

RESISTANCE IN PRAMOEDYA ANANTA TOER'S *THIS EARTH OF MANKIND* AND MIN JIN LEE'S *PACHINKO*

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Abstract

This paper delves into the theme of resistance as a recurrent motif in Asian literature, exploring its portrayal in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind* and Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*. Against the backdrop of historical colonization experiences in Asia, the study addresses two key questions. Firstly, it examines how resistance is depicted in the chosen novels, shedding light on characters like Minke and Sunja who challenge dominant powers. Secondly, the research assesses the regional nuances of this portrayal and explores the broader significance of resistance as a theme. The analysis draws inspiration from contemporary perspectives on power, emphasizing its relational nature. Grounded in the theories of Albert Memmi, Homi K. Bhabha, and Edward Said, the study delves into Memmi's notion of the mythical portrait of the colonized. It explores how, faced with the impossibility of assimilation and the realization of shouldering the colonizer's burdens, resistance becomes a crucial pivot for the colonized. The narrative of Minke and Sunja illustrates diverse forms of resistance, from challenging educational ideologies to unintentional acts of survival. Ultimately, this study illuminates how resistance serves as a pathway to self-discovery and autonomous dignity in the face of colonial dominance.

Keywords: resistance, postcolonialism, asian literature

Introduction

The theme of resistance is a recurring motif that underscores the portrayal of countries in Asian literature. Asian countries have a long history of experiencing colonization, with colonizers not only from Western nations, but also occasionally from within the Asian region itself. Considering each country's complexities and the uniqueness of their respective past with colonization, this paper will address two key research questions. First, it will examine how resistance is depicted in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind* and Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*. Second, it will assess how the portrayal of resistance by characters in these novels reflects their respective regions, and it will explore the broader significance of the theme of resistance.

Resistance is closely linked with power, traditionally defined as the military strength of the state or the ability of individuals and groups to influence others to act in alignment with their will. In a more contemporary light, power is not merely about capacity but also significantly about relations. One perspective categorizes it into collective resistance, encompassing aspects such as identity, framing, resource mobilization, and strategy, and the more subtle, everyday and concealed forms of resistance (Lilja, 2022, pp. 202–203).

Resistance is a phenomenon that arises in relation to power dynamics. It is suggested that resistance does not always confront or challenge power; in some cases; it inadvertently ends up supporting the very power it seeks to oppose. When individuals opt out and refuse to cooperate, they stand as “deviating others” who deviate from the established norm, risking being labeled as abnormal. Furthermore, resistance can be either deliberate or unintentional and has the potential to either challenge and transform power relations or fall short of doing so (2022, pp. 204; 208).

This Earth of Mankind, the first novel of Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s “Buru Quartet”, revolves around the life of Minke, an 18-year-old young man endowed with a remarkable sensitivity to the colonizer and colonized worlds around him. Minke is a Native student in a Dutch high school situated in Surabaya, and he adeptly navigates the culture of the colonizers, whether they welcome it or not. A significant portion of the novel, and the rest of the tetralogy, is dedicated to Minke’s education, a system established in the Netherlands East Indies to co-opt the brightest and most talented young Indonesians. However, *This Earth of Mankind* also delves into how Minke negotiates between his Dutch education and his Native beliefs, illustrating the conflict between these two realms and revealing Minke’s resistance when he recognizes the limitations of his Dutch schooling

Min Jin Lee’s *Pachinko* is a multi-generational family saga that spans the 20th century and explores the lives of a Korean family living in Japan. The novel primarily focuses on the experiences of a young woman named Sunja, who becomes pregnant by a wealthy married man. Sunja refuses to become his mistress and instead marries a young minister, Baek Isak, who offers her a chance at a new life in Japan. The story follows Sunja, her family, and descendents as they navigate the challenges of living as ethnic Koreans, or Zainichi Koreans, in Japan. They face discrimination and society bias due to their ethnicity. On hindsight, the novel also portrays their struggles for survival, identity, and a sense of belonging in a society that often rejects them.

While prior research has explored forms of resistance depicted in these novels, this paper seeks to analyze the portrayals of resistance based on the theories of Albert Memmi. Moreover, previous studies have not thoroughly examined Minke’s resistance within the educational sphere, particularly in his interaction with the de la Croix sisters. Additionally, this research will delve into Sunja’s more subtle, everyday resistance, in contrast to the more vocal resistance displayed by her descendents. Considering that both these novels are set during tumultuous times of colonization, it would be insightful to see the different kinds of resistance displayed by people of different social standings.

Literature Review

Review of Related Theories

This study bases itself on the theories of Albert Memmi (1920-2020), Homi K. Bhabha (1949-present), and Edward Said (1935-2003). In his work *Colonizer and Colonized*, Memmi describes what he refers to as “the mythical portrait of the colonized” (1974, p. 123). This mythical portrait serves as a justification for the colonizers’ mistreatment of the colonized. The colonized are portrayed as exceptionally lazy, while the colonizers are depicted as inclined toward action. The colonized are shown as frugal, seemingly devoid of many desires, yet ironically, they consume excessive quantities of meat, fat, alcohol, and other indulgences. They are presented as cowards who fear suffering and as uncivilized brutes devoid of any

inhibitions (1974, pp. 123–127).

Another facet of dehumanization is the tendency to generalize. The colonized are never individually characterized, giving the impression that they are not their own person. Instead, they are all lumped into an anonymous collective, in which the colonized are referred to as “they”, often in a negative connotation (“They are all the same”). Furthermore, the colonizers deny the colonized any semblance of freedom. They neglect to provide proper living conditions for the colonized, leaving them with no escape from their circumstances, neither through legal means like naturalization nor through religious conversion (1974, pp. 129–130).

Due to this fabricated image constructed by the colonizers, the colonized is effectively erased from both history and community. They are deprived of the privileges and responsibilities associated with citizenship. The colonized find themselves excluded from the community, lacking the rights enjoyed by citizens, unable to fulfil their obligations, ineligible to vote, and exempt from shouldering the community’s burdens. They are left feeling disconnected from the essence of true citizenship (1974, pp. 135–140).

In general, traditions, knowledge, customs, achievements, and the actions of previous generations are passed down and preserved in history, serving as a valuable educational resource for future generations. Language, which is central to new experiences, also plays a crucial role in this process. However, a vast majority of colonized children do not have the privilege of receiving education. Even for those fortunate enough to attend school, the history they are taught does not reflect their own people’s history. Their teachers do not align with the same narrative as their parents they do not represent the familiar and redemptive figures that teachers are in most other parts of the world. There is a lack of communication between the child and the teacher, and when it does occur, it is dangerous. The teacher and the school environment present a world that starkly contrasts with the child’s family surroundings. While the colonized child is spared from illiteracy, they pay the price of enduring linguistic dualism – a disconnect between their home language and the language of education (1974, pp. 149–150).

Generally speaking, there are two ways the colonized approach their situation. The first response is when the colonized attempt “to change his condition by changing his skin” (Memmi, 1974, p. 164). This is akin to the concept of mimicry. Bhabha, in his chapter “Of Mimicry and Man”, draws from Jacques Lacan when he states that,

"Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage.... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled - exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 121).

Mimicry is the manifestation of a difference that, in itself, is a form of denial. It serves as a manifestation of dual expression: a multifaceted strategy involving reform, control, and discipline that ‘appropriates’ the Other while simultaneously representing power. Mimicry operates at the intersection of what is recognized and permissible and that which, though recognized, must be concealed (Bhabha, 1994, p. 128). The colonized aspires to attain parity with the splendid model set by the colonizer, which, dangerously enough, may lead to an admiration for the colonizer.

Nevertheless, there will come a point in which the colonized arrives at the alarming realization regarding the implications of his endeavour. He will realize that he has shouldered

all the charges of the colonizer and is gradually adapting to viewing his own people from the perspective of the colonizer. Even if he agrees to every demand, he will remain unrescued. To be properly assimilated, it requires more than simply departing from one's own group. He must fully integrate into another. That integration is impossible, and now he is rejected by the colonizer (Memmi, 1974, pp. 164; 168).

After this point, resistance steps in. When the colonized finds it impossible to change his circumstances to appease the colonizer, he revolts. As the pursuit of assimilation is abandoned, the liberation of the colonized "must be achieved through a reclamation of self and autonomous dignity" (Memmi, 1974, p. 172). The attempts to emulate the colonizer necessitated self-negation, and the colonizer's rejection becomes an essential precursor to self-discovery.

After enduring the colonizer's rejection for an extended period, the colonized now rejects the colonizer. The colonized wages this battle using the very values and methods of combat that the colonizer understands. The colonized comes to terms with being different, but it is their perceived negative elements that are central to their resistance. They not only accept their "flaws", but also come to view them as virtues. While they possess the ability to dismantle the colonizer and colonization, they cannot erase what they have genuinely become and what they acquired during the era of colonization. Ultimately, they acknowledge, and embrace, their identity as colonized (Memmi, 1974, pp. 180–184).

The importance of the situation of the colonized and their resistance lies in Said's *Orientalism*. To truly comprehend and analyse ideas, cultures, and histories, one cannot afford to overlook the influence of power dynamics or their intricate structures of authority. To assume that the concept of the Orient was simply conjured into existence as a product of imagination is disingenuous. The interaction between the Occident and the Orient constitutes "a power relationship, marked by domination and varying degrees of a multifaceted hegemony" (Said, 1978, p. 5), which is closely intertwined with socio-economic and political institutions.

Taking Gramsci's insights, certain cultural forms and ideas hold sway over others, with specific cultural expressions assuming leadership, and this form of cultural dominance is what is defined as hegemony. Civil society comprises of schools, families, and unions. Meanwhile, political society consists of state institutions like the military, the police, and the government, exercising authority in the political realm. Culture operates primarily within civil society, where the influence of ideas, institutions, and other individuals is not enforced through domination, but is rather based on what Gramsci terms as consent.

By examining how the characters in *This Earth of Mankind* and *Pachinko* portray resistance, this study aims to shed light on the process of their evolution from adapting to a society where assimilation with the colonized is expected for them to be seen as equals, to gradually rebelling against the colonizers. Additionally, the study intends to reveal the impact of power dynamics and cultural domination, which are intricately linked with the socio-economic and political institutions form the backdrop of this resistance, and how they are representative of the regions depicted in the novels.

Review of Related Studies

Two relevant studies discuss the portrayal of resistance in *This Earth of Mankind*. Rifqi et al. mention that the colonized carry out resistance due to their subordinate position (2023, p.

130). In identifying the portrayals of resistance in the novel, the study bases itself on two different types of resistance. The first is public resistance, which is defined as “a type of resistance that involves interaction between two or more parties involved” (2023, p. 132). This type of resistance involves a more organizational structure with the potential to incite a revolution, and therefore, it is not individualistic. An example includes Minke’s refusal to become a high-ranking Javanese official, as he does not align himself with the feudalistic practices in society that put much emphasis on hierarchy. The second is private resistance, which is a more individualistic kind of resistance described to be “carried out slowly, secretly, and sometimes disorganized” (2023, p. 134). For instance, when conversing with Annalies, Minke rejects the habit of having to adjust the politeness of his language. This habit is prominent in Javanese culture, in which an acceptable level of Javanese language is permitted when speaking with high-ranking officials. Since Annalies comes from a much more liberated European lifestyle, he resists this habit.

Meanwhile, Sofī and Basiri’s study does not include a concrete definition of resistance. With their score primarily confined to Nyai Ontosoroh (also known as Sanikem), the study describes Nyai Ontosoroh’s journey from being sold by her father as a *nyai* when she was just a young child, her transition into a *nyai* living with Mr. Mellema, and her fight for the custody of her biological daughter Annalies in the Dutch court. When she was sold to Mr. Mellema, Sanikem was just a young child, and she was in a position where she was too inferior to portray any open resistance. Despite that, she displayed passive resistance by crying, representing her objection to her father’s choice even though there was no chance of changing her father’s mind. A year later into her life as Nyai Ontosoroh, she displayed resistance when she no longer acknowledged her parents, as her father traded her for wealth and status. The height of her resistance occurred when Nyai Ontosoroh went head to head with the colonial court despite the limited chance of gaining custody of her daughter (2020, pp. 165–169).

Two relevant studies discuss *Pachinko*. Unlike the related studies for *This Earth of Mankind*, the following studies do not posit themselves on the subject of resistance. However, each study indicates the characters’ attitudes which carry the spirit of resistance. Tablizo examines the three generations of Zainichi Koreans mentioned in the novel and how they respond to issues of identity and belonging in a variety of historical contexts. The term “zainichi”, which literally translates to “foreign resident” in Japanese, became prominent throughout the colonialist-imperialist history of Japan (2022, p. 100). The Zainichi community is in battle with its own identity, choosing to neither identify themselves as Korean nor Japanese. The first generation of the Zainichi community moved to Japan as a means of finding better work opportunities outside Korea, which at the time was going through tensions due to North-South politics. Despite the prejudice arising for being a Zainichi Korean, which was imbued with a negative connotation due to the strained relations between Korea and Japan, the female characters of the first generation preserve the traditions and cultures of their homeland, as evidenced by their desire to perform the *jesa* ceremony (2022, p. 112).

However, Sunja’s children Noa and Mozasu (the second generation of Zainichi Koreans) are split in terms of how they deal with their identity crisis. While Noa is eager to conform and mimic the Japanese all while hiding his Korean ethnicity, Mozasu refuses to model himself as a model Korean. In this case, Mozasu displays resistance, because he embraces the fact that no matter how he tries to mimic the Japanese like his older step-brother, he will always be a foreigner in Japan (Tablizo, 2022, p. 116). Noa and Mozasu’s situation is further elaborated

by the second relevant study. Trihtarani et al. offer an explanation of why Noa chooses to conform and Mozasu chooses to resist. Noa's bitter experience with poverty gives Noa the drive to study and work hard to obtain an equal social status to gain what he refers to as a normal life. However, upon learning that he comes from *yakuza* lineage from his biological father Hansu, he estranged himself from his mother and moved to Nagano, all while keeping his Korean and *yakuza* identity a secret despite later raising his own family there. Although Noa is successful in living a normal life as a "Japanese" person, the irony lies in the fact that the only way he achieves his normal life is by hiding his true identity (Trihtarani et al., 2019, pp. 178–179). As for Mozasu, his resistance does not stop at simply acknowledging his Zainichi identity. He finds employment in the *pachinko* business and is successful in it, breaking out of the poverty experienced by the first-generation Zainichi Koreans (2019, p. 180). This wealth carries onto Mozasu's son Solomon, a third-generation member of the Zainichi Koreans. Despite having an alien registration card, a discriminatory act considered "a form of governmental control to identify and monitor Koreans" (Tablizo, 2022, p. 116), Solomon shows resistance against existing Zainichi Korean assumptions by being educated in the United States and working a white-collar job – privileges that are passed down courtesy of Mozasu's success as a *pachinko* business owner.

Although the studies above hints at the resistances portrayed in *This Earth of Mankind* and *Pachinko*, the studies above have yet to describe resistance as a process. Memmi's theory suggests that there is tendency for the colonized to emulate their colonizers before reaching a point, or a certain realization, where the colonized decides to resist. Furthermore, there is minimum scholarship in regard to how the characters' resistance is representative of the novels' respective regions, and the significance of resistance in the field of Asian Literature in English. While the studies above serve as solid starting points to begin an analysis on the characters' resistance, this paper aims to further enrich the existing discussion.

Findings and Discussion

This section attempts to answer the two research questions above. First, how is resistance portrayed in *This Earth of Mankind* and *Pachinko*? Second, how are characters' portrayals of resistance representative of the novels' respective regions, and how is the theme of resistance significant to Asian Literature in English?

Resistance and Its Significance in This Earth of Mankind

With much of the related studies having discussed the resistance portrayed by Nyai Ontosoroh, this section will instead take a further look at how Minke resisting the influence of Dutch education. Minke is one of the protagonists in *This Earth of Mankind*. The son of a Javanese aristocrat, his privileged background allows him to obtain education in a Dutch high school, or commonly referred to as a "Hoogere Burgerschool (HBS)" in the novel (Schultz & Felter, 2002, p. 147). What makes Minke remarkable is that he is the only "Native" student among his peers. One on hand, Minke has rare access to formal education at a prestigious Dutch-language school. On the other hand, Minke experiences discrimination due to his indigenous background. His name "Minke" alone, which means monkey, is given to him by one of his teachers (Toer, 1996, p. 11).

However, this did not discourage Minke from his academic pursuits. He develops a fascination for his Dutch teachers and considers them to be the givers of "very broad

knowledge, much broader than that received by students of the same level in many of the European countries” (Toer, 1996, p. 13). He develops a fascination for one of his teachers, Magda Peters. It was Magda who introduced Minke to the writings of Mulatuli. However, Minke was unaware of his country’s troubled history.

Although his feelings of resistance were later on awakened during Nyai Ontosoroh’s fight in the Dutch court for the custody of her biological daughter, another lesser discussed example of Minke displaying resistance towards the Dutch education system was during his discussions with new acquaintances Sarah and Miriam de la Croix.

Minke’s feeling of resistance was first awakened when Miriam put him in a humiliating spotlight.

“A Native who has obtained European education. Very good. And you already know so much about Europe. Perhaps you don’t know as much about your own country. Perhaps. True? I’m not wrong, am I?”

The humiliation has now begun, I thought. (Toer, 1996, p. 162)”

Although Miriam claimed it was not her intention to insult anyone, she points out the ridiculousness of Minke’s ancestors who, “generation after generation”, believed in myths such as “thunder is the explosion caused by the angels trying to capture the devil” (Toer 163). She then presses Minke by asking whether he believes in such legends, despite having learned natural science in his Dutch school.

The peak of this exchange was when Miriam brought up Dr. Snouck Hurgronje and his Association Theory. Dr. Snouck conducted a study to see whether Natives are able to prosper provided they are raised within and European learning system, which bases itself on science and rationality. From there comes his Association Theory, which claims that direct cooperation between the Natives and European officials would only be possible provided that the former are educated based on European ways. Therefore, the Europeans would no longer need to have the “burden” of controlling the Natives (Toer 167).

Minke displays resistance during the next part of the discussion. When asked about his opinion, he disagrees with the Association Theory. He argued that the Natives have read *Babad Tanah Jawi* and are well versed in Javanese. Despite being taught to admire the Indies' Army's exceptional abilities in controlling the Natives, Minke highlights that the Natives also have their own accounts of how they have withstood the Indies Army's attacks for centuries. While acknowledging that the Natives have often been defeated, he questions why the Dutch did not conceive of this Association Theory three centuries ago when the Natives might have been more amenable to sharing responsibilities with Europeans. Minke’s implication is that the Europeans are not as progressive as they believe themselves to be, as he quotes, “he’s (Dr. Snouck Hurgronje) is three hundred years behind the Natives of that time.” (Toer 168)

This Earth of Mankind sees Minke’s journey as he receives a formal education in the Netherlands East Indies through a system specifically designed to attract the brightest Indonesians. However, Dutch education during the colonial era was a contentious issue. As illustrated in Minke’s conversation with Miriam, one possible reason for select Indonesian elites gaining access to Dutch education was the expectation that they would become capable future leaders willing to work together with their colonizers. The colonized are expected to transform into their colonizers, despite the fact that these Natives would never be like their white counterparts – no matter how knowledgeable they are.

Minke’s disillusionment with the notion of Dutch education being progressive becomes

evident when he shares the Association Theory during a discussion with Magda Peters, who promptly shuts down the conversation. Magda's justification is that such topics are not suitable for school discussion; they fall within the realm of the Queen, the Netherlands government, the government-general, and the Netherlands Indies government (Toer, 1996, pp. 245–246). This exchange underscores that Minke's Dutch education was selective, purposefully omitting significant aspects of Dutch-Indonesian history. This encounter sharply contrasts with Magda's initially described progressive attitude in the novel. Despite the promise of receiving "broad knowledge" at his Dutch school, it appears that the school and its teachers consciously choose to overlook specific aspects of their country's troubled history and the true intentions of the Dutch government.

This notion aligns with Memmi's theory that individuals fortunate enough to attend school are often taught a version of history that does not reflect the history of their own people. There is a lack of effective communication between students and teachers, and when confrontations arise, they can be perilous, as exemplified by Magda's reaction upon realizing that Minke broached a controversial topic. While the colonized Minke is spared from illiteracy, he grapples with the consequences of a disconnect between his Dutch and Native illiteracy, he grapples with the consequences of a disconnect between his Dutch and Native education.

Nevertheless, there is a glimmer of resistance when Minke staunchly defends his Native beliefs during his confrontation with Miriam. This aligns with Memmi's idea that when the colonized individual finds it impossible to change their circumstances to appease the colonizer, they inevitably revolt. Miriam's point about the paradox between Minke's Dutch education and his Native beliefs makes him realize that pursuing assimilation is futile. Left with no other choice, he decides to reclaim his self and autonomous dignity. He rejects Miriam, the colonizer, and employs the colonizer's own methods, academic discussion, as a medium of combat. Minke becomes aware that his Native history is not without flaws, considering that the Natives fell under Dutch subjugation, which is perceived as a negative element in Miriam's eyes. However, Minke turns the tables, considering these flaws as virtues, as the Natives possess knowledge that the Dutch only came to acquire many centuries later. In doing so, Minke transforms the perceived negative elements of his colonized background into a form of resistance.

The Dutch believed that controlling education was a means to suppress the growth of nationalism. Queen Wilhelmina's "Ethical Policy" of 1901, intended to win over the Natives, was promoted as a noble experiment to modernize Indonesian society and allow a new elite to partake in Western civilization's wealth – a motive closely similar to the Association Theory. However, as Minke points out, the Natives did not require salvation because they possessed knowledge predating the Dutch arrival in Indonesia. Paradoxically, the Ethical Policy marked the beginning of organized Indonesian nationalism, igniting a sense of resistance (Schultz & Felter, 2002, p. 149).

The theme of resistance is intricately connected to Indonesia's history, and this spirit is vividly manifested through *This Earth of Mankind* by Pramoedya. While the author achieved recognition through his literary accomplishments, it was his unwavering resilience in the face of tyranny that galvanized Indonesia's spirit of resistance. Pramoedya experienced imprisonment on three separate occasions under three different Indonesian regimes (Schultz & Felter, 2002, p. 144). He was a staunch critic of the New Order's self-important, power-hungry, and oppressive Java governance, attributing these issues to "Javanism", which fostered

unwavering obedience to authority figures to the extent that they could practice fascism without being questioned (Tsao, 2012, p. 120). During his incarnation on Buru Island, Pramoedya was denied access to a pen and paper to document his stories. Instead, he narrated them to fellow prisoners, an act of resistance aimed at preserving his imagination and humanity in the face of adversity.

Resistance and Its Significance in Pachinko

With much of the previous related studies having focused on Noa, Mozasu, and Solomon's journey with resistance, this section will primarily focus on Sunja's story as she shows resistance as a first-generation Zainichi Korean who moved to Japan. She was born in the early 20th century when Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910, leading to economic hardship for the nation. Sunja's family ran a prosperous boarding-house, but her life took a turn when her father died of tuberculosis when she was just 13 years old, leaving her and her mother, Yangjin, to manage the boarding-house alone.

At the age of 17, Sunja developed feelings for Hansu, a wealthy fish broker who had protected her from a group of rowdy men in the market. However, these infatuated feelings resulted in Sunja becoming pregnant by Hansu. Unfortunately, Hansu was already married with child in Japan and refused to marry Sunja. Although he is willing to offer financial support, Sunja declined to become his mistress.

Later, a sickly young pastor named Baek Isak stayed at Sunja's boarding-house and learned about her pregnancy. Isak offered to marry Sunja, and she accepted. After their marriage, Isak and Sunja moved to Osaka, Japan, with the goal of Isak finding employment in a church. This move led them to live with Isak's brother, Yoseb, and his sister-in-law, Kyunghee, in a small house in Ikaino, Osaka's impoverished Korean neighbourhood.

During World War II, the Japanese government required everyone, including Christians, to participate in weekly Shinto ceremonies and worship the emperor. During one of these ceremonies, Hu, the sexton in Isak's church, recited the Lord's Prayer as an act of resistance, which led to Isak's arrest. This arrest had a significant financial impact on the family. With no other choice, Sunja and Kyunghee started looking for a source of income and eventually established a successful food cart in the Ikaino market.

In *This Earth of Mankind* comes off as more political and revolutionary, whereas in *Pachinko*, it takes a on a more subtle form, often manifesting as everyday actions. This resistance can involve everyday and spontaneous acts of subversion employed by Korean descendants to navigate the Japanese national homogeneity ideology without explicitly political goals. Zainichi Koreans employ these strategies to combat discrimination and safeguard their cultural and historical legacy, especially in a context where the nation views ethnic and racial diversity as potential threats to its existence (Laurent & Robillard-Martel, 2022, pp. 39–40).

When Japan annexed Korea in 1910, a significant number of Koreans migrated to Japan in search of employment in Japanese mines and factories. Throughout the colonial period, the Koreans living in Japan faced severe hardships. They were typically employed in menial labour roles within the most exploited and least protected labour market, often competing with the lowest stratum of the Japanese labour force (Kim, 2011, p. 236). For example, Isak's brother, Yoseb, had seized the earliest opportunity to travel to Japan in pursuit of a different life. He self-taught himself the skills of a machinist and now held the position of a factory foreman in

Osaka (Lee, 2017, pp. 68–69). Even if these Zainichi Koreans were brought to the country by Japanese companies, they were not provided proper housing. Instead, they were provided camps attached to the mines or factories with deplorable conditions (Lee, 2017, p. 126).

“Kimchi! Delicious kimchi! Try this delicious kimchi, and never make it at home again!’ she shouted. Passersby turned to look at her, and Sunja, mortified, looked away from them. No one bought anything. After the butcher finished with his hog, he washed his hands and gave her twenty-five sen, and Sunja filled a container for him. He didn’t seem to mind that she didn’t speak Japanese.” (Lee, 2017, p. 164)

Enduring traditions serve as powerful symbols of resilience. Members of a youth organization have observed that food can be a more significant cultural identifier than language, noting that Zainichi Koreans continue to include kimchi in their diet alongside Japanese cuisine. The significance of kimchi is not merely anecdotal. Because it has historically been linked to Korean identity, its consumption has faced stigma in Japan, with the phrase “they stink of kimchi” being a common anti-Korean slur (Kim, 2011, p. 48). One instance is when Sunja’s son, Noa, was affected by the kimchi odour at home. Similar to the rest of the Korean children in his local school, Noa was teased and taunted. Because his clothes smells like onions, chili, garlic, and shrimp paste – all ingredients to make kimchi – the schoolteacher made Noa sit at the back of the classroom next to Korean children whose mothers raised pigs in their homes. He was also called garlic turd (Lee, 2017, p. 169).

In spite of the negative connotations associated with kimchi, akin to Memmi’s proposed theory, Sunja harnessed the negative elements of a culinary dish closely linked to her colonized culture and rebranded it as something positive in the land of her colonizers. Sunja remained dedicated to selling items that were rooted in her cultural heritage and gradually expanded her offerings to include other pickled vegetables such as radishes, cucumbers, garlic, and chives. Sunja’s commitment led to the accumulation of a customer base, primarily consisting of Korean women working in factories who lacked the time to prepare their own side dishes. Her success drew the attention of Kim Changho, who entrusted her as the exclusive supplier of kimchi for his yakiniku restaurant located near Tsuruhashi Station.

Sunja’s display of resistance may not be as overtly political or revolutionary as Minke’s, in which the actions of the latter ultimately serve a reflection of the overall spirit of a more nationalistic resistance. Unlike Minke, there are no academic debates or controversial exchanges of ideas. Instead, Sunja’s resistance emerges from her fundamental need to ensure her family is alive in a territory that resents her existence as a Zainichi Korean. There are no academic debates or controversial exchanges of ideas. Instead, it is purely work ethic and constant survival mode. Unlike her two sons, Noa and Mozasu, who grapple with identity crises as they grow up, Sunja simply does not have the time and energy to contemplate how to assimilate into the colonized society. She remains constantly in survival mode, selling the one thing that is closely tied to her culture to fund her sons’ education and raise them without a father figure present.

“Sunja-ya, a woman’s life is endless work and suffering. There is suffering and then more suffering. It’s better to expect it, you know. You’re becoming a woman now, so you should be told this. For a woman, the man you marry will determine the quality of your life completely. A good man is a decent life, and a bad man is a cursed life – but no matter what, always expect suffering, and just keep working hard. No one will take care of a poor woman – just ourselves” (Lee, 2017, p. 37).

Conclusion

Resistance takes on various forms, with some being outspoken like Minke's and others more understated, akin to Sunja's. Nonetheless, both types of resistance share a common thread – they challenge the dominant power that envelops them. In Minke's case, he initially followed in the footsteps of his colonizers, even admiring the Dutch education he received, believing it to be progressive. However, his interactions with the de la Croix sisters triggered an epiphany, leading him to resist by exposing the flaw in the Association Theory. He also asked his teacher Magda Peters challenging questions, which were considered unsuitable for a school setting and deemed matters reserved only for the Queen. On the other hand, Sunja's resistance was never intentional. Her sole focus was survival, with little concern for assimilating into Japanese society. With her limited Japanese, she turned to selling kimchi as a means of making a living. Despite her brother-in-laws initial reservations about women working, and also the negative stigma surrounding kimchi in Japan due to its pungent aroma, Sunja could not afford the time or energy to dwell on it. Her primary objective was simply to endure in the land of her colonizers.

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