

The Gamble of Migration: Identity and Assimilation in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfilment of
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

Identity is an inseparable part of the human experience, a complex mosaic of trials and tribulations in the path to self. For immigrants, regardless of the generation, identity shapes the course of their lives in the face of dominant cultures, with the pressure to assimilate. This study explores the immigrant experience using Min Jin Lee's novel, *Pachinko* (2017), focusing on the broader notions of identity and assimilation through the Zainichi Korean community. By examining the characters of the novel and Korean diaspora, this paper argues that assimilation is a flawed and destructive goal due to the existing prejudices and stereotypes of the dominant culture, especially in the historical background of colonization. Employing the critical lenses of Postmemory and Post-colonialism, this study shows that hyphenated identity is the reality, and path to self for immigrants. Finally, the research discusses the concept of home in the face of perpetual Otherness and generational trauma threaded in the very fabric of immigrant life.

Keywords: Assimilation; Identity; Diaspora; Immigrant experience; Zainichi Korean.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Identity is an inseparable part of the human experience, a complex mosaic of trials and tribulations in the path to self. When Japan annexed Korea in 1910 as a display of military strength, it not only reinforced the idea that the power of a nation depends upon its defence, but it also set out to ensure the complete erasure of Korean culture and identity. It is not difficult to imagine what followed—coerced pseudo-assimilation into the Japanese culture, linguistic dominance, economic exploitation and oppression of Koreans until the idea of motherland became a myth. The Korean soil turned into a memorandum of pillage, soaked with the tears and blood of all those who dared to question the legitimacy of Japanese rule.

In 1939, the outbreak of World War II divided the world into two halves—the Allies and Axis powers, with Japan being part of the latter, mobilising all its resources to emerge victorious. Koreans, in the heat of war and oppression, could only endure; their hopes and dreams hanging on the precipice of an uncertain outcome. The rest is scattered across the pages of history; Japan loses, and the Allies liberate Koreans, pushing forward a cart of heavy ideas such as nationalism, sovereignty, democracy and martyrdom. This cart of ideas is exclusionary of the narratives of those who endured away from the front lines of war, ordinary people who only sought to live in the little harmony they could find. While the drums of war beat in a frenzy, Koreans migrated to Japan in search of a life of dignity, to protect themselves from the worst of war and to silently assimilate into a society that promised civilization, progress and riches. Away from Mother with the scent of Her soil seared into their memories, they became the Other in perpetuity, building families in quiet displacement. Zainichi Koreans, as they have been labelled, are those who fell out of that cart of heavy ideas, with their narratives being pushed aside by the pen of the winning side and brushed away by the Japanese.

Now, the Zainichi Korean experience is one of trouble, for they are forever suspended between a motherland they abandoned and a culture they adopted in the pursuit of a better life for generations to come. Hence, identity dynamics for immigrants are grey rather than simple black and white, the concept of home being a question mark. The word Zainichi translates to “living in Japan”, referring to all those Koreans who migrated to Japan before and during World War II, as well as their descendants, thus becoming detached from their heritage. It is a sort of exile that was crucial for survival, but history excludes these narratives in favour of military prowess, painting sacrifice as something only armoured soldiers can perform. The fathers who suffered from a lack of morality, the mothers who sacrificed a life of comfort to raise children, the children who grew up with lashes of starvation, siblings who devoted their lives to simply carry on, are brilliantly portrayed by Min Jin Lee in *Pachinko*.

Pachinko is a popular game in Japan where players receive steel balls that descend through a maze of pins into an open slot, and the main task of the player is to guide as many balls as possible through that slot (Brooks, et al. 194). At the end of the game, the number of balls collected decides the winning prize, in accordance with the value of each ball set beforehand. The player can then exchange the balls for cash outside the Pachinko parlour, and it is what they decide to do with the cash prompts people to wonder—is it gambling? The game is one of low stakes, hence it turns players into addicts, desperate to return to the parlour and play again and again. Now, why did Lee decide to choose the name of this game as the title of her novel? It can be interpreted as a metaphor for the unpredictable nature of all Korean characters; their choices in life cascade down the generations and determine their fate.

The immigrant experience is layered and multi-faceted; family values, history of sacrifice, intergenerational trauma and the idea of home make up the bulk of Lee’s novel.

Pachinko is the saga of four generations beginning from early 1900s, where the protagonist Sunja, the daughter of a poor, physically challenged fisherman and boarding-house owner, falls head over heels in love with a much-older wealthy Zainichi Korean fish broker called Koh Hansu. Still coming to terms with the waves of adolescent emotions, she believes every word of her lover and sees the world through rose-tinted glasses. Soon, she discovers her pregnancy and even though her lover is overjoyed with the prospect of having a son, he confesses being married all along, with a Japanese woman who bore him three daughters. Hansu promises to lay the world at her feet but Sunja refuses to be a kept woman. Instead, she marries a sickly minister, Baek Isak, who protects her from the societal shame of being pregnant before marriage. This single decision changes the fate of her entire family and as she migrates to Osaka, Japan with her husband, the struggle to somehow assimilate in the eyebrow-raising, hostile Japanese society begins. Little does she realise, that one can never assimilate into a dominant culture, especially the culture of their oppressors.

In this paper, I explore the broader concepts of identity and assimilation through the Zainichi Korean community in the historical setting of colonization. Using the lenses of Postmemory and Postcolonialism, I deconstruct the intergenerational trauma that plays a crucial role in the path to self. Since this thesis is concerned with the immigrant experience, the notions of diaspora, Otherness and home shall also be discussed. By analysing the major characters of the novel, namely Sunja, Noa, Mozasu and Solomon, I argue that assimilation of the Other is a flawed and destructive goal, a fool's errand regardless of the generation in question, and that hyphenated identity is the reality for immigrants.

Chapter 2

Methodology

The methodology used to answer the research questions is qualitative, based on archival sources, such as books, journal articles and essays. The primary text is Min Jin Lee's historical fiction, *Pachinko*, with the theoretical framework encompassing Postmemory and Postcolonialism. Any researcher from the disciplines of Literature, Migration Studies, Postcolonial and Cultural Studies can easily reproduce this methodology.

This study is motivated by four research questions:

1. What are the different modes of assimilation for an immigrant, as shown in *Pachinko*?
2. How does intergenerational trauma shape identity?
3. How does diasporic literature show the connection between Self and home in reference to the Zainichi Korean community?
4. How does hyphenated identity become the path to Self for an immigrant and colonized subject, in the face of perpetual Otherness?

It is important to note that archival research is a time-consuming process, demands careful observation and close reading. It is also a very selective method as the sources may not provide the exact information required. Conclusions may not be explicitly provided, which warrants deduction. However, archival research ensures accessibility to a great variety of sources and with enough time, presents legitimate results. As the nature of Literature demands intensive reading, archival research is the preferred method.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Postmemory

Postmemory is an integral aspect of overall Trauma theory and highly applicable to the Zainichi Korean community, whose history is that of intergenerational trauma and by extension, it is connected to the universal immigrant experience. Coined by Professor Marianne Hirsch in *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012) which, as the title suggests, focuses on the generational transmission of trauma in the wake of the Holocaust. Postmemory refers to the descendants of former victims and survivors and the relationship they share with traumatic events that preceded their generation,

““Postmemory” describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they “remember” only by the means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and effectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch 5).

Here, it is clear that even though the second generation does not experience trauma first-hand, the memories spread through word-of-mouth, media and environment, which stirs imagination and generates fears and fantasies. In fact, these transmissions are so strong that they can be called first-hand memories without hesitation. As Hirsch states in the introductory pages of the book, Holocaust studies was her dominant research interest hence, her theory is motivated by years of genocide that erased six million Jews from the face of the earth, as well as the displacement faced by those who survived.

Now, the memories in question comprise information that does not receive any acknowledgement in the disseminated narratives of history. Rather, memories are a form of counter-discourse meant to fill in the gaps and offer newer, more substantial clues of what really could have occurred when victim-survivors of the Holocaust were forced to live with an annihilated psyche. To fully deconstruct this counter-discourse, Hirsch devotes an entire section about family in the very beginning, where she connects the dots between postmemory and bedtime stories for children,

“To be sure, children of those directly affected by collective trauma inherit a horrific, unknown, and unknowable past that their parents were not meant to survive. Second generation fiction, art, memoir, and testimony are shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived mass historical trauma” (34).

The bedtime stories that victim-survivor parents often tell their children are laced with traumatic details that may have become natural for themselves but it is no guarantee of a preserved psyche for the postgeneration. The trauma is transmitted through imagery during the story-telling sessions, leading to the creation of an imaginary world where past and present have no difference. Consequently, the postgeneration is not able to detach themselves from a past which, no matter how brutal and painful, is essentially past. The present becomes a dreadful memorandum of the failures of history, where descendants of victim-survivors cling on to imagined scenarios that dominate their daily life. So, tracing the steps back to the case of Zainichi Koreans, whose descendants have been raised around stories of Japanese colonization of Korea, systemic discrimination and forced displacement, these second-hand memories of trauma cascades down the generations.

3.2 Postcolonial Theory

If colonialism is a discourse, then postcolonialism a counter-discourse that challenges and deconstructs colonial misrepresentation and disinformation, taking into account social, political and psychological effects. Since this thesis is concerned with notions of identity and assimilation, a Fanonian perspective is more relevant. Frantz Fanon's monumental psycho-existential work titled, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) extensively discusses the trauma that black people experience under colonial rule. Even though there is no black experience in Min Jin Lee's novel, identity crisis and struggle for assimilation during colonial era are common grounds for both the texts.

In the second chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon observes interracial relationship dynamics, which prove that the pursuit of assimilation, for the colonized to be accepted and acknowledged in the society of colonizers, is essentially a fool's errand. He presents the case of Mayotte Capecia, a black woman who is in love with a white man, and desires nothing but to achieve some "whiteness" in her life that will emancipate her from the burden of blackness. She does not fall short in obeying and surrendering to him, yet the white society never truly accepts her, regarding which she states, "I also accepted the fact that I was barred from this society because I was a woman of colour; but I could not help being jealous" (43). Capecia fails to understand that no amount of learning can secure her place as an equal in the white society, where identity of the colonized does not exist. So, there will always be inferiority complex and the internalization of prejudice, which sets the colonized subject for failure.

In the case of Koreans, it is clear they have the same skin colour as the Japanese, yet they were treated as inferior and uncivilized. As Min Jin Lee's novel portrays, during the Japanese occupation of Korea, Zainichi Koreans failed to integrate with the Japanese society, leading to a clash of cultures and systemic discrimination. From a Fanonian perspective, the case of

Mayotte Capecia is a reflection of all those who wonder why the dominant culture never truly accepts them and rather, Otherizes them. From a colonizer's perspective, the Other is bound to meet total physical and psychological annihilation, and the realization of Self becomes a distant dream. Assimilation is the colonized subject's cry for emancipation, to be able to live without double consciousness. Characters such as Solomon and Noa devote most of their lives towards integrating in Japanese society, with the hopes of escaping the stain of being Korean, despite knowing that it is the culture of their oppressors, resulting in their identity being forfeit. Through their everyday experiences, they realise that assimilation is a self-destructive goal and a fool's errand. Therefore, the postcolonial theory not only addresses socio-economic effects of colonization, but it also captures the psychological effects, which are evident in the lives of Zainichi Koreans.

Chapter 4

Literature Review

4.1 Departure and Generational Trauma

On the topic of trauma, Professor Cathy Caruth isolates the idea of departure in Sigmund Freud's notable works, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). In her book titled *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), Caruth extensively reviews Freud's findings and attempts to understand trauma from historical, literary and religious perspectives, combined with psychoanalysis. She defines trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden and catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 18), providing examples of soldiers with PTSD resulting from their experience in the battlefield, during the World Wars. It is clear that the individual's response to the traumatic event is delayed and buried in the unconsciousness, indicative of repression, which Freud discusses in great detail in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The Freudian way of understanding trauma is based upon history, in this case, individual and religious, to which Caruth involves the idea of departure,

"For if Moses indeed "created" the Jews, in his act of liberation—if the exodus from Egypt, that is, transforms the history of the Hebrews, who had previously lived in the Canaan, into the history of the Jews, who became a true nation only in their act of captivity—then the moment of beginning, the exodus from Egypt, is no longer simply a return but is rather, more truly, a departure" (22).

Exodus or the history of departure is essentially a history of trauma for Jewish people, which repeated itself through the mass displacement caused by the Nazi regime during World War II. Jews being driven out of Europe is yet another departure, and no matter how Freud dresses it

as a sort of liberation, Caruth observes that the very idea of liberation or freedom paradoxically proves to be a problem for them as it incites persecution from the Nazis. Here, departure and return, freedom and captivity have complex connections to the human psyche, which is repeatedly damaged in the process. Departure itself is a representation of trauma, that lingers in the memories of all those who are forced to migrate, regardless of their race, class and religion. Freud remembers his own departure from Austria to avoid Nazi persecution, which he calls “liberation”, leading to the publication of *Moses and Monotheism*, and he concludes that the essence of Jewish history all along has been of repression and displacement.

Further on, Cathy Caruth discusses the belatedness or delay of trauma in line with Freud’s ideas, “The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all” (26). According to her, the latency of trauma appearance due to forgetting is exactly how people realise they have trauma. It situates things in the past, adding in historical background for those willing to study the human psyche. More than the reason of trauma, it is the reaction and response that interests scholars, and forgetting the shock of departure is a crucial part of understanding the unconscious. It is through forgetting that the past is betrayed, and this betrayal is seared within the psyche of those who have been oppressed mentally and physically. Hence, the whole experience of departure, regardless of its outcome, becomes the language of escape and quitting, a highly sensitive matter for immigrants such as Zainichi Koreans. The exile or departure from motherland may ensure their freedom but it is also a site of psychological distress.

Addressing the point of PTSD again, Professor Caruth mentions how it is the most destructive psychological disorder, “...post-traumatic stress disorder reflects the direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking over of the mind, psychically and neurobiologically, by an event that it cannot control” (68). In other words, the person suffering

from PTSD loses control over their mind to an external phenomenon, yet the disorder generates a paradoxical relationship between survival and destruction. Since Freud wrote his books during both World Wars, PTSD was a common occurrence for soldiers who served in battle. Even though they departed from the battlefield, the violence they witnessed and helped in being committed, tore their psyche asunder. As Caruth highlights Freud's theory of traumatic departure, PTSD mediates between survival and destruction, in the sense that the individual, after experiencing an episode of hallucination, realises that they are still alive and have already crossed the brutality of events. It also crystallizes the fact that by acknowledging trauma, the idea of departure, individuals can finally be free.

Now, Caruth's deconstruction raises an important question: how does the notion of departure influence the choices of displaced people and by extension, shape immigrant life? Min Jin Lee's characters, such as Sunja, Noa and Mozasu experience displacement and unconsciously endure their own departure from home, with the resulting trauma surfacing in different ways in their daily life. Choices are never easy for immigrants, for whom departure and displacement are grey areas. Each of these characters know that they are abandoning their roots in favour of pseudo-freedom, leading to an accumulation of guilt that resurfaces in several chapters of the novel. Hence, diasporic literature such as *Pachinko* sheds light upon the difficult choices and sacrifices that shape immigrant life and inquires whether departures are truly freedom or a psychological crisis in disguise.

In an attempt to connect the dots between memory and generational trauma, Cristina Lobato uses Marianne Hirsch's ideas and uncovers the importance of silence in trauma narratives. Her study of generational trauma shows that silence is a pattern in these narratives, especially if the trauma is from an unspeakable experience, "...this silenced unspeakable memory usually emerges in the shape of a ghostly presence that haunts someone's life or mind..." (102). This silence can be understood as a hidden vault inside the human psyche, the mere presence of

which is enough to haunt a person for their whole lifetime. Lobato mentions Jacques Derrida and how he coined the term “hauntology” to explain the recurrence of trauma throughout a person’s life, “spectres” that define the present with their silence. These silent recurrences or “spectres” cannot be fully expressed in words due to a lack of articulation, hence, they remain as the hidden vault. As stated earlier, Lobato uses Hirsch’s ideas, which means that somehow the presence of the hidden vault and the silence shrouding it has some transference to the postgeneration. The descendants of the victim understand this mystery through the practice of not talking about it which, paradoxically, is an acknowledgement of the trauma. It is not difficult to imagine such a scenario, where a family with the experience of war and colonization avoid speaking about the intense traumatic incidents that may have happened, which eventually creates dread amongst the postgeneration.

As Cristina Lobato deconstructs generational trauma, she mentions the flaws of mainstream history that conveniently excludes narratives of trauma based on gender and minority groups, in this case, the Zainichi Koreans,

“From a gender perspective, history fails to reveal the tragedies of the female experience and the impact that the female role has within the family in turbulent times such as colonization, migration and war, thus leaving the testimonies of memory as the main source of female representation. Likewise, history has failed to account for minority groups, such as families and individuals who migrated from a colonized land, as did Koreans to mainland Japan, in order to seek better conditions” (102).

What Cristina Lobato is trying to explain is the fact that these voices have been institutionally silenced, and the very presence of this silence, which ties back to the aforementioned discussion, indicates the hardships endured by Zainichi Koreans during the Japanese occupation of Korea. The gender perspective included here provides agency to the women

history has forgotten, women who drive most of the action in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*. Their memories and testimonies which Lee uses to create her historical fiction, illuminate the theatre of reality where identity dynamics, migratory dreams and desires are at stake.

4.2 Home and Diaspora

While exploring identity dynamics, Rym Mohammad-Azizi makes a connection between the concept of self and the idea of home for immigrants. Her primary text being *Pachinko*, Azizi explains the psychology behind immigrants having firm belief in the return to home, a common feature in diasporic literature,

“...almost all immigrant communities are depicted as people motivated by the idea of returning to their homeland, while simultaneously struggling to maintain links with their place of origin. The myth of return represents a powerful emotional tie that diasporic communities maintain with their homeland, which serves as a cohesive force for consolidating the kinship boundaries of the community and renegotiating their identity” (Azizi 401).

According to Azizi, immigrants place their homeland on a pedestal, where they worship the myth of returning. Being in a country which they must accept, they nurture the idea of a homeland that continues to elude their grasp. Essentially, they are disconnected from their roots which provides the incentive to cling on to the hope that someday, they will feel the soil of motherland under their feet. In diasporic literature such as *Pachinko*, Zainichi Koreans struggle to strengthen the connection with their homeland, Korea, in the midst of war and chaos. At the same time, they express solidarity with fellow members of their community, with the idea of home being the binding factor.

Now, Koreans who migrated to Japan during and at the end of the war, they did so not only in the pursuit of living a better life but out of the knowledge that Korea will soon be subjected to a power struggle, culminating in the division between North and South. Even though the idea of home still binds Zainichi Koreans together, they are well aware of the fact that there is no future for them if they return. In that sense, immigrants struggle to maintain a strong connection to their home, leading to tensions in securing identity.

Azizi also mentions the idea of exilic consciousness, which is relevant to the theme of diaspora. Stemming from the failure to negotiate between their roots (Korea) and branches (Japan), exilic consciousness is a constant friction in the immigrant experience,

“The characters in the novel grapple with a sense of displacement and disconnection from their homeland, as well as longing for a place they may never truly belong. This feeling of being in exile is particularly poignant for the Zainichi, who are caught between their Korean heritage and their lives in Japan” (400).

Here, the sense of displacement and the struggle to assimilate with the new culture, one that may never accept them, are issues that drive exilic consciousness for Zainichi Koreans and the broader immigrant experience, which ultimately reinforce the fact that home is forever an elusive concept for immigrants. The characters in *Pachinko* carry a shared history of sacrifice and hardship, juggling between their roots and branches, only to find out that the return to home is a myth that they worship. Their migration is an exile in disguise which leaves them no other choice but to create home for themselves in this continuous friction.

4.3 Identity, Assimilation and Otherness

Among the myriad of ideas surrounding identity, there are two dominating perspectives according to Sojeong Oh, “In the realm of identity itself, there is a constant clash between two perspectives of what we perceive ourselves to be and what society wants us to be. It raises the perpetual question of which perspective holds the essence of our being” (113). Sojeong Oh mentions identity because his observation of *Pachinko* characters falls in line with similar concepts, such as assimilation. His study examines the ‘trans’ aspect of identity, which challenges the us-them binary and defies colonial expectations. Second generation immigrants such as Noa and Mozasu juggle between Korean and Japanese cultures, the colonized and the colonizer respectively. Their perception of self is fractured, the cracks being visible in different situations whereas society defines them as one singular category, which can never be changed. From a postcolonial lens, this is the inevitable outcome for people from ex-colonies.

Regardless of the official status of colonialism being terminated, the colonial attitudes remain deeply rooted in Japanese society, lashes of which reach across generations. National labels after the war have become more important than ever, persisting in the everyday affairs of immigrants. Noa pursues the Japanese label all his life and then ends his life the moment his Korean reality is slapped across his face whereas Mozasu continues his fight with the colonial tendency of homogenizing identity by starting his own pachinko business. So, identity dynamics are more complex than ever for immigrants, with their constant struggle to emancipate themselves from the stereotype of the Other.

To understand the intergenerational search for identity and assimilation, Nicole Tablizo has extensive observations of the Zainichi community,

“The Zainichi’s problem of identity then is also a matter of social location. The dichotomy of self (ethnic Japanese) vs. other (Zainichi) results in stereotypes and stigmas that vilify the latter, who are denied individuality and equal opportunities. As a minority, they are excluded from official histories, and their social contributions are often overlooked” (102).

Here, Tablizo isolates the binary opposition of Self and the Other, with the Self being Japanese and Other being Zainichi Korean. As Koreans are Otherized in Japan, they face systemic discrimination in the job market, with fewer work opportunities and unacceptable working conditions, along with the erasure of their efforts from mainstream history. Their location, in this case, residing in Japan and subsequent naturalization of citizenship, is frowned upon by the ethnic Japanese. Once their citizenship is recognized, Koreans “become” full-fledged members of the Japanese society, a kind of assimilation that is legal, which raises the question of hyphenated identity. On this end, Tablizo finds that a hyphenated identity has merits, as it cannot be one single category, thus defying homogenization. The rejection of fixed national labels and then embracing a hybrid identity where psycho-existential issues can be put to rest, is the path to self, thereby mitigating the problem of a fixed identity.

Sojeong Oh and his study of trans-identity falls in the same line, where the issues of Otherness and assimilation are addressed, “Humans are forced to choose a category and try to fit their identity within its boundaries. However, the concept of “trans-” criticizes the dichotomous thinking that dominates the world, and seek diverse perspectives and freedom of thought” (113). With his commentary on human nature and tendencies, it can be stated that both scholars agree on the ground of transcending binary opposition. Sojeong Oh cites Frantz Fanon and his

idea of decolonizing the mind, which involves critical thinking upon all oppressive worldviews and then resisting their naturalization. By not being fully Japanese nor Korean, any sort of binary in regards to identity is cast aside and the problem of assimilating into a dominant culture is mitigated. With the acceptance of a hyphenated identity, as Tablizo finds in his study, Zainichi Koreans and their descendants can finally overcome the psychological problems that their displacement and new settlement conceived.

After an extensive literature review from different perspectives, there is an emergence of research gap. Scholars from Trauma Studies and Post-colonial Studies have focused heavily on cultural conflicts, generational trauma, existential crises, systemic discrimination and forced migration, and how these elements forge identity. However, the existing literature does not proceed towards the aftermath of the aforementioned problems in relation to hyphenated identity. There is no reconciliation between the bitter past and the undeniable present, or answer to the “what now” question, which are crucial to the immigrant experience and diaspora. There is less emphasis on how the pursuit of assimilation contradicts the efforts of an immigrant to maintain a connection with their own culture, and by extension, their homeland. Hence, this research not only explores the themes of intergenerational trauma, colonization and Otherness, but it also contributes to the dynamics of hyphenated identity as an inevitable aftermath and the destructive nature of assimilation for an immigrant.

Chapter 5

Analysis

5.1 The Matriarch- Sunja

The protagonist of the novel, Sunja is the daughter of a crippled fisherman and boarding-house owner, Hoonie, who dotes on her and makes her upbringing his sole purpose. When Sunja is thirteen, Hoonie dies from tuberculosis, leaving her in the care of her mother, Yangjin. As the years pass, Yangjin raises Sunja in a sheltered way compared to most girls during the annexation period. However, no degree of protection or shelter could prepare her to witness and experience first-hand, the harshness of the world and negotiate her desires. At the age of sixteen, Sunja meets a Zainichi Korean fishbroker named Koh Hansu, in the wet market of Yeongdo, Busan, who saves her from being sexually assaulted by a group of Japanese boys. Soon, she falls in love with the handsome Hansu, a man twice her age, and they start their passionate trysts behind the boarding-house, which culminate in her pregnancy.

Overjoyed with the idea of having a family with him, Sunja reveals her pregnancy, but Hansu confesses that he is already married to a Japanese woman who has given him three daughters. He asks her to become his mistress and promises to lay the whole world at her feet owing to his ties to the yakuza. Finally understanding the gravity of her situation, she refuses to be a kept woman and instead, marries Baek Isak, a sickly minister who took shelter at the boardinghouse. Isak protects Sunja and her unborn child with his name and soon they migrate to Osaka, Japan to live with his brother and sister-in-law, Yoseb and Kyunghee, respectively. Then, Sunja's child is born, whom they name Noa, followed by the birth of Mozasu, Sunja's only child with Isak, six years later. Her choice of not accepting Hansu's offer that day determined the fate of her future generations, leading to the broader concepts of identity and assimilation to play out, offering insights into the immigrant experience.

To understand identity dynamics from Sunja's perspective, her background and the factors influencing her choices must be unravelled first, which are complex due to her being a first-generation immigrant. Being born in a country that has been colonized for years, Sunja is aware of the plights of women, who must handle dire situations in order to live and she sees her mother perform the duties that were only expected of men,

“Yangjin has to take care of Sunja and earn money...The lodging fees couldn't go up, because the men were not making any more money, but she still had to feed them the same amount. So from shinbones, she made thick, milky broths and seasoned the garden vegetables for tasty side dishes...The lodgers brought her fish they couldn't sell in the market...she preserved them with spices to supplement the scantier meals that were sure to come” (17).

From a very young age, Sunja sees her mother struggle to run the household and raise her simultaneously, then feed the lodgers who stayed at their boarding-house. Her mother could have easily underfed them all and spend the money for herself, yet she chose to invest all for the welfare of others. Moreover, Yangjin never remarried after Hoonie died, which not only increased her difficulties as a widow but it set a standard for Sunja to follow in the years of her adulthood. When she is about to migrate to Japan with Isak, Yangjin imparts her last lessons to Sunja which become part of her identity,

“Spend what you need but just throw even a few coins into a tin and forget that you have it. A woman should always have something to put by. Take good care of your husband. Otherwise, another woman will. Treat your husband's family with reverence. Obey them...Make a good home for him and your child. That's your job. They must not suffer” (85-86).

These last words that Sunja hears from her mother before she leaves for Japan, strengthens her resolve for all the hardships she was about to endure in a new country with a new family. Sunja's identity is based on a history of witnessing hardships and performing familial duties based on the lessons from her mother during a time when women's reward was suffering. Her migration from Korean to Japan symbolises the embrace of suffering, all in the hopes of living a life of dignity and pride, which would not have been possible if she had accepted Hansu. Even though she is a first-generation immigrant, Sunja's identity is not simply tied to national labels. All her life, she focuses on being a good wife, mother and daughter, regardless of her persisting attraction towards Hansu while maintaining a connection to her Korean heritage.

From the lens of postmemory, Sunja is the postgeneration while her parents represent the generation that has witnessed bulk of the colonial suffering. So, there has been a transference of trauma from Hoonie and Yangjin to Sunja, which remains in her psyche as silent spectres, sealed away in a vault. As she continues to live her life, running the Baek household and raising her sons in the absence of their father, in the heat and chaos of war, the trauma that she has inherited become memories in their own right. She endures further hardships when her husband, Isak is arrested, leaving the household in financial jeopardy, resulting in Sunja starting her small kimchi business in an open market with jeering Japanese people. She is presented with a situation similar to her mother's—a household seething on the precipice of financial ruin. To a great extent, she finds herself struggling to live up to her mother's expectations, with Yangjin's last words that the family should not suffer, playing in her subconscious. Hence, Sunja enters the open market with her cart of kimchi and even though the Japanese shop owners refuse to let her sell from beside them, she does not quit. She serves bowls of kimchi and presents a part of her culinary identity to numerous Japanese customers. Kimchi is part of the Korean identity, and for a first-generation Zainichi Korean such as Sunja, it is through

providing food on the table for her family that she reclaims her agency and resists the colonial expectations of the Japanese culture.

As for the assimilation aspect, Sunja never truly assimilates into the Japanese society, not simply because of the rigid cultural hierarchy but due to her resistance towards the language of her oppressors. Even though she settles in Japan with Isak, she never becomes fluent in Japanese, conversing through broken sentences and words. This is her unconscious way of preserving her identity, to not taint it through Japanese thus, ensuring the continuation of Korean language in a foreign country. Here, the application of the Fanonian perspective is more prudent, since the idea of colonized people attempting to assimilate into the culture of their colonizers is shown to be a flawed and destructive goal for the human psyche. Perhaps, Sunja so readily displays her Korean roots by dressing in more traditional clothes and selling kimchi rather than any Japanese dishes is because she is too aware of her alienation. Even though her broken Japanese sentences earn her petty remarks, she realises that she will be the Other in perpetuity.

Now, what do these deconstructions merit for the broader immigrant experience? I maintain that it is always a path of trials and tribulations, especially in the case of first-generation immigrants. The first-generation Zainichi Korean, Sunja, despite settling in with her family in a hostile, prejudiced society, understands through numerous hardships that the path to self is through acceptance. Rather than putting efforts for something she can never have (she can never be truly one of the Japanese), she chooses to embrace her status of being different and pours all her energy into raising her sons and running the household, forging her identity through motherhood. The experience of a first-generation immigrant is by no means an easy one, with constant negotiation between roots and branches, which leads to the acknowledgement of a hyphenated identity for generations to come.

5.2 The Brothers- Noa and Mozasu

Identity dynamics, especially the idea of hyphenated identity, can be best understood with the sons of the Baek family, Noa and Mozasu.

Noa is Sunja's eldest son, begotten through her teenage affair with Koh Hansu. Half of his life passes at the whim of a lie regarding his true parentage. He is brought up by Baek Isak as his own son, and from an early age, Noa aspires to be like him—kind, generous, affectionate and responsible. A brilliant student with a particular love towards Literature, Noa sits for the admission exam, for the prestigious Waseda University. While a student at the university, he starts a passionate affair with Akiko, an ethnic Japanese girl who majors in Sociology. It is through her pressing questions he discovers his true parentage, that Hansu is his biological father rather than Isak. Reality comes crashing, and his life shatters when he further discovers that Hansu is part of the yakuza, which means he has yakuza blood. Unable to endure this avalanche of revelations, Noa meets his mother, Sunja, one last time and then disappears in the hope of erasing his past life. He changes his name and identity into that of an ethnic Japanese and starts working in pachinko parlors. He marries a Japanese woman named Risa and has four children with her. Sixteen years pass and Hansu finally finds out his whereabouts, telling Sunja, who rushes to meet her estranged son. Unable to bear the shock of his mother finding him, a symbolic knock from the past, he shoots himself in his office.

Mozasu, on the other hand, is the opposite of Noa. Six years younger than Noa, Mozasu has little interest in studies and harbors the American Dream, so that his mother and aunt do not have to labour anymore. Sunja's only son with Isak, Mozasu represents the typical uncivilized Korean in the snobbish Japanese society. Dropping out of school as an adolescent, he launches himself headlong into the pachinko business, as he firmly believes that wealth is the only way to gain a seat at the Japanese table. Day and night, he labours in pachinko parlours,

exponentially improving the financial condition of the Baek household. Unlike his brother, Mozasu believes in violence and aggression as the ways to settle matters. By the age of twenty, he becomes a millionaire pachinko parlour owner, marrying the love of his life, Yumi and having a son named Solomon. Tragedy hits his life when Yumi dies in a car accident and Mozasu raises Solomon as a single father. By the end of the novel, Mozasu is deeply in love with Etsuko and desires to marry her.

Now, it must be understood that Noa and Mozasu represent two opposing ends in the Japanese society. Noa, with his eagerness to assimilate in the Japanese culture, does not leave any space for people to question his Korean blood. Even though he spent most of his life yearning for fatherly love from Isak, who was arrested due to systemic oppression, ironically it is this very fatherly love that becomes his doom, leading him to a life of self-loathing and a spiral of self-denial. The scene where Noa confronts his mother, best shows what he really feels about his identity,

“Yakuza are the filthiest people in Japan. They are thugs...All the worst Koreans are members of these gangs. I took money for my education from a yakuza, and you thought this was acceptable? I will never be able to wash this dirt from my name...you have made me dirty...All my life, I have had Japanese telling me that my blood is Korean—that Koreans are angry, violent, cunning, and deceitful criminals...I can never change this, no matter what I do” (Lee 271).

Noa spent most of his life hearing the ideal that “blood does not matter” from his mother and yet, he cannot accept his own blood in the face of truth. It is not his lineage that becomes the cause of his downfall, rather it is his denial of self. For a young man such as Noa, the world is built upon ideals, which cannot change his reality. This realisation, the fact that he can never truly change his identity of being part-yakuza, and that his radical thoughts cannot secure his

redemption, leads him to disowning his own family. Assimilating in the Japanese society through proper education and a clean record becomes his distant dream. From a postcolonial lens, Noa internalizes all the vile tags commonly associated with Koreans during and after the annexation period. Being a colonized subject, he undoubtedly suffers from double consciousness as a result of trauma, which makes him disown his community. To eradicate his troubles, he embarks on a lifelong journey of self-denial, adopting the new name of Nobuo Ban and meticulously maintaining his second life. What he fails to understand, is the fact that his assimilation is simply a mask and his identity will always be Zainichi Korean, with ties to the yakuza. The adoption of a new identity, the maintenance of an elaborate façade as a Japanese pachinko parlor manager, are all his attempts to emancipate himself from the burden of his past.

Mozasu, however, has a different approach towards the culture of his oppressors. While his brother may be a gifted student with great future prospects, Mozasu wastes no time in establishing the fact he means to use force to put down force. His inclination towards violence to settle any dispute earns him the reputation of a gangster. Beneath this hard exterior, lies a self-made man with fierce loyalty and devotion towards his family. His identity rests on earning money, not because he is superficial but due to his burning desire to improve the family finances,

“Each Saturday evening, Mozasu felt proud handing his mother his fat pay envelope; she’d tried to increase his allowance, but he has refused except for his bus fare. He didn’t need much, since he ate his meals at the employee cafeteria and Goro bought him his work clothes. Mozasu worked seven days a week and slept at home; if it was very late, he slept in one of the spare employee dorm rooms at the parlors” (248).

From a postcolonial lens, Mozasu works hard to emancipate himself from the burden of poverty, which plagued majority of Zainichi Koreans during the colonial period and after the war. Being a second generation immigrant and Zainichi Korean, he is acquainted with identity crisis and the struggle of assimilation. He challenges the narrative of Koreans being intrinsically uncivilized by successfully becoming a millionaire by the age of twenty, thus setting an example in the prejudiced society. Though he never attempts to become a proper man like his brother, he lives a happier life by embracing the negativity surrounding his career as a pachinko parlour owner and sending his son to America. The white gaze, according to a Fanonian perspective, perpetuates negative stereotypes of the Zainichi, reducing the brothers to mere prejudiced images. Hence, their psycho-existential crisis stems from living in a colonial setting, where autonomy only belongs to the Japanese and all the colonized people can only do is deal with the futile goal of assimilation.

From a postmemorial lens, both Noa and Mozasu are the postgeneration. Born and raised in a Zainichi Korean household, they have always been in close proximity to stories of exploitation, starvation and war, even though their mother and aunt put all efforts to ease the situation. Their diasporic state induces identity crisis, leading to a constant negotiation between their Korean heritage and Japanese lifestyle. There is transmission of trauma from Sunja, which seeps into the brothers' lives, leading to radical life choices, with Noa living a double life and Mozasu prioritizing family wealth above anything else. It can be stated that Mozasu's character is that of resistance in a way, since he realises the stigma associated with pachinko businesses yet embraces it to earn a seat at the table. The stigma of pachinko becomes part of his identity, a reminder that he has not and cannot assimilate into the culture of his oppressors. However, the pursuit of wealth through pachinko becomes a source of trauma, which drives him to send Solomon to America, in the hope that he will live a life away from stigma, choosing "normal" jobs to make a living.

Noa, on the contrary, never resists the Japanese culture which is reflected in his life choices after he disowns his family. He chooses self-denial, a route of escape in order to cope with his life-changing revelation. As an immigrant who seeks approval from Japanese society more than anything else, Noa's case is a prime example of assimilation being a flawed and destructive goal. Even though his downfall revolves around the father figures of his life, Noa unconsciously attempts to somehow disown his Korean heritage from childhood. He joins the pachinko business as a Japanese man who is plagued with the ghosts of his past. The trauma he receives from Sunja and Isak's lies, as well as Hansu, binds him to pain until his death. His departure from the Baek family symbolises both survival and destruction, a delicate balance he fails to maintain. Not only does he have the second-hand memories of departure from his mother, he now has to face the weight of his own departure from his family in the pursuit of individual survival. As he tries to forget his past, it increases the weight of his trauma and solidifies his tragic fate.

So, for the broader immigrant experience, what do notions of identity and assimilation, as shown through the lives of Noa Mozasu, entail? The second-generation immigrant may not engage in the same battles as the first-generation immigrant but they have a greater response to trauma due to their postmemory and history of being colonized. The diasporic state and weight of maintaining links to their roots while adjusting their branches simultaneously, proves to be a sure challenge. However, it is clear that unresolved trauma and self-denial can never be the path to self. Hyphenated identity is a constant negotiation, a result of diaspora and the reality for immigrants regardless of the generation. The intergenerational search for identity is one that remains inseparable from the broader immigrant experience, be it Zainichi Koreans or any other community. Hence, acceptance of hyphenated identity, transcending the fixed category of belonging and realising that assimilation is a fool's errand is a crucial part of immigrant life.

5.3 The Ray of Hope- Solomon

Solomon's trajectory in life proves to be a monumental change in the Baek family history. He is the son of Mozasu and Yumi, a third-generation immigrant who has lived a sheltered life, without any first-hand knowledge of struggle. However, he belongs to a family that is built upon the notions of sacrifice, duty and honour, which he understands at the very end of the novel. After his mother's death, Solomon is raised by his father, grandmother Sunja, and his father's girlfriend, Etsuko. Mozasu instils the American Dream in Solomon, and educates his son in English-speaking schools, eventually sending him to Columbia University. From a young age, Solomon has socialized with Westerners, so he reaches adulthood without fully understanding his Korean heritage. At the age of fourteen, Solomon falls in love with Etsuko's estranged daughter, Hana, who teaches him how to be a proper lover and the art of sex. However, they eventually separate and while Solomon is at university, he dates Phoebe, a Korean-American woman. This relationship also fails, as Solomon does not propose her with marriage and she finds life in Tokyo difficult. He eventually secures a proper job at a British investment bank and is sent for a real estate transaction. This experience proves to be eye-opening—Solomon is fired from the bank due to his father's ties to pachinko and the yakuza. At the end of the novel, Solomon decides to embrace his roots and work for his father's pachinko business.

Identity dynamics for Solomon is based on professional success. He does not think about the identity crisis that has plagued his previous generations. Despite being educated in America, he hopes to establish himself as an equal to white men, which explains his enthusiasm towards securing the real estate transaction. He does not realise that the white society is racist and discriminating, and that his father's ties to the yakuza will be the reason for his professional failure. When he hears the explanation from the Human Resource department regarding his dismissal, he finally begins to see the whole picture,

“You’re a nice boy, Solomon, and you will have a future in finance, but not here. If you are trying to imply that you were being discriminated against, something that Koreans tend to believe, that would be incorrect and unfair to me. If anything, you have been preferred over the natives...I just don’t agree with your father’s tactics” (398-399).

Here, Solomon realises that his father is being considered a criminal, a potential murderer. The land that Solomon was tasked with acquiring, belonged to an old Korean woman who died of natural causes after selling her property. Her death is not taken lightly by Solomon’s white superiors, who waste no time in showing him the door, despite not having proof. This shows not only shows the extent of racism and discrimination in white society but it also provides testament to the fact that assimilation, even through a corporate environment, is a futile goal.

Solomon’s professional failure changes his life, as well as the life of the Baek family, which has been in identity crisis for three generations. He finally realises the extent to which the Zainichi Korean community is marginalized, the systemic discrimination they face both in Japan and the West. Due to the efforts of his father, he does not inherit trauma but experiences it first-hand. The postcolonial lens is more applicable in his case rather than postmemory, as he struggles to assimilate through professional activities and establish himself in the Japanese and Western society. Solomon’s psychological awakening marks a new beginning for the Baek family, as he willingly enters the pachinko business despite having alternative career options. Rather than disowning his roots the way his uncle Noa did, rather than aggressively challenging the snobbish Japanese society the way his father did, Solomon chooses to work for his father’s pachinko business in peace, being fully aware that he can always leave, thus bringing the generational struggle of self-denial to an end. Pachinko symbolises home for Solomon, becoming part of his identity and restoring balance between his roots and branches.

Now, the immigrant experience is one of complexity, with the intergenerational search for meaning, understanding a shared history of sacrifice and adjusting to a world that is never kind. A novel is never needed to realise the fact that assimilating into a dominant culture, especially one that has a history of colonization, is essentially a fool's errand. Identity begins with the acknowledgement of self rather than denial; it begins with the acceptance of one's flaws and having faith in their roots. Immigrant life is never easy; an immigrant never has the luxury of lineage, no matter how diverse the dominant culture promises to be. The lingering prejudices and racism in dominant societies, in this case, Japan, proves challenging for the dreams of an immigrant. The history of trauma, sacrifice and displacement are lessons that forge hyphenated identity and steer away the focus from fixed categories. Solomon will always be Korean-Japanese and a third-generation Zainichi, Mozasu and Noa have always been Zainichi Koreans and Sunja, whose choices have shaped the lives of the Baek descendants, will always feel most connected to her hometown—Yeongdo, Busan, South Korea. As the novel comes to an end with Solomon's decision to embrace his father's business, it also leaves readers with a lingering question—was the decision to migrate truly justified, given the present?

If the years leading up to the present have truly been of substance, if the lived experiences of those years have truly shown the path to self, then the gamble of migration is worth everything.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

As this thesis comes to an end, it would be wise to remember the opening sentence of Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*, which says that history has failed to serve justice to the narratives of ordinary people, ones who sacrificed away from the front lines of battle. The avalanche of historical failures, from the forced displacement of people to the intergenerational search for identity and meaning, is portrayed across pages, in the form of *Pachinko*. The institutionalised history and cultural archives can never do justice to the numerous Sunjas, Noas, Mozasus, Solomons all over the world, along with the Zainichi Korean community. *Pachinko* itself is a memory of the forces that shaped the lives of millions in the wake of the Japanese colonization of Korea and the eventual outbreak of World War II, leading to the mass migration of Koreans to the ever-deceptive Land of the Rising Sun. Even though Koreans were not subjected to the Holocaust, countless Koreans experienced psychological genocide as they witnessed the pillage of their culture and socio-economic landscape. Sufferings cannot be compared and it is through suffering that, identity is forged—*Pachinko* one such canvas of suffering.

Min Jin Lee's novel is an outlet for the descendants of Zainichi Koreans to reclaim the narratives that history neglects, which can be deconstructed through the lenses of Postmemory and Postcolonialism. The immigrant experience is layered and multifaceted, with intergenerational trauma, representing a journey of self-discovery. The notions of diaspora, perpetual Otherness, and the idea of home are explored through the life trajectories of Sunja, Mozasu, Noa and Solomon, all of whom portray the struggle of assimilation and finish the quest for identity in their own way. In the end, there can be no doubt that hyphenated identity is the reality for immigrants whereas assimilation is a flawed and destructive goal, a hindrance

in the path to self. The game of pachinko serves as a metaphor for the uncertainty of immigrant life, symbolic of the gamble that migration indeed is.

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