The Representation of the Zombie in Korean Films: Medieval Zombie vs Modern Zombie

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Introduction

In the land of goblins, gumihos, grim reapers, and ghosts, the zombies have emerged.[1] The popularity of the supernatural narrative has spread worldwide with Netflix original series such as *'Muhafiz'* (Turkey, 2018), *'The Rain'* (Denmark, 2018), or *'Jinn'* (Jordan, 2019). But for decades we have been encircled by a growing zombie-themed phenomenon and 'the proliferation of zombie mythology into mainstream culture during the past three decades has established the zombie as the predominant symbol of the monstrous other' (Boon 2011: 50).

The zombie is a paradoxical concept, 'It is at once familiar and alien, alive and dead, human and non-human' (Dendle 2011: 175). The zombie is persistently closing in, irrepressible and intractable. At a time when the average person doesn't know what to fear most, terrorism, global warming, pandemic diseases, economic collapse, or nuclear weapons, zombies are the trendy monstrous creature, that encompasses all such anxieties; zombies carry a powerful and devilish virus that metastasizes at a giddy speed making them the most redoubtable metaphorical monster of human fears. As Eric Smaw, has stated:

> It's no surprise that we're at an apex of zombie films and zombie television shows. Many people nowadays are fearing for their economic stability, and their futures, with the lack of jobs and rise of artificial intelligence. Great directors will take advantage of the times and write a movie that speaks to that fear, and people will respond positively. (In Borowiec 2019)

Korea is no exception. Zombies have recently been latest sensation in the Korean film industry. Even though Koreans were already introduced to the genre through many international TV series and films, it was not until the release of Yeon Sang-Ho's *Train to Busan* (2016) that the zombie arose and became a well-established genre in the Korean film industry. Following this popularity, the Korean zombie took a singular step with *Rampant* (2018) as the first film to feature zombies in a historical Korean movie. Subsequently, the Korean cinema has given birth to two distinct types of zombies: modern zombie and medieval zombie.

In this sense, and before we dive into the underlying meaning of this distinct representation, this paper will firstly provide a brief history of the Korean zombie, followed by an analysis of its significance — in *Train to Busan* (2016) and *Rampant* (2018) — regarding the prevalent socio-political anxieties of each epoch. Following this analysis, I will contend — through an in-depth analysis of the characteristics of both zombies and the discourse surrounding it — how the Korean zombie goes beyond the immediacy of its signification to become a concrete embodiment of the concept of fear and its shifting nature, which reinforces its system of meaning by acting as a physical mirror for Korean society and its fears.

Mapping the Zombie's expansion and signification: From the West to the Far East

As Barthes states, 'Myth is a type of speech […] a system of communication, that it is a message ... it's a mode of signification' (1987: 109). Beneath the pop-cultural flesh-eater image that the zombie has been given, lies a deeper metaphorical representation of the anxieties prevalent in each period. However, through the work of many scholars, the zombie myth has been widely coalesced under the consumerism and capitalism category[2] Nevertheless, 'zombie films cannot be lumped into one single, homogeneous category' as the zombie tend to come to the fore in more grim times, yet under the predominant liquid existence of our age,[3] more than ever the world has been overrun by an unstoppable mass of the zombie narrative (Neail 2013: 9).

Originating from Haiti and Northern Africa (Boon 2007; Carroll 1990), the zombie myth was introduced to the Western cinema through Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932), and in the late 1930s and in the 1940s a number of zombie films were produced such as *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) giving birth to the first generation of celluloid zombies known as the 'zombie drone'.[4]Given the socio-political context of America in those times (unemployment, poverty, and segregation) the zombie of that period, carried a signification of racism, colonialism, and offered a critique of both slavery and exploitation of the worker under the capitalist system.

Between the late 1940s and the early 1960s, the surge of zombie films subsided, but those that were produced carried a signification tied to nuclear war and fascism. At that time, the zombie had served to enunciate the prevailing socio-political turbulences which were greatly embodied in World War II and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Nonetheless, it wasn't until George A. Romero's seminal film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), that the zombie went through a radical transformation wherein we note 'the fusion of the zombie of Haitian folklore with the ghoul [middle eastern origins], which introduced flesh-eating into the zombie myth' (Boon, 2007: 35). Thereby, George A. Romero reinvented the walking-dead myth by creating a second generation of zombies; the modern zombie or the 'Zombie ghoul'.[5] This shift of the zombie into a creature that craves for human flesh, hunts in hoards, and carries out visceral attacks upon humans has changed its meaning significantly. Historically:

> This shift happened [...] during the Vietnam War when violent images were plastered all over the nightly news. It made sense to use a familiar monster (the zombie), change the actions and goals of the zombie, so that it will interpellate audiences all over the country. (Neail 2013: 13)

Hence, the zombies in *Night of the Living Dead* have taken a second signification as 'an allegorical condemnation of the atrocities of Vietnam, violent racism, and the opposition to the civil rights movement' (Neail: 13). Decades later, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) satirised economic declines in the U.S and the consumer movement of the 1980s, the zombie back then, as Kyle Bishop notes, 'acts as

a scathing cultural allegory [...] lampooning capitalism and rampant consumerism' (Bishop 2010: 14). Hence, the zombie has been assigned a third signification as a symbol of capitalism and consumerism. Followed by 1985's *Day of the Dead*, that served as a metaphor enunciating the 'Cold War fears and paranoia' (Bishop: 14–15).

In this period and prior to the 1980s, the monstrous creature in Korean films was ingrained with their folklore and supernatural beings like the gumihos in films such as *Thousand Years Old Fox* (Kr. Cheonnyeon ho, 1969), or ghosts with films such as *Why the Cuckoo Cries* (Kr. Dugyeonsae uneun sayeon, 1967). However, given the historical context of Korea as a territory that has been perpetually invaded and occupied, it has unavoidably been influenced by various foreign cinema trends. In the 1960s, the American horror movies of the '30s and '40s became popular and were widely consumed by the Koreans from cinemagoers to filmmakers alike. Accordingly, we note the birth of what will become known as the 'Gothic thriller' with the ghost myth dominating as the symbolic representation of the Koreans' deepest fears (Peirse 2011). This aligns with the historical context, as at this time the Republic of Korea was embarking on a new journey after the military coup led by Park Chung-hee (president from 1963 to 1979), wherein the government's fundamental ideologies were 'developmentalism, anti-communism, industrialisation and national security' (Min et al 2003: 47; cited in Peirse 2011: 33). As a result of 'Park's enforced modernization project, many traditional Korean houses were torn down and mudang (female shaman) eradicated, all of which then […] make a re-appearance in horror cinema', with ghost films such as *A Devilish Murder* (Kr. Salinma, 1965) 'as it plays upon a tension between traditional Korean life and enforced Western modernization' (Peirse 2011: 33).

In opposition to the popularity of the ghost myth in the Korean horror cinema, there was hardly any films related to what may be considered in the west as a 'zombie' film. However, in 1981, Kang Beom-goo's movie *A Monstrous Corpse* (Kr. Goeshi) was the first attempt to depict the zombie in the Korean cinema. The film is relevant in its creation of meaning as to the desire for,

and the fear of, colonial modernity; yet it was released at a time when the nation was unconcerned by its underlying meaning. The 1980s was a time when Korea was at the peak of its economic growth, so hypothetically the Koreans did not feel the need for such a serious examination of the society. Even after this first attempt, the zombie remained a genre resistant to integration into Korean cinema; theoretically, this resistance can be regarded as a form of rejection of the Western culture, which was already excessively present and unwillingly encroaching into the Korean society.

A straight cut to the west, and the zombies retreated to their graves as the films produced in the 1980s and 1990s were not as notorious or successful as their predecessors. Following this fall, the 'zombie revival began in the Far East' during the late 1990s, principally inspired by the 1996 Japanese zombie video games *Resident Evil* and *The House of the Dead*, which gave birth to a wave of low-budget Asian zombie films (Newman 2011: 559). Regardless of this, in the west, the resurrection of the dead followed the 9/11 attacks and by that, the zombie has been allocated another signification associated with ideas of 'psychosocial anxieties and stressors' (Neail 2013: 2). With films such as *28 Days Later* (2002), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *World War Z* (2006) and *Zombieland* (2009), the zombie genre has come back stronger and synchronously introduced us to the third generation of zombies known as 'Bio-Zombie'[6], wherein 'this spreading infection could be a metaphor for global crises caused by human greed, uncontrolled technology, or even anxiety about the other, such as homophobia' (McGlotten & Vangundy 2013; cited in Mun-Young, C 2017: 3). In the following years, the zombie has carried various significations associated with worldly issues such as biological outbreaks, terrorism and violence, as well as personal issues like greediness, individualism and depression.

From the 1960s until now the physical features, as well as the actions and desire of the zombie have not changed too much, yet it has constantly incorporated various significations that shift throughout history and remain rooted in the discourses of power and prominent ideologies at a given time. Wright, on his analysis of Western films, states that ‘myth depends on simple and

recognizable meanings which reinforce rather than challenge social understanding' (2009: 272). From this perspective, the zombie confronted the audience with a wide range of cultural, political, economic, and social anxieties.

The Korean Zombie's journey: From the First Resurrection to the Present Day

The post-Millennium expansion of the zombie myth into mainstream culture paved the way for the walking dead to overrun the Far East.[7] Nevertheless, within this invasion of the zombie narrative, Korea remained immune. Only now, three decades after the release of *A Monstrous Corpse* (1981), have a considerable number of films been produced to revive the zombie myth in the Korean film industry. *Dark Forest* (2006) was the 4th segment of an anthology film entitled *'4 Horror Tales'*, in which the figure of the zombie is portrayed with a Korean flavour, mingling zombies and shamanism, making it the first attempt to reintroduce the zombie myth to the Korean big screen. Accordingly, a group of filmmakers started approaching the genre with several low-budget horror films and short features including *The Neighbor Zombie* (2010), *Doomsday Book* (2012), *Horror Stories* (2012) and *Mad Sad Bad* (2014).

Consequently, after the genre had gained popularity through short films, in 2014 it took a step toward feature films with *Zombie School*. By 2016, a prodigious work of Korean zombie cinema, *Train to Busan*, hit theatres and gave the zombie its legitimate monstrous representation in mainstream Korean films, shortly followed by its prequel *Seoul Station* the same year. Following the popularity of *Train to Busan*, zombie films and TV series have become increasingly trendy; in 2018 *Rampant* became the first cinematographic work to feature zombies in a historical Korean film and shortly afterwards was followed by *Kingdom* (2019), a Netflix original series also set in the Joseon (medieval) period of Korea. During the same year a comedy-zombie film entitled *The Odd Family: Zombie on Sale* was released. In 2020, *Peninsula* which takes place four years after the events of *Train to Busan* was released, alongside the film *#Alive* and the series *Zombie Detective*. The invasion of the zombie narrative shows no sign of slowing down; in the first half of this year three films have already been released *Kingdom: Ashin of the North* a sidequel from Kingdom season 2, *Zombie Crush in Heyri* and *The Cursed: Dead Man's Prey*.

. The invasion of the zombie narrative shows no sign of slowing down, two more upcoming movies are scheduled for release by the end of this year: *Peninsula* which takes place four years after the events of *Train to Busan* and a sequel to the latter and, *Dreamcide*, a movie based on a webtoon (online comic strips) written by Hong Jung Hoon.

The Korean Zombie: Towards a Concrete Embodiment of Fear

The uprising of the zombie into mainstream culture has triggered the interest of many scholars as to the evolution of this creature and the multitude of meanings it incorporates (Dendle 2007; Bishop 2010; Drezner 2011; Neail 2013). However, despite the proliferation of the zombie narrative in the land of the morning calm (Korea), the ghosts and monster-related topics continue to be a popular area of study, while zombie studies remain timidly explored (Peirse 2011, 2013; Baek 2008; Kim 2000; Heo 2011).[8]

Given the background, in this paper, the Korean zombie will be scrutinized through a two-phase analysis. The first phase examines the underlying signification of the Korean zombie carried in both films — *Train to Busan* as the initiator of the zombie invasion in modern Korea, alongside *Rampant* as the first Korean zombie film set in the Joseon (medieval) period — in reference to the prevalent socio-political issues of each epoch. Here, I address the zombie myth as a cultural beacon, a 'mirror image of what's happening in society at that moment' (in Sills 2014). Following this analysis, we go beyond the zombie as the very presence of current problems and articulate — through an in-depth analysis of the characteristics of both zombies and the discourse surrounding it — how the zombie can be an actual embodiment of the concept of fear and its shifting nature. During this analysis, the words zombie, outbreak, night-demon, fear, and ambivalence are interchangeably used. Before proceeding, a quick outline of the films would be beneficial.

In *Train to Busan*, Su-an asks her father, Seok-woo, to take her to Busan to see her mother for her birthday. The next day they board the KTX 101 at Seoul Station with other passengers. As the train departs, an infected girl jumps onto the train with a bite wound on her leg and shortly after

turns into a zombie. The virus quickly spreads all over the train and passengers split up into different wagons. In this chaos, the train driver tries to reach Busan, where a quarantine zone has reportedly been established. In *Rampant*, Prince Lee Chung, returns to Joseon after ten years in captivity in Qing to find his brother (crown prince) dead, and his father gripping to a crumbling throne as the palace has been razed by corruption, while a plague was brought to shore by a merchantman, which turns those infected into human flesh-eaters.

The Signification of the Korean Zombie

During the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), the Korean society was, on one hand, stagnating under the Confucian philosophy that emphasizes the status quo and social order, and on the other, adhering spiritually to shamanism (Savada and Shaw 1992; Dayez-Burgeon 2012). Accordingly, the zombie in the *Rampant* takes on somewhat different hypothetical significations rooted in the predominant social-political issues and ideologies at the time. From the beginning of the film, we can draw parallels between the instability that reigned in the political environment of the age depicted and its prevalence in the movie's narrative. In *Rampant*, the country is not being effectively ruled, the throne was besieged by corrupted ministers, and the wicked minister of War Kim Ja-joon, in his quest to take over the throne and create a new order, goes as far as to accuse the crown prince Lee Young of plotting an uprising, and, thus, to be the reason behind his suicide (*Rampant* 2018).

This fight over power and the strong desire of both, the crown prince, and the minister of war, to chase away the Qing army and rebuild Joseon was the reason behind the zombie outbreak. As the ship that brought the European arquebuses to drive away the Qing and bring a 'new order' is the same that transports the first 'night-demon' (zombie) we meet in *Rampant*, an infected German gun trader with whom the minister of war Kim Ja-joon spies an opportunity to execute his plan. That being so, out of the ashes of the zombie outbreak he tries to build a new order which will soon come back to haunt him.

In this context, the trespassing army of night-demons carries the signification of ambivalence and uncertainty, which is the origin and the outcome of any attempt to order (Bauman, 1990). The ambivalence is the umbrella under which various socio-political issues of that time can be highlighted. Savada and Shaw (1992) underline some of the predominant issues in the Joseon dynasty (1309-1910), as a dynasty that underwent a series of natural disasters including floods, droughts, and plagues, wherein the peasants became more and more miserable beneath the burden of taxes enforced by corrupted officials and landlords under the rigid ideology of Confucius. The social system was marked by a sharp distinction between the rulers and the ruled, and not least, the succession to the throne often caused long and bloody conflicts that aroused a ravenous avidity for power and paved the way for corruption to run rampant.

In contrast to the temporal indefiniteness of *Rampant,* which is set in a wide historical period, *Train to Busan* owes its success to its timelessness regarding the socio-political issues prevalent in modern-day Korea at the time of its release. The zombie outbreak in *Train to Busan* was not merely serving as a bloodbath horror, but as a direct commentary on contemporary fear, a representative voicing of the worries of a society fearing the next economic crash, epidemic, or political treachery. The opening of the film gradually introduces us to the tension preceding an incoming threat, before a convulsing young woman boards the train with a bite wound on her leg, turns into a zombie, and spreads the virus throughout the train.

Within this state of chaos and extreme confusion, the government covers up the truth by stating via the media that 'thanks to our rapid response various outbreaks are being contained … we must not waver in our faith of trusting the government in the process of overcoming such a disaster' (*Train to Busan*, 2016). On the other hand, the train attendant, who is supposed to oversee the helping and rescuing of the passengers, ends up putting himself before others. Elise Hu states that it is 'a message the film's director was sending about the institutions' in Korea (Hu, NPR Online 2016) This message that can find its meaning within the socio-political turbulences at the time, regarding how the Korean government handled several disasters, such as the national tragedy of Sewol ferry

sinking in 2014 in which three hundred people, mostly teenagers, died as they were left behind by the captain and crew who got into lifeboats without rescuing the passengers (*New York Times* 2017). Followed the same year by an outbreak of the 'Mers virus', in which the government, in scenes eerily reminiscent of governmental approaches to the current Covid pandemic, did not communicate the information about where patients were being treated, nor how the virus would be controlled, instead, they asked the citizens to trust them (Watson 2015).

Additionally, the Korean audience can grasp the meaning behind the train name 'KTX No. 101', on account of the accident that occurred in 2013 when three trains (KTX, Mugunghwa, and Saemaul) crashed near Daegu Station due to bad signalling, blocking the rail traffic between Seoul and Busan (*Korea JoongAng Daily* 2013). With that in mind, it's no wonder that Koreans flocked to theatres to get a glimpse of the modern zombie[9] as these disasters have left the Koreans with a strong feeling of insecurity; they no longer feel safe in the society they live in, thus echoing Wright's words, myth is a 'communication from a society to its members' (2009: 270). The Zombie of *Train to Busan* carries a signification of insecurity, treachery, distrust, and socio-cultural stressors that offers a critique of Korean society, as a liquid society infected by individualism, immediacy, and capitalism (Bauman, 2013). However, the narrative of *Train to Busan* is not a simple critique, but also a warning about how the Koreans are living.

From *Rampant* to *Train to Busan*, chronologically, time moved forward, but the socio-political problems remained the same over the years. In spite of the chaotic situation, both movies present several scenes whereby questions around social hierarchy, privilege, and power are raised, with an emphasis on the response of authorities to the outbreak, which is slower than its rate of expansion, giving the zombies time to spread beyond containment, as in both narratives the government has abandoned those in need. Considering these similarities, the narrative of both movies triggers our interest through a distinct representation of the zombie. On one hand, we are introduced to the quasi-vampirized zombie in the Joseon dynasty period, on the other hand, we have Romero's zombie in the modern age. Given that, through an interpretation of the characteristics of

both zombies and the discourse surrounding the creature, we can move beyond the similarities to uncover what this distinct representation tells us about the 'undead' of each epoch.

Medieval zombie Vs Modern zombie: The shifting of the Nature of Fear

In contrast to how widely the zombie is portrayed as a relentless flesh-eater, in *Rampant* we are introduced to a new form of zombies, what can be termed the 'Medieval zombie', a 'Quasi-vampirized zombie' that ravages the streets of Joseon by night, and by daylight hides from the dazzling sun. The sun traditionally carries various symbolic significance, it conveys something positive, such as the giving of life, hope, strength, and energy. Sunrise is commonly associated with a new beginning, the end of a gloomy era or coming of a glorious era. Conversely, in *Train to Busan's* narrative, this trait is absent. The daylight holds no symbolic significance as modern Korea is overrun by zombies offering no respite. The presence and absence of the symbolic meaning of sunlight in the zombie's characteristics unveil the type of fear that predominates each epoch. Thus, I will now explore how the distinct characteristics of the zombies in both films, and the discourse surrounding it, mirror the nature of fear, what shapes it, and how it's reinforced or weakened in each epoch.

Defined vs Undefined creature: From Solid to Liquid Fear

In *Rampant*, the zombie is not referred to as so but is given the name 'night demon'. Joseon people know how to confront it, as the former lieutenant Park Eul ryong says 'pierce their hearts or head in order to kill them. Their corpses must be burned, or they could come back to life' (*Rampant*, 2018). It was a period wherein Joseon people were facing a known creature, metaphorically a real and solid fear, what the Greek called 'Deinos', a 'conscious fear ... whose origin is known' (Bordoni 2017: 2). However, the same cannot be said about the zombie in *Train to Busan*, throughout the narrative it

remains nameless, when one of the passengers see the zombies trying to break the door to get to them, he confusedly asked 'What are they?' His question remains unanswered and shortly after the media ambiguously addresses it as a ‘riot’ or an ‘outbreak’. This indefinability of the creature is what metaphorically characterises the contemporary fear, a fear whose frontiers are dissolved, volatile and liquid, it perturbs the mental and physical balance of the person in the absence of a veritable and concrete threat (Bauman, 2006).

In the modern age, the 'Deinos' has been dethroned by a new form of fear, a liquid fear (Bauman, 2006), that rests upon invisible threats persecuting the imagination, what the Greeks called 'Phobos', a 'blind, unconscious fear, with deep, atavistic roots, making it difficult to control' (Bordoni 2017: 2). In the Joseon Period, the fear was socio-politically powered. In modern Korea, it is largely self-powered. In contrast to what is widely believed, 'the geopolitical worries with the North are routinely at the bottom of perceived stressors in surveys of South Koreans, below more routine factors such as work, family and culture' (Ozy.com, 2018). Today, Bauman argues:

> The orderly world in which we live, is frail. We are skating on thin ice. There is a fear of a collective disaster. Terrorism, genocide, flu, tsunamis […] There is not just fear of a collective disaster, but of personal disaster - the humiliating fear of falling among the worst off or otherwise ostracised. (The Guardian, 2005)

The Koreans are more fearful of becoming obsolete at work, friendless, unloved, or socially marginalized.

The Zombie and the Spirit of the Korean’s: Between Yesterday and Today

Early in *Train to Busan,* and shortly after the chaos broke out, Su-an offers her seat to an old lady, seeing this, her father lectures her 'you don’t have to do it […] at time like this you only need to watch yourself' (*Train to Busan*, 2016). This short moment of the film would have struck a

responsive chord among the audience about the selfishness of a Korean society which operates under the principle of every man for himself. As film critic Youn Sung-eun stated, 'we don't trust anyone but ourselves' (in Hu 2016). In contrast to this individualistic culture, *Rampant* evokes the period when Joseon people were conducted by Confucianism wherein the conception of the 'self' has little or nothing to do with introspection, but instead is determined by one's place in the larger context, such as family and society. Any action of any individual member is almost completely rooted in one's collective community and by that the self is perceived as a whole. Regardless of the differences, everyone comes together to face the night-demons, prince, peasant, monk, guards, man, woman, and eunuch. The fight is led with a 'we' consciousness. The same cannot be said about *Train to Busan* which takes us back to the modern world, wherein man has established a superiority on nature (whether real or imagined) and declared himself as the new God with nothing else to believe in or rely on than oneself. Thus, under these conditions, the zombie seizes the opportunity to fuel its restlessness and reinforce itself in the absence of collective consciousness within a world desperately fragmented and increasingly uncertain and unstable.[10]

The narratives of both films display a distinct conception of the self in each epoch. Another factor in this is time, and it is to that I now turn. In *Rampant*, the sunset and sunrise symbolise the passage of time, which vitally allows the Joseon people and to track, control, and eliminate the night demons along with their fears. *Rampant* portrays an epoch wherein the flesh-eating creature was defined, localised, and familiar, and so is the fear. People live their lives bound by the principle of wholeness, and the slow-paced life draws our attention to the interplay between rational thinking and time. The combination of these ingredients is where the fighting spirit of the Joseon people finds its roots.

Unfortunately, in the modern age, time is not a commodity people have in abundance. The passengers of *Train to Busan* must face an unknown creature, a chaos which is impossible to shape and holds no meaning in their referential, the restlessness and relentlessness of the modern zombie leaves them with no time to track, control or take down this fear. Hence, in Korean cinema, the

zombie socially stands for the 'bali bali' *(hurry hurry)* culture that reigns in Korean society, wherein instantaneity rules, the future is blurred, and the persistent sense of instability moulds the people's reflexions and action.[11] Thus, within this fast-paced life, the Koreans are on the move, between professional stress, academic pressure, and the fear of being different, Koreans cannot stop, and neither does the Zombie. Moving forward ever faster is revealed as a way of life, the only way there is and the only life available and the zombie is following closely behind, taking advantage of this state of distraction, and gaining ground.

The intersective relation between the distinct conception of the self and the slow/fast-paced life has much to do with the way the zombie is reinforced or weakened in each epoch. During *Rampant*, even in the moments of despair (zombification) the fighting spirit of the Joseon people remains fuelled by a unified goal: eradicating the night demons, rebuilding Joseon, and restoring the balance in their lives. Throughout the *Rampant* narrative, the fighting spirit was neither weakened nor substituted, it was the one and only conceived way to face the night demons. Powered by the awareness of the creature, the slower-paced life and their collectiveness, the Joseon people were not afraid of facing the zombie, and so through their fears, they succeed in halting the proliferation of the night demon and eradicate it.

In contrast, the narrative of *Train to Busan* leaves us with a fragmented social behaviour when faced with the 'outbreak'. On one hand, we have the majority of the passengers that choose to keep themselves locked in, preventing any survivors from entering, displaying self-interested behaviour that portrays the predominant Korean reality. Socially, when faced by the professional, academic, and social pressure, rather than confronting, fighting, and eradicating these zombies, the Koreans choose to escape and hide as they stand by hopeless, unable to slow the strong flow of undead, let alone predict and control its direction (Shim et al 2008). In this sense, the modern zombie feeds off this passivity to spread its contamination into other unexplored territories and, thus, reinforces its position, trapping the Koreans in an unavoidably permanent state of attempted escape. On the other hand, for Seok-Woo and Sang-Hwa escaping wasn't an option, they crawl their

way through the beastly, rotting bodies to ensure that their loved ones continue to live, their characters personify the Joseon fighting spirit that remains, albeit vaguely, in the modern-day Korea.

Between those escaping to survive and those fighting to save the ones they love, the character of In-gil chooses to surrender to the zombies. While fighting her way amid the zombies, she stands, a tired soul who no longer has neither the will nor the power to fight. In this chaotic environment, perceiving herself as nothing but a burden of which everyone will be better off without, she surrenders to her fears and joins the ranks of the zombies. She leaves behind her sister, Jong-gil, who cannot bear to live life without her and subsequently opens the door to join her, allowing the zombies to attack and kill her. On a commentary level, when In-gil surrendered to the zombie she did not just reinforce the flow of zombies, but she triggered a new fear in her sister's life by leaving her alone to face the death of a loved one and the emptiness of her existence which drives her to surrender to the zombies. Thus, socially symbolizing the concept of suicide contagion,[12] an act that is also portrayed by the character Yong-guk (baseball player) upon the zombification of his friend Jin-hee, wherein rather than fighting or running away he chooses, like Jong-gil, to join her. Every new zombification triggers new threats and reasons for new and unprecedented fears (high-tech, pollution, capitalism, globalization, xenophobia, homophobia, etc.) and makes the world appear more perfidious and frightening and arouses more defensive actions that lead the world into an endless self-cultivating capacity of fear.

Conclusion

The zombie has been standardized as a frightful enemy to humans, a metaphor to mirror a wide range of social, cultural, political, and economic anxieties. Many scholars have unmasked its underlying meaning regarding the predominant anxieties experienced at any given moment (capitalism, consumerism, imperialism, and cultural racism to name a few). The zombie fear has

enthralled and appealed to generation after generation, but via its complex interplay and relation to social changes, it inevitably changes its nature too. Thus, the Korean zombie allows us, through its distinct representation between the medieval and the modern zombie, to go beyond its symbolic representation of the present anxieties and analyse its shifting nature.

What this discussion of the characteristics of the quasi-vampirized zombie from the *Rampant* (2018) and the Romero-esque zombie from *Train to Busan* (2016) shows, is the nature of the zombie, what shapes it and how it's reinforced or weakened in regard to the discourse surrounding it in each period. Although Korea has relatively a short history of zombie films, its zombie incarnations introduce us to a new metaphorical representation wherein the temporal and spatial factors reinforce its systems of meaning by acting as a physical mirror for Korean society and its fears. Thus, the zombie is no longer considered as merely a reflection of anxieties at a given time, but it becomes a concrete embodiment of the concept of fear whose actual nature has changed throughout history, shifting from a solid form (aka quasi-vampirized zombie or medieval zombie) to a liquid form (aka Romero' zombie or modern zombie). One thing is for sure, the Korean zombie is taking us into an in-depth metaphorical representation of the society, limited neither in time nor space, allowing its meaning to shift and slide and, by that, crowning the undead as an eternal social revolutionary.

Notes

[1] Gumiho known as a fox that lives for a thousand years and can turn into a fox spirit and shape-shift freely. Its most preferred form to take, though, would be that of a beautiful young girl who seduces men and makes a meal out of these unfortunate souls. Retrieved from: https: //bit.ly/2ktPi9i; The grim reapers in Korean culture are called JeoSeung Saja 저승사자, hold supreme as death gods who reap the souls of the dead; The goblins known in the Korean culture as dokkaebi 도깨비 are created by the spiritual possession of objects that hold the stain of human

blood; Ghosts known in Korea as "gwishin" (귀신) which are believed to be the spirits of the deceased who have not fulfilled their life's purpose. They are stuck in the afterlife, still haunting the living, not able to cross over to "the other side", waiting for their souls to be appeased. Retrieved from: https: //bit.ly/2ksPXI3;

[2] Refer back to Bishop, Kyle William (2010). *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture*. McFarland; and Newitz, Annalee. (2006) *Pretend We're Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Pop Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.

[3] Bauman (1990; 2006: 2013) advocates for the concept of liquid modernity through which the idea of liquid existence can be defined as opposed to the solid one in which stable and well-defined social forms existed. Unlike a solid form, the liquid cannot keep its shape when pressed or pushed by an external force, no matter how minor, the links between its particles are too weak to resist. Thus, in the modern world, human ties have become unstable, which is consistent with the constant change imposed by the socioeconomic environment. In this regard, Bauman describes a society without a stable landmark in which people are constantly adapting to changes, wherein the ambiguity embodied in this restless changing stimulate a feeling of discomfort, carry a sense of danger, and reinforce the ambivalence.

[4] They are '[a]reanimated corpse brought back for the purposes of aiding production [and] posit the potential loss of self and volition' (Boon, 2007: 37) as when the self is lost, the body continues to labour.

[5] Moving beyond the slave concept, Zombies acquired the image of flesh-eater creatures that attack humans (Boon, 2007; 2011). This new form took shape in George Romero's zombie film trilogy: *Night of the Living Dead (1968), Dawn of the Dead (1978), and Day of the Dead (1985*). 'Romero's zombie can be categorized as the modern zombie or a second-generation zombie' (Mun-Young, 2017: 2).

[6] A bio zombie, 'is one that has been deprived of its essential self or its volition by some external substance. The course of zombification can vary from chemicals to viruses' (Boon, 2011: 58).

[7] Japan: *Versus (2000), Deadman Inferno (2015). Malaysia: Zombies from Banana Village (2007), KL Zombi (2013)*. Hong Kong: *Bio-Cops (2000), Zombiology: Enjoy Yourself Tonight (2017). Cambodia: Run! (2013). Singapore: Hsien of the Dead (2012). Philippines: The Grave Bandits (2012)*. Thailand: *Sars Wars: Bangkok Zombie Crisis (2004)*. Retrieved from: https: //bit.ly/2lCCWfe

[8] The only English article on the Korean zombie was published by Mun-Young Chung on 2017 entitled 'Humanity of the Zombie: A Case Study of a Korean Zombie Comic' wherein the author explore an alternative representation of zombies that are more human than monstrous, through the analysis of a webtoon named 'Every Moment of Your Life'.

[9] The movie achieved box office success, grossing $83.2 million domestically, and $98.4 million internationally (Source: The Numbers).

[10] The changing face of Korea and this increased confidence in the physical world become distinguishably present when the Korean society began to move toward "modernization" led by Park Chung-hee (1962–1979) and embedded in the philosophy of Chondogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way), an indigenous religion that teaches that every human 'bears divinity' and that one must 'treat man as god' (Savada and Shaw, 1992). However, in the concrete material world of the Joseon period, the movement of Chondogyo was built upon the self as a whole, in other words, 'live together or die together', yet the incorporation of the donghak ideology in the modern-to-be Korea has resulted in a shift of meaning. According to Foucault's position, 'in any given historical period we can write, speak, or think about a given social object or practice (madness, for example) only in certain specific ways and not others' (McHoul, and Grace, 2015: 31). See: "Bell, K. (2004). *Cheondogyo and the Donghak Revolution: the (un) making of a religion* (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia), for more information about the philosophy of Chondogyo.

[11] See: Shim, T. Y. J., Kim, M. S., & Martin, J. N. (2008). *Changing Korea: Understanding culture and communication* (Vol. 10) for more information about the 'bali bali' culture.

[12] ‘Is the exposure to suicide or suicidal behaviors within one's family, one's peer group, or through media reports of suicide and can result in an increase in suicide and suicidal behaviors’. (Source: HHS). In 2016, the Korean government reported an average of 36 suicides a day. Studies have shown that high-profile suicides can not only provoke more deaths but also spur people to adopt similar methods (Park, Minwoo, and Jiwon, Choi, 2017).

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