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Creating a Home Elsewhere: Diasporic Imagination in Lee Isaac Chung's *Minari*

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Abstract

Minari, a film screened in 2020 directed by Lee Isaac Chung, presents a Korean immigrant family having moved to Arkansas in fulfilling their American dream at the cost of being displaced and out of place. By focusing on the attempt made by Jacob, the father, to recreate the imagined home which refers to South Korea, this study aims to show how the displacement and unhomeliness in the construction of diasporic imagination are displayed in the film. David, the son, not only feels out of place but is also obligated to feel a kind of belonging to both cultures. Jacob's mother-in-law, Soon-Ja, having newly arrived in the US brings recent memories of home into the family that represent the Korean immigrant perspective of living in the US for the first time. This approach will show how the American film attempts to incorporate the new forms of portraying the 'elsewhere' which is an important characteristic of American dream narratives. The analysis is conducted by referring to Bhabha's unhomeliness and Walder's displacement in comprehending the contrast between the stereotypical characteristics of Korean immigrants and the American dream through the dialogues and scenes. We would like to argue that Minari follows the convention of the American dream narratives. However, due to displacement and unhomeliness, the film shows how Korean immigrants experience being awkwardly immersed within the mainstream American cultural discourse.

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Introduction

Minari (2020), an award-winning film by Lee Isaac Chung, presents Jacob, a Korean immigrant, moving from California to Arkansas together with his family to build a home. The film begins with the arrival of Jacob driving a truck and Monica driving a separate car along with their two children, David and Anne. Minari, however, does not present the departure point from which the family begins their journey. This part of the film then raises questions, is Jacob's journey of creating a home a migration from South Korea, or has he long-forgotten Korea as a definition of home? Jacob's attempt to define building a home seems to be the main focus of the film, reflecting the desired life of immigrants in the US. With all these issues in mind, the discussion of Minari becomes significant.

Looking back, in the American film industry, before *Minari*, there were other significant award-winning films depicting East Asians namely *The Joy Luck Club* (1993), *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), and from the Korean industry, *Parasite* (2019).

East Asian representation in American films is not only limited to the films mentioned above but there is a common theme presented in these films. It became prominent to acknowledge that East Asian countries' relation to the US varies, thus, having different film characteristics and trends of entering the American film industry.

One of the leading films displaying Asian cultural background is *The Joy Luck Club*, an adaptation of the novel of the same title by Amy Tan, a Chinese-American author. The film received the spotlight for its contrasting characters, indicating the characters as one of its uniqueness (Wang, 1994). Following this is *Memoirs of a Geisha*, a Japanese historical fiction film that is also an adaptation of a novel by Arthur Golden with the same title. This film portrays orientalized femininity, in which the Asian female bodies are fetishized, exploited, and compared to the Western myth of Madonna (Yoon, 2008). In 2018, *Crazy Rich Asians*, a movie adaptation of the novel with the same title written by Kevin Kwan and directed by Jon M. Chu was known for developing tired racial tropes (Sugino, 2019). According to Sugino, instead of striking against social ranks to escape racism, the film shows that it is only possible to climb it.

A Korean movie directed by Bong Joon-Ho, *Parasite* caught viewers' attention internationally, despite its initial aim for a domestic audience. The film received various international awards, four of which are the Oscars: Best Director, Best Picture, Best Original Screenplay, and Best International Feature Film. Moreover, *Parasite* is the first non-English speaking film to have received the Best Picture award at the Oscars. The film marks one of the most significant changes in Korean cinema in the international market accelerated by the *Hallyu* phenomenon globally. Not only is it produced by a Korean company, but it also only uses the Korean language. Another Korean cinema product produced by Netflix is *Squid Game* (2021), directed by Hwang Dong-hyuk. The film is known worldwide and has received six prestigious awards, one of which was the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series in 2022.

These films have one thing in common: their relations to East Asian culture. However, *Minari* is closest to the ideal casting of the characters as it only casts Korean American actors and actresses, similar to the Korean movie by Bong Joon-ho and Hwang Dong-hyuk. Additionally, *Minari* indicates the development of Asian-American films, especially after the increasing interest in *Hallyu* worldwide. It also received a prestigious Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 2021 for Youn Yuh-Jung, who plays the role of Soon-Ja.

As a land that represents freedom, American films often highlight the American dream in their narratives, including *Minari*, especially depicting the Korean immigrant family fulfilling their dream in rural Arkansas. The film portrays Jacob based on stereotypical characteristics of Korean immigrants living in the US who experience displacement and unhomeliness due to the contrast between Korean culture and the American dream discourse. In a study by Roberts (2006) of *The Great Gatsby*, the American dream "offers them [the characters] limitless freedom, wealth, and power," (p. 73). *Minari* portrays Jacob's ambition of reaching his American dream through the plan of owning a farm and selling Korean crops to markets.

As one of the most recent movies screened in 2020, there have only been mostly critics' perspectives posted in online magazines and newspapers. A review by Seitz (2021), for instance, highlights that Jacob has portrayed the prototypical mid-20th century farmer in fulfilling the American dream. His appearance from head to toe, such as gimme cap, terse speech, breast pocket cigarette pack, and ambling gunfighter walk has introduced the typical image of immigrant farmers living in the US. The American dream itself has been the cause of the fight between Jacob and Monica as the two shared a goal with different priorities. Additionally, Newcott (2021) is in the same line as Seitz because Jacob has a strong native

culture but a stronger passion for the American dream.

Another review sees that as the film portrays the immigrant life of Jacob's family, the film mainly focuses on David's perspective as the second generation in perceiving the two contrasting cultures (Scott, 2021). Similar arguments are also mentioned by Bradshaw (2021) and Brody (2021). In agreement with Seitz, a similar perspective of the film is also brought up by Bradshaw (2021) and Nguyen (2020). As an immigrant who comes from a monocultural society, moving to the US not only changes the way Jacob's family assimilates with the culture but also the significantly different surroundings. Prejudice and racism have become a familiar unwelcomed approach. Not limited to the theme within the film, the movie production is still receiving questionable recognition, such as the Best Foreign Language Film category which Nguyen (2020) questions as to why it is considered foreign when it is categorized as a Hollywood film.

Before *Minari*, previous studies regarding displacement have also been found in an East American film directed by Lulu Wang, *The Farewell* (2019). The film also has a similar background to Minari in its being based on the director's past experiences as an Asian-American living in the US. The film presents a Chinese-American woman, Billi, flying back home due to her cancer-diagnosed grandmother. In the research by Cortez (2022) regarding the film, Billi feels displaced as she "has fallen out of sync with the progress-oriented timeline of American success her relatives in China expect she will fulfill" (p. 94), yet haunted by her ancestral home she left behind at the age of six. Billi feels displaced after going back home and realizing that she belongs to neither of the cultures as she is only half of one and the other, and not fully immersed. In comparison, Cortez compares the displacement of the characters in *The Farewell* and *Minari*.

Previous studies and articles written about *Minari* have been published regarding its recognition in Asian-American film development and the moral message that it presents. However, these have not covered the discussion of unhomeliness as it relates to the displacement and diasporic identity represented by Jacob's family as a Korean immigrant in the US. Therefore, this article aims to address the topic yet to be discussed by referring to the theories of unhomeliness and displacement on a conceptual level as well as narratological aspects of its filmic features.

Methodology

The study is in the domain of postcolonial studies and film narratology. The discussion will focus on scenes from the film and the way they are narrated. Analysis of the film, specifically on a home elsewhere, will refer to the work of Ashcroft *et al*. (2000) on diasporic identity, Walder's (2011) displacement, and Bhabha's (1994) unhomeliness. Meanwhile, the analysis of the film narrative structure will refer to film narratology by Verstraten (2009). Considering the timeline of East Asian-American films, *Minari* is categorized as one of the most recent and successful films directed by Lee Isaac Chung. In addition, this study will refer to the film narratology theories seen in the film, as well as the location of culture regarding the immigrant background of the movie.

Immigrant experiences in films have previously been depicted as old-fashioned due to their acts of preserving culture. However, recent depictions of diaspora experiences have changed as descendants of immigrants have also developed different cultural practices in which they preserve, extend, and develop their originary cultures (Ashcroft et al., 2000). The different cultures, thus, create a sense of displacement, a sense of a familiar yet different cycle of living compared to that of the homeland (Walder, 2011). Apart from displacement, it can also be noticed that the film portrays the characters' going through the feeling of unhomeliness. According to Bhabha (1992), unhomely is a paradigmatic post-colonial experience that negotiates the powers of cultural difference. Additionally, Bhabha (1994) states that unhomely is the borderline between the home and the world. It is also everything that ought to remain hidden that has come to light. The hidden characteristics are then introduced through the narratology of the camera work.

Avery (2014) states that an uncanny or unhomely world creates a "third space" that not only converges two different identities but problematizes the idea of two distinct places or identities to exist. Additionally, according to Rapport and Overing in Avery, feeling displaced is necessary to achieve a sense of belonging by becoming alienated before feeling at "home" (2014).

These conditions of being both unhomely and displaced are apparent in the narratological aspects of the film. It is important to recognize that such aspects are not always presented through direct narration, but can also be shown through camera works and the details implied in scenes. According to Gaudreault in Verstraten (2009), there is a first-level type of narrativity in which the form of telling is through showing. This can be seen as implied in the cinematography of *Minari*. In addition, Verstraten (2009) has mentioned in *Film Narratology* that casting has a narrative impact. The characters that the actor portrays correspond to their traits and physical characteristics that have a role in the plot of the movie. In comparison to literary texts, Genette (1980) wrote that cinematic narrative can only be consumed in time that is the reading time.

Referring to Chatman, narrative in films utilizes the characters and props as a virtually limitless sensory particularity (1990). In accordance, Verstraten also states that "[a] literary description can demonstrate precision and exhaustive meticulousness, whereas cinema is always 'over specific'". The descriptive choice of words in literary texts, thus, equals the details presented in films. If the power to affect literary texts is words, Bal (1997) added that a film's power to affect is through showing, as well as the narrative method. In line with Chatman's argument, in his critical view of the *Minari*, Brody (2021) states that it brings out the logic of the story without allowing emotion to expand as it shows "over specific" details that are possibly overlooked.

Results and Discussion

The analysis is divided into two subsections, presenting the diasporic imagination represented in Jacob's family in the US and its effect on the home created elsewhere by immigrant communities. The dialogues and the scenes analyzed in this study, supported by references and related research as a secondary source, have shown that diasporic identity and imagination have significantly affected the home and sense of unhomely by immigrants living abroad.

Diasporic Imagination

Over the years, the American dream has driven many immigrants to move to the US. With the euphoria of coming to a new modern place and building a house with white picket fences and a front yard, immigrants are delighted to start fresh and open a new page of their lives, and Jacob's family is one of them. In *Minari*, Jacob and his family have lived in the US for approximately 10 years, followed by their decision to move to Arkansas and build a farm there. The voluntary movement of his family to a new region is thus categorized under the term diaspora (Ashcroft et al., 2000).

Jacob and Monica seem to have different definitions of settling down and fulfilling the American dream. The two represent the family's different levels of Korean and American assimilation. Referring to Bhabha (1994), "the borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of the past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation" (p. 10). Therefore, the new is needed to separate it from both spectrums of time, thus, defining and following the definition of culture. Jacob defines the *newness* through the modern yet traditional value of running his farm, but Monica stays with the urban lifestyle. The first few minutes of the movie introduce the trailer house that both Jacob and Monica view differently. Jacob is satisfied with the roof over their head, whilst Monica is disappointed with the expectation that they could settle once they moved to Arkansas.

The movie opens with the scene of a mother with two children driving a sedan while following a truck. It shows a glimpse of the mother's disconcerted expression while passing empty lands on both sides of the road

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and hatcheries or factories. According to Verstraten (2009), the opening scene that introduces the surroundings apart from the characters offers an impression of the general ambiance. Later it becomes known that the mother in the opening scene is Monica who follows her husband, Jacob, driving the truck with their family's belongings.

Later introduced in the film, Monica is accepted in a chicken sexing job together with Jacob, where she meets another Korean immigrant woman working beside her. Monica's remarks as expressed in the following show that she is pleased that there are other Koreans there.

> *Monica: "There are Koreans here!"* (Chung, 2020: 00:06:56).

We see that Monica's displacement is quite explicitly shown as she is delighted to see another fellow Korean worker in the hatchery. After living in Arkansas for quite a while and re-adjusting herself to the new surroundings, the film projects Monica as feeling displaced because of her previous routine of meeting fellow Koreans when living in California. Monica is delighted to see a fellow Korean who is likely able to understand her feeling of displacement as she has just moved into a new place. Several other acts by Monica also indicate the nostalgia that she is longing to create a duplicate of her Korean home in the US. According to Walder (2011),

> *It [nostalgia] is a relationship defined in part by the multiple (unconsciously) remembered and (consciously) recalled associations that the everyday lives of diasporic subjects frequently if not continuously throw into relief, as they proceed through the familiar (yet for them fractured) cycles of family, occupation, and leisure in the new homeland* (p. 29).

A familiar culture that is seen in a foreign space has confused Monica as an immigrant who has been far from her definition of home.

Monica's colleague assumed that their family was wealthy and in no urgency to work in a chicken sexing job due to their migration from California to Arkansas. The scenes that follow present the reason why Monica and David agreed to move to Arkansas, and that is because Monica was not fast enough to work in California.

Comparatively, Monica's agreement with Jacob in moving to rural Arkansas did not last long as she realized the problems that arose due to their new home, including the hospital that is at least one hour drive from home and no one to look after the children when both parents are working at the hatchery. Monica's anger reached a climax which created a dispute between the couple. Additionally, the dispute indicates that a familiar scene has most likely happened several times before as the dialogues imply as follows.

> *Jacob : "Working myself to the bone! Living in a tiny home with no money!"*
> *Monica: "And where did that money go?"*
> *Jacob : "Don't start again"*
> (Chung, 2020: 00:12:45).

This scene implies that the conflict between Monica and Jacob revolves around their different concerns as Monica is concerned about the funding for David's checkups while Jacob is about his past efforts that seem to not have any resolution as they are still living in "a tiny home with no money". In the following scene, the film presents the reaction David and Anne have to their parents' arguments.

Figure 1. Anne and David flying paper airplanes toward their parents (2020)



David and Anne quickly make paper airplanes with "Don't Fight" written on them and create as many copies as they can. They glide the paper airplanes to their parents in the hope it will help them reconcile. The camera then shifts the focus to the response that Anne and

David have towards the debate between their parents. The camera shift implies the importance of the response compared to the actual dispute between Jacob and Monica. The camera movement of back and forth is what Verstraten suggests that it only slightly matters who speaks and what is being said (2009, p. 77). Applying Verstraten's perspective onto the scene, the camera shifts from portraying the parents to their children to show the importance of Anne and David's reaction to their parents' disagreement by flying paper airplanes. Subsequently, the camera shifts in accordance with the dialogues of Jacob and Monica which no longer focus on the reaction but rather the issue being disputed.

Jacob portrays the oxymoron of immigrant life in the US as he strongly believes in what the film depicts as Korean immigrant characteristics, such as not using services that can be done by themselves in order to compress the budget. This portrayal is relevant to Ashcroft et al. (2000) that diasporic movements have not only developed the distinctive culture that preserves it. The application of the narrative is seen through Jacob and Monica preserving Korean values in the family, but also developing it so that it could merge with the American dream. In a similar view, Walder (2011) finds that the merging of two cultures indicates nostalgia and the longing for the idealized past which results in an unending restlessness. The nostalgia, thus, applies to the scene mentioned below.

> *Jacob: "Korean people use their heads. Never pay for anything you can find for free"* (Chung, 2020, 00:17:19).

Jacob refuses to use the water dowsing service and insists on implementing his personal belief of finding the water source for the farm. The film shows how Jacob, displacing locals with Korean crops on a farm located in the US, awkwardly experiences the American dream journey due to the stereotypical Korean immigrant characteristics that he has. Jacob does not follow conventional American thinking in reaching for his dream and is presented as a character that exoticizes American culture as it is foreign to a foreigner like him. This is similarly argued by Scott (2021) that "exoticism can be a two-way mirror, and America is a pretty outlandish place." Jacob's nostalgia for his homeland is also characterized as a genuine pharmakos, a term used by Andreea Ritivoi in Walder (2011, p. 30), which is both medicine and poison. The pharmakos is reflected through the merge of his South Korean, as the old-world, and American, as the new-world, cultures. Jacob represents the immigrants that have the American dream, yet stay true to their initial culture that has quite contrasting characteristics.

The movie has not only stressed the immigrants' characteristics but also the supporting characters as to how immigrants are viewed from their perspective. According to Seitz (2021), the characters, including the adults, are depicted as still learning the correct way to behave. One of the scenes that ought to be highlighted is the church scene where Jacob and his family go together for the first time, including Soon-Ja. The church acts as the space of interaction between Jacob's family and the world. It also implies the film's attempt to break the stereotype that has been brought up in the earlier scene by the Korean colleague who says Koreans migrate to rural areas to avoid churches. The church acts as the melting pot in what Bhabha (1994) would argue as "the border between private and public" where it is "erased and has become part of each other" in which Jacob is "forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (1994, p. 13). The diverse space implies the stereotype that both parties, locals and immigrants, project onto each other, but at the same time, creates the bridge between the home and the world that inhabits a discursive line that merges both cultures. Through Soon-Ja, the movie depicts that immigrants see locals as foreign as much as it is *vice versa*. Similarly, David and Anne received a weird look from the children their age which, in Bradshaw's (2021) observation, classifies as a nasty remark.

Home Elsewhere Represented by Soon-Ja

Korean immigrants' representation in *Minari* becomes an important part of the film as it is one of the themes. The husband and

wife, Jacob and Monica, fundamentally have different beliefs on the American dream and Korean culture. Walder (2011) states that past experiences have a significant effect on most recent beliefs when living abroad because when living abroad self-representation through memories of the past. This resonates with Jacob and Monica's situation in which they represent themselves differently. On the other hand, as stated by Baronian et al. (2006), the diasporic identity can be characterized as the sense of belonging to a diasporic group in other locations of the world. Within this context, Monica represents the Korean diaspora in that she looks for a Korean church before actually going to a local church and blending in with the locals. Chronotopically viewed, diasporic identity is what Peeren (2006, p. 73) believes as "a construct symbolically kept in place by out-of-place subjects." Moved from one place to another, the diaspora creates their homeland abroad and would never feel that they belong to either place of origin or settlement as they constantly negotiate with both cultures with the interference of memory.

As the second generation of an immigrant family, David and Anne's characterization indicates how influenced they are by American culture and less by their parents' culture as Koreans. Regardless of the two cultures, there is no specific beginning nor ending of which culture belongs to both children. Nayantara Sahgal in Walder (2011, p. 35) raises a question: "Where does one culture begin and another end when they are housed in the same person?" Having lived in the US most of his life, David presents unhomeliness as he is foreign to the Korean cultures that his parents implement in their house. Referring to a term coined by Freaud, Bhabha states that, unhomely, or *unheimlich* in German is "[t]he name for everything that ought to have remained … secret and hidden but has come to light" (1994, p. 14). The migration of David's grandmother, Soon-Ja, has allowed him to learn more about his homeland which he has never been exposed to before and, thus, has brought the hidden facts to light.

The introduction of Soon-Ja as she comes to the US represents how she creates the feeling of 'home' while adapting to live in the US. As a new immigrant, Soon-Ja presents what Baronian et al. believe the "[d]iasporic cultures [that] exist by producing and discovering new places to speak, new territories to remember and to forget" (2006, p. 15). Soon-Ja introduces anchovies and *gochugaru*–the main ingredients in many Korean dishes. Following her first scene, she brings David and Anne to a nearby stream and mentions her plans of planting the Minari to later be consumed. Soon-Ja's existence in the house brings quite significant changes to the family as she just arrived from South Korea, thus, viewing the US the same way as she presumably sees Korea. Soon-Ja is also viewed as 'strongly Korean' as David views her as unlike the American grandmothers he usually sees and that she smells like Korea–despite not knowing what Korea is like. Due to the strong Korean characteristics the film portrays, Soon-Ja presents displacement through the changes she brings into the family. One of the scenes that indicates this is how she supports anything David and Anne would do that their parents will not, such as for David to run or pray differently than Monica's usual bedtime prayer. David also picked up Soon-Ja's phrase when he played mahjong with his friend.

David: "Out of my way, you Bastard!"
(In Korean) (Chung, 2020, 01:20:01).

Shown as if against each other, Soon-Ja's moving to the US seems to show the opposite of Jacob in his American dream journey. This occurrence is shown by one of them in how she planted Minari straight after she arrived in the US as a way for her to remind herself about Korea as a foreign country. Soon-Ja's characterization also brings the family back to Korean household rules. She plays *mahjong*, makes a traditional medicine for David, and plants Minari. Therefore, *Minari* becomes the only actual proof of Korea's existence in the film as it is brought from home, yet never presents what Korea is like, unless from dialogues and the imagination of home. Soon-Ja's character also presents the intersectionality of the film as it represents an elderly immigrant moving from one place to another while bringing a plant that would remind her of home. However, she also shows how she blends in with the foreign culture by drinking Mountain Dew and speaking English

with David. Soon-Ja represents the *familiar* and *foreign* home to Jacob's family.

Figure 2. Monica cries seeing anchovies and *gochugaru* from Korea (2020)



Monica's overwhelmed expression upon receiving anchovies and *gochugaru* represents the feeling of missing home as she has been abroad for 10 years. She seems to be overwhelmed by the fact that her mother finally visits her in the US while receiving the ingredients mostly used in Korean dishes that are hard to find abroad. The camera focuses on the mother-and-daughter interaction from outside the room which later becomes known it is from David's point of view. The camera presents the scene from David's point of view for a while until it shifts to show David silently seeing his mother cry from a "mere" vegetable. On the other hand, David's acceptance of Korean culture is relatively low. David declined to share his bedroom with Soon-Ja and said,

> *David: "Grandma smells like Korea"*
> (Chung, 2020, 00:35:25).

which later is opposed by Anne as David cannot say so without having been to Korea. Soon-Ja is an unfamiliar figure to David and brings unfamiliar values from Korean culture which David has been accustomed to the American lifestyle since little.

Minari is first introduced by Soon-Ja when she brings David and Anne to the creek near their house. This scene only includes the three of them, without Jacob and Monica. It implies that David and Anne are most probably unfamiliar with Minari, unlike Jacob and Monica, who, on the other hand, miss it more than anyone else. However, in this scene, Minari is not introduced to what it means apart from the fact that it is the film's title. Towards the movie's end, a similar scene is introduced: Soon-ja and David come to the creek to pick the Minari that is ready to consume. Minari is introduced through Soon-Ja's dialogue.

> *Soon-Ja: "It grows anywhere, like weeds. Minari can be put in kimchi, put in stew, put in soup"*
> (Chung, 2020, 01:08:31).

Figure 3. The first mention of Minari in the film (2020)



Minari's first mention in the film (00:39:21) marks the beginning of Jacob's attempt to fulfill the American dream and the unhomeliness highlighted through Soon-Ja's characterization. Coming straight from South Korea has given her the utmost and recent understanding of the Korean culture that slowly fades away in Jacob's family. Many of the scenes in *Minari* use the first-level narrative to what Gaudreault in Verstraten (2009, p. 51) would say as "an agent that simply projects images on to the screen in a number of frames per second from an unchanging position". The scene in Figure 3 focuses on the observation done by Anne and David as they enter the creek for the first time together with Soon-Ja. This scene indicates the importance of the details; thus, the camera does not move and only shoots from behind the two siblings.

The second mention of Minari (01:08:23) indicates the displacement of Jacob, Monica, David, and Anne as Korean culture becomes quite dominant within the family. The scene in which Minari has fully grown and is ready to be consumed also functions as the *bookmark* for disastrous events coming up. The following day of harvesting Minari, Soon-Ja is suddenly caught having a stroke, and David and Anne have to sleep over at their friends' house because Jacob and Monica are out of town. Monica has decided to divorce Jacob, and in the climax of the story, the farm's vegetables are

burned down due to a fire. Jacob's arrogance marks the start of his misfortunes towards the ending which ends up catastrophic or as Verstraten (2009) would say as the catastrophe hinted will take place in the future, thus, giving signs of anticipation of a bigger conflict or the climax. The incident seems to wake Jacob up from his American-yet-Korean dream, thus, he looks for the water dowser service that he declined in the first place. Subsequently, the third Minari scene included in the movie (01:51:20) indicates how Jacob has accepted his fate and lowered his ego in merging Korean culture with his American dream.

Upon Soon-Ja's arrival in the US, Monica longs to go to a Korean church where the children can meet and play together. Her colleague says otherwise,

> *Korean Woman: "The Koreans here leave the cities for a reason, to escape a Korean church"* (Chung, 2020, 00:38:15).

Monica expresses a bittersweet smile as it might have been a different case for her. The scene presents a new perspective of what is within immigrant communities that, in Huyssen's words, "[s]tereotyping of otherness combined with its exclusionary mechanisms may make a given diaspora appear more homogeneous than it is in reality" (2006, p. 83). Even though immigrant communities might seem homogeneous from an outsider's perspective, it might be different from the inside. Additionally, there is also less assimilation in Korean churches as everyone is from the same origin which makes it paradoxical that Korean immigrants that *ran away* from Korean society would later meet them in American churches. Correspondingly, in accordance with Baronian et al. (2006), as part of the diasporic experience, Monica's displacement might be seen as an "impulse to (re)produce and (re)create the loss but, simultaneously, to reinvest something else somewhere else in the present and in the future" (p. 15). Alternatively, Monica feels like she belongs to the excluded group that brings a sense of belonging to her homeland similar to that of Soon-Ja.

Soon-Ja's expression following the accident is also important to discuss as it is the only scene in the film that uses a zoom-in shot which stands out more than another narratology of the camera operation implied. Her looking intently at the rest of the family members while the camera moves toward her face is what Verstraten (2009) notes as the film attempts to show Soon-ja making a major discovery. This particular scene, then, marks the beginning of Jacob's shift of creating a home in the US following his next move to revive the farm.

Minari, as the title suggests and the plants that Soon-Ja planted, represent the diasporic imagination in the family. The plant Minari is a water plant that has a stronger flavor compared to the watercress (Macdonald, 2021). It also represents the family's struggles and how they have come far to keep going forward in their journey despite being pushed to the brink. Despite being a local vegetable usually planted in Korean soil, Minari can still grow in American soil as long as it has the same characteristics. This indicates the similarities that Jacob and his family experienced between Korean and American culture, yet different in some ways. Even so, the fully grown Minari harvested by Jacob presents the idea that Jacob has come to an agreement with himself regarding what he is willing to accept in regard to the Korean belief in the American dream journey.

Conclusion

From the discussion, it can be seen that *Minari* presents the American dream through a Korean immigrant's perspective, thus, integrating Korean culture into the journey of accomplishing the dream while being true to one's homeland culture. Jacob, who presents diasporic imagination the most, shows the characteristics of wanting to integrate 'old-fashioned' belief in his modern thoughts of starting a farm. Giving significance to Jacob's family after she arrives in the US, Soon-Ja represents displacement and her definition of creating a home elsewhere as she brings a duplicate of Korean culture to Jacob's household. The other immigrant characters also represent the different perspectives of unhomeliness that occurred, one of them

through David who is blurred in between the Korean and American cultures he lives in.

Minari presents the characters experiencing awkward situations in integrating the homeland and American culture because Korea becomes an imaginary homeland that the film does not portray. Therefore, the characters feel displaced and out of place resulting from the contrasting characteristics of the conventional American dream narratives with the stereotypical Korean immigrant that are represented by Jacob's family.

The films inserted details of Korean culture through the dialogues, card games, food, and most importantly, Minari. Not only as one of the dish ingredients that is brought to the US, Minari acts as the metaphor that represents the family's struggle to stay together and overcome their failure. To conclude, the film presents the idea of creating a home from a diasporic imagination of Jacob as the character with big dreams and Soon-Ja as the just-arrived immigrant adapting to the US that brought changes in the family.

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