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Representation of the National Trauma in *Train to Busan* (2016):

Based on a Semiotic Approach

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Representation of the National Trauma in *Train to Busan* (2016):
Based on a Semiotic Approach

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The object of this project is to dissect the filmic elements in *Train to Busan* (2016) to analyze how the film represents the Sewol Ferry incident, a national disaster occurred in South Korea, and how the audience is able to engage with the trauma. As the first zombie blockbuster created in South Korea, *Train to Busan* adapted the elements of the zombie genre that has been delineated repeatedly. The film inherited the traits of zombies, representation of government and media, and feature of human characters from the genre created in Hollywood. Additionally, national characteristics had been added through reflecting the Sewol Ferry incident. Based on the ideas of genre studies, not only the components that construct the zombie genre, but also how the spectators confront the trauma while viewing the movie can be examined. Cinematography, narrative, character settings resemble the tragic event, which consequently trigger the audience to engage with the national trauma. Thus, while adapting the genre constructed in the Hollywood, *Train to Busan* reveals how Korean adaptation of the zombie media has been made.

Keywords: *Train to Busan*, the Sewol Ferry, national trauma, national tragedy, South Korean films, zombie films, film linguistic, zombie genre

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Representation of National Trauma in *Train to Busan*: Based on a Semiotic Approach

Introduction

On April 16, 2014, in South Korea, the Sewol ferry sunk in an accident, leaving 299 people dead and five passengers missing. It is considered to be one of the greatest tragedies to have occurred in South Korea in the twenty-first century. One of the areas in Korean society that noticeably reflects the impact of the tragedy is the media industry. Many films and television series still attempt to engage with the public's memory of this event. Among the list of Korean films that represent the Sewol ferry incident, *Train to Busan* (2016), directed by Sang-ho Yeon, can be named as one of the most commercially successful examples. The movie both implicitly and explicitly illustrates the accident through elements like the symbolic meaning of the body of the zombies, narrative, character representation, and mise-en-scene. While viewing the images and a narrative that demonstrate the disaster, the audience is confronted with the memories of this national tragedy.

Because *Train to Busan* was the first major zombie blockbuster made in South Korea, studying the film is important for several reasons. First, it represents the Korean adaptation of the zombie genre created in the West. Since zombies are a global pop culture icon, depiction of the monster in South Korean media expands the discourse in terms of its textual meaning. Additionally, *Train to Busan* occupies an important place in South Korean zombie cinema, as its market success enabled various production companies to create further zombie media. As a result, analysis of the film based on existing studies of the monster will help to elucidate the film's position in global zombie discourse and to recognize the Korean adaptation of the genre. Secondly, *Train to Busan* is an example of the Korean film industry's reaction to the Sewol ferry incident. To understand this perspective, semiotic analysis of the genre allows us to examine how the semantic and syntactic elements used in the film are related to the event

and how this enables the audience to recall memories of the tragedy. Furthermore, semiotic analysis of *Train to Busan* will be a useful model by which to analyze other posttraumatic films that deal with the national tragedy. As local viewers engage with this national trauma while viewing the film, it can be said that a Korean-ness is represented through the illustration of this tragedy that may be lost to spectators outside the country. Thus, this project will argue how *Train to Busan* can be understood as a zombie film that metaphorically expresses this national tragedy and can be considered a successful case of localizing the zombie genre created in Hollywood. In the analysis of the film's representation of the Sewol ferry incident, centered on a semiotic approach, the allegorical depiction of the national tragedy will be studied.

Train to Busan follows the standard structure of the zombie narrative, except for the fact that it is set on a moving train. The main character Seok-woo, a fund manager, boards a train at Seoul station that is heading to Busan station. He is accompanying his daughter, Su-an, on a visit to his ex-wife to allow the girl to spend her birthday with her mother. However, as soon as the train departs, Su-an witnesses a station agent being attacked by a zombie. The audience is also shown a person who has been bitten by a zombie on board the train. As this victim turns into a zombie, the passengers are trapped in this isolated train. In these dangerous circumstances, Seok-woo tries to save himself and his daughter from the monsters as well as the threat posed by fellow passengers seeking only to save themselves.

The film appealed to not only South Korean audiences, but also to global spectators. *Train to Busan* earned more than one hundred million dollars in the global market. Only two Korean movies have achieved this record before. Moreover, the movie is a successful example that shows how Korean cinema has localized zombie media. Prior to the film, there were limited attempts to produce in the zombie genre, which has resulted in the local spectator lacking a background knowledge, or cultural context, of the monster. The first

zombie film created in South Korea was *Monstrous Corpse* (1980) directed by Beom-gu Gang; it is criticized for plagiarizing the Spanish zombie film *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie* (1974), directed by Jorge Grau.¹ This argument was made because *Monstrous Corpse* replicated not only the narrative, but also some lines and camera shots.² Afterwards, there were a few attempts to create zombie films, but those films were all low-budget, small projects. Therefore, local production of the zombie genre did not gain attention in South Korean media prior to *Train to Busan*. Recently, Korean audiences have become familiar with zombies due to the success of imported zombie films. The production of *Train to Busan* was possible due to the market success of zombie media created in Hollywood, such as *World War Z* (2013), which gained popularity in the Korean box office as well. The global prevalence of the monster enabled spectators to become familiar with the essentials of the zombie texts, as semantic elements of the monster are now imported from Hollywood and global zombie films. Thus, in terms of the worldwide recognition of the genre, South Korean cinema began to develop the zombie genre even though it had not been successfully localized before.

Another reason that South Korean viewers were able to easily relate to *Train to Busan* is that it represents the recent national disaster, the Sewol Ferry incident. To be specific, the Sewol ferry sank near *Jeonam Jindo*, in the south sea of Korea on April 16, 2014. The ferry was carrying 476 people, including 325 students from Danwon High School who were on a field trip. The main reason for the accident is presumed to be a problem caused by a sudden alteration of the route. Other factors could have also contributed to the sinking, such as cargo above the weight regulation, and the fast ocean current of the area. The incident left 304 people dead and missing, with only 172 survivors. Most of the victims were teenagers; only

¹ Ji-woong Heo, *Memory of the Ghost – Korean Horror Films from the 60s to 80s* (Seoul: KOFA, 2010; my translation), 107

² Heo, 107

seventy-five students survived among the 325 young passengers who were on board. The Korean-ness expressed in *Train to Busan* can be spotted through the illustration of the Sewol ferry incident as only Korean audience can relate with it.

Methodology and Literature Review

In examining the adaptation of the zombie genre in *Train to Busan*, Rick Altman's semantic and syntactic analysis of genre will be used. In the semiotic approach, a genre can be understood as a structure that has been constructed by people through time. Altman discusses a way of analyzing genre based on semantic and syntactic approaches. By semantic, he indicates a way of studying the explicit characteristics of a given genre, such as sets, characters, shots, locations, traits, and attitudes.³ It allows us to look at the similarity in a group of films that can be categorized as the same genre. In the case of the syntactic approach, it is a way to examine the structure of the elements used in a genre. This perspective helps to read the implicit meanings within the choices made in a film, such as background setting, or the outlook and personality of a character. Thus, through the lens of film linguistics both the cliché of the genre and the distinctive characteristics of the movie, such as its representation of the national tragedy, can be researched. This will allow the examination of the globalization of zombie media through its specific genre reconstruction in South Korean cinema. As South Korea's cultural heritage does not include zombies, the adaptation of the monster demonstrates the global influence of zombie media. Furthermore, the syntactic approach reveals the distinctiveness of *Train to Busan* through the depiction of this national tragedy. Thus, this research will contribute to studies that consider zombies as a global cultural product. Likewise, the Korean reconstruction of the genre will broaden the

³ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 219-220

study of zombie media made in countries outside of Hollywood, as the illustration of the national tragedy can be viewed as a unique nationalistic element.

Secondly, *Train to Busan* will be studied in accordance with existing zombie studies to explain the distinctiveness of the movie compared to other zombie movies made in the West. Also, this project can show the place of this film in terms of the discourse of zombie studies. The body of the living dead has been examined by various scholars in terms of its history and representation, the meaning of which has changed over time. For instance, Ian Olney explained that in early films, the monster symbolized slavery or the idea of colonialism.⁴ Moreover, as time has passed, the genre evolved to critique capitalism and self-centered behavior of people developed under capitalistic society.⁵ In addition to Olney, Antonio Sanna discussed the criticism of capitalism within the genre through analyzing the background setting described in different films, such as *Silent Hill* (2006) and *Resident Evil* (2002). By reviewing and comparing existing studies, the role of the body of zombies in *Train to Busan* will be analyzed. In the movie, traditional elements of the genre constructed in the West are being replicated. For example, the critique of capitalism and reproduction of the narrative structure of zombie apocalypse. Thus, by using the existing ideas of the zombie studies, how the film borrows the idea from the West will be explained.

Lastly, Adam Lowenstein's idea of representation of trauma in film will be adapted to analyze the elements in *Train to Busan* that illustrates the Sewol ferry incident. Lowenstein explained that the allegorical moment within a movie is "a shocking collision of film, spectator, and history where registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted,

⁴ Ian Olney, *Zombie Cinema – Quick Takes Movies & Popular Culture* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 19

⁵ Olney, 54

confronted, and intertwined.”⁶ According to him, the metaphorical moment invites the audience to confront the historical context that is portrayed in the film.⁷ Thus, by reading the allegory in *Train to Busan*, the director and local audiences’ engagement with national trauma can be studied.

Previous research that analyzes *Train to Busan* and national trauma exists but does not center on the Sewol ferry tragedy. For instance, in the study *Biocalyptic Imaginations in Japanese and Korean Films: undead nation-states in I Am a Hero and Train to Busan* (2019), Jaecheol Kim discussed that the outbreak of zombies in *Train to Busan* represents South Korean society based on two aspects: global capitalism and the H1N1 flu outbreak, which is another disaster that took place in South Korea.⁸ While following in the footsteps of Kim’s work, this research is distinctive in that it concentrates on a different event, and thus will expand the discourse that covers the film’s relationship with national trauma.

Furthermore, this examination differs from former studies that have addressed *Train to Busan* in that those focused on areas unrelated to national trauma, such as psychoanalytic analysis of the zombies and understanding the film as a zombie apocalypse based on its narrative. In the case of *The Unconscious Meaning of the Zombie in Train to Busan and Seoul Station: Centering on the Psychoanalytic Theories of Freud and Klein* (2018), written by Joon-ho Lee, the research analyzes the body of the zombies and their behavior in *Train to Busan* in accordance with Sigmund Freud’s theories and concentrates on psychoanalytic analysis of the monster. He suggests two reasons to explain why the public consumes zombie media. First, he argues that it is derived from the unconscious desire to redeem the

⁶ Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation – Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and The Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 12

⁷ Lowenstein, 8-9

⁸ Jaecheol Kim, *Biocalyptic Imaginations in Japanese and Korean Films: undead nation-states in I Am a Hero and Train to Busan* (Routledge, 2019), 444-445

satisfaction that is achieved during the oral stage, as an infant.⁹ Another point posits that the greedy aspect of zombies, such as continuously devouring human flesh, reflects human jealousy and desire.¹⁰ According to Lee, jealousy is unconscious and rampant in contemporary society; for example, jealousy can be derived from looking at another person's life reflected on social network sites.¹¹ Withal, his research is centered on analyzing the subconscious meaning of zombies and why audiences consume zombie media. In the case of Sung-Ae Lee, her study, *The New Zombie Apocalypse and Social Crisis in South Korean Cinema* (2019), focuses on analyzing the body of the living dead and its representation of the social disorder from which South Korea is suffering. In addition, Sung-Ae Lee's analysis of *Train to Busan* focuses on the narrative and illustration of the zombie apocalypse. Her argument finds, in these aspects, representations of social irresponsibility, egoism in the family, and ecological crisis.¹² She uses the protagonist and his family as the element in the film that reveals social catastrophe; for instance, the protagonist is divorced and has difficulty creating a good relationship with his daughter. Based on the narrative that deals with the redemption of the irresponsible husband, Lee claims that social disorder is the cause of the zombie outbreak in the film and the protagonist's absolution functions as the solution.¹³ By using the Korean metaphor, "*the nation is a family*,"¹⁴ Lee points out the importance of lessening stress and social crisis as an important aspect of the narrative of *Train to Busan*.

⁹ Joon-Ho Lee, *The Unconscious Meaning of the Zombie in Train to Busan and Seoul Station: Centering on the Psychoanalytic Theories of Freud and Klein* (The Journal of Contemporary Psychoanalysis, 2018; my translation), 81

¹⁰ Lee, 96

¹¹ Lee, 96

¹² Sung-Ae Lee, *The New Zombie Apocalypse and Social Crisis in South Korean Cinema* (University of Barcelona, 2019; my translation), 158-160

¹³ Lee, 160-161

¹⁴ Lee, 156

Both theorists offer distinctive interpretations of *Train to Busan*, but their studies lack understanding of the film's representation of the Sewol ferry disaster.

Additionally, Louisa Koo's work examines the Sewol ferry incident and the role of national trauma in *Train to Busan*. Her article, *National Cinema, Trauma, and Melodrama in the Korean Zombie Film Train to Busan* (2020), reveals the film's specifically Korean aspect by analyzing the narrative in regards to melodrama. To understand the Korean-ness, her methodology concentrates on studying the cultural and contextual history of Korean national cinema.¹⁵ By doing so, she describes how the melodramatic moment, which has been one of the remarkable characteristics of Korean film history, is being reconstructed in the zombie genre.¹⁶ Koo researched the character's behavior to study the melodramatic affect and, also, how the film enables the audience to relate to the trauma.¹⁷ While utilizing Koo's analysis of the Korean-ness reflected in melodrama, valuable analyses can be added to this study by examining this film from a genre analysis based on film linguistic approach. In contrast to the existing studies, comparing *Train to Busan* with zombie cinema made in Hollywood enables us to view the nationalistic elements expressed in the film while adapting the zombie genre.

As the first zombie blockbuster made in South Korea, *Train to Busan*, successfully adapted the structure of the zombie genre. To elucidate both the film's reproduction of the genre and representation of national identity, Altman's idea of genre study will be used. By adapting Altman's argument, the film's illustration of zombies, their outbreak and environment, and characters' behavior and relationships will be analyzed.

¹⁵ Louisa Koo, *National Cinema, Trauma, and Melodrama in the Korean Zombie Film Train to Busan* (Vernon Press, 2020), 166

¹⁶ Koo, 167-169

¹⁷ Koo, 173

Zombies and the Zombie Narrative

Train to Busan can be considered a more traditional adaptation of the genre, as it uses many standards and clichés present in zombie cinema. The film reconstructed the conventional characteristics of the monster and narrative structure of the genre. However, at the same time, it reveals different textual meaning which can be argued as the trait of national identity. By using Rick Altman's theory of genre, these characteristics can be used to illustrate *Train to Busan's* adaptation of zombie conventions and where it departs from the standard of genre.

Initially, *Train to Busan* borrows the concept of the monster created by the film director George A. Romero. The explicit characteristics of the zombie, such as the dead being brought back to life as a flesh-eating monster and the outlook, are used without any remarkable changes from other zombie media. To be specific, blurred eyes, veins visible through pale skin, the blood of the victims, and a distinctive shaking bodily motion can be mentioned as semantic elements. These components have been continuously reproduced in numerous movies and now have settled into an iconic image in popular culture.

Olney suggested that originally the representation of zombies was strongly related to slavery, as the idea of a living dead person symbolized the migration to a different world.¹⁸ At this point, the zombie did not have the characteristic of eating human flesh. For example, in Hollywood zombie films made during the 1930s, the monster had maintained the traditional concept derived from Haitian culture,¹⁹ which was a moving corpse without a soul.²⁰ Moreover, the concept of the monster was used to explain slavery as a form of sorcery,

¹⁸ Olney, 19

¹⁹ Olney, 21

²⁰ Sara Juliet Lauro, *The Transatlantic Zombie – Slavery, Rebellion, and Living Death* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 15

removing the soul from the body.²¹ Through this inheritance of the original concept, the genre was constructed on the idea of colonialism as the old zombie films illustrated black otherness.²²

Additionally, John Edgar Browning argued that the recent concept of the zombie derived from Richard Matheson's novels, including *I Am Legend* (1954), is described as the transition of the zombie to a flesh-eating monster.²³ Monsters used in Matheson's novel are described as vampire-zombies, which eventually become the zombie that is the flesh-eating, mindless living dead.²⁴ Likewise, an earlier form of the monster that can be understood as the transition phase combines the characteristics of a vampire and the living dead. In the case of the film industry, Romero can be named as the director who adopted Matheson's reinvention and guided the transition of the monster to the form that we now know.²⁵ With *The Living Dead* series, Romero constructed the modern standards of zombie cinema. He is known as the filmmaker who modernized the genre and reinvented the monster as a human-eating being.²⁶ Romero not only modified the characteristics of the zombie but also established the standard narrative setting of the zombie apocalypse, which involves people being trapped in an isolated place due to the outbreak of the monster.

This reinvention of the monster has been maintained in Hollywood through time and set as the standard of the genre. Director Yeon adapted these semantic elements that have

²¹ Lauro, 16

²² Olney, 19-20

²³ John Edgar Browning, "Survival Horrors, Survival Spaces: Tracing the Modern Zombie (Cine)Myth through to the Postmillennium," in *Zombie Talk – Culture, History, Politics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 12

²⁴ Browning, 12-13

²⁵ Olney, 48-49

²⁶ Olney, 49

been repeatedly used in the zombie genre. For example, in the film, after the first outbreak of the monsters in the train, survivors look for news on their cell phone. Here, the screen shows the word zombie is on the list of the most searched words on the internet. This indicates that the characters in the film recognize the monsters as zombies through perceiving their explicit aspects. Also, as audiences are familiar with the traits of the monster created in the West, they are able to recognize zombies through viewing the semantic aspects. According to Altman, semantic elements provide similar components of the genre, and thus, the semantic approach can be applied to a broad spectrum of films that can be categorized as belonging to the same genre. He wrote, “Semantic approaches to genre thus serve the important social function of providing easily sharable and consistently applicable vocabulary.”²⁷ Based on this perspective, it could be argued that visual setting and characteristics of zombies serve as one of the building blocks of the genre. Thus, global audiences recognize the distinctive traits of the monster while consuming the zombie genre as it has been reproduced through various works.

Furthermore, zombies being able to run proves that *Train to Busan* has borrowed more recent semantic element from zombie films made in the West. In the past, zombies were described as moving at slow speeds from which human characters were able to run away. However, in the twenty-first century, some directors have changed that aspect and shown zombies running even faster than human characters. For example, *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) and *World War Z* (2013) demonstrate zombies running at high speeds. This semantic component proves that the director Yeon took cues from contemporary Hollywood zombie films that were popular in South Korea. As Altman explained, the semantic approach allows

²⁷ Altman, 89

us to understand the usage of similar components,²⁸ in this case, the visual of the monster, within the genre.

When it comes to narrative structure, *Train to Busan* follows the standard zombie narrative developed in Hollywood that has been repeated in various media forms. By adapting the semantic approach, the structure can be dissected into factors that have been frequently replicated. The narrative of the zombie genre follows similar characteristics: it is set in a space where the characters, or survivors, are trapped and have been isolated because of the zombie outbreak in the outside world. In *Dawn of the Dead (1978)*, for example, the characters are trapped in a shopping mall and are only allowed to move along certain routes where there is no threat from the monster. Likewise, the zombie apocalypse, a common narrative structure of the genre, deals with how characters try to survive. In *Train to Busan*, the characters are trapped in the KTX train. At one point, the characters are able to disembark, but find the station overrun by zombies, from which they must escape by boarding the train once more. Thus, although the story is set on a moving train, the basic concept is that of the zombie narrative, in which the characters are isolated from the outside world.

In addition to the similar usage of semantic elements, *Train to Busan* also diverges from the conventional aspects of zombie cinema made in the West, which can be explained as a manifestation of national traits. This aspect of the film can be understood through the lens of the syntactic approach argued by Altman. In the case of the syntactic approach, it is a way to examine the structure of the elements used in a genre. “Stressing an exclusive corpus of texts that share multilayered patterns, the syntactic approach requires attention to much more than individual objects or images.”²⁹ To distinguish the semantic and syntactic, he explains

²⁸ Altman, 89

²⁹ Altman, 89

“The distinction between the semantic and the syntactic, in the way I have defined it here, thus corresponds to a distinction between the primary, linguistic elements of which all texts are made and the secondary, textual meanings that are sometimes constructed by virtue of the syntactic bonds established between primary elements.”³⁰ This perspective helps to read the implicit meanings within the choices made in a film, such as background setting, or the outlook and personality of a character. Based on syntactic approach, different meaning can be derived from the distinctive circumstance used in *Train to Busan*. To be specific, the semantic elements in the movie demonstrate the Sewol ferry incident as they symbolize and engage with the actual disaster.

Lowenstein’s argument is a useful tool to discuss the illustration of a national disaster, in that he discussed the allegory in a film and how it enables the spectator to confront the trauma. To be specific, he used the term “shocking representation” to elucidate how viewers encounter the historical moment through the allegory.³¹ According to Lowenstein, the allegory within a horror genre, for example, is tied to the representation of a historical trauma, and the film offers the audience an opportunity to face the event rather than offering a cure, or redemption, for the trauma.³²

Moreover, local audiences were exposed to various images of the disaster that had been broadcast by different media. Due to the scale of the disaster, it was broadcast through various media, including television, internet news, radio, and newspapers. Also, television channels developed documentaries or special programs about the incident, airing images of the accident. For example, a cable channel in South Korea called *JTBC* produced a forty-minute documentary, titled *My son, ah, my daughter* (in Korean *아들아 아!, 내 딸아!*), based on

³⁰ Altman, 224

³¹ Lowenstein, 4

³² Lowenstein, 8

the seventy-two hours of footage recorded during the accident. This video shows the relatives of the passengers waiting for news of survivors in a temporary shelter and reveals the image of a rescue team making plans to search for survivors. The process of the sinking of the ferry can also be seen in the documentary. When the rescue helicopters and television broadcasts reached the accident point, the ferry was tilted and part of it was already underwater. Seventy-two hours after the accident, the ferry was completely turned over and only a small part of its bottom was still above the surface of the sea. These images were not only used in the documentary, but also reported through various news channels. According to Hirsch, repeated contact with the image of the atrocity can function as a traumatic potential, which can develop as a trigger of the memory.³³ Even without the help of narrative, filmic images can cause vicarious trauma, however, if an image does not function effectively, then a filmic sense of support is needed.³⁴

The local spectators of *Train to Busan* were consistently exposed to various images of the incident, which have become a trigger of trauma. Thus, while watching a fiction film that allegorically depicts the incident, the public can recall memories of the tragic event. As a result, it could be noted that the movie functions as a bridge which reconnects the viewer to their memory of the accident. While enabling audiences to empathize with the characters, at the same time, the film provokes them to recall the memories and to encounter the shocking moment, especially through the deaths of the characters and the bodies of the zombies.

When asked why he wanted to create a zombie film, director Yeon answered that he always liked zombies due to their difference from other monsters. He said that zombies are a threat, but, at the same time, they symbolize the victim of the zombie outbreak as they had to be bitten to become the monster. Based on his intention, not only the death of the passengers

³³ Hirsch, 13-14

³⁴ Hirsch, 13-14

in the train metaphorically symbolizes the victims of the Sewol ferry, but also the bodies of zombies. Thus, based on the syntactic approach, the bodies of zombies in *Train to Busan* demonstrate different textual meaning when compared to conventional meaning in zombie cinema in the West.

Furthermore, the film reflects the Sewol ferry incident through the selection of transportation, a train, as the background setting. The environment did not just resemble the event in an explicit way, it also supported similar implicit meanings. Explicitly, the train serves as an allegory of the ferry because it is familiar and isolating and thus can be considered as a bodily space. According to Lowenstein, in a film, trauma can be engaged through registering the bodily space and historical time, meaning that allegory triggers the audience to recall the memories of tragedy.³⁵ The alteration, from a ferry to a train, helps the local viewers relate to the setting more easily, as trains are a more frequently used form of transportation. Additionally, choosing a ferry as the background would have been too direct. Also, as the train departs from Seoul and heads to Busan, the route penetrates the whole country, which symbolizes the zombie outbreak as a national threat.

By using a mode of transportation as the background, the isolated situation of the characters becomes an allegory of the Sewol ferry incident. In the actual event, the victims were not able to receive help from the outside world because they were trapped in the ferry. Similarly, in *Train to Busan*, characters are forced to help themselves without aid. This allegorical image illustrated in the film serves as a moment which encourages the spectator to recall the memory of the actual disaster. The characters are not able to escape from the train or receive support from organizations or people outside the train, which draws another similarity to the Sewol ferry incident. After the first outbreak of zombies on the train, the survivors gather in one cabin where they are safe from the monsters. Here the camera uses a

³⁵ Lowenstein, 12

wide shot to capture the whole cabin, which is fully packed with people; this image communicates that the passengers are trapped, as the left, right, and top sides of the screen are filled with the structure of the train. This shot resembles the accident by recreating a similar situation of the victims from actual disaster. While adopting the zombie films which depict the isolation of the characters, *Train to Busan* metaphorically describes national tragedy by using a train as the background setting.

Moreover, according to Louisa Koo, *Train to Busan* illustrates national color through melodramatic narrative which is another difference the film has to the standard zombie narrative.³⁶ Melodrama is considered a characteristic of Korean cinema, despite the fact that fans and critics often criticize this mode of storytelling as overly dramatic. Director Yeon said in an interview that he is aware of the opinion that *Train to Busan* is overdramatic. He has also mentioned that people easily notice it since the film is a live-action movie, even though his animated works also used this melodramatic mode.³⁷ Nevertheless, melodrama is a significant component of Korean films, and has developed through the history of Korean cinema as a way to express national identity.³⁸ Melodrama is a remarkable characteristic of Korean-ness in local cinematic history, since it was developed as a national trait during the Japanese colonialization period.³⁹ In other words, Korean melodrama, which has been constructed through diverse films, was used to create a sense of national identity, due to the obstacles facing Korean culture, including Hollywood cinema, the Japanese government, and Korean dictators.⁴⁰ Koo suggests that melodramatic expression and national trauma are

³⁶ Koo, 174

³⁷ Sangho Yeon, interview by Ji-young Yoo, "Train to Busan Used To be A Different Story," *OhmyStar*, July 28, 2016; my translation

³⁸ Koo, 168-169

³⁹ Koo, 168

⁴⁰ Koo, 168-169

representations of Korean-ness in *Train to Busan*.⁴¹ Thus, the melodrama in this film is an example of successful localization of the zombie genre.

Consequently, *Train to Busan* is evidence of the globalization of the zombie and the monster's function as a pop culture icon. Due to the lack of cultural heritage, director Yeon has borrowed the reinterpretation of the Afro-Caribbean monster created by Romero and other zombie cinema filmmakers after him. As mentioned above, the appearance of the monster has not changed even though it has been created in different countries or media forms outside the United States. As zombie media has spread to different countries, the zombie has proved a monster that global audience can easily relate to, especially due to symbolic elements evoked by this genre. For example, many people from various countries can relate to the apocalyptic narrative because they are also enduring man-made disasters such as pollution, plague, and mindless consumerism.⁴²

Moreover, using zombies as a metaphor for national tragedy is an important aspect that shows the globalization of the monster and the adoption of national traits into the genre from the regions in which the films have been produced. The zombie is important because it is not considered horror film's classical monster, but rather an adaptation of cultural heritage.⁴³ As it has become a global icon, many countries have attempted to replicate the zombie genre. As a result, different national identities can be included in the genre. Moreover, exportation of the monster has also broadened the discourse in terms of the monster, as it is studied in the countries that engage with these zombie texts. These projects cover various subjects, such as researching the original heritage of the zombie from the Haitian culture or

⁴¹ Koo, 174

⁴² David R. Castillo, *Zombie Masses: Monsters for the Age of Global Capitalism in Zombie Talk – Culture, History, Politics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 59

⁴³ Ian Conrich, *An Infected Population: Zombie Culture and the Modern Monstrous in The Zombie Renaissance In Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 16

studying the national aspect of a zombie film based on the country in which it was made. For instance, in the book *The Transatlantic Zombie* (2015), Sarah Juliet Lauro wrote about the zombie in accordance with its cultural origin from Haiti, which is different from the western reinterpretation. She used the term “Haitian Zombies” to distinguish her research from American zombies and studied the monster in its original culture. Examining the exportation of zombie genre to Japan, *I am a Hero* (2016), directed by Shinsuke Sato, localizes the genre by representing the country’s fear of the nuclear crisis,⁴⁴ which stems from the atomic raid during the World War II. In the movie, the zombie outbreak begins in the city of Fukushima, where Japan’s first nuclear powerplant is located.⁴⁵ Here, Japan’s national trauma has been depicted through the zombie genre. Similarly, by allegorically demonstrating the national tragedy, *Train to Busan* added Korean-ness while engaging with the genre’s structure constructed in the West.

Outbreak and the Reaction of the Government and Media

Secondly, there are other elements that *Train to Busan* adapted from the zombie genre produced in Hollywood. The film has reproduced the circumstances of the zombie outbreak in other zombie media as South Korea lacks a cultural heritage of the monster. Also, the representation of the government and media have used the conventional building blocks of the genre. However, through the lens of syntactic analysis, these components illustrate different textual meaning as local spectators perceive the allegory of national trauma.

Frequently used semantic element of the zombie genre, which *Train to Busan* follows, is that a virus is considered to be the cause of the zombie outbreak. Often, newly developed medical products or chemical contamination have functioned as the cause of creating the

⁴⁴ Kim, *Biocalyptic Imaginations in Japanese and Korean Films: undead nation-states in I Am a Hero and Train to Busan*, 441

⁴⁵ Kim, 441

monster. For instance, in *28 Days Later* (2002) a virus leaked from a laboratory provokes the spread of zombies. Similarly, in *Resident Evil* (2002) a leaked virus from a medical company triggers the outbreak of zombies. In both cases, the newly developed chemical causes the outbreak of the monster. In the case of *I am the Legend* (2007) a vaccine made to cure cancer is the reason people turn into the living dead monster.

Comparably, in *Train to Busan*, an undisclosed chemical contamination appears as the agent turning humans and animals into zombies. In the opening scene, a dead deer is shown returning to life in a zone quarantined due to possible contamination. Additionally, the film communicates that there was an accident at the nearby biochemical factory through news broadcast on television and cell phone screens. As South Korea does not have a cultural heritage of the zombie, *Train to Busan* adapted the origin of the monster illustrated in the films made in the West. Thus, it could be said that director Yeon reproduced the similar building block of the genre based on semantic approach.

In accordance with the outbreak of zombies, the illustration of the government and media in *Train to Busan* is another aspect that corresponds with the convention of the genre. In the film, the irresponsible reaction of media and government empathizes that the public institutions are ineffective at helping people in need. For example, after the outbreak of zombies in the train, the audience is able to hear the narration of the government's spokesperson, who says that the government has acted rapidly and has things under control. While the spokesperson is still speaking, images on the screen exhibit different streets in Korea being overrun by zombies, proving that the government is lying. This scene demonstrates the failure of the media and the government to give accurate and trustworthy information.

This component corresponds with zombie films made in Hollywood. For example, in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), a recording of a report is broadcasted on television that law

enforcement agencies and the military are organized to terminate the monsters. However, at the end of the film, Ben, the protagonist, is shot by a person in the organization that was supposed to kill zombies. This scene is an expression of racism, but at the same time can be understood as an irresponsible public institution. Furthermore, another example is *Day of the Dead* (1985), in which the characters have their own power structure due to living in an underground bunker. The antagonist Rhodes is a military officer who is in charge. At first, Rhodes' mission was to protect the scientists, however as they lost contact with other bases, he tries to rule the place using violence. When the scientists try to resist to his order, Rhodes threatens them with gun. This scene depicts that there is no governmental power that can protect the innocent characters.

In addition to the semantic approach, also applying the syntactic approach, distinctive textual meaning can be derived from the outbreak of zombies and the reaction of the government and media depicted in *Train to Busan*. These components function as the allegory of the Sewol ferry incident which the local spectator can perceive. As mentioned above, the bodies of zombies in the film demonstrated the victims of national tragedy. Similarly, the circumstance of the zombie outbreak metaphorically resembles the Sewol ferry incident. Additionally, the representation of the government in the film coincide with the government's behavior during the actual event. This allegory invites the audience to confront the national trauma and results in triggering the moment of shocking collision argued by Lowenstein.

This can be seen in the scene depicting the outbreak of the zombies on the train. The girl who turns into a zombie in the train first attacks a cabin attendant, who with the zombie on her back, goes into a cabin where all the passengers are high school students. While the students are attacked by the two zombies, another cabin attendant comes to help, but he is knocked down by adults running away from the danger. In this scene, the isolated image of

the students resembles the Sewol ferry incident as they are left behind by the adults. As mentioned above, the zombie films made in the West used the outbreak of the monster to criticize scientific progress. While adapting certain setting, due to lack of cultural heritage, *Train to Busan* used the outbreak of zombies to allegorically describe national tragedy and criticize irresponsible adults.

Moreover, the illustration of media and government in the film can be argued as components which reflect the Sewol ferry incident. As mentioned above, the event was broadcast through different media at the time and one of the controversies that occurred due to excessive broadcasting was false reporting. False reports were made as a result of miscommunication between police stations and reporters and broadcast stations. The public broadcasting channel in Korea announced that all passengers were rescued from the ferry, but this was a false report that was corrected about twenty minutes after the statement. This mistake caused panic, as the high school and the department of education sent out text messages to the parents of the students who were on board that the students were all rescued. When the false report was corrected, parents of the students were grouped in a hall in Danwon High School and some people acted out violently toward the administrator who shared the false news. For instance, two people kicked the door of a room where the administrator was located, and several people yelled at the reporter, demanding they tell the truth. The incidents of false reports and irresponsible reactions by the government are reflected in the film through scenes of news broadcasts. Moreover, because most of the abandoned victims of the Sewol ferry were teenagers, the absence of support from the government was strongly criticized. The rescue team did not arrive in time because the police did not properly react to the emergency call. As the disaster took place in the middle of the ocean, maritime stations exchanged calls to learn about the accident, causing delay. Additionally, the president at the time, Guen-hye Park, was criticized for not appearing in the

media for seven hours after the sinking of the ferry was reported. By depicting the absence of governmental support and media announcing false report, the film reproduced the tragedy. Thus, while viewing the film, local audiences were induced to confront trauma which helped them to easily empathize with the characters' situation.

In addition, the localization of the zombie genre has importance for two reasons: first, it reveals the Korean-ness that is expressed even with the re-creation of a media from the West and, second, it explains the success of the film in the local box office. According to Koo, *Train to Busan* can be considered an example of national cinema under globalization.⁴⁶ As it is the first zombie blockbuster to achieve success in local and global box office, it has influenced the local film makers and producers to have an interest in the zombie genre. Since the movie demonstrates national traits even though it is an adaptation of a genre created in Hollywood, it illustrates how national identity can be represented through globalized genre. Exoticism and distinctive characteristics, such as melodramatic moments, are reasons *Train to Busan* gained global awareness. In the case of Korean zombie films after *Train to Busan*, the movies have been functioning as national film as they try to draw international attention through the exotic view of traditional culture in South Korea. For instance, the film *Rampant* (2018) and the Netflix series *Kingdom* (2019) show the zombie outbreak happening in the historic Chosun dynasty of Korea. The production design of both *Rampant* and *Kingdom* display the traditional aesthetics of Korean culture as they adapt the setting from modern day to historical drama. This element illustrates that the producers and filmmakers are inspired by the global success of *Train to Busan* and aim to repeat the same outcome through emphasizing exoticism. Thus, by localizing the zombie genre, *Train to Busan* added characteristics of its local cinema, specifically expressing national trauma, and explicitly exploiting Korean culture.

⁴⁶ Koo, 174

Human Characters and Their Behaviors

Lastly, human characters and their behaviors in *Train to Busan* demonstrate how the film has localized the zombie genre. The characters in the movie not only adapt some of the clichés in zombie cinema, but also function to represent the national tragedy which only the local audiences can relate to.

Train to Busan recontextualized the critique of capitalism, which is a topic that has been repeatedly illustrated throughout the history of zombie cinema. This ideology has been developed by Romero with his *The Living Dead* series. For example, in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), Romero represents consumer culture and satirizes people's desire. He used a large shopping mall as the place where the characters are isolated due to the threat of zombies. By displaying the characters crazily shopping in an empty mall, Romero criticized the consumer culture at the time.⁴⁷ These settings, introduced by Romero, are now standard and have been frequently replicated in various media. Olney examined the representation of consumer culture in zombie cinema and pointed out that the genre served as an ideal place to criticize late capitalism.⁴⁸ The zombie is closely related to capitalism, as the creation of the film genre coincided with the Great Depression in the United States.⁴⁹ The mindless undead monster attracted audiences as it reflected the suffering of ordinary people due to financial issues and the world's economic crisis.⁵⁰

Additionally, Antonio Sanna wrote about the critique of consumerism and capitalism represented in the zombie genre based on two film series, the *Resident Evil* saga (2002–2012)

⁴⁷ Olney, 54-55

⁴⁸ Olney, 52

⁴⁹ Olney, 51

⁵⁰ Olney, 51-52

and two *The Silent Hill* films (2006–2012).⁵¹ Sanna analyzes Las Vegas, as depicted in the *Resident Evil* films, in which the deserted area of the city contrasts with the current image of the city, drawing the audience's attention to the fall of this consumerist metropolis.⁵² In the case of *The Silent Hill* series, the movies are set in a devastated urban area, which, according to Sanna, symbolizes an outcome of capitalism. In the film, the urban space appears as a place where the good aspects of humanity have been lost, serving as a critique of capital-centered behavior.⁵³

Similarly, in *Train to Busan*, the main character, Seok-woo, is described as a fund manager whose devotion to his work creates tension in his relationship with his daughter. Through his behavior and other characters' understanding of him, director Yeon criticizes capitalism. Seok-woo does not care about other people, even in situations where others' lives are in danger. When Seok-woo holds his daughter as they escape from the zombies, he closes the door in front of the pregnant couple behind them. His attitude represents the devastated mind of a person enveloped in capitalistic society, illustrating that his positive morality has been lost. Seok-woo's occupation functions as a point from which to criticize capitalism as well. In one scene, a character named Sang-hwa asks Su-an what her father's job is and Su-an answers that he works as a fund manager. Immediately, Sang-hwa says that he is a blood-sucker, which means that he takes advantage of powerless people to earn money. Furthermore, when faced with the zombie outbreak, Seok-woo calls his junior staff member, Min, and asks whether he will be safe at Daejeon station, where the train is supposed to stop for evacuation. Once Min tells him that the passengers will be isolated for quarantine, Seok-

⁵¹ Antonio Sanna, *Consumerism and the Undead City: The Silent Hill and Resident Evil Films in The Zombie Renaissance In Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 56

⁵² Sanna, 57

⁵³ Sanna, 59

woo tries to persuade Min to figure out a way for him and his daughter to pass through, telling Min that he can offer him a good deal. When arriving at Daejeon station, Seok-woo escapes from the group of survivors with his daughter and a character who overheard his conversation with Min to avoid quarantine without notifying the others. Thus, Seok-woo is a character that fits into Sanna and Olney's interpretation of consumer culture within zombie cinema. Olney suggests that late capitalism is represented as a flesh-eating cannibalism in zombie films.⁵⁴ In contrast, this idea in *Train to Busan* is expressed through the human character, rather than the monster. In a sense, the movie adapts the ideology that has been reproduced within the history of zombie cinema, but the main character, specifically his behavior and occupation, is used as the element that creates the textual meaning of criticizing capitalism.

Furthermore, another semantic element that is frequently used in the zombie genre is a selfish character. For instance, in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), an antagonist is depicted as a character who does not care about other people except for his family. Cooper was hiding in the basement with his family and another man while the main characters, Ben and Barbara, were trying to secure the house from the threat of zombies on ground floor. When being asked why he did not help, Cooper answers that he would not risk his life for saving other people who might be in danger. Throughout the film, Cooper does not care about other people and disrupts Ben from setting better plans for the survivors. Therefore, the selfish character is one of the archetypal characters that is depicted in zombie films.

Based on the semantic approach, similar characters appear in *Train to Busan* as well. To be specific, the self-centered attitude of Yon-suk has similar aspects to that of Cooper. In the film, a group of survivors escape from the threat of zombies to a safe cabin where another group of people are hiding. However, Yon-suk tries to lock the closed door, saying that the

⁵⁴ Olney, 55-56

newcomers might already be infected. Inside the safe cabin, Yon-suk and other passengers stare at the closed door. Specifically, in the sequence, the camera captures Yong-guk trying to open the door locked by Yon-suk and the survivors, then cuts to show Sang-hwa, in the opposite direction, holding the door to prevent the zombies' entrance, from the next cabin. This composition of shots emphasizes the contrast between the characters' attitudes: one sacrificing himself to save the others and the egoistic counterparts who do not consider others' lives. Also, dramatic music is chosen in the scene to highlight the death of Sang-hwa, a character who protects his pregnant wife and others throughout the movie.

One of the main differences *Train to Busan* has when compared to other zombie films made in the West is that it recontextualizes the national tragedy through the representation of the characters. Centered on the syntactic approach, the Korean-ness expressed in *Train to Busan* can be examined as the situation depicted in the film mirrors the actual events of the Sewol ferry incident. The allegory used in *Train to Busan* can result in triggering the trauma of the local audiences. Specifically, the selfish characters and their behaviors and the representation of high school students in the film resonate with the Sewol ferry incident.

During the incident, the adults in charge have been criticized as the crew members in the ferry did not properly help the passengers. When the event occurred, the staff on board announced that the passengers need to remain seated and should not leave their rooms. High school students followed the orders from the staff member and stayed in their rooms, which resulted in the huge number of casualties. Meanwhile, Joon-seok Lee, the captain, left the ferry and did not make any statement for the students to evacuate. Afterwards, he was sentenced to life in prison for murder, along with other crew members who left the ferry without making an evacuation announcement.

In the film, Yon-suk's behavior resembles that of the captain of the Sewol ferry. In one scene, the characters have to run back to the train from Daejeon station, as it is already full of

zombies. Yon-suk yells at the cabin attendant to call the captain to escape from the place, since he had already made it back to the train. Instantly, Jin-hee, a female high school student, announces that her friend has not made it to the train yet. However, Yon-suk does not listen and rather pushes her to the wall of the cabin. Here, Jin-hee's line synchronizes with one of the survivors' testimony after being rescued. One student said that even though she told the police on the lifeboat that there were many students in the ferry, they only helped those who were able to jump into the ocean by themselves. Similarly, Jin-hee's situation and line resonates with the passengers on the Sewol ferry. The last two high school student characters, Yong-guk and Jin-hee, become victims of the zombies in the end because of Yon-suk's selfish behavior. While trying to save his own life, Yon-suk pushes Jin-hee into a zombie behind them, using her as bait. As Yon-suk is trying to open the closed door to escape, the camera cuts to show Yong-guk fighting with the zombie that previously bit Jin-hee. Without caring about Jin-hee and Yong-guk's lives, Yon-suk escapes from the place, risking the lives of the two students. After getting rid of the zombie, Yong-guk sits down on the floor, holding Jin-hee and saying that he is sorry for failing to protect her. Here, using a wide shot, the camera is positioned away from the two characters, placing them inside the doorframe of the cabin. The camera is located inside the cabin while the characters are in the hallway between the cabins. By positioning Yong-guk and Jin-hee in a smaller frame within the shot, this scene symbolizes the isolation of the students who are left behind. This setting can be read as a reconstruction of the disaster, as the adults who were in charge, such as the captain, abandoned the student passengers. As mentioned above, the event was a shock to the country, in part because the adults abandoned teenagers in danger. In the film, Yon-suk's behavior stimulates the trauma of the audience, as he uses the lives of the students to save himself.

Additionally, *Train to Busan* allegorizes the Sewol ferry incident through the representation of high school student characters. They are a unique component to this film

which embodies the national tragedy and can trigger the trauma of local spectators. The high school students in the film stand out as their clothing, such as jackets with their school name, display their social status. This visual element causes the audience to recall the memory of the actual tragedy, as most of the casualties were high school students. Although the students of the incident were not wearing school uniforms, the costume visually enables the viewers to relate it to the event as it symbolizes that the victims onscreen are students. This analysis can be seen in the scene in which Yong-guk encounters the cabin where he finds his friends have turned into zombies. As mentioned before, director Yeon said that zombies are a threat, but, at the same time, they symbolize the victim. Here, the audience can sympathize with Yong-guk's emotion as he is stunned by seeing his friends who did not survive. He hesitates to attack them and, at that moment, Yong-guk's short pause express his grief. The camera uses shot-reverse-shot, illustrating Yong-guk's face first, then cutting to the friends who have turned into zombies, and cutting again to reveal Yong-guk's emotion. The spectator is invited to identify with Yong-guk.

Moreover, the local audiences easily sympathize with these scenes that recall the disaster as they previously experienced images of it from news broadcasts. During the actual incident, various television channels offered programs related to the incident; one of these was the broadcast of a temporary funeral, an incense altar for the victims. Funerals in Korean culture feature an incense altar, so that visitors can dedicate a flower to the deceased person. As the facility was opened to the public, news footage showed images of the people who visited the altar to express their condolences. In addition to the temporary funeral, when the bodies of the victims were found, a proper funeral was held for each person. In those cases, the footage demonstrating the survivors attending the funeral was reported as well. In one funeral, one of the survivors read a letter written to her lost friend in front of the family members and the reporters. This scene is allegorically reproduced in *Train to Busan* through

Yong-guk's situation, explained above. As the bodies of the zombies represent the victims of the disaster, Yong-guk experiences a moment of confronting the tragedy and the victims simultaneously, just as the broadcasted image of reading the letter revealed the grief of the survivor. Thus, the representation of the victims through the body of the zombies creates the moment of shocking representation which triggers the trauma of the viewers. For this reason, while adapting some of the similar character settings from the zombie genre, *Train to Busan* added specifically Korean components to the genre.

Conclusion

Overall, *Train to Busan* has significance in academic discourse in regard to the zombie genre, as it demonstrates a unique usage of the body of the living dead, which functions as an allegory of national tragedy. While adapting the structure of a genre constructed in the West, *Train to Busan* not only replicated semantic elements but also contextualized traits of national identity. Altman's argument of genre helps to view how *Train to Busan* engages with the convention of genre and adds aspects of Korean-ness. Traditionally, the zombie genre has been used to criticize colonialism and capitalism through different films made in Hollywood. The zombie genre conventionally criticized capitalism through the bodies of zombies and selfish behavior of characters. When the genre was reconstructed in South Korea, Sang-ho Yeon focused on the zombies' characteristics of being a monster and a victim of the disaster at the same time. While adapting some of the semantic components of the genre, *Train to Busan* constructed distinctive aspects through demonstration of the national tragedy. Thus, it could be said that *Train to Busan* offered the possibility of zombie films to be considered a national cinema, even though the genre is a creation of the West.

Furthermore, even though *Train to Busan* is a fictional film, the settings and images are entangled with the Sewol ferry incident. This understanding enables the movie to be a

part of the posttraumatic discourse that includes texts from survivors, witnesses, and even those who engaged with the photographic images of the event.⁵⁵ In *Train to Busan*, the local audience can perceive the national tragedy through the characters, cinematography and story. As explained above, the narrative and visual elements demonstrating the victims of the zombie outbreak and reaction of the government coincide with the Sewol ferry disaster. The Korean government's neglect of the sinking ferry caused the deaths of the high school students who were on board. Based on Lowenstein and Hirsch's argument, as South Korean viewers were exposed to various images of the incident, they are able to link the fictional images of high school students being abandoned with the national tragedy.

In this sense, *Train to Busan* is an important posttraumatic film in South Korean cinema history, as it encourages the audience to recollect the national tragedy. As explained above, the Sewol ferry incident revealed negative characteristics of Korean society and governmental power. Here, confrontation helps the spectator look back on the tragic event, rather than focusing on redemption from it. Remembering and facing how the tragedy occurred while watching the movie can be considered a productive process. Lowenstein wrote that, "...allegory honors representation's promise that trauma can be communicated – its commitment to the image of death is simultaneously a commitment, however conflicted and provisional, to recognition, to the past's value for the present."⁵⁶ While consuming the shocking images of zombies, the audience can remember the atrocity that was created by the Korean government and unconscientious adults. Thus, the past's value for the present, as Lowenstein has argued, can be delivered to the spectators, so the negative characteristics of the country will not be forgotten.

⁵⁵ Hirsch, 7

⁵⁶ Lowenstein, 16

Train to Busan achieved global success, as the national trauma is described allegorically rather than directly. For the global audience, the film could be understood as a Korean reproduction of the genre, as those outside of Korea are not able to relate to the national context in the film. As zombie cinema describes the apocalypse metaphorically, it is possible for diverse spectators to relate to the narrative, regardless of their nationality. For example, David A. Reilly has suggested that the zombie apocalypse symbolizes the negative consequence of globalization. He wrote that both the zombie outbreak and globalization can be read as an unavoidable threat to society.⁵⁷ Likewise, due to its global success, the threat of a zombie outbreak in the film could be understood as symbolizing various events, both national and international. Moreover, this project can lead to further research on *Train to Busan*, such as utilizing ideas from the area of fan studies. By using fan studies, the comparison and contrast between audiences from South Korea and the United States and the way they approach national tragedy can be examined.

Regardless of the textual meaning that only local spectators can relate to, the film gained attention in other countries, as audiences are already familiar with the structure of the genre because it has been reproduced numerous times in the West. For local spectators, *Train to Busan* serves as a model of posttraumatic cinema. On the other hand, it can be understood by the global audience as the transnational influence of the zombie genre, since the film demonstrates both the Korean-ness and traditional syntax of the genre. Likewise, the worldwide consumption of the zombie draws a circle of capital that demonstrates the circulation of a cultural product, showing the genre being exported from Hollywood to another nation and then being exported back into Hollywood. As a South Korean film, *Train to Busan* enables the spectator to confront the memory of an incident that the public should

⁵⁷ David A. Reilly, *The Coming Apocalypses of Zombies and Globalization in Zombie Talk – Culture, History, Politics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 73

not forget, because it revealed negative aspects of Korean society. The film has not only broadened the possibility of adapting the zombie genre, but also has revealed the role of posttraumatic film after the disaster. The public should confront trauma in order to remember the sacrificed victims and the negative aspects of Korean society, drawing meaning from the past to the present.

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