Writing the Forgotten War: Afro-Korean Antagonism and Solidarity in HBO's *Lovecraft Country*, Toni Morrison's *Home* and Chang-Rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*

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Introduction:

My inquiry into transnational Afro-Asian, specifically Afro-Korean, relations began with reading Paul Beatty's novel, *White Boy Shuffle.* Beatty's novel is a satiric, semiautobiographical bildungsroman of poet and basketball prodigy Gunnar Kaufman, set against the backdrop of the 1992 L.A. race riots. Beatty's novel artfully challenges the myth of cultural purity by displaying how the protagonist, Gunnar's experiences are shaped by geographic racism, which dictated his proximity to other minority groups, such as Asian and Latino communities. Escalating tensions between Black and Korean Americans, specifically, are cited as a major contributor to the 1992 riots, and this communal tension is manifested in Beatty's novel through select characters.

One of these characters is Ms. Kim, a multiracial owner of a local corner store. Gunnar states, "To us, when she was behind the counter in her store, Ms. Kim was Korean. When she was out on the streets walking her dogs, she was black" (Beatty 99). Ms. Kim is an "in-between" figure. Her character symbolically subverts ideologies of racial essentialism, enabling a deconstruction of rigid racial categories by the readers. At the same time, Ms. Kim, who is presented as extremely suspicious toward monoracial black people that shop at her store, reinforces racial hierarchies and highlights the anti-blackness prevalent in Asian American communities.

As I re-read the book to start brainstorming about my thesis, it became evident that I missed the significance of Ms. Kim's history (as it is only briefly mentioned once in the text), and how it helps in situating in a global, political context, Afro-Korean antagonism (a term coined by Japanese scholar Kodai Abe) that Beatty creates. Beatty mentions Ms. Kim's history: "Ms. Kim was the half-black, half-Korean owner of the corner store. Fathered by a black G.I., she was born in Korea and at age seventeen was

adopted by a black family and raised in Fresno (Beatty 98).” A product of the Korean War, Ms. Kim is one of the thousands of forgotten Afro-Korean children created because of relationships between African American soldiers stationed in Korea, and usually, but not exclusively, Korean comfort women. The Korean War is often called the “Forgotten War,” and the history of the African American soldiers who served in Korea is labelled as “doubly forgotten” (Cline 2). Yet the war is crucial not only to understand Afro-Korean cultural encounters but also how the War functioned as a strategic disruptor to the growing Pan-African movement, and an increasingly prominent antiimperialist and anti-racist discourse around the globe (Abe 703). Professor Kodai Abe argues that the Korean War was crucial in creating “Afro-Asian antagonism”, which he describes as racial hate between African Americans, Asians, and Asian Americans (703). In my thesis, I would like to explore the presentation of Afro-Korean antagonism (and solidarity) because of racial, gendered, and imperialist politics that influence the relationship between African American and Korean subjects in the TV show, *Lovecraft Country* and two novels, Toni Morrison’s *Home* (2012), and Chang Rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* (2000).

Section 1: A Historical Overview of The Korean War and Afro-Asian Solidarity

1a) The Korean War: A Brief Overview

American historians often refer to the Korean War (1950-1953) as the “Forgotten War” or the” Unknown War,” due to the lack of recognition it receives in the American public consciousness (Cline 7). They attribute this to the overshadowing legacy of the two conflicts that bracket it: The Vietnam War and World War II. However, the lack of understanding of the Korean War could also be said to stem from its study as an

isolated historical event, instead of acknowledging the war in Korea because of culminating tension from the start of World War II, particularly US-Soviet tension, when Korea was still a colony of Japan (Gowans 15). Today, Korea is divided into two states- The Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea, and the Republic of Korea (ROK), or South Korea. The international de facto border that separates them (one of the tensest fronts in the Cold War) remains unacknowledged by both. Each sees the border (known as the DMZ) as a cease-fire line and accuses the other of illegally occupying territory over which it has rightful jurisdiction (Gowans 13).

Within Korea itself, the Korean War is far from “forgotten”. Depending on which side of the DMZ you are on, it is known as the 6.25 War or the Great Fatherland Liberation (Gowans 14). From the perspective of the DPRK, founded by anti-Japanese imperialist Korean patriots, the War was fought for independence from foreign rule, from both the hegemon of Japan and the United States. After Japan’s defeat in the Pacific War of 1945, Korea was divided into separate US and Soviet occupation zones, as a supposedly temporary measure to accept the Japanese surrender (Gowans 17). However, by 1947, the growing strength of communist forces in East Asia convinced US officials that withdrawal from Korea would allow emancipatory movements in the region to flourish (Gowans 17). Similarly, an economic crisis in Japan was a proponent of the growth of communism, a threat to US financial, commercial, and industrial interests.

Control over South Korea would allow Washington to restore Korea’s economic linkages to Japan (Gowans 17). This would facilitate the renewal of Japan’s capitalism, restart the engine of the country’s economic growth, and make the Japanese forget about the attractions of communism. Secondly, the plan would also disrupt Korea’s gravitation to a communist future in the south and keep its expansion from the north (under Soviet control) contained (Gowans 17). Hence, what would appear to be the

persistence of Japanese imperialism was simply an extension of US control. The Soviets withdrew from Korea on December 25, 1948, three and a half months after the founding of the DPRK, leaving North Koreans free to manage their affairs (which Soviet occupation forces had largely allowed them to do previously). Meanwhile, the United States, declined to quit the country, making a brief show of exiting the peninsula in the summer of 1949 by withdrawing combat troops, but leaving hundreds of military advisers behind and secret protocols in place to keep Korean forces under US operational control, which allows the US to exercise wartime operational control over the South Korean military to this day (Gowans 19).

1b) Situating the Korean War in Afro-Asian Cultural History

Professor Kodai Abe proposes that the Korean War was used strategically to create “Afro-Asian antagonism” in response to global political events that occurred around this time (Early and Mid-Cold War Era), particularly the Pan-African movement, which led to prominent African American intellectuals actively creating and engaging in transnational movements that aimed to fight American racism and imperialism, both domestically and internationally (Abe 702-703). This resulted in a significant global rise in Afro-Asian solidarity. At the beginning of the 19th century, prominent black intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois posed the question of racial oppression as not just an issue prevalent in the US, but one that would shape global geopolitics. In *the Souls of Black Folk* (1903), he stated, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea (Du Bois 11). In situating the problem of African Americans in a global context, they were able to forge intellectual ties with leaders across the globe, most notably in Asia and Africa. In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* renowned Black civil

rights activist Malcolm X states, after reading Mahatma Gandhi's account of decolonization, that "excepting the African slave trade, nowhere has history recorded any more unnecessary bestial and ruthless human carnage than the British suppression of the non-white Indian people" (272). In his work *Afro-Orientalism*, Bill Mullen asserts that "Malcolm's reading is also framed by and confirms his newfound appreciation, via the tutelage of Elijah Muhammad, that he is himself a descendant of the 'Asiatic Black Man" (6). W.E.B. Du Bois, as editor of *Crisis*, would routinely write on political developments in Asia since the journal's founding (1910).

His friend, Indian social reformer and freedom fighter Lala Lajpat Rai had spent years living in the United States from 1914 to 1919 and had written a book on the country's racial relations, for readers in India (Mullen 6). Conferences such as the Bandung Conference (1955) and The First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists (1956) though held after the Korean War, were a definitive culmination of the growing consciousness and sympathy of black intellectuals and activists toward global de-colonial movements and a growing association of racial oppression domestically and internationally, that begun in the early 20th century. In my next sections, I specifically refer to the writings of two prominent Black intellectuals and writers to analyze Afro-Asian relations- W.E.B. Du Bois (whom I previously referred to) and Richard Wright. W.E.B. Du Bois was a pioneering Black sociologist and writer known for his concept of double consciousness, which helped him articulate the psychological struggle of African Americans living in a racially divided society. Richard Wright was a prominent African American author whose fiction and essays exposed the realities of racism, poverty, and Black alienation in 20th-century America. Through works like *Native Son* (1940) and *The Color Curtain* (1956), he explored the global dimensions of race, linking Black struggles in the U.S. to anti-colonial struggles abroad. I chose to focus my discussion on Afro-

Asian relations using the writings of these two intellectuals as they were amongst those most involved in producing literary works discussing Asian geopolitical events, and are featured extensively in Bill Mullen's work, *Afro-Orientalism* (2004), which lays the foundation for my theoretical analysis.

1c) History of Afro-Korean and Afro-Japanese Solidarity

I found the writing of black intellectuals on the topic of Korea to be surprisingly limited, due to the admiration black intellectuals tended to have for Japan, which may have compelled them to, at least initially, downplay/not acknowledge Japan's imperialist activity in Korea, as well as Manchuria, in the decades leading up to the Korean War (1910-1935). In 1906, three years after publishing *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois wrote of Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905): "For the first time in a thousand years, a great white nation has measured arms with a colored nation and been found wanting. The Russo-Japanese War has marked an epoch. The magic of the word "white" has been broken, and the Color Line in civilization has been crossed in modern times as it was in the past. The awakening of the yellow races is certain. That the awakening of the black and brown races will follow in time, no unprejudiced student of history can doubt (Du Bois 330). The Russo-Japanese War was fought for the acquisition of Korea and Manchuria, which were crucial to both empires to expand and industrialize (Gowans 24). Unlike the United States and Russia, whose expansive continental empires contained almost all the raw materials needed for national economic development, or France and Britain, which had vast overseas empires, Japan lacked many crucial resources that a growing industrial power required. Hence, a colonized Korea could support Japan's needs for raw materials and cheap labor (Gowans 23-24).

Yet, these complex motives were overlooked by black intellectuals (predominantly W.E.B. Du Bois) when Japan was used as a model for black sovereignty. Michelle Stephens states that the black internationalism of the early twentieth century constructed “a global imaginary that drew from the masculinist rhetoric of sovereignty essential to both imperial and national visions of the state,” with the “black empire” serving as an alternative model for black freedom in the context of the Americas” (20). Though Du Bois developed a “dialectical branch” of thought that involved Afro-Asian solidarity as essential to counter white western racism and capitalism, his quote on the Russo-Japanese War demonstrates his lack of understanding of the nuances of Asian identity and geopolitics which inadvertently caused him, even as a progressive intellectual to overlook elements of Japanese imperialism (Mullens 3). Du Bois’s conceptualization of race was the main framework of his analysis, and he paid little attention to differences among racial or ethnic groups within a nation-state or larger region. Non-white people were often collectively identified by him as either “Africans” or “Asians”. Mullen labelled this simplification of the Asian identity by black intellectuals Afro-Orientalism (rooted in Edward Said’s theory of *Orientalism).* Afro-Orientalism refers to the literary subgenre in which African Americans oversimplify Asian identity and idealize Asians as their allies, which renders Asia into a “utopian attraction” for anti-imperialist and antiracist discourse (Mullen 2). Du Bois’s Afro-orientalism compelled him to associate with and condemn colonialism only when committed by Western nations, and he maintained a pro-Japanese stance throughout the Asia-Pacific War (1937-1945). Du Bois’s high regard for Japan due to its modernity and his belief that Japan would be the leader of all colored nations also stemmed from his positionality as a member of the West and revealed the elitist facets of his activism (S.W. Lee 514). A notable example of this is Du Bois’s “Talented Tenth” concept, which

refers to the most gifted and educated minority of African Americans (as per Du Bois's views) who would be leaders in their community and fight for the civil rights of their race (Green 359). Du Bois believed that these exceptional individuals, through their education and intellect, could uplift the entire Black community (Green 359). Continuing this line of thinking related to Black American exceptionalism, Du Bois emphasized the importance of African American leaders in developed countries bringing civilization and modernity to black people on the African continent, and similarly, believed it was Japan's duty to bring modernity and civilization to the rest of Asia (S.W. Lee 514-515). Japan's officially adopted stance of a self-sufficient Pan-Asian Empire paralleled Du Bois's initial vision of Pan-Africanism (S.W. Lee 515). Even as he grew disillusioned with Japanese imperialism post-WWII, Du Bois argued that Western racism and colonialism remained the greater global evil, and that U.S. condemnation of Japan was often hypocritical (Mullen 26). Post-war, Du Bois largely abandoned any admiration for Japan, turning his attention fully to anti-colonial movements in Africa and the rise of Communist China, which he saw as a more genuine liberation force (Mullen 26-29). Though Du Bois eventually developed a nuanced understanding of Asian identity, his favorable views on Japan colored a large part of his literary discourse on

Asia. I use the example of Du Bois to highlight a point of tension between African Americans and Asian subjects, which is how African American intellectuals may conceive of progress and modernity as Westernization, which may (at least initially) compel them to view traditional Asian culture and Asian countries that were not fully modernized as "primitive". At the same time, they felt like outsiders and were treated poorly in the West. I refer here to the feelings of "disinheritance" in the black experience as expressed by another prominent black intellectual, Richard Wright, to understand

how Black subjects may understand their positionality concerning the East (Asia) and the West (the U.S.). In “Tradition and Industrialization,” in his work *White Man, Listen!* Wright writes:

> My position is a split one. I’m black. I’m a man of the West . . . I see and understand the West, but I also see and understand the non- or anti-Western point of view. This double vision of mine stems from my being a product of Western civilization and from my racial identity, long and deeply conditioned, which is organically born of my being a product of that civilization. Being a negro living in a white Western Christian society, I’ve never been allowed to blend, in a natural and healthy manner, with the culture and civilization of the West. Yet I’m not non-Western. I’m no enemy of the West. Neither am I an Easterner. When I look out upon those vast stretches of this earth inhabited by brown, black, and yellow men... my reactions and attitudes are those of the West. I see both worlds from another and a third point of view.
> (Wright 705-706 cit. in Mullen 43)

While it is imperative to question what this third point of view is, and if this third point is entirely constructed, I agree that Black Americans could more wholly understand and relate to non-Western subjects. Wright’s inability to fully understand and relate to non-Western subjects, and his condescending views about their primitivism, did not make him less sympathetic to their cause, however, he developed a sort of negative loyalty to the West, which made Wright’s pursuit of what he labels ‘universal humanism’ to be challenging. In his report on the Bandung Conference (1955), a pivotal political event that brought together 29 Asian and African nations to discuss peace, decolonization, and the role of the Third World in the Cold War, entitled *The Color*

Curtain (1956), Wright states “As a frank and sometimes bitter critic of the Western World, I’ve been frequently dubbed “extreme.” ....Well, what I hear from the lips of many Asians startled me, reduced my strictures to the status of a “family quarrel”.....I found that many Asians hate the West with an absoluteness that no American Negro could ever muster. The American Negro’s reactions were limited, partially centered, as they were, upon specific complaints; he rarely criticized or condemned the conditions of life about him as a whole. Once his particular grievances were redressed, the Negro everted to a Western outlook. The Asian, however, had been taken from his own culture before he had embraced or pretended to embrace Western culture: he had, therefore, a feeling of distance, of perspective, of objectivity, toward the West which tempered his most intimate experiences of the West ....” (Wright 448-449).

Throughout *The Color Curtain*, Wright characterizes the Asian Other as deeply religious, powerfully irrational, and desperately in need of Western political ideas to guide them to modernity. There is this sense provided by Wright that Asians (with the exception of the Western-educated elite that he aligns himself with) and those belonging to the so-called “Third World” are so alien, that their deep hatred for The Western World (which guides them toward civilization) is beyond the scope of understanding to African Americans. This disaffiliation is similarly felt by Morrison’s protagonist Frank Money, a Korean War veteran, in her novel Home. Frank states: “Korea. You can’t imagine it because you weren’t there. You can’t describe the bleak landscape because you never saw it. First, let me tell you about the cold. I mean cold. More than freezing, Korea cold hurts, and clings like a kind of glue you can’t peel off (Morrison 126). In the following works I think that the East/West divide between Koreans and African Americans initially does contribute to their inability to relate to each other, amongst other factors and during

the Korean War the positionality of Black Americans as part of the Western world was weaponized to generate mutual hostility between the two groups.

1d) African American Soldiers and the Roots of Afro-Korean antagonism

Two years before the outbreak of the Korean War, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 in 1948, declaring his administration's commitment to quality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country's defense "without regard to race, color, religion or national origin"(Abe 702). Truman's action to officially desegregate the American Armed Forces was notably praised by W.E.B. Du Bois in the *Chicago Defender* (1945) as a significant milestone for racial progress (Abe 702). But the real reason behind desegregation was not as well-intention as Truman made it out to be; when military desegregation was finally established, it was a result of a platitude of forces, such as the willingness of African-Americans to take up arms to try and claim a part of the American democratic promise, sustained pressure from African-American civil rights activists, and the needs of the Korean War itself, which both needed more troops and forced branches that had lagged to desegregate (Abe 703). Furthermore, while Truman pushed for a desegregated army, there were no policies put in place to ensure integration, or rules mandating an equitable distribution of diverse races, or equitable treatment (Cline 14).

In his work *Twice Forgotten: African Americans and the Korean War*, Professor David P. Cline asserts that the desegregation of the military and the participation of African Americans leading up to and during the Korean War were integral to achieving the goals of the Civil Rights Movement (9). Historically, African American participation in the armed forces has served as leverage for the Black community to collectively bargain for freedoms from a country that has long promised to deliver them (Cline 10). Cline

asserts that even without the Korean War, military desegregation would have occurred due to greater political and ideological pressure, both from African Americans and because of Cold War pressures, as allies and enemies alike were critical of U.S. Jim Crow laws (11). Still, the war conditions were a catalyst for more immediate change.

Joining the military led to a host of new experiences for black soldiers, often related to crossing the divisions put in place by Jim Crow (Cline 13). Black veterans who participated in the army returned to the segregated U.S., experiencing new freedoms and demanding equality at home. The desegregated army was a stepping stone, followed by desegregated schools, transportation, and other hallmarks of American life, beginning with Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, one year after the end of the Korean War (Cline 13).

There was this idea promoted in the U.S. that the Korean War had a “liberalizing” effect on racial politics, not solely for African American subjects but also Korean ones (Abe 706). The U.S. intervention in Korea was justified by being portrayed as a liberal, humanitarian mission (Abe 706). Daniel Y. Kim argued that this construction helped to “justify the American intervention in Korea on humanitarian grounds, highlighting the role that US servicemen played as protectors and saviors of Korean war orphans (Kim 9).” However, this supposed liberal demarcation of racial lines between white, black, and Asian subjects was to cover up the racist, militaristic aspirations of the U.S. Koreans were first initiated into American racism via their exposure to the American armed forces (Abe 707-708). While Koreans had been exposed to white Americans through positive cultural depictions, such as cinema, their exposure to Black Americans was mainly through soldiers, and racist stereotypes perpetuated through popular American media (Abe 708). Professor Kodai Abe argues that due to this limited contact,

certain violent incidents committed by Black soldiers in bars and clubs around US bases were amplified and helped consolidate a racist stereotype of black violence against Asian subjects (707). This, Professor Abe claims, formed the basis of what he calls Afro-Asian antagonism. He states, “When the Truman administration began to “utilize negro manpower,” it did so by exporting militarized blackness to be fully represented abroad” (707).

Through the Korean War, African Americans also came to distrust Asian subjects. According to Michael Cullen Green, this distrust was two-fold: “black military service in Korea,” Green states, “encouraged African Americans to hold racialized attitudes toward Asian peoples, while increasing their support both for the war and for their nation’s growing military empire in Asia” (110). For African Americans who looked to serve in the Armed Forces to participate in American democracy and affirm their identity as American citizens, disidentification from East Asians and, more importantly, identification with *American militarism was* crucial. Professor Abe proposed that this mutual hostility between African American and Korean subjects formed the core of American Cold War tactics (707).

1e) Langston Hughes and Korea: A Forgotten History of Afro-Korean Solidarity

While Afro-Japanese solidarity has a well-documented and recorded history, there is a curious and somewhat forgotten point of Afro-Korean solidarity that is largely overlooked, in the works of Harlem Renaissance writer and early innovator of jazz poetry, Langston Hughes. Jang Wook Huh states, “In *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956) and an uncollected poem, “Wait” (1933), Hughes links racial discrimination in the United States to colonial rule in Asia, presenting Koreans as a group vulnerable to racial subjection in the Japanese empire and challenging the typical binary of white colonizer

and “colored” colonized. In so doing, he invokes a minoritarian history of Koreans that has been obscured by both a dichotomous notion of race (“white” vs “colored”) and by Japanese historians (Huh 210).

Langston Hughes mentioning the subjugation of Koreans in his works, along with his words being used in Korea to describe Korean colonial disenfranchisement, often creates recognition between Black Americans and Koreans, by equating antiblackness/Jim Crow with the racialized subjugation of Koreans under Japanese imperialism. This allows for, Professor Huh poses, exploring the implications of using “literature to represent Asians under an Asian colonial regime as a collective whose suffering parallels the black suffering depicted in African American radical literature” (Huh 201).

Langston Hughes visited Japan in 1933 and several other places, which he documented in his book *I Wonder as I Wander* (Hughes 316). In a cabin of the steamer *Taiyo Maru* bound for Hawaii, Hughes reads Japanese newspapers he bought in Japan. Titles like KOREAN STEAL WATCH and KOREAN CAPTURED WITH BIKE (Hughes 316) catch his eye, and recognizes the racialized criminalization of Koreans reminds him of the way African Americans were racially profiled in the U.S. He stated, “The Koreans, being a subject people of the Japanese, received the same kind of press treatment in Tokyo. Both the Japanese and the Koreans were colored races, but I saw quite clearly that color made no difference in the use of race as a technique of hurting and humiliating a group not one’s own. In Japan, Asiatics did so to Koreans. In America, whites did so to Negroes” (Hughes 316).

Following this visit, Hughes wrote works that pointed to the racialized subjugation of Koreans and lent works to Korean authors to translate, who modified the poems to add a colonial sub context. The deliberate overlapping of black disenfranchisement and

Korean colonial loss creates a sense of shared positionality of Koreans and African Americans in a global, racial, and imperial hierarchy. Professor Huh states that “Hughes and his Korean translators employ the poetics of overlapping dispossessions to provide an epistemological model for imagining a shared juncture of subjugations—racial and colonial—and the affinity between the racialized governance of the U.S. and Japanese sovereignties over subjects” (Huh 203). However, this shared affinity is complicated and subverted during the Korean War as African American soldiers stationed in Korea become active enforcers of US imperial interests, creating this imagery of Black victimizers and Asian victims, which is a gross reduction of the complex realities, particularly of Black soldiers. Analyzing Afro-Asian Korean War stories empowers us to study racial antagonism and friendship not as mutually exclusive, which I feel is especially accurate when considering the works, I am analyzing, where Black and Asian characters often both dehumanize and identify with each other simultaneously. This recognition becomes prominent in Chang-Rae Lee’s novel, *A Gesture Life* (2000), where there is an explicit link made between the racialized subjugation of Koreans under Japanese imperialism and Black Americans in the U.S.

Section 2: Shaping Cultural Memory: The Korean War in Popular Media

In his work, *The Intimacies of Conflict: Cultural Memory and the Korean War,* Daniel Y. Kim theories that the depictions of black soldiers in popular Korean War in the black press and popular media led to the construction of military multiculturalism (a term coined by Melanie McCallister), which undermined the anti-war stance, and ideologies surrounding Pan-African discourse embraced by black intellectuals around this period (Kim 53).

Kim argues that the Korean War saw the collapse of black-anticolonial movements that opposed American foreign policy, and the embrace of old War American foreign policy by black liberals (Kim 7). The War ultimately paved the way for the armed forces to be seen as the most meritocratic, socially equal institution in the United States. Kim asserts that certain media portrayals, as well as writings about the Korean War in prominent African-American journals (such as *Atlanta Daily World),* helped solidify the portrayal of black military heroism, in the U.S. Kim refers to prominent T.V shows like *Pork Chop Hill* (1959) and *All the Men* (1960) that propagated the image of the loyal, brave African-American G.I., to quell any critique that black intellectuals or activists may have regarding the racism that black soldiers may experience during service and the unequal recognition and resources given to white versus black war veterans (Kim 53-55).

Section 3: Examining Lovecraft Country: An Interesting Portrayal of Afro-Korean Relations

3a) General Overview: Racism and Lovecraftian Horrors

In the context of this knowledge regarding mainstream portrayals of African American soldiers, I was fascinated to discover a more nuanced presentation of Afro Korean relations during the War, in a black Historical Horror Show called *Lovecraft Country* (2016), released on HBO. The series follows a Korean War veteran, Atticus (Tick) Freeman, his friend Letitia, and his Uncle George as they travel across 1950s Jim Crow America, searching for his missing father. The show, an adaptation of a novel by the same name, incorporates elements of fantasy and horror, influenced by the work of writer H.P. Lovecraft (Woźniak 94). The TV show incorporates many elements of Lovecraftian horrors, such as supernatural occurrences, mythical or extraterrestrial

creatures, and emphasizes cosmic dread (Woźniak 107). Cosmic dread can be understood as the philosophical inquiry related to how an individual can lead an authentic life in a world riddled with absurdity and question the incomprehensible nature of existence (Woźniak 107).

By juxtaposing the bizarre, supernatural, and occult occurrences in the show with the mundane, but horrific individual and systemic racism the Black characters in the show face, which is based on historical events (the show even features figures such as Emmett Till), *Lovecraft Country* reveals the incomprehensible horrors of prejudice, its absurdity, and how it may invoke a similar experience of cosmic dread in those experiencing it. In his paper on the show entitled *Monsters Among Us: Using Lovecraft Country to Teach about Du Bois and Fanon*, Randall Wyatt states, “Using horror as a backdrop, the creators can present to the viewer the atmosphere of white supremacy and anti-Blackness that figuratively and literally terrorizes people of color. When real-world events are juxtaposed alongside the supernatural, the viewer is given the second sight of Black people and forced to make a judgment on what Blacks should actually fear: demons, ghosts, and monsters, or the police and racist white citizens that fulfil roughly the same functions” (363).

In a show where elements of traditional horror are combined with real-life horror, and both literal monsters and the monstrous behavior of humans are used to invoke fear, one must ask questions such as: Who is the monster in the series? In his paper *Race and Horror in HBO’s Lovecraft Country* Mariusz Woźniak suggests that the figure of the monster in *Lovecraft Country* has many forms, and in certain contexts, human characters can take on the role of “monster”, representing the fears and anxieties of both the characters in the series and their viewers- he gives the example of police officers who often appear in the series and embody the human monstrosity that is

systemic racism (105-106). He also states, “Similarly, Black people are also treated as monsters by white society in the series – white people do not understand Black people and their culture. Black people escape the framework of the reality white people have lived in so far, so white people are unable to treat Black people like human beings. In this sense, white people’s treatment of Black people is also related to Cohen’s next thesis: that monsters are the embodiment of otherness” (Woźniak 106).

Atticus Freeman’s decision to participate in the Korean War is hence framed as a quest to escape the label of “monster” or “other” placed on him by white society and the monstrous realities of segregation. Atticus thinks that enlisting in military service will allow him to escape the violence he faces. But to do so, he must now make a monster out of the Korean nationalists and communist sympathizers, whom he is forced to kill or capture as a part of his duties. Episode 6 of the show, entitled “Meet Me in Daegu,” is a flashback episode, showing the protagonist Atticus’s time as a G.I., during the Korean War, and his romance with Ji-Ah, a Korean nurse, who is also a *kumiho* (a Korean fox demon). Ji-Ah is the secondary love interest in the show, and her relationship with Atticus serves as an important medium to understand not only his “disinheritance” in the Black American experience that drove him to serve in Korea, but also comprehend inherited legacies of systemic and identity-based violence that help them empathize with each other, such as the fact that both Ji-Ah and Atticus are victims of the American Imperialist system, although Atticus is also an enforcer of this system, due to his position in the military.

3b) Afro-Korean Antagonism in *Lovecraft*: Who is the Monster?

In his paper, Randall Wyatt says of the characters in the show, “The characters in the *Lovecraft* series constantly grapple with the question of 'who or what am I' when

attempting to locate themselves or others in a map of human ontogenesis (363). Characters struggle endlessly with the figure of the monster both externally and internally.” In the case of Atticus, his external “monster” is the systemic racism his family has experienced which haunts him and leads him to view serving in Korea to physically escape the site of violence and his internal “monster” that he grapples with, particularly in this episode, is all the violence he is forced to commit against Korean communists and collaborators. As mentioned previously, this requires the “othering” of Koreans which would help him psychologically justify the violence. But even before Atticus gets closer to Ji-Ah and begins a romantic relationship with her, he seems to empathize with the Koreans and their plight, recognizing the similarities in the racialized dehumanization they experience.

The plot of the episode sets up the dynamics commonly associated with Afro Korean antagonism, as proposed by Professor Kodai Abe: Korean women suffering violence at the hands of Black male soldiers. Ji-Ah’s friend, Young-Ja, is a communist sympathizer who leaks private information about the hospital they both work at to Korean nationalists, which provokes Atticus’s unit to line up and interrogate all the nurses working in Ji-Ah’s shift (“Meet me in Daegu” 00:026:10–00:29:00). Atticus and another black soldier shoot two of the Korean nurses, capture, torture, and presumably kill Young-Ja, reinforcing the framework of Black perpetrator/Asian victim. Both parties behold the other as the “monster”, which sets up the reason for mutual hatred and demonization of the other group. This interaction is also mediated by a white soldier, who initially starts questioning the women. I found it particularly striking how the white soldier set up the tension by beginning to threaten the women, but the act of physically carrying out militarized violence was left to the black soldiers, as a reminder that placing

black soldiers at the forefront of the violence was a deliberate choice used to subvert interracial solidarity.

This antagonism is only overcome when Ji-Ah (initially on a mission to avenge her friend) interacts with Atticus after he is brought into the hospital to treat some wounds (“Meet me in Daegu” 00:029:23–00:34:00). The hospital setting is crucial to their ability to connect and subvert the Black perpetrator/Asian victim framework. Ji-Ah takes on the responsibility of caring for him, allowing her the upper hand in their dynamic. She watches him cry when he is unable to read his book with his broken glasses, and his frustration at being unable to care for himself. She witnesses the negative consequences and suffering he undergoes as a result of the War and starts to empathize with him. This presentation of Atticus’s emotional and physical vulnerability complicates the image of black soldiers embodying a violent, militant masculinity. Furthermore, as Atticus and Ji-Ah bond over books and popular media, Atticus admits to her that his reason for joining the army had little to do with political ideology or national pride, which complicates his motivations for carrying out these acts of violence. Later, the two have a conversation about Atticus’s father and Ji-Ah’s mother having placed certain expectations on the two characters that they feel like they cannot fulfil:

Ji-Ah: Things are difficult with my mother, too; she wishes I were someone I’m not.
Atticus: I like who you are. My entire life, my father’s been trying to turn me into someone I’m not. I’ve gone halfway across the world to get from under his thumb, and now, being here, this war, it’s done his job better than he could imagine.
Ji-Ah: We have to stop letting their fear shape us. (“Meet me in Daegu” 00:37:30–00:38:13).

There are several layers of meaning to this conversation. Ji-Ah's struggles with her mother stem from the fact that she is a literal monster (a *kumiho*) trying to become human, while Atticus's strained relationship with his father and his sense of self is mediated by struggles that bring him closer to becoming a metaphorical monster. Atticus's father expects his son to be a stoic, "tough" Black man—someone who doesn't show weakness or emotion, which he thinks will help Atticus survive in a deeply racist world, which Atticus feels like he cannot achieve, preferring to use reading as a form of escapism. Ji-Ah's status as a *kumiho* and Atticus's position as a Black soldier have forced them to play the part of the monster by committing violent acts against others. But this conversation affirms the similarities that emerge between them, a mutual recognition of each other's true potential for humanity that supersede violent political structures that pit them against each other, and an understanding that they are both victims of this war, and of Western imperialist interests. This breaks down the binaries of the Black perpetrator/Asian victim, which were set up earlier.

Later in the episode, Ji-Ah confronts Atticus about the fact that he killed her friend, and yet she still loves him. She tells him, "We have both done monstrous things, but that does not make us monsters. We could be the people we see in each other. We just must choose to be" ("Meet me in Daegu" 00:47:52–00:48:03). In this instance, Ji-Ah affirms that their love for each other validates their humanity. It also rejects the decision of White Western civilization to portray them as the "monsters", and their relationship seems to indicate the redemptive power of Afro-Asian solidarity. Ji-Ah's only way to retain her human form is by killing 100 men, and she can only steal their souls after they climax, or orgasm. Her sexual encounters with men are monitored by her mother, who functions as a sort of brothel madam, forcing her to bring home men. This places her in a position of sexual subordination to men, somewhat reminiscent of a Korean comfort

woman. As a Korean woman, Ji-Ah is perceived as exotic and sexually submissive, and the gendered connotations of this racialized construction make it easier for her to fulfil her expectations as a *kumiho* for her mother (Wyatt 364). Atticus is a poor Black man, perceived as hypermasculine, aggressive, and a tool to be used by White civilization against other people of color, to further their imperialist interests (Wyatt 364).

Due to their racialized and gendered positionalities, they initially use different mechanisms to escape the oppression they face. Ji-Ah uses her exoticized body to lure and wield power over men, and Atticus resorts to reactionary violence. Their relationship offers an alternative path to confronting their feelings of alienation, outside these construed stereotypes.

Ji-Ah and Atticus's romantic relationship challenges the limits placed on the ontological positionality of both characters. Ji-Ah is a fascinating character because of the layers of liminality she experiences, and how she straddles so many supposedly dichotomous identities- Western/Eastern, Woman/Demon, Human/Animal, Subject/Object, Good/Evil, and Victim/Perpetrator. The shapeshifting myth of the *kumiho* lends itself to the breakdown of these boundaries, and Ji-Ah's acceptance of her ambiguous ontological position aids her in helping Atticus process the acts of violence he commits, affirming that it does not negate his humanity. Atticus tells Ji-Ah, "I've done horrible things, things I've tried to forget. And when I'm with you, that seems possible. It's like, it's like cause you see the good in me, I know it's there "("Meet me in Daegu" 00:43:30–00:43:52). Ji-Ah and Atticus's mutual acceptance of the other, along with their moral complexities, once again makes viewers question the validity of the Monster/Human dichotomy and blur its boundaries.

Craig Warren's theory of onticide posits that the Black subject is metaphysically negated in Western society and denies the capacities of individuality or uniqueness.

Indeed, the construction of (white) humanity depends on the dehumanization of the black subject (Warren 392). Atticus's relationship with Ji-Ah seems to disrupt an established ontological order because of her willingness to move past racialized judgment and truly understand the motivations behind his decision to join the army and his personal struggles. The show seems to propose that while love is not utopic, and certainly cannot undo systemic violence or injustice, it can open new modes of being and understanding the self, for both Atticus and Ji-Ah.

3c) Ji-Ah, Racialized Sexuality and the Myth of the *Kumiho*

In my view, the TV. Shows evens out or equalizes Ji-Ah and Atticus's relationship by presenting Ji-Ah not just as a Korean woman, but as a *kumiho,* a nine-tailed fox demon from Korea, to make her a moral and psychological mirror to Atticus. The choice of portraying Ji-Ah as demonic, particularly a *kumiho,* both mythologies her, cementing her as a part of Eastern, or Korean, folkloric tradition. However, she also possesses certain additional abilities (such as seeing the future) that tie her to Western folklore, as a sort of Cassandra figure.

The *kumiho* is a myth recorded in China, Korea, and Japan, and constitutes a tradition of identifying and questioning the alien's place in its cultures. The myth of the *kumiho* is used to signify both the "attraction and repulsion that can be generated by a society's conception of its others, and especially the dangers threatening social fabric" (S.A. Lee 136). The *kumiho* was also used to test the moral boundaries of society, often portrayed as a devious woman who used her magical powers to seduce men. In this way, the *kumiho* is a warning of the dangers of uninhibited female sexuality. In the case of Ji-Ah, we see this lack of inhibition through her nine tails, which emerge when she

has sex with men and eventually rip them apart, which she asserts that she has no conscious control over.

The *kumiho* can also be thought of as sharing some similar characteristics with the “Dragon Lady” stereotype, which characterizes East Asian women as deceitful and mysterious, yet extremely sexually alluring. In visual media, the Dragon Lady is often visually defined by an emphasis on “otherness” and sexual promiscuity. Unlike the submissive “Lotus Blossom trope”, this character’s overt sexuality is transgressive, even fatal, and we see in the show that Ji-Ah weaponizes her sexuality to lure in and murder men. The reason why Ji-Ah is possessed by a *kumiho* in the first place is because her mother summoned the *kumiho* to kill Ji-Ah’s stepfather, who raped her as a child, which ruined her sexual “purity”. Ji-Ah does not understand this love as transgressive, which is attributed to her being a monster:

Ji-Ah’s mother: My husband…. hurt my daughter. His kind of love was wrong. Ji-Ah: And that’s why you had the mudang summon me. To kill him. Because he was a monster?
Ji-Ah: Yet you want me to kill like a monster to become human?
Ji-Ah’s mother: You don’t understand why his love was wrong…. because you can’t feel love. You can’t feel anything because you are a monster.
(“Meet me in Daegu” 00:22:06–00:05:00).

In this instance, Ji-Ah’s inability to distinguish between socially appropriate and inappropriate sexual acts is what makes her a transgressive figure, as well as her inability to feel love, particularly romantic love, which reduces all her encounters with men to a purely sexual act, where her body is an object for them to use, and site of

transaction for both parties. Ji-Ah doesn't want to sleep with these men but is coerced by her mother. It is also revealed that Ji-Ah's mother did not stop her husband from raping her daughter because she was borne out of wedlock and marrying him was her only way to avoid being publicly disgraced and restore her family's honor. In this vein, Ji-Ah's question to her, "Yet you want me to kill like a monster to become human?" ("Meet me in Daegu" 00:22:26) is pertinent because it blurs the lines between monsters and humans. It makes one question the portrayal of the *kumiho* as "monstrous", an assertion built on heteropatriarchal understandings of maintaining a respectable female sexuality, which drives Ji-Ah's mother to do monstrous and horrific things to her daughter. Ironically, Ji-Ah realizes that the closer she gets to being human, the closer she gets to becoming an actual monster, as she realizes that individuals like Atticus and her mother have shown her that humans are capable of immoral acts. Ji-Ah's portrayal allows the *kumiho* figure depth and nuance and questions the social rules in place that allow others to demonize her.

Sexual stereotypes associated with the *kumiho* have also been historically used to demonize African American men. In this context, I specifically refer to the stereotyping of black men as hyper masculine and hypersexual, which is used to present them as a threat to white women and the moral fabric of white society. Black men and Asian women, in particular, face hypertextualization borne out of the intersection of racial and gendered categories. A study conducted on patterns of racial and ethnic exclusion by internet daters showed that Black women and Asian men, were more highly excluded as romantic prospects across all ethnic groups surveyed (White, Black, Latino, Asian, Middle Eastern, East Indian) than their counterparts, as they are seen as the less desirable option within their respective racial categories (Robnett and Feliciano 826).

Considering this information, I found the way the show portrayed the romantic and sexual relationship between the two characters to be interesting, particularly the tenderness and genuine mutual affection between Ji-Ah and Atticus that is built into the depiction. There seems to be a lack of overt sexualization of the "other" in their relationship that is based on racial and gendered stereotypes, and in my opinion, the show's choice to portray the relationship as not only sexual but also emotionally vulnerable avoids playing into a White, Western gaze. In the case of Ji-Ah, she tells her mother that her love for Atticus affirms her sense of humanity:

Ji-Ah: I love Atticus.
JI-Ah's mother: You're still a *kumiho*. You'll kill him sooner or later.
Ji-Ah: No. I can control my tails.
Ji-Ah's mother: So, you have made my mother a monster……and a whore. Ji-Ah: You told me I wasn't human because I could never have feelings. That no one could have feelings for me, but you were just making excuses. To give yourself a reason not to love me. Young-Ja cared about me. Atticus cares about me. And if they can, so can you. ("Meet me in Daegu" 00:40:30–00:05:31).

Ji-Ah's ability to control her tails, at least initially, implies that she feels a sense of control and sexual agency in their relationship, as her sexuality is not perceived as dangerous or threatening. While this portrayal of Afro-Asian romance is almost revolutionary in its nuance and is fantastic representation for a less frequent romantic racial pairing, it is important to inquire into whether the improbability of this romance undermines the representation of Afro-Asian solidarity. Additionally, there seems to be a kind of Orientalist gaze in the portrayal of Ji-Ah, specifically in the first episode of the

show, where she is not portrayed as a kumiho, but a generic alien in Western tradition, who comes down from a spaceship to meet Atticus. This was strange to me, as it undermines the specificity of portraying Ji-Ah as a *kumiho* (though it is important to note that she is not a traditional portrayal of a *kumiho* either). I think this element of the show could have been revised. Yet, I was impressed with the use of Korean mythology in the episode on Korea, and the use of the *kumiho* to question heteropatriarchal, conservative values in Korean society.

3d) American Films in 1950s Korea: Navigating Romance during a Cultural Cold War

“Meet me in Daegu” introduces viewers to Ji-Ah in the very first scene, showing her sitting in a nearly empty movie theatre that is screening the American movie *Meet Me in St. Louis.* As the only other people in the theatre leave and Ji-Ah is left alone, she jumps up to dance and sing with her favorite American actress, Judy Garland. She is wearing a stylish western dress, and has fashionable hair and makeup, as per beauty trends at the time (“Meet me in Daegu” 00:00:50–00:01:22). For American viewers, this is an insight into the socio-cultural and political context of a rapidly westernizing Korea, post Japanese colonialism, and under U.S. military rule (“Out of the Ashes – the USROK Alliance & South Korean Cinema”). Though the Japanese colonial Empire (19101945) strictly prohibited American films, Hollywood films occupied more than 80% of the imported films screened in Korea in the 20s and 30s (“Out of the Ashes – the US-ROK Alliance & South Korean Cinema”). For Korean audiences, going to the cinema was not only an escape from the oppressive colonial condition, but also was seen as a way to engage in progressive values and the latest material trends. Hence, during Japanese imperialism, the U.S. remained a symbol of prosperity and progress, which

was admired from afar (“Out of the Ashes – the US-ROK Alliance & South Korean Cinema”). However, after the U.S. occupation of Korea, there was a deliberate effort by U.S. forces to promote anti-communist, pro-U.S. sentiments. The US also started to invest in producing films specifically targeted to Korean audiences, collaborating with Korean locals and featuring various places in Korea being reconstructed, with American support. The U.S. had a keen interest in “cultural relations” as a tool of micro-level governance, which laid a cornerstone for the “Cultural Cold War” to come (“Out of the Ashes – the US-ROK Alliance & South Korean Cinema”).

Considering this knowledge, Ji-Ah’s love for U.S. cinema becomes complex and multifaceted. Post-WWII, *Meet Me in St Louis* was a symbol of nostalgia for a Pre-War, idealistic, white America, which represented traditional family values. Judy Garland plays Esther Smith, the oldest daughter of an upper-middle-class white family, who falls in love with the boy next door. St. Louis, the setting for *Meet Me in St. Louis*, was a city full of contradictions—booming with industrial growth, yet also deeply segregated and racially unequal. The film presents an idealized, whitewashed version of the city that ignores the real social dynamics of the time, particularly racial segregation, economic disparity, and urban tension. The episode’s title “Meet Me in Daegu” even echoes *Meet Me in St. Louis*, underlining the dissonance between romanticized Americana and the reality of U.S.military intervention abroad. Since the title draws a parallel between St. Louis and Daegu, there is a conscious attempt to compare the oppressive conditions of segregation with colonial rule in U.S. occupied Korea. It also shows the influence of American ideals regarding womanhood and traditional femininity that somewhat overlap with Korean culture, with Garland embodying a specific kind of white, domestic femininity. However, for Ji-Ah, who is training to be a nurse, unmarried, and soon-to-be breadwinner of her household, her relationship with Garland’s protagonist is

multifaceted. In my opinion, it does not represent her striving toward a traditional feminine ideal as much as it shows the impact of U.S. consumer culture on the erasure of a more traditional, Korean identity. Judy Garland is often praised for her performance of a confident, highly stylized form of gender and glamour. Similarly, Ji-Ah is performing femininity, both as a *kumiho* pretending to be human and as a daughter expected to fulfil her mother's and society's expectations. The Hollywood musical sharply contrasts with the brutal reality of war and identity loss depicted in the episode, which critiques the fantasy sold by such films.

For Ji-Ah the movies are a way to escape the daily stressors of her work, family tensions, and the colonial context, which is something that contributes to a disconnect between her and several other Korean characters, most notably the Korean men she meets when she goes for a speed dating event. One of the men even calls her out on her passion for American films, stating, "The Japanese spent 50 years eradicating our cultures and traditions, and you spend your time-consuming American propaganda?" ("Meet me in Daegu" 00:05:32). Ji-Ah, who only gets her knowledge on American culture through such superficial films that ignore brutal realities related to racial issues in the U.S, and views America as a glamorous, progressive utopia. Ji-Ah's contact with Atticus and his Japanese soldier friend is essential in her understanding that the movies she is consuming are an idealistic version of the U.S. and helps her understand how her racial identity influences her social standing within the hierarchy of the U.S. empire. When Ji-Ah asks them, "Have you two met Judy Garland?" The two men laugh, and Atticus tells her, "It's just, the only way we'd meet Judy Garland is if I was her butler or if he (Atticus's friend) was her chauffeur" ("Meet me in Daegu" 00:35:07–00:35:24). This evokes a sort of solidarity, as Ji-Ah realizes that people of color are discriminated against in the U.S., and the link is made between racial oppression domestically and

colonial subordination in Korea. This also makes Ji-Ah more sympathetic toward Atticus and helps develop their relationship. Yet, their first official date is in a makeshift theatre, where they were watching *Summer Stock* (1950) featuring Judy Garland and Grace Kelly, which is about Jane (Judy Garland), a farmer in England whose life is disrupted when her younger sister, Abigail, shows up with a troupe of New York actors—led by Joe Ross (Gene Kelly)—asking to use Jane's barn to rehearse a summer musical ("Meet me in Daegu" 00:40:30–00:44:46).

The themes of the movie include self-discovery, and the use of performance as a form of escape, which encapsulate Ji-Ah and Atticus's relationship at this point in the episode- although they do appear to develop romantic feelings toward each other, they are still performing an idealized version of the self for the other, by withholding crucial information. For instance, Ji-Ah has yet not told Atticus about the fact that she originally sought him out to seduce and kill him, to avenge her friend, Young-Ja, who Atticus and his military unit kill, and Atticus, although he has alluded to Ji-Ah that he has done terrible things during the war, has not elaborated on this. Due to this, when they attempt to have sex after they watch the movie, Ji-Ah cannot control her tail and risks harming Atticus, which is why they cannot continue with the act.

Later, after Ji-Ah has confronted Atticus about Young-Ja's death, they manage to have sex without Ji-Ah's tail emerging, and this takes place in the same makeshift movie theatre, notably, in front of a blank screen ("Meet me in Daegu" 00:48:17–00:49:02). It is an acknowledgement of the realities of war, colonialism, and racial oppression that the glamorous American movies were omitting, and the pain that they have both suffered. In this way, Atticus helps Ji-Ah see past the projections of U.S. films employed as part of a Cultural Cold War, and the relationship that emerges between them is authentic because it is not superficial, doesn't ignore the complex realities of

their situation, and allows for a relationship to develop that is not mediated by normative gendered expectations perpetuated by white society, that exoticize racial minorities.

3f) Afro-Asian Romance and Contesting National Boundaries

Another aspect of Lovecraft Country that I found compelling was the way that the show used Ji-Ah and Atticus's relationship to inquire into ideas related to nation building, and geo-political boundaries, which is particularly important in the context of the Korean War, which led to the creation of the DMZ, arguably one of the most contested borders in the modern world. As this war was crucial in defining the boundaries and modern-day national identities of North and South Korea, it is important to think of the implications of an inter-racial romance and how it alludes to ideas related to nation building and national identity. In her work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999) Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa based her Borderlands theory on her experiences as a Latina woman who grew up near the U.S.-Mexico border. I think the theory is helpful when understanding Ji-Ah and Atticus's interactions due to its use of issues related to race, gender, and colonialism. It explores how people living in the "borderlands" — literal and metaphorical — experience identity and culture in complex, hybrid ways. Those who exist in the "borderlands" occupy a liminal space, and often do not feel like they fully belong anywhere. It refuses binary thinking of identity (e.g., male/female, Korean/American) and instead synthesizes identities into something fluid. Anzaldúa proposes a *"new mestiza"* identity—a consciousness that embraces ambiguity, contradiction, and plurality. Both Ji-Ah and Atticus are navigating identities shaped by violence, colonialism, and war, and their experiences echo Anzaldúa's idea of living in an "in-between space". Their relationship exists in a shared borderland of trauma and desire: while Ji-Ah is haunted by her literal inner demon; Atticus is haunted by his

figurative ones. They both recognize what it means to be unclaimed and abandoned by nation and family, seeking wholeness on their terms, through their romantic relationship.

Gloria Anzaldúa states that “The Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy . . . A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (Anzaldúa 19). In my opinion, this perfectly encapsulates the state of U.S.-Occupied, war-torn Korea; in a state of transition and uncertainty, with undefined borders, and where people who would usually never come in contact, like Atticus and Ji-Ah, get to form relationships with each other. In this tumultuous time, when Korea’s future is uncertain, the role of women as nation builders becomes even more crucial.

Ji-Ah has a chance to recreate Korea, with her reproductive abilities, but also the opportunity to create a new nation. Ji-Ah and Tick’s relationship, even though it could not last due to numerous external factors, hints toward Afro-Asian futurism and the formation of racial identities that resist Western Imperial categorization. It transcends and blurs national boundaries and implies a child of Ji-Ah and Atticus could be imagined as a literal embodiment of Anzaldúa’s *New Mestiza*, not just in racial terms, but in terms of cultural and historical hybridity. In this way, there is not only Afro-Asian solidarity, but an imaginative leap toward a new consciousness, produced because of the breakdown of racial and national boundaries.

4. Exploring Afro-Korean Antagonism in Toni Morrison's Home

4a) A Brief Overview of *Home*

Morrison's work *Home* was published in 2012, over 50 years after the end of the Korean War (1953). In an interview with PBS NewsHour, Morrison states that her motivations for writing the book were to push back against this notion in popular culture that the Post-War period in the '60s was a "Golden Age" where everyone was employed, happy and financially stable (PBS NewsHour). Morrison states that for a black veteran, coming back to the U.S. was a "second fight", a sentiment echoed by David P. Cline in his book on the testimonies of black soldiers (Cline 7). The novel focuses on the experiences of a Korean War veteran named Frank Money, who narrates his experiences in Korea and his post-war struggles with trauma and discrimination as he travels from Portland to Lotus, Georgia, in search of his sister Cee.

Morrison's novel is structured as an oral history, and the narrative style aids in Morrison's mission of (re)telling a mythologized version of American history that silences or misrepresents marginalized experiences.

Morrison highlights the fact that both the psychological aspects of the Korean War and the lack of resources provided to Black veterans make them struggle with alienation and a lack of a sense of belonging when they return, in addition to the spatial segregation that further isolates them. In their work, *Reassessing the Past: Memory and Identity in Toni Morrison's Home* Ksenija M. Kondali and Sandra V. Novkinić state that "in the record prosperity and accelerated development of a consumer society postwar, millions of white Americans moved to the suburbs, prompted by a baby boom and the benefits of the veterans' legislation package known as the G.I. Bill. However, most of the US was segregated due to Jim Crow laws that made millions of African Americans the victims of dislocation, poverty, and racial violence" (490). They assert that the urban

developments mostly benefited the white population and mostly displaced African Americans, for whom the notion of home was now unstable and under attack.

4b) Displacement, Disinheritance, and Shared Afro-Asian Victimology

Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), deals with the categories of class, gender, institutional and geographic location, and how these contribute to the formation of individual identity in the modern world. Bhabha tries to explain the “unhomely” spaces occupied by marginalized individuals within society, stating that colonial subjects are never purely "colonized" or "colonizer"—their identities are complicated, in a constant state of tension. This perfectly exemplifies Frank Money’s struggle in understanding his identity as both a victim of U.S. racial oppression and an agent of U.S. imperialism. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist, Frank Money, recounts one of his earliest childhood experiences, which is a violent lynching and burial of a black man near Lotus, Georgia, that he and his sister witnessed (Morrison 12). Frank states that he remembers the way the man’s body was thrown into a hole in the ground, without any proper ritual, and into an unmarked grave, which is the first act of brutal, racial violence and dehumanization of black people they witness (Morrison 12). He claims he was so focused on the men’s horses that he forgot about the burial, but it is evident that it had significantly traumatized him- Frank returns to the sight of this violence throughout the book and giving this unknown man a proper burial is central to him learning to process the violence he has experienced.

What is prominent about this incident is it highlight the way that black individuals face a sense of “unhomeliness”, or a lack of a fixed identity, due to the constant racial violence they face, which causes them to constantly move from one place to another, and prevents them from having any having possessions, property or community which

are crucial to building a strong sense of identity, specifically in a capitalist society. This dehumanization and erasure continue into death, as seen in the instance of this unknown man, who is buried without any proper ritual, and in an unmarked grave. In this way, his existence and experiences, as well as black cultural and social history, are erased by White society.

In the second chapter, Frank wakes up in a psychiatric facility, a prisoner of the modern carceral state. Instead of being treated with dignity as white veterans are, he is stripped of possessions such as his shirt, boots and shoes, which would allow him to travel far, but Frank also notes that this strips him of his ability to look purposeful. He states, “Still, before escape, he would have to get shoes somehow, some way. Walking in the winter without shoes would guarantee his being arrested and back in the ward until he could be sentenced for vagrancy. Interesting law, vagrancy, meaning standing outside or talking without a clear purpose anywhere” (16). Frank goes on to state that it truly didn’t even matter if you were loitering, because the police had full access to the private spaces and homes of black people and could go and arrest them anyway. This points to the criminalization of black people in urban public space and the systemic violation of black privacy, which contributes to the perpetual state of “unhomeliness”, as Frank becomes a permanent refugee, unable to assimilate into mainstream, white society. In her paper *Entanglements of Trauma: Relationality and Toni Morrison’s Home*, Irene Visser states that “Frank’s trauma narrative in *Home* fully engages African Americans’ history of enslavement, disenfranchisement, and continuing oppression and discrimination. Like Morrison’s other works, it presents this history as the search for a place of acceptance and safety, for belonging, and exposes its obstruction and disruption by laws, regulations and racial prejudice” (6).

On his journey to Lotus, Georgia, Frank relies on the kindness of strangers, getting some money and shoes from a Reverend, and a place to stay from a man named Billy Watson, whom he meets on the bus to Chicago (42). Frank makes his way to Lotus by depending on the uncertain and spontaneous kindness of predominantly black men, which evokes imagery of the Underground Railroad, historically operated by abolitionists and former slaves who risked their lives to help others gain their freedom. This network of people helps him get to his destination, where he searches for his sister Ycidra (Cee) to restore some sense of purpose, community and connection to his personal history that he has felt so disconnected to since he came back from Korea, having lost his two closest friends who also served in the War with him. Frank's uncertain sense of safety at every given moment, his lack of assurance as to his destination, and his constant state of momentum l in most of the novel also prevent him from "putting down roots" and having a fixed sense of self. This instability is further exacerbated by his PTSD, which is evident through the scattered structure of Frank's narrative voice and how the novel jumps between the past and present, not adhering to a linear account. Frank's haunting past and uncertain future make it difficult for him to stay grounded in the present and focus on his current state of being.

Frank is on a constant journey of trying to understand and process his trauma, battling a sense of "unhomeliness", and struggling to carve out a place for himself Post War in a society that does not want to create space for him. His "disinheritance" in his national identity is highlighted by his conversation with Billy Watson on the bus. When Watson asks him where he is from, Frank replies, "Aw, man. Korea, Kentucky, San Diego, Seattle, Georgia. Name it, I'm from it" (42). It is intriguing to me that Frank lists Korea as the first place he associates himself with. This not only shows that his identity is unstable, not rooted in any one physical location, but also likens the violence he

experienced during the war in Korea to everyday life such that the two major places depicted in Morrison's novel—Lotus, Georgia, and Chosin, Korea—are interchangeable locations. This further equates the subjugation and suffering of Korean War refugees and Black soldiers.

It is Frank's refugee status and his past experiences that seem to help him empathize with the unknown Korean girl who was scavenging for food at the camp where he was stationed. He states, "I remember smiling. Reminds me of Cee and me trying to steal peaches off the ground under Miss Robinson's tree, sneaking, crawling, being as quiet as we could so she wouldn't see us and grab a belt. I didn't even try to run the girl off that first time, so she came back almost every day, pushing through bamboo to scavenge our trash. I saw her face only once. Mostly, I just watched her hand moving between the stalks to paw garbage" (128). It is notable that Frank compares the Korean girl to Cee, his younger sister. Ycidra "Cee" Money is born under challenging circumstances that significantly influence her life and self-worth. Her mother, Ida, gives birth to her on the side of the road during the family's forced migration from Texas to Georgia after being evicted from their home. This unconventional birth becomes a source of scorn from her step-grandmother, Lenore, who refers to Cee as a "gutter child" and associates her birth with misfortune. Frank exclaims to his grandmother that "being born in the street—or the gutter, as she usually put it—was prelude to a sinful, worthless life" (62).

The invocation of the term "gutter child" draws parallels between Cee and the unnamed Korean girl, who scrounges for food in the trash. Cee did not grow up with much paternal affection as Cee's biological parents are notably absent and emotionally distant, and Lenore is openly antagonistic toward her, which leaves Frank as the only paternal figure in her life. Frank, too, finds a sense of meaning in his relationship with

Cee above everything else. He thinks, “Maybe his life had been preserved for Cee, which was only fair since she had been his original caring-for, a selflessness without gains or emotional profit. Even before she could walk, he’d taken care of her” (52). Frank’s caring instincts toward Cee seem to extend toward the Korean girl, and while he does not intervene or try and help her, he expresses a fondness for the girl perhaps borne out of a recognition of how war and instability has made her a refugee who wanders in search of food and other resources to sustain herself and is vulnerable to abuse and violence. Frank also discusses having to scavenge for food to survive, stating, “Talk about tired. Talk about hunger. I have eaten trash in jail, Korea, hospitals, at tables, and from certain garbage cans. Nothing, however, compares to the leftovers at food pantries (58)”. This testimony further blurs the boundaries between the treatment of Black soldiers and Korean war refugees, which also complicates the superficial Black perpetrator/Asian victim dynamic set up that creates Afro-Asian antagonism in this context.

4c) Women, Sexual Violence and Nation-Building: Comparing Ycidra (Cee) and the Unknown Korean Girl

A prominent feature of *Home* is the parallels created between Frank’s sister Ycidra Money and the Korean girl Frank sexually assaults and shoots. Both represent female innocence and experience sexualized and racialized violence. Cee’s failed marriage with a man named Prince forces her to live alone and financially support herself as a waitress. Cee, lacking emotional support and education, idealizes love and romance, believing that finding a man will validate her worth, and allow her to achieve social mobility, and financial stability. Prince, with his attractive car and smooth demeanor, represents a superficial, masculine appeal that Cee romanticized. She soon realizes that Prince is ashamed of her rural upbringing and had married her so he could

steal her step-grandmother's automobile. Cee's reason for running away with Prince includes the cruel treatment she faced at the hands of her grandmother Lenore, who resents Cee for being poor, unwanted, and born outside of "proper" circumstances. Lenore's internalized racism and adherence to respectability politics cause her to berate Cee for caring about her appearance, wearing nail polish or makeup, labelling her a "hussy" (Morrison 70). Frank, who usually tried to shield Cee from the harassment of men and from being hypersexualized as a child, is stationed in Korea when she decides to run away with Prince, and hence cannot intervene. Cee recalls an instant as a child where a man flashed her, stating. "Suddenly, he was behind the tree she was leaning against, swinging his bat twice into the legs of a man she had not even noticed standing behind her. Mike and the others ran to see what she had not. Then they all ran, Frank dragging her by the arm, not even looking back. She had questions: "What happened? Who was that?" The boys didn't answer. They simply muttered curses. Hours later, Frank explained. The man wasn't from Lotus, he told her, and had been hiding behind the tree, flashing her. When she pressed her brother to define "flashing," and he did so, Cee began to tremble. Frank put one hand on top of her head, the other at her nape. His fingers, like balm, stopped the trembling and the chill that accompanied it. She followed Frank's advice always: recognized poisonous berries, shouted when in snake territory, and learned the medicinal uses of spiderwebs. His instructions were specific, his cautions clear (Morrison 72). In this regard, Frank searching for Cee after the war, and his desire to take care of her is partially an act of moral redemption for his failure to protect both his sister from the abuse she faces while he is stationed in Korea, but also see moral redemption for failing to protect the Korean girl, who violates and kills.

Cee's economic situation causes her to seek employment as a nurse under a Confederate named Dr Beauregard Scott, who exploits Cee's vulnerability to employ her

and sterilize her against her will. Cee's sterilization refers to the history of medical racism, sexual violence, and forcible sterilization of black women. Medial racism, or eugenics in the U.S., has roots in the British movement, with anxieties about "racial purity" and "race suicide" (142). Across the U.S. South in particular, black women bore the brunt of eugenicists, suffering higher rates of forcible sterilization. In *Loving Mean: Racialized Medicine and the Rise of Postwar Eugenics in Toni Morrison's Home* by James Fitz Gerald he states that, "This racial gatekeeping traded on prominently held beliefs in selective migration— which argued that more intelligent blacks migrated North and, in the process, left their dysgenic counterparts behind—and legitimized aims that extended far beyond the region's anti-miscegenation statutes. White-led clinics and sterilization programs housed within neighborhoods of color buttressed negative eugenic defenses against race degeneration and came to overshadow black Americans' own insistence on procreative autonomy" (143). Hence, Cee's sterilization was a result of the intersection of her race and class status, as well as her Southern background. The Korean girl Frank shoots is also a victim of sexual violence, presumably serving as a comfort woman to U.S. soldiers, even though she is a child (we glean this from her groping Frank unprovoked, which hints at sexual trauma). Like Cee, she has been hypersexualized at an early age and subject to horrific sexual abuse. Both Cee and the Korean girl are subjected to exploitation that removes them from the traditional roles expected of women in a national or ethnic community, particularly the role of reproductive futurity, i.e., the ability to bear children who sustain the nation. The Korean girl is not even given the chance to reach reproductive age, as a sort of deterrent to nation-building, or rebuilding in the case of a war-torn Korea. Frank's act of killing the girl may seem like a mercy killing, but it can be read symbolically as a failed attempt to restore order through violence, an example nation-state often rebuild after war: through

ethnic cleansing, exclusion, or elimination of those deemed racially "impure", a theme we also see in Cee's sterilization.

4d) Shifting Perspective of Afro-Asian Antagonism, Recognition and Solidarity

" I have to say something to you right now. I must tell the whole truth. I lied to you, and I lied to myself. I hid it from you because I hid it from me. I felt so proud, grieving over my dead friends. How I loved them. How much I cared about them, missed them. My mourning was so thick it completely covered my shame.

Then Cee told me about seeing a baby girl smile all through the house, in the air, the clouds. It hit me. Maybe that little girl wasn't waiting around to be born to her. Maybe it was already dead, waiting for me to step up and say how.

I shot the Korean girl in her face.
I am the one she touched.
I am the one who saw her smile.
I am the one she said "Yum-yum" to.
I am the one she aroused.
A child. A wee little girl.
I didn't think. I didn't have to.
Better she should die.
How could I let her live after she took me down to a place, I didn't know was in me? How could I like myself, even be myself if I surrendered to that place where I unzip my fly and let her taste me right then and there? And again, the next day and the next as long as she came scavenging.

What type of man is that?

And what type of man thinks he can ever in life pay the price of that orange?

You can keep on writing, but I think you ought to know what's true". (Morrison 182-183)

Morrison's *Home* is written as an oral history- Frank is narrating his story to an unknown person (maybe Morrison herself) who is writing the novel. Frank initially tells readers about the unknown Korean girl earlier in the book but omits the fact that he kills the Korean girl, and not another soldier, like he initially tells readers and the interviewer/writer. This is linked to his presentation of a cohesive self. Frank's sense of purpose and his idea of what it means to be a man seem to stem from protecting the people he cares about and those who are vulnerable. We see this reflected in both his commitment to find Cee, and care for her after she has been forcefully sterilized, as well as his guilt surrounding his inability to protect his friends, Stuff and Mike, who died during the War. His invocation of "love" and "care" in his statement "I felt so proud grieving over my dead friends. How I loved them. How much I cared about them, missed them" (Morrison 182) are prominent because they create the image of a man who prides himself on his ability to take care of his loved ones, which Frank seems to struggle to understand can co-exist with an ability to cause harm and pain.

The inability for him to feel both mourning and shame at the same time shows that Frank may struggle to psychologically process that he is both a victim of this war and a perpetrator. His survivor's guilt framework causes him to hide the reality about the Korean girl. But eventually, he also realizes that only when he stops lying to himself can he once again begin to take care of others (like Cee), return to his roots, and be the type of man he wants to be. This also reflects the novel's broader idea: home is not only a physical community (that Frank eventually finds with Cee and the other women in Lotus) but also

a site of confrontation and repair. In his paper, Kodai Abe states that, “The novel identifies Frank’s sense of guilt stemming from his own violent acts in Korea as a psychosocial basis to morally and effectively discourage him from imagining transnational, interracial kinship. As a veteran of an unjust, integrated war, he is an agent of American national violence against Korea, rather than a possible ally of color against white America’s violence” (717). Even in his recognition of his sexual assault of this Korean child, he assigns blame to her when he says, “How could I let her live after she took me down to a place, I didn’t know was in me?” (Morrison 183). Abe proposes that “He (Frank) cannot help ascribing responsibility to the Korean victim as if she were to blame, or as if either an African American or an Asian must be a perpetrator when addressing victimhood on either side” (720). Abe posits that it is ironic that Frank processes his experiences using a U.S. constructed framework where both Asians and African Americans are either victims or perpetrators of violence, whereas undermining

Afro-Asian antagonism requires the acknowledgement that they can, and often are, both (720). I personally see Frank’s confession of this guilt, and his comparison of the violence experienced by Cee and the Korean girl, as a subconscious understanding of their similarities as victims of racialized oppression, and that this oppression is transnational. Hence, Frank’s attempt to fix his relationship with Cee is also an attempt to apologize for his act of violence against the Korean girl, and his moral failure in that circumstance. I personally see this as a first step for Frank to develop a sort of transnational consciousness and link U.S. racial oppression to imperial violence overseas. The fact that Frank includes this event in his oral history and makes it part of the narratives means that the testimony becomes a sort of “third space”- a space where binaries are challenged, and categories like national identity, memory, and power are contested.

Section 5: Afro-Antagonism and Solidarity in Chang-Rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*

The last literary work I would like to discuss is Chang-Rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*. Written in 1999, the novel follows Franklin Hata, a Japanese man of Korean birth, as he attempts to assimilate into suburban, middle-class white American society in the late 1980s and 90s, post-World War II (1939-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953). Hata is an unreliable narrator who tries to portray a picturesque version of himself as a good father, partner and member of his community, conveniently omitting his history, particularly his work in a military clinic in World War II. During the war, Hata is stationed in Burma (modern-day Myanmar), and a significant and haunting part of his wartime experience involves his interactions with a Korean comfort woman, whom Hata calls K, who is forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military.

It is important to note the significant ways in which Lee's *A Gesture Life* differs from *Lovecraft Country* and Morrison's *Home*:

1. Unlike *Home* and *Lovecraft Country,* which take place in the 1950s, during or right after the Korean War, *A Gesture Life* takes place during the 1990s, with flashbacks to WWII and other events from the 1940s to 70s.
2. Unlike the other two works, which feature Black G.I. protagonists who serve in Korea during the Korean War, the protagonist is an ethnically Korean man adopted by Japanese parents and serves as a medic during World War II.
3. The prominent Afro-Asian relationship in *Home* and *Lovecraft Country* are between Black soldiers and Korean women/girls, while in Lee's novel, it is the relationship between Franklin Hata, an ethnically Korean, Japanese-adopted man, and his multiracial (Korean and Black) daughter, Sunny.

4. The central relationship is between two American characters (Hata presumably identifies as Japanese American, and Sunny can be labelled as Korean/African American, although it is unclear how she would self-identify).
5. Unlike the previous works that feature monoracial characters, Lee's novel features characters who have multi-faceted ethnic/racial identities.

The novel's historical connection to the Korean War is through Hata's adopted daughter Sunny- who is hinted to be the product of a Black G.I. and a Korean woman, (possibly even a comfort woman, although we cannot be certain), and was most likely conceived during or right after the Korean War. Sunny represents the millions of multiracial, Black and Korean children born during or after the War, who faced significant prejudice and hardship in Korea, often stigmatized as the offspring of "military prostitutes". Over 200,000 children were sent abroad for adoption in the six decades following the Korean War, and approximately 40,000 of these children were multiracial (C. Kim). After the war, President Rhee presented multiracial children as undesirable, and was known for an ideology that embraced one nation, one race, and mixed-race children didn't conform to this rigid societal model (C. Kim). Black children were stigmatized. Korean comfort women who served Black soldiers were often at the lowest rung of Korea's social hierarchy, and their multi-racial children were often lower, existing on the margins of society. They are those who are "invisible, considered neither Korean nor American" (Abe 709). Post American occupation, antiblack racism was deeply ingrained in the Korean psyche, but even before U.S. influence, "Korean people had long upheld their version of ethno-nationalist supremacism that was exacerbated by the transplantation of American racism" (Abe 710). The circumstances made multiracial black children more likely to be put up for adoption.

I wanted to include the novel in my analysis even though it is significantly different, as the experiences of Afro-Korean, multi-racial characters are rarely found in mainstream literature, and they are rarely significant characters in novels.

5a) Double-Consciousness: Hata, Ethnic Identity and Assimilation to White American Suburbia

The protagonist, Franklin Hata, is an ethnically Korean man who grew up in Korea while it was under Japanese colonial rule. Hata states that he left his Korean family and lived with a Japanese couple, who assumed the role of adoptive parents for him. Originally born to the Korean Oh family, Hata decides to "pass" as Japanese and adopt the Japanese surname of the prominent, well-to-do Kurohata family to achieve social and economic mobility. He recounts his reason for assimilation, stating, "For me, it was readily leaving the narrow existence of my family and our ghetto of hide tanners and renderers. Most of us were ethnic Koreans, though we spoke and lived as Japanese, if one was in the twilight. Of course, I didn't leave on my own. No one of my family's circumstances could expect to change his station, at least without a lifetime of struggle (C.R. Lee 71). In his paper *the white-clad people: The white hanbok and Korean nationalism,* Yeseung Lee theorizes that the assimilation policies enforced by the Japanese Empire in colonized Korea led to a sort of Du Boisian double-consciousness (273).

Throughout the book, we see Hata struggle with assimilation as he tries to "pass" off as Japanese, and how this informs his ideologies surrounding social mobility. We see him try to suppress his Korean origins to assimilate into Japanese and then American identity, and this has significant negative consequences on his psyche. His entire life is structured around gestures such as etiquette, appearances, and codes of respectability,

rather than authentic emotional expression, which stems from his identity of being found out as a cultural outsider. Hata uses these ideas of social and cultural assimilation to fit into the community of a middle-class, white suburb, Bedley Run. The main secret of book—the information he tries to conceal from the readers—his complicated relationship with Kkutaeh or K, a Korean comfort woman, and his participation in her sexual abuse, his failure to protect her, and her eventual, violent death are slowly revealed to readers in a series of flashbacks. Kkutaeh's death forms the moral and psychological core of the novel, and Hata's guilt at his failure to protect her is linked at his shame at concealing his Korean identity, and taking on the role of the Japanese oppressor, specifically in the context of his service in World War II, where he treats the injuries of Korean comfort women, so they can continue sexually serving Japanese soldiers. Kkutaeh is also one of the only characters who knows that Hata is Korean, which is revealed in an exchange with him where he shares her name with him. She states. "My Korean name is Kkutaeh, but I never really wanted the name. I'm the youngest of four daughters, so you can see how I got it. May I ask yours?" and Hata replies, "I don't have one" (C.R. Lee 235). Hata has changed his name several times, from his Korean one to the Japanese name Jiro Kuhata, to his Americanized name Franklin Hata, which reveals the way he adopts a new identity to assimilate to whichever region he moves in. K's confrontation with Hata brings up complex feelings of shame and guilt, but instead of acknowledging this truth, he denies his identity. Later when K kills Japanese Captain Ono after he rapes her, she requests Hata that he kill her, to spare her from the brutal sexual violence and trauma she will surely face as her punishment.

K puts him in a position where he must act decisively, and any choice he makes will reveal who he truly is. If he kills her, he accepts responsibility—and guilt, and if he

refuses, he admits his cowardice and betrayal. Hata chooses the latter. He does nothing. And K is taken away, presumably sexually tortured and killed. But her request, and final gesture of rebellion, reveals that Hata is more likely to side with his oppressors and choose individual survival over protecting not only the woman he supposedly loves but also his country and heritage, which K represents. When Kkutaeh asks Hata to kill her, he tells her that they can escape somehow and live together after the war. She cries, “I am not going anywhere with you!” (C.R. Lee 300). Hata implies that Kkutaeh and he can have a “normal” life, which requires forgetting, or at least not reckoning with the trauma of Japanese Imperialism, war and the systemic erasure of Korean culture. In this way, Kkutaeh’s choice to rebel against the Japanese soldiers is a sign of Korean resistance and a refusal to assimilate into the dominant (Japanese) culture. This assimilation to Japanese culture is then mirrored during his immigration to the U.S., by the way Franklin Hata uses notions of respectability politics, clinging to his false Japanese identity, and internalizing white suburban values such as restraint, politeness, and non-confrontation. He strives to be a valuable and respected member in his community. His petit bourgeois positionality is made tangible via the fact that he owns his beautiful Tudor style home (that many of his suburban community members envy) and, at least initially, his medical supply store. His home is meticulously kept. He follows neighborhood norms rigidly and is well-liked without forming close, intimate relationships. In this way, there is a direct link made between Japanese and White American cultural hegemony. Hata uses his socio-economic status to gain proximity to whiteness and distance himself from other people of color, most notably black people. He recalls when he first moved to the U.S., and states, “I suppose, for certain groups, such as the blacks, or the Chinese in the cities, who for one reason or another seemed to live apart. Still, I had assumed that once I settled somewhere, I would be treated as those people were

treated, and in fact I was fully prepared for it. But wherever I went— and, here in Bedley Run—it seemed people took an odd interest in telling me that I wasn't unwelcome" (C.R. Lee 3). Hata's assimilation is also tied to his perceived Japanese identity, as Japanese Americans were seen as more Americanized, and fit more neatly into the model minority stereotypes than Korean Americans, who were less culturally "assimilated" than Japanese Americans in white-majority spaces (Nguyen). Hence, there is also a distinction made between the way that different Asian American groups are racialized, in proximity to whiteness.

5b) Hirohata and Sunny: Anti-blackness, Assimilation and the Model Minority Myth

In *A Gesture Life* (2000), Kkutaeh is a moral and psychological mirror for Hata's daughter Sunny, who is both Korean and Black, and serves as a symbolic link between the racialized subjugation suffered by Koreans under Japanese colonialism, and Black Americans in the U.S. Hata initially adopts Sunny to assimilate better to a suburban familial ideal, something which he later tries to complete via his relationship with a white neighbor, Mary Burns. This relationship, on the surface seems be unsuccessful because Sunny does not enjoy in suburban bourgeoisie recreational activities which people in her community like to engage in, such as attending events at the prestigious country club (which Mary owns)- but it is later revealed that Mary is uncomfortable with the way Hata treats Sunny, because of the way he racializes her. Given below is a part of their conversation regarding Sunny:

"I try my best to treat her with respect," I said.

"Yes," Mary Burns answered earnestly. "Yes, you do. You treat her like a grown woman, which I guess is understandable because she's very mature for her age." "You know how much I want her to be independent."

"Yes, she is," she replied. "But it's as if she's a woman to whom you're beholden, which I can't understand. I don't see the reason. You're the one who wanted her. You adopted her. But you act almost guilty, as if she's someone you hurt once, or betrayed, and now you're obliged to do whatever she wishes, which is never good for anyone, much less a child" (C.R. Lee 60).

Here, it becomes evident that Hata likens Sunny to Kkutaeh, and his decision to adopt her is a manifestation of his guilt at his failure to protect her and her unborn child, and an attempt at moral redemption. Sunny, possibly being the daughter of a soldier and a Korean comfort woman, also likens her to Kkutaeh's dead child, and shows Hata's attempt to revise history by taking care of a child who was a product of the war and imperialism.

Sunny is a Korean/Black American girl adopted by a Korean-born man attempting to pass as Japanese in a white suburb. She both cannot, and does not want to, assimilate into the white suburban mold Hata has built for himself. While Hata erases his Korean roots to fit in, Sunny (like Kkutaeh) refuses to perform this assimilation. She embodies the complexities of ethnic identity that Hata tries to suppress. Sunny, being black, cannot neatly fit into the model minority model that Hata embodies. Hata's internalized anti-blackness and his refusal to reckon with both his daughter's racial identity and their strained relationship cause Sunny to eventually run away from home. When he reminisces about adopting her, he states, "When Officer Como casually mentioned at the hospital that she had seen Sunny, I instantly saw in my mind the picture of her at the age when she first came to me. A skinny, jointy young girl, with thick, wavy black hair and dark-hued skin. I was disappointed initially; the agency had promised a child from a hardworking, if squarely humble, Korean family who had gone

down on their luck. I had wished to make my own family, and if by necessity the single parent kind, then at least one that would soon be well-reputed and happily known, the Hatas of Bedley Run. But of course, I was over hopeful and naive, and should have known that he or she would likely be the product of a much less dignified circumstance, a night's wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl" (C.R. Lee 204). Sunny's identity as both Korean and Black forces readers to understand the connection between these two identities, and Hata's acceptance of his Korean-ness is interwoven with his acceptance of Sunny's blackness.

5c) Sunny's Multi-racial Identity and Sexualization of Black and Korean Women's Bodies

Sunny and Kkutaeh are also similar in terms of how their gendered and racialized bodies are a site of sexual violence, and they both struggle against Hata to obtain agency over their sexuality and bodies. For Kkutaeh and Sunny, their respectability lies in their sexual purity, and both characters are subject to the expectations and domination of Hata, who attempts to regulate their sexuality to preserve a sense of moral or cultural respectability. For Kkutaeh, this control is extremely violent: she is a Korean comfort woman systematically raped by Japanese soldiers, under Hata's complicit medical care. Hata, who serves as a medic, supposedly ensures the "physical well-being" of comfort women, but he helps cover up the violence they face by helping keep them healthy enough to continue this sexual service. Hata also physically violates Kkutaeh under the premise of "love", which he thinks is noble and respectable. Kkutaeh calls him out on this false veil of respectability he hides under, stating that if he loved her, he would shoot her, allowing her agency over her fate.

Sunny's body becomes a site of racial respectability politics in American suburbia.

Hata policies her body and morally judges her for her sexual autonomy, especially when she becomes pregnant by a Black man—a situation that deeply unsettles Hata's assimilationist ideals. Hata also inappropriately lingers on her body, showing both his ambivalent status as a parent and his sexualization of his daughter. This leering is reminiscent of the way he leers at and objectifies Kkutaeh. Sunny eventually moves out to live with Jimmy Gizzi's house, which is notably home to many black and brown men, and Gizzi himself is a white local, a 25-year-old high-school dropout and drug dealer. Hata's repulsion at this move is racialized, and he is distressed over the fact that he cannot surveil her, to control her sexual activity. Hata visits the house and watches his daughter have sex with Linc, a black man, who is presumably the father of Sunny's child. He watches as she strips for Linc and Gizzi, who is an observer, and states, "I had never seen her move in such a way. I knew what her body was like, of course, from when she was a young girl, and later, too, when she'd swim or sunbathe at the house in a bikini, which was hardly a covering at all. She was always lithe and strong and sturdy-limbed, never too skinny or too softly feminine. I saw her as I believe any good father would, with pride and wonder and the most innocent (if impossible) measure of longing, an aching hope that she stays forever pristine, unsoiled" (C.R. Lee 114). Though Hata professes that he has nothing but paternal feelings toward her, his decision to stay and watch his daughter have sex, his hyper-sexualization of her body, and the way his gaze lingers on her body are strange and alarming. His choice to watch her strips her of bodily autonomy and privacy and reinforces his desire to control women's bodies. In sleeping with Linc, Sunny is re-creating the circumstances of her conception, and Hata is watching her, unable to control her.

Sunny is often described by Hata in terms of her "looseness"—traits historically attributed to hypersexualized stereotypes of Black femininity in the American racial imagination. Hata blames his daughter for asserting her sexual agency, associating it

with shamelessness. While watching her, he stated, “She was moving and dancing with every suggestion, and then finally she was touching herself in places no decent woman would wish men to think about, much less see” (C.R. Lee 114). Hata is disturbed not only by Sunny’s sexual autonomy and her having sex with a black man, but also by what her behavior represents: the failure of his project of assimilation and control. He also associates her resulting pregnancy, which is a result of wedlock, with shame and social degradation. Hata’s decision to force Sunny into having a dangerously late abortion, and the way he uses medical procedures and interventions to exert control over the bodies of women (such as Kkutaeh).

In both cases, Hata objectifies and polices the bodies of these women, who are hypersexualized due to their racial and ethnic identity. Hata’s need to control both women reflects his deeper anxieties about identity, assimilation, and his masculinity. Both Kkutaeh and Sunny resist his control—Kkutaeh through direct defiance and final acts of self-determination, and Sunny through emotional withdrawal, which is at the heart of why she is unable to get along with Hata.

5d) Afro-Asian Solidarity? Hata and Sunny’s Reunion

Hata and Sunny’s relationship is complicated, and in my opinion there will never truly be a resolution due to their different, political views and ideas about gender, race respectability etc. which often seem too different to have a satisfying resolution, or one that I think is fair to Sunny, as in my opinion I do not see Hata ever being completely emotionally vulnerable with his daughter, or acknowledge how his anti-blackness and racialization of her affected her childhood. However, Hata does undergo some change by the end of the novel. On Hata’s end, as he starts to reveal more details about his service and his ethnic identity, this facade of suburban idealism fades. By the end of the book, Hata has sold off markers of his suburban respectability- such as his

house and his store- and moved into a more modest living space. He has realized that the name he has built for himself, and the legacy he has desired for so long to build with his daughter, as the “Hata’s of Bedley Run”, is nothing but a façade. This shift signals his willingness to accept a more ambiguous, open-ended existence. On reuniting with Sunny, Hata also comes to terms with how the abortion he forced her to have deeply hurt her. Toward the end, we see Hata begin to reckon with the harm he has caused to both Sunny and Kkutaeh.

When Hata reunites with Sunny 13 years later, she is a single mom, which does not fit into a white suburban ideal, but she is also notably a hardworking professional, which gives Hata great pride and shows that he certainly does not give up all notions of assimilation and class mobility. Sunny now has a black, multiracial child named Thomas, whom Hata expresses a fondness for. When he first sees Thomas, he notes his heritage “I think the boy must be hers, bestowed as he is with her high, narrowing eyes and her black hair, though it’s tightly curled, near-Afro, and her warm, nut-colored skin (though I wonder why he isn’t darker)”(C.R. Lee 208). Accepting Thomas, even silently, is Hata's first meaningful gesture of acceptance of Sunny’s racial identity and personal agency, and of a more complex, multiracial future that cannot be sanitized. He also notably allows Sunny to decide the terms of their relationship and acknowledges that he cannot exert control over her body and agency. His acknowledgement of Thomas, an individual born out of her exercising her agency, who represents Hata’s failure to control her, is a crucial first step. However, it is also evident that for Hata, unlearning racial prejudice and mending his relationship with his daughter will be a continuous, long process. The relationship between Sunny, Thomas, and Hata remains wounded but tentatively open- Sunny never fully reconciles with Hata, but accepts a cheque he sends her, and allows him to spend some time with Thomas. This hints at a

possibility that Hata may begin to unlearn some of his racial prejudice, accept Sunny and Thomas, and through this process, his past, and begin to reckon with his complex identity and history.

Conclusion:

For my conclusion, I tried to frame my final inquiry into the three texts that I explored in the form of a question:

In what ways do the portrayals of Afro-Korean antagonism and solidarity in Toni Morrison's *Home*, Chang Rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*, and *Lovecraft Country* differ, and what implications do these differences have for understanding the complexities of Afro-Asian relations?

Across all three texts, I find that notions of Afro-Korean antagonism and solidarity complex, and multi-faceted. In my opinion, while the interracial romance between Ji-Ah and Atticus in *Lovecraft County* was compelling and even revolutionary, the depictions of Afro-Korean relations were much more realistic, showcasing the solidarity not as active, but more of a quiet recognition of the ways in which both Black Americans and Koreans were victims of U.S. imperial interests, specifically during the Korean War. The history of Afro-Korean solidarity is often overlooked (like Langston Hughes's writings in Korea), and acknowledging the conditions used to manufacture Afro-Asian antagonism, specifically in the context of the Korean War, are crucial to understanding persistent racial stereotypes and tensions between different racial groups. By centering marginalized perspectives, these works push back against dominant historical erasures and open space for nuanced discussions of memory, trauma, wartime experiences and cross-racial connection.

In the future, I hope that the forgotten points of Afro-Korean cultural overlap and history, particularly solidarity established between Korean subjects under Japanese imperialism, and Black-Americans under U.S. racial oppression, get more recognition, as well as the rich history of Afro-Asian cultural overlap more generally.

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