". This discussion of deconstruction and mutual dialogue is underpinned by multidisciplinary conversations among sociology, theology, psychology, and pastoral theology. In sociological terms, Santos (2018) conceptualizes the sociological deconstruction of Eurocentric ideology and colonialism by situating the epistemologies of the South. Contrary to the epistemologies of the North, representing Eurocentric rationality, the epistemologies of the South stress the importance of the subject's lived experience, which encompasses the holistic views of our bodily sensations, emotions, and *corazonar*,<sup>7</sup> the counterpoint of rationality (Santos 2018). Through the process of identifying the abyssal line and colonial authority in the form of the sociology of emergences, Santos argues that we can initiate intercultural translation, constituting the works of empathy and curiosity in the pathway of "opening up to new experiences" (Santos 2018, p. 33). The concept of intercultural translation corresponds to the pastoral theological paradigm of interculturality (Lartey 2003). Lartey (2013) speaks of the Christian theological concept of the Trinity to illustrate the intercultural dialogue in the imaginary form of preservation of tensions in the tripolar relationship of God. By addressing interculturality, he asserts the mutuality of pastoral care in facilitating diversity and authentic participation of "others" (Lartey 2013).

Therefore, the harmful in-group exclusion in Korean society, which simultaneously clings to the sub-imperial mode of life, can be transformed from the dominant norms of Eurocentric capitalism, modernity, and coloniality by reflecting Korean values and other cultural values in the epistemologies of the South and intercultural dynamics. The transformation for self-awareness enables the Korean collective identity to move toward a recognition of colonial differences in which other cultures—including Japan and North Korea—are also involved in the colonial spiral of collective trauma and the resultant social fight response.

Psychology plays a pivotal role in demonstrating the therapeutic resilience of one's mind in cultural trauma. The inherent resilience in human nature can be reified when one practices self-care and mutual reciprocity (Haines 2019). Collective resilience is also feasible because "[integrating resilience helps] us both heal and be more able to deal with ongoing conditions of oppression" (Haines 2019, p. 204). When we connect the significance of collective resilience to the prevalence of trauma, we reify the restoration of collective trauma in the broader understanding of the human condition in psychology. Watkins and Shulman (2008) write of the restoration of collective trauma in the form of liberation psychology. In the account of liberation psychology, they suggest, "to be able to deeply entertain the difference that the other poses, we must learn to at least temporarily dis-identify from our passionately held beliefs and be able to see what ideologies and assumptions they are based on" (Watkins and Shulman 2008, p. 177). They stress on "the capacity to differentiate and integrate the self's and others' points of view" so that the core of dialogical interaction can be restored (Watkins and Shulman 2008, p. 179). In so doing, collective resilience can take place while avoiding in-group exclusion in intercultural dynamics.

The Korean hatred and distrust toward others devalues mutual recognition and dismembers the Korean relationship with them. The result of the dismemberment is the isolation of the Korean identity among the multinational/multicultural globality. It is time to reconnect the dismembered condition of the Korean relationship by acknowledging the difference between us and others and transforming the distrust into empathic trust. For this reconnection and empathy, the recognition of others' woundedness and relevant responses are required. Korean people must remember that they are not only the victims of colonial

legacy and oppression. The authentic resolution of liberation can be possible when all narratives of cultural trauma among people, cultures, nations, and religions can take part alongside the other in deeply listening to the sources of each other's suffering (Watkins and Shulman 2008).

Ryan LaMothe (2018) takes another step to continue the pastoral theological discussion in terms of political well-being. He conceives intercultural and international relations by considering the globe our "shared home". To undermine the foothold of political violence, in-group exclusion, and oppression, LaMothe writes that shared power/knowledge in a common action of politics is required in global citizenship (LaMothe 2018). The shared power in the polis is hinged upon mutual recognition and "a sufficient amount of trust and loyalty for people to cooperate together—speaking and acting together—to achieve shared aims (vision-hope)" (LaMothe 2018, p. 83). The idea of the political recognition of the "other" as a unique, valued, and agentic person is relevant to be situated in the Korean cultural trauma in sublimating the unhealed pain to a more mature form of mutual mourning process (LaMothe 2018; Watkins and Shulman 2008). In turn, this cultural mutuality will promote a counterhegemonic power of the liberative resistance against the coloniality of power in the colonial/modern world-system.

The theological rupture is to go through the transformation from the colonial complicity of Protestantism to the restoration of the Protestant authenticity in divine love. The Korean concept of *jeong* displays the liberating possibility of Korean cultural trauma. *Jeong* is "longtime attachment or bonding with other persons with all the ambiguities of such relationships" (Poling and Kim 2012, p. 74). *Jeong* encompasses all the heterogeneity in the relational dynamics of love because it includes the nature of care and acceptance of others (Poling and Kim 2012). From the postcolonial theological view, Joh asserts that the Cross, "with its powerful love ethics," signifies the inclusive relationality embodied by *jeong* (Joh 2006, p. 74). The crucified Christ does not represent the superior image of self-sacrifice like the Western cultural imagination but is the part of both *han* and *jeong*, "holy but also paradoxically abject in all abjectness's misery, suffering, and pain" (Joh 2006, p. 83). Through *jeong*, this embrace can heal the Korean *han* and help them deepen their capacity for inclusivity and love for others. With this perspective, the Korean church can see others not as sinners or enemies but as objects of intercultural dialogue. Also, the Korean church can move forward to fulfilling God's authentic love, not satisfying the capitalist aim of prosperity theology.

In the multidisciplinary work between sociology, psychology, theology, and pastoral theology, we can conceive the decolonial possibility of Korean cultural trauma and its restoration. The cultural trauma of Korea is not only engaged in the non-ending process of interpretation but should be embraced in the intercultural dialogue within the lived experiences of each collective identity. We do not only remember the event with righteous anger but also reflect on it and our cultural response to create a breakthrough in the colonialism that put all cultures in the quagmire of political polarization, colonial nationalism, and false universalism.

## 5. Conclusions

The process and consequence of cultural trauma are ongoing problems all around the world. They continue to undermine the core values of human dignity and cultural mutuality while preserving colonial differences and coloniality of power. However, God's will to care for the traumatized collective identity is also ongoing in today's global world. It is the liminal possibility of actualizing care, love, and liberation. Here, liberation means not only emancipation from the oppressive and traumatic situation but it also encompasses all kinds of reconciliation and restoration. Restoration, for the cure of cultural trauma, does not mean a "return to a golden age in the past, but a compassionate proactive awareness of ruptured flows of relationship and communication in the present that may be reopened in the future" (Watkins and Shulman 2008, p. 314). In the love and care of God, pastoral theology plays a key role in practicing restoration for cultural trauma. Through the caring activities

facilitated by pastoral theological intervention, divine love can be actualized in the Korean cultural trauma by re-membering the dis-membered identity of the Korean collectivity through the *han/jeong* dynamic embedded in the Korean culture (Rogers-Vaughn 2016). On the one hand, *han* can promote a collective rupture in the mourning process through which the trauma can be remembered and reimagined in a reconstruction of healthy cultural interpretation (Alexander 2004b; Watkins and Shulman 2008). On the other hand, *jeong* reconnects the ruptured relationship between “us” and “others” in restoring mutuality and a liberative view of the colonial world. The restoration is a transitional possibility of decolonial response to the colonality of power, which manipulates the global ideologies in the name of universalism, capitalism, and all invisible forms of “-isms.” Therefore, the invocation of decolonial critiques in cultural trauma theory can valorize intercultural reconciliation and restoration so the sociological analysis of cultural trauma is not confined to the realm of the social construction of moral universals (Alexander 2004a) but transcends to a holistic understanding of cultural diversity and colonial legacy in the dynamic of cultural trauma.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The distinction between individual trauma and collective trauma is the immediacy of a traumatic event and experience to an individual. How can we determine the traumatized self in one’s mind who has not directly experienced the trauma? This question has to do with the fundamental characteristic of the collective trauma. When psychoanalytic thinking first described trauma, it focused on the notion of the emotional residues of a hysterical patient whose impression of the accidental situation facilitates a sort of second state of consciousness (Freud [1886] 1981). When Breuer and Freud (Breuer and Freud [1893] 1981) further developed the study of hysteria, the discussion of trauma became a way of explaining the course of hysteria: how the memory and affect connected to the event are repressed from consciousness and are subsequently manifested as neurotic symptoms (Smelser 2004). The pathogenic relation between hysteria and traumatic neuroses is thus denoted in the discussion of repression, illuminating the clinical importance of expressing the affect into words from one’s unconscious (Breuer and Freud [1893] 1981). In his later works, Freud’s interest in-group psychology seems to share some critical psychological ideas with sociology. He remarked that a group has a libidinal structure in which the ego’s narcissistic libido moves toward the group itself as object love, “putting the object in the place of the ego ideal” (Freud [1920] 1981, p. 130). In so doing, the ego’s identification with the group is established enough to follow the ideals and rules of the group regardless of the individual’s intellectual level (Freud [1920] 1981). This conceptualization helps to understand how collective identity is shaped in both individual and collective processes of identification on the basis of the notion of libidinal force and the ego’s psychic structure. However, Freud has not fully accounted for the connection between his works on traumatic neuroses and group psychology. Of course, he already mentioned the totemism of a primitive tribe in terms of a sense of guilt toward the killed father to describe the psychoanalytic aspect of the prehistoric Oedipus complex with a sociological view (Freud 1995). Also, this idea has been developed to understand the ritualistic repetition of the Jewish religion as a sort of collective neurosis to compensate for the sense of traumatic guilt for the murder of Moses in a collective dimension (Freud 1939). Nevertheless, in this psychoanalytic account, we can only affirm a certain form of collective traumatic symptoms induced by the Oedipal guilt, overlooking other possibilities of traumatic events or memories in the group identity and its cultural signification. Unlike psychoanalytic thinking, which only signifies the neurotic manifestation of the repressed trauma of individuals, cultural trauma theory regards the collective narrative of trauma as “a nonending, always-expanding repository consisting of multiple precipitates of a continuous and pulsating process of remembering, coping, negotiating, and engaging in conflict.” (Smelser 2004, p. 54).
- <sup>2</sup> Of course, we cannot deny that some political statements regarding a specific memory of a historical event can be made by political elites who want to foster their intended way of public opinion in their own political interest. However, it is also part of a reaction influenced by the event and a macro level of cultural meaning of the event. For more discussions on the political representation of cultural trauma, see (Alexander and Gao 2012) and (Dromi and Türkmen 2020).
- <sup>3</sup> The ongoing violence between Hamas and Israel proves their dichotomic opposition. Each side is claiming their own casualties occurred by the opposition forces without any humanitarian reference for children, seniors, and women whom they have sacrificed. For more information, see <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-gaza-hamas-war-781b3c63af4ae6e51c313a68f314e66d> (accessed on 17 October 2023).
- <sup>4</sup> Young Eun Ko (2016) articulates how the role of the Christians from the North has created a strong alliance between Korean Protestantism and the nationalist government, especially President Seung-Man Lee and President Jung-Hee Park’s dictatorship.

The hypervigilance manifested by the Christians from the North represents the consequence of cultural trauma. Their lived experiences and deep-rooted feelings of resentment against Communism were good resources for constructing anti-Communism for the government and the Protestant theology in the name of defeating God's enemy.

- 5 By describing the anti-Japanese sentiment in Korea as *Wae-Saek*, a disparaging expression of Japanese culture trending in Korean society, Jeon (2019) investigated how the connotation of anti-Japanese sentiment has been stubbornly maintained, even though the denotation of anti-Japanese discourse in the area of mass culture has changed because of the cultural opening. On the one hand, the political and historical discourse sticks to the process of demonization of Japan. On the other hand, the cultural exchange between Korea and Japan has caused significant differences from the past discourse of *Wae-Saek*, making light of the problem of the historical relations between the two countries (Jeon 2019).
- 6 Akiko Hashimoto (2015) wrote of three main visions of moral recovery in Japan. First, the nationalist approach appeals to respect and national belonging to recover the wounded identity of Japan from the traumatic defeat by emphasizing Japanese national pride and patriotism (Hashimoto 2015). It is a dominant political approach in Japan, fostering geopolitical tensions with China, Korea, and Russia. Second, the pacifist approach is now upholding today's Japanese military stance, using the Self-Defense Force as a protective means of national security (Hashimoto 2015). However, Japan's military trends are leaning toward strengthening its armament for the concern of China, so the nature of its pacifism is fading away and is now more in line with nationalism. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2023/01/29/commentary/world-commentary/japan-security/> (accessed on 1 November 2023). Third, the reconciliationist approach stresses the importance of mutual trust by initiating Japan's acceptance of guilt and a full apology and restitution to Korea and China (Hashimoto 2015). It is the most idealistic but unfeasible in today's political situation in Japan.
- 7 In the Latin American context, *corazonar* refers to a terminological bridge of feeling-thinking that connects all separated relationships by dichotomies (Santos 2018). "*Corazonar* is the act of building bridges between emotions/affections, on the one hand, and knowledges/reasons, on the other. Such a bridge is like a third reality, that is to say, a reality of meaningful emotions/affections and emotional or affective ways of knowing." (Santos 2018, p. 101). In this sense, we can use *corazonar* as a means of navigating reciprocal dialogues and empathic intercultural translation. This concept corresponds to the Korean cultural term, *jinshim*. *Jinshim* refers to one's wholeheartedness when considering someone else or other related matters in terms of relationship. When one needs others' *jinshim*, it means not only a reasonable way of thinking or a logical description but also requires considerable attentiveness, solicitude, and empathy. Therefore, I sense that *jinshim* also can play the role of bridge-building between emotions/affections and knowledges/reasons in the form of intercultural translation like *corazonar*.

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