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**AN ANALYSIS OF PARK CHAN-WOOK'S VENGEANCE TRILOGY
IN THE SCOPE OF THE UNATTAINABLE PROMISE OF REVENGE**

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Unattainable Promise of Revenge**

**Park Chan-wook'un İntikam Üçlemesi Üzerine; İntikamın Ulaşılamaz
Vaatleri Kapsamında Bir Analiz**

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ABSTRACT

The word screen may mean much more than what it means, we can say, a short while ago. In the last 10 years period with the spread of portable screens to all over our lives; it has become the most effective gadget for mass communication. And cinema as one of the most sophisticated ways to utilize the power of screening kept its popularity despite being surrounded by various innovations to attract the attention of masses such as social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook...etc.) or streaming services (Netflix, Prime Video, Hulu, Blu Tv...etc.). I believe one reason for cinema to be able to keep its popularity and importance in this era is its quality of being able to open a way for problematizing the even most philosophical topics in the ordinary or familiar contexts from life. This relatively new or newly discovered side of the cinema not only keeps it alive while many other contemporary styles (stage & performing arts or conventional journalism and radio broadcasting) are disappearing from the sight.

Settling on from this opportunity of problematizing philosophical aspects through cinematic contexts, in this study; I analyze the concepts of revenge, retaliation and violence in the scope of the false promises they offer for the vengeful sides in the plots of a trilogy by the director, Park Chan-wook. In his trilogy, mostly known as the Vengeance Trilogy, the director elegantly placed the themes of revenge and retaliation into his scripts and reflected them in their most violent forms on the screen. However, when we look closer to the results of the violent vengeance for the protagonists and the certain repeated implications on the false nature of the concepts that were taken in hand throughout the movies; we can observe the philosophical approach that actually condemns the concept of revenge for its false nature of offering satisfaction, and then carries a step further after the act of revenge to propose a more realistic picture of the result for the audience and also to suggest an alternative way to speculate in order to reach a relief .

Keywords: Vengeance, revenge, retaliation; Violence; Resentment; Satisfaction, fulfillment; Forgiveness.

ÖZET

‘Ekran’ sözcüğü bugün yakın bir geçmişe kıyasla hayatlarımızda çok daha geniş bir anlam kazanmıştır. Özellikle son 10 yıllık süreçte, taşınabilir ekranların hayatımızın her alanına yayılması ile de en etkili kitle iletişim aracı haline gelmiştir. Ekran yayıncılığının hala en sofistike yöntemlerinden olan sinema ise kitlelerin dikkatini cezbeden sosyal medya platformları (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook...vb.) ya da internet yayıncılığı (Netflix, Prime Video, Hulu, Blu Tv...vb.) gibi birçok yeni iletişim yöntemiyle çevrelenmiş olmasına rağmen popülerliğini korumaktadır. Sinemanın yaşadığımız çağda önem ve popülaritesini koruyabilmesinin bir nedeninin de bizlere çoğu felsefi konuyu hayata dair, tanıdık ve sıradan içerikler üzerinden tanıtmaya ve tartışmaya şansı vermesi olduğunu düşünüyorum. Bu göreceli olarak yeni keşfedilmiş yanı; sinemayı çağdaşı olan birçok diğer gösterim yöntemi (sahne ve performans sanatları, geleneksel gazetecilik ya da radyo yayıncılığı gibi) popülerliğini yitirirken canlı tutmaktadır.

Sinemasal içeriklerde felsefi başlıkların konu edilmesinden yola çıkarak, bu çalışmada; Park Chan-wook’un *İntikam Üçlemesi* eserleri içerisinde yer alan üç farklı senaryo dahilindeki karakterlere; intikam, kısas ve şiddet kavramları bağlamında sunulan asılsız tatmin duygusu vaatini inceledim. Ünlü üçlemesinde yönetmen, intikam ve kısas temalarını senaryosuna incelikli bir biçimde yerleştirir ve bunların yol açtığı şiddeti en vahşi formlarında ekrana yansıtır. Ne var ki, filmlerde yansıtılan vahşetin ana karakterler adına yarattığı sonuçları ve ele alınan kavramların içerdiği asılsız vaatlere dair imaları daha yakından incelediğimizde; intikamın vaat ettiği tatmin duygusunun asılsızlığına dair felsefi bir bakış açısı sunulduğunu görürüz. Bu bakış açısı dahilinde intikamın bir adım ötesini de ele alan senaryolar; seyirciye gerçekçi bir resim sunmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda üzerine düşünülecek alternatif bir kurtuluş önerisi de getirir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Öç, intikam, kısas; Şiddet; Hınc; Tatmin, memnuniyet; Affetme.

INTRODUCTION

It was the year 2005 when my friends at university started to praise a movie called *Oldboy* by a Korean director, Park Chan-wook. I resisted to add it to my watch list for so long; perhaps just because I was reluctant to watch an Asian movie as it felt so far away from my cinematic orientation mostly adapted to American or European movies. After a couple of years, I was still suggested by different people at different times to see this brilliant piece of work. Coincidentally, it was soon after a tragic incident in which my mother suffered badly from a groundless violent act in a public space by a person she barely knew. Then I finally watched the movie that seemed in a distance but strangely felt so close. We encounter a narrative of a man as a subject and the instigator of a violent act in the movie, *Oldboy*. For me, despite being in an ideal position to accept and hold the logic of revenge in those days especially; it was more like an understanding or at least questioning rather than feeling a relief or pleasure while seeing a fantasy of revenge at its extremities. *Oldboy* is the second movie of Park Chan-wook's trilogy of vengeance who is described as the director that put the South Korean cinema out on to the world stage (New York Times Magazine, 2006).

Although he is referred to as Tarantino of Korean cinema by the international press with his blood and gore-splattered films, he is also discussed as much for the philosophical content of his movies (The Guardian, 2009). The philosophical side of his works is the mere point that tempted me to follow and consider them deeper. He became most remarkable with his *Revenge (Vengeance) Trilogy: Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002), *Oldboy* (2003), *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (2005). Themes of vengeance, violence and revenge are the common thread of *Vengeance Trilogy*. Over the theme of vengeance; movies not only give the audience the stories of the avengers leading themselves to their irreversible acts of violence but also present their quite complicated psychology preventing the characters from experiencing peace after their cathartic moments. In this study, I am to analyze how and why the leading characters end up in great devotion to these violent acts of vengeance, and then I will present the results of their acts in terms of providing

them with long-term satisfaction/fulfillment or not. And additionally, I will also take the issue on the side of the spectator by focusing on the feeling of ‘sympathy’ and to which level it is possible for them to create the state of identification through the narratives.

Methodologies and Approach

For this analysis, I will include a couple of methodologies. While analyzing the motives and reasons of characters’ vengeful acts I will turn to texts of Foucault about freedom, subjectivity, power on the social and the private space analysis, then I will also include a couple of other researches in the field of Psychology for the explanation of the relationship between the vengeful acts and the expected satisfaction through it. Following this, I will also use the term ‘resentment’ as one of the fundamental motives that enables the characters to commit violent acts to soothe their anger in the form of vengeance. In order to be able to inquire about the nature of the main cause as ‘resentment’ there will be certain analysis about a local concept of ‘han’ as the name of ‘the *smoldering feeling*’ comes out through oppression in Asian societies, especially in Korean society and certain explanations from Nietzsche’s theory of ‘*ressentiment*’ as the complementary text to help us understanding the motivation of the avengers for their reciprocal actions deeper. Finally, I will include the texts of Steve Choi and Hannah Arendt for the resolution idea of the trilogy that turns out to be the effective nature of ‘unconditional forgiveness’ prevailing the act of vengeance, ‘revenge’ in providing a closure for the past transgressions of the characters.

Background Ideas - Cultural & Contextual Links Behind Narratives

In order to eliminate the agents leading to violent acts - the manifestation of violence - we need to have a closer look at the aspects (cultural and historical background realities of Korea under a rapid globalization process) around which Park shaped his works with the consideration of his personal motivation to create

this perspective. During his interviews he explains his motivation to create these movies as the following;

“When I’m insulted I cannot vent my anger in front of people, and the anger has been accumulating in me, so I wanted to express that through cinema. But if I wanted to express this to my complete satisfaction, to make violence within a good film then it gives me a feeling of guilt. At the same time, I have to express the dark side of an act of violent vengeance even if the revenge is for a good reason (Icons of Fright, 2007).”

The ideas of ‘venting anger because of an insult’ and ‘expressing it through violence’ that he used in his explanation of motives to create this trilogy give us the reason to consider these motives as a result of certain social and historical backgrounds becoming also effective factors to create current conditions of individuals in society through his personal experiences. In this way, there’s also an interactive relation between the depictions of the characters mostly isolated from the social world and the emotional state of the director/creator (his conscience) related to his own reality.

In each movie we encounter protagonists from different age, class or gender groups. Park shapes them in seemingly authentic settings of modern Korean society in which we can observe both the local and the global histories that surrounded the characters. In his book *A History of Korea: From 'Land of the Morning Calm' to States in Conflict* Jinwung Kim simply describes the country as having an extensive history which has been characterized both by the persistent assertion of a distinctive Korean identity and by military, political, and cultural assaults from external sources (Kim J. , 2012). This depiction of the writer simply gives us the binary construct of the country. He proceeds saying that South Korea standing as an internationally recognized middle power, marked not only by a fully functioning modern democracy but also by a high-tech modern world economy (Ibid: xii). Besides, he continues his remark that the country; despite all the devastation and poverty following the Korean War (1950-1953) and the long-term rule of authoritarian regimes afterwards, raised itself as a fully democratic nation

committed the human rights, rule of law and prosperity of its people with being one of the fastest socioeconomic growth stories in the world. The current representation of prosperity and justice actually still bears the traces from its tragic history. Prior to the Korean War, the country suffered from the imperialistic rule of Japan for 35 years (took its start with the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 to the end of World War II, 1945). The shadow of the constant threats from neighboring countries China and Japan had constant irritation in not only national but also international area for Korea, and after World War II these threats caused the intervention of the global forces; America and Russia, with their subtle struggle to gain the strategical control of the area. Being exposed to the struggles of greater forces, nationally and geographically kept Korea from forming its' unity as a country and as a nation. This exposure only caused other countries to prove superiority, implement limitations and provocations on Korea throughout its history. As a result, an irreparable separation occurred with an unforgettable sorrow and never-ending paranoias for both Koreas. The sufferings of the past and rapid developments of today result in certain characteristics in modern Korean society effecting the emotional states and responses of its people. In July 17, 1945 with a meeting held by the Soviet Union, United Kingdom and the United States at Potsdam International Conference; Korean peninsula was divided into two from the 38 parallel as North Korea and the Republic of Korea or also recognized as South Korea (NK News - The U.S. and the 1945 Division of Korea, 2012).

“The division of the Korean peninsula at the 38th parallel had tremendous consequences for the Korean people who had lived in a unified nation for a millennium. The 38th parallel symbolized a traditional Korean sentiment, *han*, a smoldering bitterness about past wrongs (see Kim J. , 2012: p. 364).”

‘A traditional Korean sentiment *Han*’ occurs in South Korean society ‘about past wrongs’ reminds us ‘the anger accumulates’ in director’s own self which is the description of a feeling that motivates him to create the trilogy. These real-life inferences find their reflections in the intense representations of vengeful violence which occurs as a result of past transgressions committed by the characters. *Han* is

described by Sandra So Hi Chi Kim; ‘as a collective feeling of unresolved resentment, pain, grief, and anger that runs in the blood of all Koreans...and as an affect that encapsulates the grief of historical memory—the memory of past collective trauma—and that renders itself racialized/ethnicized and attached to the nation (see Kim S. S., 2017: p. 273).’ So, in a way, this concept which claimed to be as an inseparable part of country’s characterization is actually an outcome of a collective enduring of oppression. At this point *Han* has become something accumulating in the society and waiting for its turn to explode. Anthropologist Nancy Abelmann’s words also indicate this quality of the concept which we can easily associate with the description of characters’ being and their reactions against fear or trauma in the movies.

“Its latency makes it powerful; when the experience, collective or individual, is not the source of self-conscious action, *han* is only further ‘building up,’ becoming a greater force to fuel an eventual ‘blow-up.’ Indeed, in the very way that people talk about *han*, they talk about something that eventually explodes (see Abelmann, 1993: p. 152).”

The latter characteristic of the concept ‘*becoming a greater force to fuel an eventual ‘blow-up’*’ could be considered as a descriptive concept related to the reasons for the explosion of resentment in the movies. It allows us to draw a quite reasonable interpretation of the motives that encourages the director personally to reflect through his characters while constituting the cause - effect relationship between their actions and their emotions. Park reflects this connection not openly through direct historical or social agenda; he creates anonymous personal stories in a modern setting and simply finds a way to undercover the deeper realities behind their extreme reactions.

Chapter Summaries

In the first movie of the trilogy, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, the narration centers on the characters of Ryu who is a factory worker, his boss Dong-jin and his anarchist girlfriend Yeong-mi in their social and private spaces. These three characters find themselves in a circle of retaliation soon which is caused by a miscalculated act of kidnapping and the unfortunate deaths of the innocent victims as a result. Vengeance reaching its top potentiality between the characters constitutes the main theme of the piece. And all the active characters in the movie could only prepare their own ends through their vengeful acts.

In the second movie, the act of vengeance is caused by a past transgression of a middle aged Oh Dae-su when he was at high school which costs the life of a teenage girl in the end, and her brother, Woo-jin, to chase a lifelong revenge plot against Oh Dae-su afterwards. Following the same path of self-destruction through the constant pursue of fulfillment through revenge, the main characters lose themselves in a great struggle to end one another (Idea adapted from: Talay Turner, 2018). And similar to the first movie we witness the extremist examples of the retaliation on screen with the scenes of mutilation to the years long psychological torture. From the impulsive talents in committing the violence one another to the elaborate plots including great examples of manipulation.

Lastly, we witness a story of a young woman convicted from a child murder and imprisoned for more than thirteen years in the final piece of the trilogy. This time, Park introduces us with a female protagonist who soon after appears to be mistakenly convicted from a crime that was committed by another party. The unreasonable suffering of imprisonment, and more than that being apart from her new born baby for years drags her to the edge of the great anger and an unbendable feeling of vengeance towards the responsible party, Mr. Baek. In this piece, again we witness an elaborate plan for revenge that takes years to implement. Different from the other protagonists of the first two movies, Geum-ja, the female protagonist of the final piece, carries out a successful plan to avenge from Mr. Baek together with the families of murdered children, and also with the help of her loyal friends

from prison. However, Park does not offer us any kind of satisfaction through her succeeding revenge in the last movie either. Instead he presents us a dissatisfied protagonist shooting a dead body to feed her appetite for revenge towards the end. Conclusively, she finds the relief she searches for in the consent of her daughter. This unexpected way of releasing oneself from unpleasant captivity of the past transgressions and mistakes actually offers a unique and an opposite alternative to the act of revenge on the screen.

Central Themes

In each narrative there is a loss (Oh-Daesu loses his family under captivity, Geum-ja loses her daughter by ending up behind the bars etc.) or at least the fear of losing (at the beginning part of Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance- Ryu shows his deep concern about his sister's critical health situation) the beloved ones as a catalyst factor to release characters' extreme daring for executing their acts. Feeling this fear of a great loss at a strong level carries characters to a judgmental state in which they find rational compensations/ excuses for their vengeful acts. In her article 'Emotions and Evaluative Judgements' Zeynep Talay Turner, referring to Sartre, expresses the relationship between emotions and actions saying 'when we find ourselves in a difficult or unbearable situation, we realize that we can no longer live in such a difficult world, and yet we must act, we have to act, and in acting we change the world...(Ibid: 47)' If we take 'acting' as 'reacting' here as it occurs because of 'a difficult or unbearable situation'; then the connection between the situation and the reaction is built through emotions such as anger. Talay Turner points out that there is an intrinsic relation between emotions and judgements, meaning when 'we have a certain judgement about something, this judgement itself can evoke a particular emotion, or vice versa, that is, a particular emotion may evoke, or even change a particular judgement about something or someone. However, there is more to it: emotions-judgements are also directly related to actions. And this is where ethics comes to the scene (Ibid).' In the movies we observe the visible effects of certain feelings on characters while they are shaping

their decisions to act on. In the first movie, that is, *The Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, this becomes obvious during the talk between Ryu and Yeong-Mi before they decide to kidnap a young girl. When Yeong-Mi makes her statements about the huge inequality of income levels and that even as kidnappers they will be just harmless, her statements address both their judgements about the inequality in the society and also the feelings that result from it and the future hopes of her boyfriend Ryu. Or in the second movie, *Oldboy*, we observe Oh-Dae-Su feeding his feeling of anger day by day in an ‘unjust’ captivity to take his revenge, and Geum-Ja also in the last movie, *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*, devotes her years in prison for her revenge plan no matter what the cost would be. This shows us the catalyst effect of emotions that we have about the situations we find ourselves in. In the movies we observe that anger and, correspondingly, the desire to take revenge are the dominant emotions that lead to particular actions of the characters. While analyzing the pattern of reactions behind the extreme acts of all the characters in the movies, it is essential then to take the feeling of anger or fear caused by their victimization on the side of the characters into consideration as the catalysts for their judgements to lead their reactions. After analyzing the cognitive relationship of emotions and actions in the narratives, I will focus on the message that the director aims to give through the act of vengeance and its nature to prove an inefficient role of violent revenge in creating satisfaction even if it comes along with an experience of catharsis or not for the characters, which contradicts with most of the other examples in cinema on similar context.

Furthermore, I will analyze the level of identification and also ratification of the instigator’s legitimacy on the side of the message director wants to give to the audience. As Park explains in one of his interviews: ‘All revenge films deal with the idea that you can get even-even if, when it’s the most foolish thing in the world to do. A lot of films try to hide that last fact. You just get the sense that it’s fun and that’s cool. But I try to put that fact in front of the audiences (see Imdb: Quotes, Park Chan-wook).’ Here we can conclude that there is a definite criticism of the idea that taking revenge could result in a state of cathartic pleasure and the feeling of long-lasting satisfaction that would bring closure to the issue on the side of an

avenger in reality. That's why Park continues his comments on the theme of revenge in London as; 'Revenge is something that makes you happy and invigorates you only when it is in your imagination, but when it comes to actually realizing it. It is never happy and never gives you pleasure. Because it is an act of total stupidity (Campbell, 2016).' With each ending of his narratives, Park creates his more realistic and less cathartic perspective of vengeful acts for his characters and through them for his audiences as well. This interpretation of revenge by Park also finds its basis in psychology. According to Eric Jaffe who has covered behavioral sciences for the various journals including APS Observer; 'the actual execution of revenge carries a bitter cost of time, emotional and physical energy, and even lives.' And in the same article he continues emphasizing that;

“Behavioral scientists have observed that instead of quenching hostility, revenge can prolong the unpleasantness of the original offence and that merely bringing harm upon offender is not enough to satisfy a person's vengeful spirit. They have also found that instead of delivering justice, revenge often creates only a cycle of retaliation, in part because one person's moral equilibrium rarely aligns with another's (Jaffe, 2011).”

Depending on these facts, in the last parts of my analysis for each movie, I will define the problematization of revenge by the director rather than rationalization of it to create satisfaction. And this brings me to the realization of a surprising force, the unexpected effect of forgiveness, that comes up in the resolution part for the female protagonist, Geum-ja in the last piece of the trilogy.

CHAPTER I: *SYMPATHY FOR MR. VENGEANCE*

1. The Role of Social Constructs

The first movie of the trilogy *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* has a complex and rich text creating an inclusive perspective for the trilogy (Roser, 2006). Beside violence, which is the central theme, the main characters are shaped around the themes of capitalism, modernization and nationalism. They struggle with the challenges and misfortunes caused by their class positions and their roles in the society. Such as the two main protagonists; Ryu who is a lower-class handicapped factory worker, disempowered by the demanding requirements of the ruling social system or Dong-jin who is a factory owner dealing with heavy responsibilities to keep his business going at the cost of causing his employees or his family to suffer. As the text gives equal importance to these characters' stories, it goes beyond the conventional dichotomy of 'good' protagonist vs. 'evil' antagonist. Furthermore, the cause and effect-based narrative gives both characters justification for seeking vengeance (Se Young, 2010). Alike with the following movies of the trilogy, the deeds of retaliation and exposure of brutal violence constitutes the triumph of this piece. However, it becomes possible for the audience to feel sympathy for either side of vengeance cycle, and the antagonist of the plot becomes the systematic failures rather than one of the characters as these failures become the underlying causes for all the sufferings that the characters experience throughout the plot. While analyzing the cause-and-effect relationships in the occurrence, execution and culmination steps of violence in the movie, I will focus on physical agents such as social and economic challenges affecting characters' emotional states and triggering the acts of retaliation between them.

2. Physical Agents as Triggering Factors

The movie takes its' start from the story of Ryu – a young boy both deaf and mute – struggling to save his sister's – his only family's – life at all costs. In the

very first scene of the movie we understand that these siblings are bonded each other with a great love and devotion. In the scene, through the letter he wrote to his sister, he explains how she supported him by working at a factory until she gets ill, and now after leaving his education in fine arts and working at a factory to support his sister and himself in life, Ryu also enlisted himself to donate his kidney in exchange for finding a compatible one for his sister. It is quite obvious in this scene that Ryu feels the motive to make any kinds of sacrifices for his beloved sister. The devotion of Ryu could be interpreted to include double meanings. It is a feeling occurs between the two siblings depending on their love and gratitude for each other. And, also it helps to provide Ryu with the connotation of a devoted citizen portrait. The idea of sacrifice occurs as one of the background themes lying under the frequent symbolism of losing body parts during the struggles to protect or take the revenge of the beloved ones for the characters, which also reminds us of sacrifices made for the prosperity of modern Korean nation by its citizens. Park creates a critic of nationalism in the new democratic republic of Korea which undergoes dramatic changes with the effects of rapid globalization in its economy and democratization in the society. That is the reason why the director, Park, portrays Ryu as a loyal and devoted young man besides other definitive aspects. Before moving on to his actions, I would like to evaluate his positioning in social and private spaces. As a character, Ryu symbolizes a modern young working-class man who adapts himself to fulfill the requirements of the day despite his physical disabilities which he even sometimes uses as an advantage of his coping strategy.

We observe him first at the factory where he moves just like one of the machines around him. He has no social interaction, his movements are consecutive, and he moves according to the signal mechanisms of the factory such as whistles, announcements etc. Although this non-communicative working atmosphere effect other workers in the same way as we could observe from their communal movements, we see in the break-time scene at the factory that Ryu adopted the machine-like behavioral pattern more radically than the other workers. He does not even use his break time to get fresh air when the machines stop. He just stops with them. Another point Park makes obvious that Ryu does not need to use ear-

protection-muffs like others while working to protect his ears against the loud noise of the machines as he is already deaf. By making this obvious, Park also emphasizes his character's state of being which stands for a well-productive, lower-level member of society who has to turn even his physical disadvantages into a survival and adaptation kit to carry on his existence in a highly challenging working atmosphere. Moreover, the character adopts mechanical movements more than the social ones in his daily life which could be seen as an indicator that his lack in critical/judgmental approach towards the accepted order of life as well. Until his first extreme act, we observe him in a manner of complete obedience in fulfilling the requirements of the available conditions in his life.

Another important part of the factory scene is that we see Ryu and his counterpart, Dong-jin, the owner of the factory together for the first time. Their first interaction is also meaningful as it is in the form of an accidental slap by Dong-jin to Ryu's leg while passing by. This accidental slap is a foreshadowing, symbolic movement which stands for Dong-jin's unaware impact on Ryu's and also on other workers' lives while trying to keep his business going. We witness in the following scenes that his decisions and actions continue to result in devastation for the ones around him and cause them to act radically as a result. And one of these radical acts (Ryu & his girlfriend, Yeong-mi's kidnapping of his daughter) causes Dong-jin to become a part of the retaliation circle later on. Dong-jin, as a character stands for the newly fledged urban middle-class members who become effective representatives of liberal economic system in the country. Beside this socio-economic status, Dong-jin appears to be a man having his own struggles to be able to keep and enhance his existence in the society as well. His struggles become as critical as the others', and his state of existence becomes equally difficult as the narrative progresses.

Transitions between the work scenes and the other spatial scenes show us that the same mechanical mode of Ryu also continues in his social and private actions. He eats and rests in the same serial mode of movements without being affected by the noises or movements available around him. The visualization of these scenes also emphasizes similar meaning of being controlled by a greater force. The camera

shoots the factory scene from above, in bird's eye view. And while shooting the scenes at home, the camera zooms out to the whole building, then a modern view of the city covers the screen with the reflection of apartment blocks. Both visualizations provide the observer with the feeling of full acknowledgement about what goes on or the idea that similar things are going on in other parts of this partially common space for other people too, and all are visible now for the audience. Park repeats this holistic viewing of the city between various scenes in the movie. Through this holistic viewing of living under the watch of an authority, there is a creation of a panoptic atmosphere as a constructive mechanism of a disciplinary power defined by Foucault (see Taylor, 2014: p. 34).

“Foucault finds the “formula” for the generalization of the exercise of disciplinary power in Jeremy Bentham’s architectural plan for the model prison, *Panopticon*, published in 1791... He explains on Bentham’s behalf, “Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behavior must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used (Ibid:35).”

The implication of a power shaping space and the movements of people living in it accordingly, functions for the creation of ideal, more productive and less disobedient citizens in modern Korean society, not quite different from the western societies. These citizens, as far as we observe in the movie, intrude each other’s life in both public and private spaces. (Exposing to next door neighbors’ fights, being sexually seduced by a misconception of a screaming sound not because of pleasure but because of pain, getting an idea from a wall sticker in a public toilet...etc.)

Image Ch.1.2.1: Youngsters from next door masturbating with the screaming of Ryu’s sister not because of pleasure but because of pain. **Image Ch.1.2.2.:** Ryu following the organ mafia who he found out about from a sticker on a public toilet wall.



(HorrorDNA, 2010: <https://www.horrorDNA.com/movies/vengeance-trilogy>)

However, these constant intrusions result in unilateral exploitations of one's pain or weakness rather than creating common dialogue to sympathize each other's state. The cause of this unawareness for each other's state is again the design of the living spaces and the requirements of the society in which they live. They are separated in small individual areas and expected to get together in spaces where they can only be productive and obedient for their country. So, their awareness works for the common good only. And they remain unaware or indifferent to each other's personal state such as sufferings, conflicts or even joy. With their struggles and interactions, characters appear as the representatives of modern Korean society who pursue their lives by striving in their social and spatial surroundings to survive in a system that controls their reactions. In his theory of subjectivity, Foucault illustrates and provides support for his argument that subjectivity is a social, cultural and historical form rather than a pre-given "substance" that is outside of and therefore distinct from sociocultural norms and values (see Taylor, 2014: p. 6). Although it was expressed to describe the individuals in western societies, this perspective of Foucault finds its simulations in the characters of Dong-jin, Ryu, Yeong-Mi (Ryu's girlfriend who is an ardent supporter of anarchism) and Detective Ji (a representative of incapable security and justice system). Each of these characters act in modern society of Korea according to certain reflexes and behavioral models that they acquired through common or individual background experiences. This state of being brings the suspension of feelings alongside automatically as it leaves the characters with the inability of questioning/reasoning their conditions with keeping them busy constantly, shaping their environment in isolation and inventing more and more requirements for them to fulfill.

Moving from the design of the space to the narrative of the events, we observe that Ryu feels more and more disempowered against the continuous events of misfortune. First, we see his sister's doctor asking him to take his sister home until they find a compatible donor as staying at a hospital costs extra money that Ryu cannot pay. During their dialogue, the tone and the mimics of the doctor towards Ryu while explaining the situation are again quite indifferent just like the other

interactions occurred before. Right after this encounter though, we observe Ryu at a shanty gaming spot shooting a baseball hysterically to drain his anger in the following scene. This expression of anger shows that no matter how hard one tries to keep up with the systematic rules in order to survive and enhance his survival as a citizen of the society, his feelings rule over his movements when he feels a vital danger for himself or his beloved ones' existence. We can observe this in one of his explanations when the only interruption of his sequential moves occurs with the involvement of his sister. While observing him in a highly indifferent mode of reacting towards the defects of surrounding conditions, Ryu only reacts when his sister is disturbed by the noises of their fighting neighbors coming through their thin walls and couldn't sleep. He says 'The estate agent must have thought that living in this noisy apartment wouldn't be a problem for me, but I cannot sleep if my sister doesn't sleep.' His expression makes it clear that no matter how hard he tries to adapt himself to his physical and social conditions, it is his emotional conditions that breaks the harmony of his systematical existence. And his sister is the strongest triggering factor, as she is the most beloved one in his life. His lines about his irritation when his sister cannot sleep also bear a foreshadowing effect for the reason of his extreme deeds that follow.

When the challenges like bureaucratical procedures suspend his sister's recovery period and harsh financial policies cause him to lose his job at the factory add up, Ryu, concerning about his sister's survival, decides to turn to an illegal organ trafficking mafia to find a compatible kidney faster. The idea occurs in his mind when one of the intrusion scenes occur in the public toilet. When Ryu is at the toilet; first a cleaning lady appears as an intruder in a supposedly private atmosphere in a public area to rub out the stickers on the walls, then a couple of guys appear to stick the new ones right after the lady. Both parties symbolize constant shifts of intruders around the character. As he gets the idea of working with the illegal organ mafia from those stickers in the toilet, obviously the effect of intruders doesn't remain physical, but it becomes one of the leading factors to act on. Hoping to find a solution through an illegal community can be analyzed in two ways; on the one hand, it is a kind of a rebellious move that represents Ryu's

reaction to the legal systems creating only problematic solutions for him. On the other hand, the organ mafia could represent another agent that occurs as a result of the faults in the system. In this perspective, it stands as a representative of the current operative system and its malfunctioning constitutions such as; the hospital or the factory. Since Ryu not only loses his kidney but also loses the money to provide a healthy kidney for his sister in the end, the second inference is better to define the function of the illegal community. After being deceived by the organ mafia, Ryu and his girlfriend Yeong-mi become more radicalized in their acts.

Feeling that the risk of losing his beloved sister becoming more and more critical in every minute, Ryu starts to act more impulsive by following Yeong-mi's extremist ideas about reacting against the inequality of the system by kidnapping Dong-jin's daughter to get the money they need for the kidney transplant as a ransom. Until this point Ryu is portrayed as an obedient and a naïve citizen. He acts kindly towards needy people, he works hard, and he finds the most harmless way to drain his extreme feelings such as anger. At this point it is important to underline Yeong-mi's words about the situation. She convinces Ryu through her remarks of inequality between Ryu and his boss, Dong-jin. She says that Dong-jin's car costs the 10 year-salary of Ryu. Thanks to Yeong-mi's encouragement of her boyfriend, they have a constant effort to avoid the conventional label of kidnappers and negative connotations that accompany their actions. From that moment on we can observe their attempt to rationalize every line of logic that would make their reasons justifiable. In his comments on Spinoza, Ulus Baker questions seeking justice through this kind of actions. Baker explains the remark 'no good feelings could come out from a bad one' by giving the character of Othello as an example. In the play *The Tragedy of Othello* by William Shakespeare; Othello is portrayed in an ethical search to find out about the truth. His search does not end well for anyone in the end, and causes mostly devastation for Othello, himself. Baker points out that the feeling of jealousy lies under the origin of Othello's ethical search, and that's why even if his persona and his acts are defined in good connotations; they resolve in devastation, bringing no good for anyone (Baker, Youtube; 2017: Accessed November, 2019). Similarly, Yeong-mi and Ryu's efforts remain futile in the

following scenes when his sister finds out that Ryu has been lying to her and by feeling herself as a burden for him; she commits suicide. Her suicide both adds one more loss to the narrative and proves the futility of Ryu's efforts to obtain a gain through the action that cause the pain for the other. More importantly, the feeling lies beneath their action is anger. Anger; curved by systematic challenges to overcome, not having equal opportunities to pursue one's existence and constant irritation of intrusions in personal space, emerges as a strong catalyst to act accordingly. Ryu and Yeong-mi implicitly declare themselves as victimized members of an unequal system and hold on to their common anger against all the challenges preventing them from keeping Ryu's sister alive no matter the cost. Through their overall anger, they target Dong-jin to become the one that deserves to take part in their suffering and also capable of provide the money they need. With this rebellious step, they start the circle of a retaliation that includes various parties encountering in violent acts one way or another in the movie.

3. **Seizing and Losing Reason**

The characters choose to channel their anger towards another rather than taking the full responsibility of what they experience as individuals. In *Rhetoric*, Aristoteles suggests that '*it [the anger] must be felt*' towards an individual.

“Anger may be defined as an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or towards what concerns one's friends. If this is a proper definition of anger, it must always be felt towards some particular individual, e.g. Cleon, and not 'man' in general. It must be felt because the other has done or intended to do something to him or one of his friends. It must always be attended by a certain pleasure-that which arises from the expectation of revenge (Rhetoric by Aristotle, 2013: Accessed November, 2019: <http://www.bocc.ubi.pt/pag/Aristotle-rhetoric.pdf>).”

For Ryu it is questionable in the beginning if Dong-jin is an absolute object of the anger accumulated inside him. As he does not harm Ryu, himself or his sister

directly. Still though, Dong-jin becomes the symbolic persona, who is at an accessible position, combines the aspects of modern capitalist system in his socio-economic status. And, it does not take long for their actions to become reciprocating acts.

Until the kidnapping, we observe both of the characters act perfectly according to their roles in the society. In order to pursue their social and financial existence, they suspend their personal needs and emotions satisfied through these needs such as losing the peace and happiness at home with his daughter and wife for Dong-jin in order to keep up with the needs to survive his business or, for Ryu, despite sacrificing his future plans to support his sister's treatment on his own in a quite challenging socio-economic atmosphere, failing to provide her with healthier condition. As I mentioned above during their daily lives, we observe characters act in sequences alike with the machines around them. This adaptive behavioral model for obeying the conventions of the system indicates their suspension of their reason to question the quality/ aim of their actions while fulfilling the requirements of the day. So, we can conclude that these characters remained inexperienced in understanding and living in harmony with their emotions, consequently, with their reason to perceive the events happening around them as well. At this point, I need to turn to neo-Stoic perspective of Nussbaum in which emotions are accepted as 'intentional' and 'cognitive' forces rather than "unthinking movements". According to her, objects of our emotions determined through a cognitive process and targeting that object is an intentional movement both physically and mentally (Nussbaum, 2001). Anyhow, certain triggering factors, Ryu faced one way or another in the system, caused him to direct his fear and anger to certain individuals through his retributive actions in the end. Dong-jin follows similar steps in a more rapid transformation to act on his grief after he finds out about the death of his daughter. Considering that their impulsive moves occur as a consequence of their cognitive perceptions towards the current situations they find themselves in. I can say that both of them have justifiable reasons to react against the injustice they experienced through the entwined happenings. The questionable part of their reactions is the retributive face of their anger. And the futility of their persistent

actions in providing any satisfactory gain for themselves. To be able to comment on destructive violence taking over towards the end, I'm going to analyze each action taken by the characters and their following mutual results.

A. On the side of Ryu

As I mentioned above, Ryu is portrayed as a perfectly adapted and well-productive citizen in the system. When he encounters with a challenge hard to overcome and triggering strong emotions, he brilliantly suspends his reactions with great ignorance or drain his negative emotions through harmless actions such as hitting a baseball in the side street. In a way, he works hand in hand with the demands of the ruling system to oppress his emotions and thoughts as an independent individual. We never observe him questioning until his girlfriend Yeong-mi encourages him to do so. He breaks through the oppression of the system with the fear of losing his sister. Fear turns into anger as he keeps failing to find a solution for his sister. Anger comes out from various triggering factors targeting certain individuals in the form of a violent payback action resulting in the loss of actual reason.

Following the kidnapping, Park zooms out from the city and zoom back in to a playground which is located away from the city in nature. We see Ryu, Yeong-mi, Ryu's sister and Yu-sun (Dong-jin's kidnapped young daughter) singing and playing peacefully. This scene reflects a perfectly different atmosphere from the preceding scenes. It means that they fall away from the bitter reality of their act through the relief they find with their justification of hope for their action. Aristotle describes similar state of emotion in *Rhetoric* as the following;

“When people are feeling friendly and placable, they think one sort of thing; when they are feeling angry or hostile, they think either something totally different or the same thing with a different intensity [...] Again, if they are eager for, and have good hopes of, a thing that will be pleasant if it happens, they think that it certainly will happen and be good for them (Rhetoric by

Aristotle, 2013: Accessed November, 2019: <http://www.bocc.ubi.pt/pag/Aristotle-rhetoric.pdf>.”

Despite their positive perception of their acts, it is still important to remember though their original aim is to simply avenge for their misfortune, for the anger originated from various unfortunate situations they find themselves in, from Dong-jin. As in the following scenes, when Ryu's sister finds out by accident that her brother is hiding the truth of being dismissed from the work, feeling to be a burden for him because of her sickness, she kills herself. Her suicide proves the impotency of Ryu's efforts and futility of his positive hopes together with his lack of control over the flow of events even if he feels so. It also acts as the greatest catalyst for Ryu to lose his aim to act on. Although he continues to act with an accelerating harshness, he has no expectation which means a positive emotional motive of a pleasant result anymore. His motive changes from hope to the feeling of an unconditional revenge with the death of his beloved sister. From that moment on, the violence emerges with each move of Ryu in its most brutal form bearing an aim to just satisfy his feeling of revenge.

The trauma Ryu goes through when he discovers his sister's suicide is not only caused by a loss but also caused by the feeling of guilt about not being able to fulfill his aim to keep her alive. His feeling of guilt doubles with the sudden tragic death of young captive Yu-sun because of his own carelessness. During the burial scene by the lake, we see Ryu devastated and moving in a semi-conscious state by the effect of his great sorrow. He left Yu-sun in the car, and took her sister's death body to the other side of the lake to bury. There is another intruder in this scene. A mentally and physically handicapped man irritating Yu-sun while she is sleeping in the car. Yu-sun jumps into the lake and gets drowned while trying to reach Ryu. At the end of this scene, Ryu's look at the lifeless body of Yu-sun in shock interchanges with Dong-jin's look at it in great sorrow. With this scene on, Ryu's anger changes its phase. And both men lose themselves in their desire to take the revenge of their tragic losses. Park repeats his transformational reflecting of the two characters while showing the combined scenes either by making them complete each other's sentences or committing similar acts. We see Dong-jin completing

Ryu's answer using the same words to define his action while they are talking to different parties. Through this depiction, their positioning remains in two different dimensions; one of which is counter while the other is analogous.

Richard and Bernice Lazarus describe vengeance as 'one of the faces of anger which occurs through our impulse to cope with the damage to our ego by retaliating... And the mounting of plans for long-term revenge may motivate the acquisition of useful skills and generate impressive accomplishments (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994).' Ryu's first consciously violent attack is butchering the members of organ mafia family with a well-functioning plan and in cold blooded proficiency. We observe him preparing himself for his attack mentally and physically. His usage of baseball bat while knocking down the huge guys from the beginning of the scene signifies the changing size and phase of his anger from the beginning to that moment. His skills of fighting and especially in executing the deadly strokes are spectacular in the scene. Through the given portrayal of mafia members in implementing an illegal act at its most corrupted way, the audience could easily identify themselves with Ryu in terms of executing justice for the benefit of the society against criminals. The vengeful action serves its aim for both sides, for the avenger and for the audience, in providing satisfaction throughout the scene. Another reason for the feeling of satisfaction here is that Ryu left no parties alive to form a counter side of the retaliation, meaning this attack is the end of the cycle that started with losing his kidney. Park keeps pumping the irritation caused by the bloody vengeance with blood and gore enriched with each move of the characters on the screen. Also, he insists on pursuing the theme of retaliation by creating other cycles for his character to act on.

After seeing Ryu's capacity of executing violent acts, we see that his retaliating cycle is recreated with the murder of Yeong-mi by Dong-jin. Breaking through his deep sorrow as a father who lost his beloved young daughter; Dong-jin starts to track down his daughter's kidnappers. He haunts down Ryu's girlfriend and partner in crime, Yeong-mi by electrocuting her to death. We observe Dong-jin as calm and capable as Ryu in executing a violent act. As a result of his girlfriend's brutal death, Ryu starts a new haunt for Dong-jin to take the revenge of

his girlfriend without any hesitation, but this time Park does not give the closure easily for the sides. Corresponding to the further explanations as ‘an attack in retaliation leading perhaps to a counter attack, commonly results in resentment and provide a poor climate for problem solving (Ibid: 19).’ by Bernice and Richard Lazarus again. As pain and grief that are experienced by both sides are equally extreme after losing the beloved ones in their lives, their motivation and effort for retaliation are also equally intense when they start to target each other as the object of violence. With this change of the opponent, the feeling of sympathy which originates from the expectation of satisfaction through the acts of the sympathized character also disappears towards Ryu. He no longer stands for a character whose struggle is against the ‘guilty’ people contributing to injustice; instead he became a ‘guilty’ one by causing a death of an innocent child. We see both men trying to hunt down each other for a while in the movie. In this hunt though, Park gives his positioning hint about the counterparts through the words of detective while informing Dong-jin about Ryu’s slaughter. Detective makes the remark that the way Ryu killed the mafia is utterly brutal and inhumane. According to this description, Park gives us the hint that the position of Ryu becomes animalistic so Dong-jin becomes the one capable of hunting the savage down. And in the following scene, we observe their hunt resolves accordingly. Ryu becomes the object that will be sacrificed to feed Dong-jin’s vengeful anger in the fight that was started by Ryu, himself. The vicious nature of retributive act is reflected perfectly in this progression of plot. By pushing the logic of revenge to its breaking point, Park problematizes its vulgar ethics of retribution as an impossible aporia (see Choe, 2016: p. 31).

According to its perception in the field of psychology, the actual execution of revenge carries a bitter cost of time, emotional and physical energy and even lives (Jaffe, 2011). This destructive nature of revenge becomes perfectly visible in Park’s narrative. Ryu not only faces the loss of his sister but also with his own destruction as the price of another’s loss. Although I will analyze the results of Dong-jin’s retributive acts in the following part, I can say that his efforts also fall short of creating a solace for his loss. Park gives us the reasonable order of events to bring

out justifiable causes for their attachment to the feeling of revenge. However, he also refuses to glorify retributive acts by adopting a contradictory discourse instead. Revenge is one of the most popular and attractive themes of cinema through which it is easier to create satisfaction for the viewer. Unlike the perspective given in Park's trilogy, it is not uncommon to come across some films in which the feeling of revenge and the acts following it are presented and represented without being problematised. As a corresponding example for this, we may remember a current success of a biographical experimentation of a comic book character 'Joker'. In its current success, together with the remarkable talent of the performing actor, there is an obvious contribution of reflecting the character's breaking point as an act of revenge against the unfair and merciless transgressions of his past. In the movie the leading character, Joker, becomes the folk's hero by slaughtering and shooting the upper-class members of the society. Moreover, he is openly supported by crowds and followed ferociously as a result of his violent act considered as a mechanism of building justice in society. The satisfaction on the screen easily felt by its audiences and created a blockbusting results at the cinemas. Whereas, we see Ryu alone after his extremist act of killing. The critic of his action continues with the comment of detective on it as an inhumane act. Finally, with the defeat by his opponent and become a victim instead of an executer in the end clearly function as the opposite of what happens in the movie *Joker*.

The character of Ryu symbolizes the dull nature of revenge in providing a satisfactory result. Each move of the character causes death or destructions for the others around him, but brings him no victory or relief in return.

B. On the side of Dong-jin

Considering Dong-jin as another representation of Park's distinctive critic of revenge, it requires to pay extra attention to his words before he executes Ryu. After he traps Ryu down, he ties him up and brings him back to the lake in which his daughter is drown due to Ryu's neglectfulness. Everything is set perfectly in the scene for a brilliantly plotted revenge. The tension is at its peak as not only the

audience but also both of the characters are aware of each other's capability of executing violence. Then an unexpected hesitation looms in Dong-jin's movements towards Ryu who is now trembling with fear in front of his potential killer. At this moment, Park introduces us with an alternative by squeezing compassion and forgiveness in through a slight hesitation of Dong-jin into the screen. Yet, incoherently persistent nature of revenge takes over again with Dong-jin's words and he continues as; *'I know you're a good person; therefore, you understand why I'm going to kill you.'* then by cutting his Achilles tendons; he ensures Ryu, standing in the water with his hands tied up, to be drowned struggling just like his daughter, Yu-sun, did. The execution of this retributive act results in an equivalent payoff before Dong-jin even leaves the lake by, presumably, the members of Yeong-mi's anarchist group. The persistence of the characters in executing their vengeful acts finds its response not as getting even with their opponents but as the destruction of both sides. Again, we observe a close plan shooting and slowly progressing action on the screen. The way Park conveys the violence through vengeful moves on the screen openly aims to irritate the viewers. Perpetual reflections of vengeful violence on the screen sweeps all the chances for the characters to be able to reach a closure or feel any kind of peace. Choosing to create irritation rather than pleasure of gaining victory over others has become Park's characteristic technique for his criticism of revenge on the screen which is valid for each piece of his trilogy.

Just like Ryu, Dong-jin is also reflected in an existence perfectly matching with the *zeitgeist*. His engagement in the success and the profit of his factory becomes meaningless after his great loss. Until that moment though, we are presented that he was resistant to emotional irritations as he already sacrificed his marriage and witnessed the pathetic situations of his loyal employees because of the harsh working environment and sudden dismissals (Mr, Paeng's carving up of his chest in front of Dong-jin and his friends after being dismissed from his job at the factory while he and his family in desperate need of the salary he got). None of these tragedies has a stimulating effect on Dong-jin. Apparently, his devotion to keep the prosperity of his business prevailed each time. Nevertheless, even knowing that his daughter is in danger made his transformation to begin because of the

traumatic effect of losing someone precious for him. By creating parallelism between the feelings and experiences of the two opponents Park presents the unjustifiable nature of retributive violence as the audience cannot feel the direct hostility to any of them. In Dong-jin's part; when he finds out that his daughter is kidnapped, his indifferent manner to the tragedies happening around or in his life has to change. Because this time he is facing with a direct threat to his beloved one. His attitude towards this threat at the beginning is not in the form of retribution; similar to Ryu's primary aim which was purely helping his beloved sister to heal, Dong-jin's attitude was more positive and in the form of hope to bring her daughter back at home at any cost. His hope keeps him away from the state of anger or despair in this phase. As he is hopeful to be able to correct this with his personal effort, we see him following Yeong-mi and Ryu's directions with no hesitation. He does not involve the police in the situation either. After handing the money at a park though, he gets tied up to a lamp post with a bag on his head and becomes completely disempowered against the awaiting tragedy. As in the following scene we see Ryu discovering his sister's suicide and experiencing great depression that will cause him to conclude the action of kidnapping with an accidental death which will bring the end of Dong-jin's hopeful state. So, we see Dong-jin at the crime scene completely devastated by the tragic death of his daughter. At this moment on, his hope disappears and leaves the stage to his great devastation and anger against the ones that caused Yu-sun's death. In the book, *Passion and Reason*, relief is described as 'reversal of the tension and the absence of any need for action' (see Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994: p. 69). For Dong-jin, what happens is just the opposite of relief.

In the following scenes, first we observe him joining the autopsy then the funeral. In neither of them he openly expresses any states of emotion such as crying bitterly like his wife does or expressing his grief verbally. His silence is followed by numbness most probably meaning that it is not possible for him to cope with the bitter truth. With all these, the state Dong-jin is in could be described as a kind of a denial to his irrevocable loss which is not considered as a healthy way to dealing great losses. Considering his delusional scene when Dong-jin hugs and talks to the

image of his deceased daughter; and hear Yu-sun expostulates him about not getting her to take swimming courses. It is obvious that, part of his denial and anger comes from his own feeling of responsibility and consequently guilt towards the happening. His feelings of guilt and desperation for what happened enthrall him to act on a compensation for his loss. This feeling of need to act concurrently prevents him from grieving over his loss in a healthier manner to be able to acknowledge its reality in time, and instead turns his journey into the one which is experienced through despair. The feeling of vengeance occurs at such a state of despair. Coinciding with Ryu again Dong-jin doesn't lose time to act on his loss by following the offenders, Ryu and Yeong-mi.

First, we witness his execution of Yeong-mi after interrogating by electrocuting her cold bloodedly. During the scene, we observe Dong-jin finding out about the friendly and compassionate attitudes of the kidnappers towards his daughter from the photos he found in Yeong-mi's wall. This discovery and Yeong-mi's own confession about their harmless intentions at the beginning and their regret about the result remain futile to stop him; just like his awareness of Ryu's naïve nature will remain ineffective in his following execution. Dong-jin tortures and murders Yeong-mi in great calmness, and express no sign of hesitation or regret in the end. Before Yeong-mi dies, Park adds one of this character's foreshadowing lines. Throughout the movie, Yeong-mi as a representative of anarchism bears the mission of creating awareness about the awaiting chaos or cruelty with her words. She again warns Dong-jin about her anarchist fellows who would take her revenge if anything happens to her. This warning again stands for a destructive result awaiting at the end of appearing retributive violence. As mentioned above he continues his hunt for Ryu and fulfills his execution in the same manner of persistent proficiency. And it does not take so long before Yeong-mi's quite far-fetched foresight proves itself to be true as above-mentioned scene of Dong-jin's falling as a victim to Yeong-mi's anarchist group.

4. Sympathizing with the '*Foolish*' Nature of Retributive Violence

The word 'sympathy', used in the title and as a concept expected to be felt by the audience throughout the narrative, does not indicate a manner to create identification with a specific character in the movie. It is used in favor of creating a perception for the overall plot and the message valid through the narrative of each character's story.

One technique to prove this theory is the parallelism that Park created by reflecting each main character's story with all aspects. The feeling of sympathy is reestablished on the side of the audience with the progress of each story introduced through different characterizations. Meaning while the audience might sympathize with Dong-jin as a father trying to rescue his daughter, they could also sympathize with Ryu who pushes the limits of his potential to keep his sister alive. And as the observer of characters' brutal actions given uncensored, the audience also may look at them from a criticizing distance. This interchanging nature of the sympathy also functions as a barrier to construct a full identification with one of the characters. By building this interchanging cycle of sympathy, the creator (the director) tries to keep the audience, more precisely the feeling and understanding of the audience, in a distance to the violent acts of vengeance on the screen. He clearly avoids from creating a satisfactory feeling resulting from the execution of retaliating acts. As a result, sympathy carries out its empathetical nature towards the '*foolishness of getting even*' (see Choe, 2016: p. 29)' with the destruction that the retributive violence brings for nearly all the characters involved in the circle of retaliatory violence in the narrative. As mentioned at the beginning while not taking a specific character as a protagonist for his story, he also gives his message in a reverse manner of the title's implication. The 'sympathy' is expected to be felt towards the message to the audience themselves, not to a specific characterization (not *to a Mr.*). Corresponding to this aim, neither Ryu nor Dong-jin could experience a heroic moment by all means despite their tragic stories and persistent efforts. Park wanted to reflect them not as heroes but more as losers because of their tendency of taking retributive actions in dealing with their emotions towards the adversities of life. As

a director and the creator of the movie, he aims at delivering a sincere message through his story which at the same time stands as a challenge for the popular counterparts praising the satisfactory essence of retributive violence. He successfully proves his claim in the end by presenting the following results of violent executions.

CHAPTER II: 'OLDBOY'

In an online Korean magazine, it is written that according to a famous tale, Park only seriously resolved to become a filmmaker upon watching Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo," and he was reluctant to watch it twice for fear of shattering those initial, overwhelming feelings the movie had evoked in him (Korea Herald, 2018). The sharp and unforgettable nature of the scenes he created in his movies is obviously the reflection of this fondness. He uses this striking cinematic language to convey his message more effectively on the screen. *Oldboy*, the second movie of his trilogy, owes its international success to its unique presentation of a new Korean cinema as a third arm of 'hallyu' (Roll, 2020)¹. Conflicting with all the other naïve representations of Korean culture such as K-soaps or K-pop on an international scene; *Oldboy* reached out to the world as a part of a new auteur cinema whose challenging perspective of shattering taboos both in context and in its cinematic techniques were embraced by western audience. This piece of his trilogy is sharing the same message with the other two pieces about the unrealistic reflections of the satisfaction/climax on the screen that claimed to be experienced as a direct result of the execution of reciprocal violence. Yet, in this one, Park also digs deeper under the surface of the modern image of Korea to reach its subconscious through an evolution of a middle-aged office worker Oh Dae-su into a dehumanized, mechanical, revenge-seeking warrior.

¹ "Hallyu is a Chinese term which, when translated, literally means "Korean Wave". It is a collective term used to refer to the phenomenal growth of Korean culture and popular culture encompassing everything from music, movies, drama to online games and Korean cuisine just to name a few." Accessed 26 September 2020: <https://martinroll.com/resources/articles/asia/korean-wave-hallyu-the-rise-of-koreas-cultural-economy-pop-culture/>

This piece starts with a sudden imprisonment of seemingly simple middle-aged man who is portrayed as an ordinary family guy finding relief in alcohol. His eccentric imprisonment in a room with just a TV and a bed lasts fifteen years. And during this part his situation gives away no more than a growing victimizing from a petty state to a heartbreaking misery with his wife's murder for which he is framed on TV and his yearning to see his daughter given away to a Swedish family. Oh Dae-su's struggle to escape turns into an unbendable ambition for revenge during the years. We observe him turning himself into a fully equipped revenge mechanism with the help of the small TV in his captive room which stands as his only 'gadget' to utilize for salvation. After fifteen years, his release comes as sudden as his imprisonment did. While the initial set-up of Oh Dae-su being imprisoned for so long, framed for his wife's murder and separated from his daughter for fifteen years without a cause seems like the obvious premise, the more interesting and underlying question of his release proves to be the catalytic event for the narrative's true examination of revenge for both Oh Dae-su and his captor (Criticism by Nick Yarborough, 2015). After his release, he wastes no time to find the perpetrator by hunting down a few clues made available to him during his imprisonment. At this point, it is reasonable to assume that the clues Oh Dae-su follows with great motivation are made available by omniscient hands as our protagonist obviously has no control of events. While following the tracks, he also falls in love with a young woman who is a sushi chef at a restaurant to give him an alive octopus to consume upon his release. Eating an octopus alive is one of the most climactic scenes of Park's cinematic mastery as it means the very moment that the character feels alive again, like a reborn, and he is reborn with a new love and an unbendable passion for his retaliation too. The young girl's name is Mi-do. From this moment on, the first layer of the story gets loose, and we find Oh Dae-su getting involved in another story of victimizing with the plotting activated by his captor outside the cell this time.

Not long after, Oh Dae-su discovers that a man named Woo-jin is responsible for his fifteen-year-imprisonment. He is a man that once attended the same high school as Oh Dae-su, and a man whom Oh Dae-su caught having an incestuous

affair with his sister. Then in those years, Oh Dae-su retold the scene he witnessed to the entire school—causing feelings of shame for Woo-jin and his sister that ended up with the latter's committing suicide. In his article 'Love Your Enemies', Steve Choe comments on vengeance as a feeling that requires a past transgression (see Choe, 2009: p. 29). Causing the death of his beloved sister, Oh Dae-su becomes the target of Woo-jin's lifelong revenge plot. This revenge cycle between the two reaches a climactic confrontation when Woo-jin finally exposes the truth of his elaborate revenge plan against Oh Dae-su. Mi-do is revealed to be a calculated manipulation as well. In consequence of bringing the two together with a love affair, Woo-jin created a replication of his sister over Mi-do in the plot which he created for Oh Dae-su—as Mi-do is actually Oh Dae-su's daughter.

For imposing his own trauma on his rival, Woo-jin has dedicated his plan for replicating the experience upon Oh Dae-su—to lead catastrophic and horrifying results for his opponent. Having achieved his *coup de grace*, nothing left for him to live for, and Woo-jin commits suicide with a bullet to the head. In his studies on vengeful acts, one of the theories Gollwitzer has put forward is the 'understanding hypothesis'. According to that, an offender's suffering is not enough to satisfy the revenge holder. Just like we observe in Woo-jin's plan and his resolution, the avenger must be assured that the offender should make a direct connection between the retaliation and the initial behavior according to the 'understanding hypothesis' (see Gollwitzer & Schmitt, 2011: p. 367). Through this functioning revenge narration, Park actually creates one of his brilliant avenger portraits. Through the embodiment of Woo-jin, he puts forward a powerful authority figure of modern times. He has the absolute capability of utilizing the advantages of the era in every way from transforming his own body to live on an artificial heart (in this way he achieves a quality of a cyborg which again one of the most relevant transformations made available in post-modern era through which I mean the changing form of human bodies and their physical capabilities today) to manipulating his victim for years to submit his desires. However, it is still controversial to define his depiction for the act of retaliation as praiseworthy when considering that Park attributes this to a character who is portrayed as an antagonist. Park, unlike his previous piece,

this time does not give a comprehensive picture for each side of the story. And even though we could observe a seemingly satisfactory moment for Woo-jin; his vengeful act remains unappealing for the audience and also deficient for himself to have a closure in order to continue his life or regain peace. So, he shares the common failure of being trapped in revenge psychology that would last and cost lifelong payments. Just like for all the leading characters that we observe in the first piece of the trilogy. Woo-jin ends his own life without showing any trace of forgiveness for his counterpart instead leaving Oh Dae-su with the utmost dilemma of his life: choosing an incestuous love by hiding the truth from his daughter and even from himself through hypnosis or saving himself and his daughter from this incestuous intimacy by facing the truth for the cost of losing her.

Once more it is an obvious theme that a revenge cycle built upon the two men brings them to the extremities of human nature. Park uses varied methods of the same motivation to display the different ways that revenge may infest the mind and change a person's psychology—whether through Woo-jin's ridiculously complicated plan taking over decades or through Oh Dae-su's almost animalistic, instinctual drive that reigns his extraordinary performance in destroying his enemies in the most brutal ways for the sake of reaching the actual target of his vengeful anger. Depending on these facts; it seems that both men are only capable of satisfying the base feeling (revenge) infested their heart at the cost of sacrificing all those other emotions that compose their humanity. In order to reveal more about the critique of revenge, I am going to analyze the narration of each side in detail. I believe that the creator's aim is to deliver a critic rather than an appraisal for the idea of revenge through violent acts which challenges most of its western cinematic counterparts in its message. Following that with a brief overlook to the viewers' perspective on national and international arena, we can understand that the director actually achieves an unusual way of building a bond between the characters and the audience as well through this second piece of his trilogy.

1. Irrevocable Logic of Revenge – Woo-jin & Oh Dae-su While Chasing the Unprocurable Justice

While defining the extremities on the screen, David Andrews notes the ‘downbeat materials’ as “mental cruelty and abuse; misogyny and rape; violence and torture; substance abuse and sex addiction: carnage and gore...profanity, pedophilia, incest, and bestiality [...] and existential despair (see Mattias, 2016: p. 2).” Including abovementioned themes in a way that would shock or even irritate viewers rather than creating an appealing content for them is seen as one of the most prominent features of *extreme cinema*. So, combining taboo-breaking concepts, and creating a transgressive narration leading an experimental reciprocation from the spectator does not fall far from the effect that vengeance trilogy achieves through its visual and contextual narratives. As the leading character of the story, Oh Dae-su is portrayed with this approach. There are obvious taboo-breaking themes in the character’s portrayal such as eating a live animal (eating an octopus alive at a sushi restaurant short after his release), torturing and killing people in a machinery manner without exhibiting any empathy or feelings, or involving in incestuous coupling with his daughter. Each of these extreme actions occurs after Oh Dae-su’s captivity in the story.

Before his long-term captivity starts, we see Oh Dae-su at a police station; apparently, having caused a disturbance and posing menace for public. Despite all his unruly manners and libelous language, police set him free. Similar to *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, here again we observe a passive profile of the police force which is not taken as a central figure to abuse authoritative power in dramatization of events. As in the modern era authority and power transferred more to individuals than the organizations, the representatives swap places accordingly in the narrative. Right after his release Oh Dae-su is taken into an anonymous captivity. The reason and the duration of his captivity remained indefinite until the moment of release. Park limits the anger and the growing desire of vengeance into a personal realm

rather than placing them directly to the social arena in his post-modern tale.² And the concept of space and time also become unknowable (anonymous) in the movie through the description of spaces such as a single room, a sushi bar (sushi bar with an emblem of a dragon is something so common in modern Asian cities or even all over the world now) or a penthouse with smart technology. Also, uncertainty of the time is given through the clocks repeatedly appear without any notice of the dates on the screen. Although there are certain tracks about the periods considering the progress of the story; the attitude of the police, for example, is not realistic for the years the event is supposed to take place. As the scene at the police station belongs to the previous period of his 15-year-long captivity at the beginning of 2000s, the police act in a manner conflicting with the period it is portrayed in. The act of releasing the offender without any punishment despite his aggressive manners could hardly be an attitude of late 80s and early 90s which were the years before such institutions adopted regulations in accordance with human rights. This indefiniteness in the narration of the time and space gives the story a quality of autonomy in creating its message that is detached from any definite period or place, and narrated in personal realms valid for a more contemporary and universal message to convey instead.

Observing the room which functions as a cell has a bed, a small television, and a kind of a food delivery service for fried dumplings that is served each day. With the basic look of the atmosphere and seeing the captive Oh Dae-su eating,

² The term 'post-modern' is used in the chapter in accordance with the meaning given by Kyung Hyun Kim in his article called '*Tell the Kitchen That There's Too Much Buchu in the Dumpling*' (2009). In the article, while depicting the nature of events and their relations in the scope of time and space; Kim points out that 'in the three films of Park Chan-wook's "revenge" trilogy, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002), *Oldboy* (2003) and *Lady Vengeance* (2005), one can trace the emergence of "postmodern" attitude that takes up not only the point of view that the grand ideologies (humanism, democracy, socialism, etc.) are faltering, if not entirely dissipated, but also a belief that the image is merely just that: an image. Image here is that which is not an impression of reality, but a perception of matter that approximates the verisimilitudes of both space and time that may not have anything to do with reality.' Following the perspective, I also used the term 'post' here as a prefix which is not in the meaning of 'after' or 'following' what is 'modern' but instead in the meaning of 'independent or free from it' or even 'irrelevant' from the term it is followed by.

watching TV, masturbating, sleeping (although by inhaling the hypnotic gas that puts him to sleep) and determinedly training his body; one can assume that there occurs a representation of a microcosm of the life outside. In this way, Park Chan-wook takes his story from a seemingly realistic public scene to an isolated microcosm that may allow the character and the audience to meet at an anonymous time and place and create a subversive atmosphere in which characters are pushing the limits of their capabilities while conveying the striking message of the narrative. A single room including basic furniture for one person such as a bed to sleep in, a table to eat at and a contemporary entertaining machine/technology such as the TV set reminds us of isolated living spaces for the individuals of modern societies who could end up suffering from psychic fragmentations as a result of being disconnected more and more from the outside reality. I can say that although Park forms his characters away from realistic flow and space mostly, he manages to emphasize fundamental areas of commonness owned by the counter sides of the screen (targeting the viewers' own inner conflicts). In other words, he achieves to polish and reflect his criticism for the defects that modern individuals suffer the most through his characters' states of being. Through this perspective, we can assume that the director touches the theme of 'Panopticon' by Foucault that I mentioned in the 1st chapter while describing the effect of physical space on private and public structure of relations. Describing the small isolated living spaces like the apartment blocks in *the Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* or the captivity room in *Oldboy*, Park introduces us the control of a greater force of the social system which finds its existence inside our private spaces; inside us through physical and systematical designs. And that's may be the reason why the director sharpens his perspective by portraying the institutions and their members as passive forces in the narrative for disciplining and manipulating the characters.

Not being able to understand or find out about the reason of his captivity both increases the effect of Oh Dae-su's victimization and curves the feeling of revenge grown out of his anger to his mysterious captor. Together with his further plans of retaliation, Oh Dae-su vigorously plots his escape through a hole he has been carving for probably years with the tip of a spoon that he stole from the food-

delivery tray. However, the release arrives as unexpectedly as his captivity did. After a hypnotic sleep, he wakes up at the top of a building; visibly, as a different person. When he wakes up on the top of a building, Oh Dae-su is nicely dressed in a sharp suit and has a wallet full of cash and a mobile phone in his pocket. One of the themes frequently occur in all three movies is definitely commodification of human body. Just like we observe the theme through the organ trafficking, amputation or blood and gore covered scenes in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, it occurs through the modification of human body achieved by Oh Dae-su or extracting teeth of Mr. Park as the means of negotiation for tracking down Woo-jin. Commodification of human body is a way to imply the manipulatable nature of human beings when confronted with dominating circumstances. Right after setting him free, his captor Woo-jin calls Oh Dae-su to offer a deal for which he gives him five days to discover the reason for his captivity. If he manages to do that Woo-jin will kill himself; but if he fails, Woo-jin tells him that he is going to kill everybody he loves. This move makes the great manipulation that reigns over Oh Dae-su throughout the story obvious for the viewers. However, the manipulated protagonist with no hesitation, desperately starts his predestined journey of retaliation.

He was no longer a messed-up family man who finds it hard to feel devoted to anything. This new man obviously evolved into a devoted fighting machine in search of vengeance for his stolen family and fifteen years of life-time. Having spent all those years alone in his cell training himself in martial arts and growing an adamant desire for revenge; he now became a super-warrior who lacks any basic emotions. He starts to speak in a concise language that is out of past or future usages. Erasure of tenses and skinning out of emotions provides him with a kind of a ubiquity, a god-like feature. The catalyst effect of anger and its following feeling of vengeance for the execution of limitless violence becomes obvious again in personal realm depending on unfair sufferings. Although he is victimized under an unreasonable captivity until this point, from the point of his release on, he starts to act like a hunter or an executer searching for his target of attack who is '*the responsible other*' of all the suffering.

Oh Dae-su visits a sushi bar in a restaurant called *Jjunhae* upon his release as the first place. There he asks for something alive to eat. And, the young female sushi chef Mi-do serves him a live octopus. Eating a live octopus in one piece is one of the most spectacular taboo-breaking scenes of the movie. Even if eating an animal alive is not exactly a taboo in Asian culture, it definitely is an extraordinary action in the global scene for many cultures. And the way Oh Dae-su chews and swallows the animal; brilliantly evokes the vision of a savage man on the screen for the audience from all kinds of cultures. With this shocking remark, it is obvious that now he accommodates two identities. One of them is a mechanic super-warrior equipped financially and technologically wearing a suit and acting in great coordination to execute his power on others to reach a salvation in hunting down his captor. The other is a savage man who is ready to take extreme actions to feel alive. As a result of his fragmented identities, Oh Dae-su commits series of taboo-breaking acts during the movie. Such as extracting Mr. Park's teeth (Mr. Park is the owner of the building where he was captivated) mercilessly with a claw hammer while interrogating him about the identity of his captor(s), fighting and defeating a number of men with just a hammer like a robot fighter then showing no sign of pain despite being stabbed and wounded seriously...etc. His relation with Mi-do also is revealed as the extremist act of breaking taboos because of its hidden nature.

After Oh Dae-su uncovers the truth about his captivity with the help of Mi-do who becomes the only person for him to trust and love; it is revealed both for the character and for the audience that everything he has gone through caused by a past transgression that he committed as a high-school student. His captor and torturer Woo-jin actually is just another sufferer who devoted his all energy and capabilities in life for taking the revenge of his sister's suicide caused by the humiliation she felt for the rumor of incest spread by Oh Dae-su at school. In order to avenge the loss of his love, Woo-jin as a fully equipped representative of modern capitalist era utilize media communication technology and cybernetic technology in manipulating the ordinary office worker Oh Dae-su for his elaborately plotted revenge scenario (see Jung, 2010: p. 143). He watches over his captive through surveillance cameras and recorded all his movements during all those years of

captivity. This allows him to gain an omniscient control. He reshapes his captive identity by distorting Oh Dae-su's perception of reality and manipulating his reactions to retaliation during and after the captivity. He could even interfere when Oh Dae-su tried to commit suicide thanks to the technological superiority he holds. (As he could see the suicide attempt through the recording, he was able to stop him through spraying anesthetic gas into Oh Dae-su's room and inactivate his actions.) Surrounded with all kinds of technological adequacy, Woo-jin's close pursuit of his enemy continues after the release. He used a bug placed in his shoes giving out a real-time sound transmission of Oh Dae-su's actions to track him wherever he goes, and the most striking one is the post-hypnotic signals Woo-jin sends through the mobile phone to command Oh Dae-su's actions. We see Woo-jin even controlling when and with whom Oh Dae-su falls in love thanks to these mechanisms. Woo-jin's great manipulation over the flow of the events that Oh Dae-su goes through makes Oh Dae-su a "Kafkaesque hero who rages against fate, and who acts in such a great violence that it becomes transgressive (Ibid: 143)."

Enacting Oh Dae-su like a puppet to follow each sign that was formed deliberately for him, Woo-jin finally faces with his enemy at his high-tech design stylish penthouse. In this scene, Woo-jin reveals each step of his highly sophisticated plan to Oh Dae-su, and he achieves his *coup de grace* through the revelation of the incestuous bond between Oh Dae-su and Mi-do. Before Oh Dae-su finds out about this biggest trap of his counterpart, he exerts to force Woo-jin to submit his rashness. It is obvious that at the beginning of this confrontation Oh Dae-su is still the ready-to-go mechanism of revenge to act in accordance with his limitless anger and a heart seeking solace in revenge. When Woo-jin counter attacks with the threat of revealing the bitter truth to Mi-do though Oh Dae-su submitted to his rival in the most painful way by cutting off his own tongue as a compensation of his past guilt and as a sacrifice for a future forgiveness.

The fulfillment of satisfaction for Woo-jin occurs in accordance with Gollwitzer's theories in the psychology of revenge. According to his first theory called 'comparative suffering', means witnessing the suffering of the offender 'restores an emotional balance to the universe' for the avenger (Jaffe, 2011). In the

movie, Woo-jin provides this kind of satisfaction for himself repeatedly during his watch of desperate Oh Dae-su under captivity through cameras and the recordings. Also, in the encounter scene we observe Woo-jin in the mood of great content. The most triumphant moment of Woo-jin's satisfaction in accordance with 'comparative suffering' theory can be observed at the moment of Oh Dae-su's painful sacrifice of his own tongue. Woo-jin is seen covering his mouth with a napkin as if he was disgusted or hardly bearing the level of violence, yet it turns out to be his joyful laugh that is hidden behind his napkin. Manipulating Oh Dae-su and Mi-do to fall in love and become parts of incestuous relationship clearly corresponds with the second theory of Gollwitzer. The 'understanding hypothesis' does not confine itself to watch the suffering of offender, but to make the offender to build a direct connection between the retaliation and the initial act (Ibid).

Lee Woo-jin's perfect acquiring of his revenge makes him the prosecutor of his own justice. And at this point it wouldn't be too much to expect a sign of a satisfactory closure for the avenger himself. Yet, surprisingly the scene ends up with his suicide rather than a satisfactory closure that could take place for a better new beginning for him. Also, considering that his character functions as a torturer to be avenged by Oh Dae-su, it becomes quite unusual that he ends up as the one experiencing his catharsis perfectly at the end of the encounter scene in a way leaving the sufferer with repentance and despair. It is a reverse narration of revenge resolution in a movie. As a part of his critic, Park doesn't attribute the ability to reach a satisfaction through vengeance to the protagonist. Instead, he depicts the cathartic moments experienced by the antagonist of the movie. Yet again, Woo-jin's victory of revenge cannot be considered as an appraisal for the act of retaliation by Park because the character ends up committing suicide with a bullet to the head few minutes after his catastrophic moment.

There is a visible parallelism between the encountering scenes of *Oldboy* and *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*. There seems no possibility of expected forgiveness from the prevailing parties at the end of the reciprocal struggle for revenge. We see both Ryu and Oh Dae-su on their knees begging for mercy during the final encountering scenes in the movies. However, Dong-jin despite indicating he has

discovered that his rival is not a bad man, carries his ritual of revenge till the end and kills Ryu at the end of the first movie. Just like this attitude towards the execution of the vengeful act, Woo-jin shows no mercy for Oh Dae-su even after his brutal sacrifice. These interpretations of absolute executions invoke the idea that for both parties there is no way to follow other than carrying out the revenge till the end in their lives. We can see the same urge in Ryu's and Oh Dae-su's actions as well. None of them hesitated to take the path of revenge throughout the narratives after the minute they are included in their own revenge cycles. Their lives are meant to be depleted for retaliation. And if the characters of the narratives are not dead on the screen, they surely become depleted or voided by their urge for revenge in the end. In the cases of Oh Dae-su and Ryu, they started as the victims of cruelty, poverty or despair. Yet, even if they discover that they have caused deaths of others as well; they don't stop chasing their rivals to make them pay despite the possibilities of causing more harm.

What Park puts forward through his characters' final desperations in both of the beforementioned movies is obviously a reverse perspective of many other cinematic narrations. Such as western, thrillers and melodramas in which the leading character reaches a cathartic moment by bringing his enemies to their knees and get them pay for their sins. The idea of restoring justice is used to fascinate the audience and give them a perfect imagination of a just world rather than uncovering more realistic consequences of retaliation for the individuals. In the movies, the narrations of Woo-jin and Dong-jin as the characters that manage to execute their vengeful acts till the end do not provide them with a chance to a new beginning of a better life or at least a long-lasting satisfaction. Woo-jin kills himself right after his retributive victory and Dong-jin becomes a target of another vengeful assassination as a result of his own vengeful act. So, despite certain short-time offerings that are scientifically accepted in the studies about revenge psychology such as Gollwitzer's, there is also other side of consequences following the venting retributive violence to a transgressor.

In the study *'The Paradoxical Consequence of Revenge'* conducted by Kevin M. Carlsmith, Daniel T. Gilbert and Timothy T. Wilson; it is verified that in the

relation between the belief about venting aggression to an object in order to relieve the tension accumulated inside would not be as effective as it was predicted in theory. In their example, the subsequent aggression for the designated object only caused the avengers to experience more anger at the end of the experiment rather than reducing it. As a result of that, as long as someone or something is taken as an offender to be avenged; although a punisher could experience a cathartic effect of his action to some level, there would be no decrease in the level of aggression or a chance to reach a closure in the end. Park brings this realistic perspective brilliantly to the light with his dauntless narration. That's why even if his characters are mastering extreme abilities in every way that could make their revenge possible against their targeted enemies, none of them can manage to leave the screen in an absolute victory unlike similar series from the western cinema on the same themes such as *Kill Bill Volumes 1 & 2* by Quentin Tarantino or *Desperado* by Robert Rodriguez. Park ensures his main message about the destructive nature of retaliation reaching extreme executions of violence to one another by carrying the states of his characters one step further from the moment following the vengeful punishments.

Despite this critical difference of the main message reflected in the perception of the themes, Park's trilogy managed to gain a cult status internationally among other disaccording examples of the kind. That has two main reasons obviously; using extreme blood and gore screening with brilliant cinematic techniques and designing the protagonist to grasp spectators' interest both in and outside of his country.

2. Oh Dae-su: A Cool Warrior or An Undignified Survivor

The techniques and the narration that Park deploys for his second piece of the Vengeance Trilogy made him to be categorized among the pioneers of *extreme Asian thrillers* on the international stage (Peirse & Martin, 2013: p. 193). In his book *Korean Masculinity and Transcultural Consumption* Sun Jung verifies that in 2006, *Oldboy* was ranked 118th among *IMDB.com*'s top 250 films. The movie also

gained a new cult status after it was awarded the Grand Prix with the accompanying praise of Quentin Tarantino at Cannes International Film Festival in 2004. It wouldn't be wrong to say that the movie owes this high international interest to a quite striking portrayal of its protagonist, Oh Dae-su. There are similar extremities in the presentation of the taboo-breaking themes by the same creator for the first movie, but it was the second one which carried the trilogy to the high interest level on the international stage.

Oh Dae-su obviously falls in a different category from the portrayals of heroes who ensures justice for themselves or for others with their unquestionable victories or at least manage to overcome their lacks or compensate their past mistakes to make a bright new beginning possible in life. Yet, he is still seen as one of the most impressive characters among local and international viewers interpreted from the fan web pages or the from the box office numbers (Wada-Marciano & Choi, 2009). Supposedly not because there occurred a full identification on the side of the audience with the protagonist, but most probably because there have been certain manifestations of the character to feed the viewers' appetite. Sun Jung analyzes the audience fandom under two main reasons including "totally savage but cool" construction of the character. The words 'totally savage' and 'cool' represent different qualities for the appeal of audiences. Savageness of the character definitely fits with postmodern commodification of Otherness (could be considered as an implicit Orientalist notion) as it is stated in Jung's text. Blending this submissive attraction with modern day masculinity of 'cool' man in terms of demonstrating isolation (detachment from home and family; from any kind of domesticity describing 'maternal love'- loneliness) and transgression opens way for the audience to appraise their desires through this characterization of contemporary Asian man. In their commentaries on various online platforms viewers compare Oh Dae-su with Alex from Stanley Kubrick's crime thriller *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) in subverting the conventional virtues of a chaotic post-modern society which were valued by Western cultures, and Tyler Durden, the male protagonist of *Fight Club* (1999) in experiencing psychic fragmentation as an outcome of the alienation; detachment from the society, because of the 'accelerating rate of

transformation and an increasing complexity of rapid, frequent, multi-directional cultural flows made possible by advanced technology'. According to these comparisons, it becomes evident that Oh Dae-su evokes interest in audience not through an identification for sharing the ideal that his deeds represent but through the commodification of aspects in his characterization that feed the desires of the viewers. Jung concludes the interest of audience as 'ambivalent because it seeks the strangeness of "otherness" and, at the same time, the familiarity of modern "coolness"'.

For the local Korean culture, on the other hand, there is an ineradicable factor based itself deeply in their collected memory and also believed to be still hanging around the everyday atmosphere of contemporary society that they live in. As available in each movie of the trilogy, the concept of *Han*, 'a traditional Korean sentiment, a smoldering bitterness about past wrongs' that 'becomes a great force to fuel an eventual blow up (Kim S. S., 2017)', finds its representatives in the story of the characters and their interactions with each other. Both of the leading characters, Woo-jin and Oh Dae-su are experiencing resentment and anger because of past transgressions in their lives that caused great losses. Holding each other responsible for these traumas they have been through fuel the everlasting cycle of retaliation which cause more destruction rather than a relief for their pain. There is no doubt that a local spectator in Korea would find so much more in this narration than they could ever find in other two genres that represent Korean culture in and outside of the country. Such as K-soap and K-pop which are centered upon pretty boys and pretty girls in pretty clothes and pretty houses/landscapes engaging in genteel, "no-sex-please-we're-Korean" romances as a winning formula without any concern of reflecting reality (Salmon, 2012). The bond that the movie build with its local spectators through the characters is depending on meaningful representation of a common sentiment. The social and emotional states addressed through Asian characters also find their admirers in other Asian countries as well, so the international success, bonding with the audience is not limited with the western interest. In 2006, just two years after the original movie was released, an Indian adaptation of *Oldboy* come up to another side of the continent under the name of

Zinda. Western remake by Spike Lee also found its place on American theatres in 2013.

It is still highly surprising that a character like Oh Dae-su which bares more the qualities of extremities and existential despair than heroic achievements could reach such a world-wide popularity. Especially when we think of the message that Park aimed to give through his character. At the end of the movie after Woo-jin's dramatic revelation; Oh Dae-su is left like an emptied shell. As we can observe step by step during the movie, Oh Dae-su does not feel the pain or any other romantic or horrific feeling apart from the desire for revenge. He also displays no sign of memory about his past or identifiable ability for expressing himself through language. His memory only functions when he needs to remember the reason of Woo-jin's retributive anger. He obviously deployed from all of his human identities as a father, a husband and a working clerk after all those years of isolation from the outside world and manipulation that transformed him into a well-trained mechanic body functioning only for the sake of vengeance. Woo-jin's replication also works for the transformation of his enemy into a petty inhuman, cyborg-like state that he became after his loss. Surviving cannot mean to go back to his life and forget about the past for Oh Dae-su anymore. Escaping from any kind of confrontation with the truth, he chooses to erase his memory about the real nature of his romance with Mi-do through hypnosis. And he is seen walking to unknown as a being not only deployed of his human features but also ripped off from his mechanic abilities that were once given through the feeling of unbendable desire for retribution. However, with this hidden reality, there seems no chance to build a reality for these two anymore. They are meant to be trapped in a twisted reality. The punishment occurs for Oh Dae-su resulted in sacrifices could be considered to connect with the Oedipal myth of incest as Irene Lee suggested in her article '*My name is Oh Dae-su*': a mirrored image of Oedipus in Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* dated 2016 (Hee-seung, 2016: p. 127-139). The name '*Oh Dae-su*' sounds like chosen on purpose to remind this connection with the protagonist of the ancient mythological cult. On the other hand, the resolution of the plot makes it clear that incest is not the taboo Park desires to focus on particularly in the movie. We can observe this from Woo-jin's statement

while revealing his anger to Oh Dae-su. He says “It wasn’t my dick that impregnated my sister. It was your tongue (see Wada-Marciano & Choi, 2009: p. 186)”. Another interpretation could be made on Oh Dae-su’s sacrifice which isn’t performed through repentance on the act itself, but because of the fear to lose his beloved Mi-do instead. So, it can be assured that the main taboo to be broken is actually the unmentionable victory experience as a reward of a retributive act. The only state following the execution of revenge is desperation comes along with greater losses than the initial ones. There is also no room left for the spectator to dare identifying with this inferior state of being in search for any kind of satisfaction.

Although Park Chan-wook created an appealing protagonist in its states of victimization, transformation and agitation; he did not abstain from pushing the limits of mainstream tradition to the edges by embodying transgressive acts together with desperation and dehumanization of the character who ends up at a state deprived of any humanistic desire.

CHAPTER III: SYMPATHY FOR LADY VENGEANCE

1. A Road to Salvation Through an Unexpected Forgiveness

The last piece of the trilogy bears its importance for the overall philosophical perspective embodied in the whole trilogy as being the resolution part of the first two pieces. First two movies represent the faulty nature of revenge that captures the protagonists in its circle of retaliation while struggling to reach their goal of retribution. The vengeful protagonists ended up in destroying both themselves and other parties around them; third movie, *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance (2005)*, on the other hand achieves to present a successful revenge plot that functions well throughout the movie with a protagonist neither ends her life nor removes her memory to be able to carry on in the end. However, the resolution I will focus on in this chapter does not lie under the success of a well-plotted revenge that brilliantly carried out by a female protagonist, Geum-ja. Instead I will focus on her persona that comes to the realization for asking or paying for atonement to restore

justice through a vengeful act is futile to relieve her pain of guilt or the suffering of victimization, then manages to pursue and accept the possibility of a hope for the future through the forgiveness of a self.

The movie opens with the release scene of Geum-ja (a beautiful woman in her late twenties, early-thirties) from the prison. Outside the facility, there is a group of Christian carolers wearing Santa costumes and waiting for ‘good-hearted Geum-ja’ as they call. When the expected one appears, they start singing a hopeful rhyme about overcoming the hardships with the light of the God. Then the camera zooms in to the priest holding a huge white tofu plate to offer approaching Geum-ja. He cheers her saying “It’s been hard, hasn’t it? Thirteen and a half years. I’m so proud of you.” With the priest’s words audience watches through a series of flashback moments showing Geum-ja found guilty of kidnapping and murdering a six-year-old boy called Park Won-mo and sent to a prison. In the following parts of the flashback, we see her, in prison, laughing with and collaborating other inmates. Then she meets the priest, and he shows her how to pray and repent for her sins. The voiceover during the flashback tells the story of her transformation from a sinner to a good Christian lady paying for her sins. The framing of the narrative is built very well on the religious rightness through this Christianity reference. The reference of a western religion finds its place better for the philosophical interpretation of the character’s journey. Also, while taking the Christianity with a Buddhist tradition of offering Tofu for a new life of purity, the reference becomes more reciprocal. This reference of the religious morality includes certain global definitions such as good and bad, guilt and punishment. And as far as we could observe from the flashback moments and from the words of the priest, Geum-ja has been paying for her sins for more than thirteen years as a good Christian lady who helps out her friends and fulfills her religious duties. In the last part of the flashback, her voiceover is embodied in a moment of confession in front of prisoners, observer officers and delighted priest. When the scene turns back to the present moment, the religious man continues his words “It’s a tradition to eat tofu upon release so that you will live white as snow and never sin again.” Yet, the religious charm of the scene shatters when Geum-ja knocks the plate down to the ground with a disgust

on her face among the puzzled look of the others in the welcoming group and tells the devastated priest to get lost. This rejection of taking refuge in an existence and omnipotence of a greater being provides the first hint showing that she has actually been in disguise of an identity to perform in public as a good-hearted Christian woman. Including the open reference of Christian morality, Buddhist tradition; and the rebellious reaction of the character towards them, the director makes a way of criticism that is not only against local religious moralities but also against its western forms as well. As a global context, the Christian morality was utterly criticized by Nietzsche with the specific human typology he presented in *Genealogy of Morals* dated back to 1887. In the introduction part of the book the editor Keith Ansell suggests that:

“Nietzsche provides us with a stunning story about man’s monstrous moral past, which tells the history of the deformation of the human animal in the hands of civilization and Christian moralization; but also hints at a new kind of humanity coming into existence in the wake of the death of God and the demise of a Christian-moral culture (Nietzsche F. , 2006: p. xiii).”

Actually, this definition was presented specifically to define Christian morality by the philosopher. Yet, in this specific scene of rejection we observe a criticism is activated in the context of Christianity; but through a huge plate of white tofu as an object bears its symbolism in a local religious content of Buddhism, Geum-ja’s rebel could be interpreted as more of a Korean correspondence of Nietzsche’s criticism of Christian morality which finds its equivalence in Asian culture towards the accepted moralities in this culture.

And settling from this hint forward, we find out that Geum-ja is not the actual killer of Won-mo either; the killer is, an English teacher of young children, Mr. Baek who inhumanely tortures and kills his students coming from wealthy families. Geum-ja had to take over the guilt as Mr Baek kidnapped her baby, Jenny, and threatened Geum-ja with the baby’s life. In the following parts of the movie, we acknowledge the background story as Geum-ja had an unexpected pregnancy at a very young age and without any place to go or any other person to ask help from

neither a family member nor a friend; she took shelter in her kinder-garden English teacher Mr. Baek's place and helped him kidnapping the children in return. As the hidden story comes out behind the murder and her punishment, it becomes clear that Geum-ja has more than a feeling of guilt that enables her to act. She bears a great anger towards the man who not only caused the death of a young child but also the separation of a mother from her newly born baby girl which we discover is the biggest atonement that Geum-ja pays for her mistaken act of accepting to be a useful asset for a cruel man.

After discovering the background story of the events, Geum-ja becomes a protagonist who has her reasons to feel great resentment to avenge upon as we can expect from a leading character in a Park Chan-wook's movie. And concurrently, it turns out that she is obviously not a passive character in reality who could find a relief in praying and religious purification that is offered her by the priest.

Before digging deeper in the plot of events, I need to touch upon the critic of certain themes that the director emphasizes in his narration included in the first scenes. The first critic occurs with the unexpected rejection by Geum-ja of her inspiring image built through her religious and public devotion for years in the prison. She apparently takes on a pretentious identity to set herself free from the prison sooner and gain the trust of others to manipulate them easier through the disguise of piety (just like she did to the priest to support her release in public) and make others become useful for her targeted revenge scenario. In this sense, she is not actually a resentful character in classical meaning that takes shelter in religious practices to reach salvation. Instead, she is an active human being to make her own judgements to determine her actions. She basically aims to be able to restore justice in person not through the judgement of a third-party involvement. She carries out her elaborate plan successfully with the help of her ex-inmate friends who feel unquestionable loyalty to her because of her generosity for them throughout the hard times during their prison days. Her disbelief of a greater force or the power of the legitimate law to restore justice and provide relief for her agony proves the critic that the director adopts towards the established beliefs and judicial system. And also, through using the identity of repentant sinner as a manipulative disguise in

society just to implement her own plan to bring justice becomes another critical point for the idea of relief through piety. Geum-ja is given no chance to defend the truth to pay for her own mistake and make the responsible party to pay for his greater wrong as she is always under a threat and a superiority of a more powerful individual that dominates her in the system. That is why her growing resentment shapes an inevitable motive for retribution in the end. Yet, the importance of her retributive act does not come from its rightfulness but from its uniqueness.

In this scope, the birth of Geum-ja's revenge plot that took years to set out includes similar indications from Nietzsche's claims in his theory of '*ressentiment*'. In his *Genealogy of Morality*, the philosopher traces the birth of Christianity not out of the 'spirit' *per se* but out of a particular kind of spirit, namely, *ressentiment* (Nietzsche F. , 2006: p. xiv); also, in his connotations of slave morality, he proposes as the following;

“Humans can bear suffering; what they cannot bear is seemingly senseless suffering, and this is what the slaves' suffering is. It has no meaning, it is a mere brute fact. The priests' intervention consists in giving the slaves a way of interpreting their suffering which at least allows them to make some sense of it. 'You slaves are suffering', so runs the priestly account, '*because you are evil*'. The *ressentiment* that was directed at the masters is now turned by the slaves on themselves. The sick, suffering slave becomes a 'sinner'. In addition to this diagnosis of the cause of suffering, the priests also have a proposed therapy ... The 'healing instinct of life' operates through the priest, in which ideas of guilt, sin, damnation, and so on, serve 'to make the sick *harmless* to a degree', and the instincts of the sufferer are exploited 'for the purpose of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-overcoming' (*GM III*, 2006: p. xxvi).”

Considering all those years Geum-ja served in prison and worse than that being separated from her baby, we observe character's great suffering for the crime

committed by another party. Geum-ja does not symbolize innocence as a character, she has her part to be paid. Yet, she still suffered from senseless punishment irrelevant to her part of the story. So, searching for relief under a religious discipline could be one way for her to overcome the resentment she experiences through if she were a suitable character to be defined as a resentful character. According to the theory of *ressentiment* this piety could be the only way for such an oppressed character reigned over by the authorities either in the form of malfunctioning assets of law or a dominant relentless male figure. Nonetheless, we observe her taking another way to sooth her pain and pay back for her own part. Her anger does not cause only the desire to take her revenge by destroying or feeding grudge towards the perpetrator himself; she wants to restore justice both for herself and also for the ones who deserves. That is what distinguishes her from the protagonists of the first two movies. Following her own feeling of justice, she chooses to make the actual perpetrator to pay for his crime, and executes an elaborate plot actively for her vengeance with the help of her fellow inmates who owe her favors from their imprisonment days. And this choice obviously makes our protagonist differ from the Nietzschean resentful characterization as well. As a result of her choice and her following actions, she appears to be active in building her own sense of values then enacting herself to restore her personal understanding of justice accordingly instead of being passive to cling on producing only counter values against the dominating groups through the adoption of religious practices. Her actions may not be correct or satisfactory, but they definitely turn out to be valuable experiences for her in the end.

We follow the protagonist threading every detail of her plan carefully while settling herself a life with a house and a job again through her connections from the prison. While settling in a place one of her friends, Kim Yong-hee, found for her; we witness a strange dialogue between the two. After hugging each other tight with a touching emotionality as repeated in each encounter of Geum-ja with her inmate friends, Kim Yong-hee realizes the change in her friend and tells Geum-ja that she changed a lot. From the flashback scene belongs to the past experiences of these two women we understand that Geum-ja not only used to advise her friend at the

moment of crises but also had a romantic intimacy with Kim. However, in the present scene Kim realizes that Geum-ja is not the same woman with a bright face, valuable advices and a relieving compassion. She even asks Geum-ja if her love was real or not when they were together. This shows the extent of Geum-ja's effort as an avenger preparing her great vengeance; even if it takes to fake love, she did not hesitate to perform. Yet, still we see Kim ready to help her friend for the sake of their precious past. There are lots of similar re-encountering with friends during the movie in which Geum-ja is found different either because of her make up (she did not use to wear at all in the past, but now she always wears her red eye-shadows and red lipstick) or her rather deterministic and strict manners comparing to her soft and affectionate character and pure beauty without any make-up in the past. Park keeps his protagonist's aesthetic beauty, but changes her style into a sublime warrior hidden behind her red eye shadows like a war paint.

Geum-ja's effort and devotion to her revenge are align with the other protagonists in the first two movies. She spends years on her plan as Woo-jin did against Oh Dae-su after his beloved sister being dragged to suicide because of the rumor retailed by Oh Dae-su; she also meticulously applies her plan just like Dong-jin did to hunt down unpredictable Ryu in order to take the revenge of his daughter's death. She has the same determination to exterminate as Oh Dae-su and Ryu when someone stands her way to prevent succeeding her retaliation. (She defeats two guys hired by Mr. Baek using her physical skills and the equipment of war successfully at the time of the danger) Additional to these skills sharing similarities with other characters'; Geum-ja gathers more in herself such as capability of protecting the beloved ones of family and friends. With all these qualities she bears as a sovereign heroine, Geum-ja follows the path of a beast released from her bondages. Bondages of threat, imprisonment, exploitation or deception. While describing the civilized human being, Nietzsche reveals his theory of uncaged beasts underlies this image.

“At the center of all these noble races we cannot fail to see the beast of prey... this hidden center needs release from time to time, the beast must out again, must return to the wild: – Roman, Arabian, Germanic, Japanese nobility,

Homeric heroes, Scandinavian Vikings – in this requirement they are all alike.
(GM I, 2006: p. 23).”

Geum-ja releases the beast inside to hunt down Mr. Baek just like all the other protagonists of the trilogy. We observe her desire to kill first time when she is dreaming Mr. Baek’s head on a dog’s body with a sledge-feet dragged by her on the snow. In her dream, she drags the sledge on an edge of a cliff then shoots the head with a gun and watches him dying in great joy.

Image 3.1: Dream scene in which Geum-ja experience the satisfaction of revenge in her imagination.



(interrogating ideology with a chainsaw, 2014)

While feeling great desire to hunt down Mr. Baek, Geum-ja also searches the right way to pay atonement for her own part to (victimized boy’s) Won-mo’s family. Short after her release, she visits Won-mo’s family at their house. First, we hear the begging voice of the parents asking what she wants from them then we see Geum-ja with a knife on her hand preparing to cut her fingers off. The voiceover tells that she was going to beg Won-mo’s family till the loss of her last finger. But instead, after she cuts off her first finger; a short parody begins with the parents desperately searching for the finger on the ground. The burlesque of this melodramatic scene aims to reflect the perpetual nature of these kind of guilt and payback. As a result, the act is short of providing Geum-ja the forgiveness she is seeking from Won-mo’s parents. The only feeling she caused was panic and terror in them. In creating such a scene, Park also achieves to put a distance with the audience by preventing them from identifying strong feelings and fulfillments that are expected but not available on the screen. After this unsuccessful try, she does not give up on her struggle for paying the atonement for her sins. After she discovers that Won-mo was not the only child victim of Mr. Baek’s brutal cruelty, she finally finds a way to pay the

atonement for her part by offering the real perpetrator to the families of victimized children. And this creates the most striking scene of punishment in the movie which I will be analyzing in detail soon.

Apart from her search of atonement and her pursuit of relief through a well-executed revenge, Geum-ja also struggles to reach her daughter and beg forgiveness from teenager Jenny for leaving her without a mother during all those years. Her daughter, Jenny was adopted by an Australian family while Geum-ja was in jail and grew up in that country without any contact with her own language or culture. Geum-ja travels to Australia to meet Jenny and her foster family. The scenes in Australia are adorned with different extremities of hysterical moments both for Geum-ja and Jenny. While Geum-ja is getting utterly drunk with the foster parents and losing herself in laughing, Jenny is sitting at the corner of the room with a sulky face. Or we see Jenny having a nervous breakdown and threatening her mother and the foster parents to kill herself with the knife she is holding. Throughout the part audience is not provided any kind of satisfactory scene describing the sentimental reunion of the mother and her daughter. It is obvious that Jenny has built a *ressentiment* against her mother for having been abandoned by her. When Geum-ja desperately accepts Jenny's demand to travel back to Korea with her, there starts another journey to solve out the *ressentiment* existing between the daughter and her mother.

During their time together in Korea, Geum-ja and Jenny have certain moments to exchange sincere emotions. We observe Jenny trying to understand the reason of her mother's abandonment and somehow find a way to forgive her because of this. Geum-ja finds a letter written by Jenny and hidden to her pocket while she is tying up Mr. Baek who she trapped and brought to a deserted school building with the help of an ex-inmate friend, Yi-jeong. When Jenny's voice-over is heard reading the letter, Park reflects a flow of parallel events to the screen in which we see Geum-ja is preparing Mr. Baek for her final act of vengeance while Jenny is writing the letter to express her desire of revenge against her mother. Yet, the requirement for Jenny's demand turns out to be much different than her mother's. In her letter she wrote; Jenny says:

“Don’t think that I forgive you. I think mothers who dump their kids should go to jail. When I was younger, I often thought of taking revenge on you. But I couldn’t imagine killing you, because I didn’t know what you looked like. Anyway, since we’re on better terms now, give me your reasons, at least. Apologizing once is not enough. You should say sorry at least three times. Not generously, your daughter, Jenny (Chan-wook, 2005).”

Considering Jenny’s demand from her mother in order to be able to have a closure, we can observe the difference between the demands of Jenny and Geum-ja in their creditor positions from the debtors for reaching a closure of their *ressentiments*.

The concepts of ‘sin’ and ‘atonement’ that Geum-ja keeps repeating in her explanation as the reason of her physical and emotional sacrifices from cutting off her fingers to keep herself distant to her beloved daughter are given in line with the concept, presented by Nietzsche in the second essay of his book *Genealogy of Morality*, ‘*Schuld*’ which could be translated as either ‘guilt’ or ‘debt’ depending on the context. Nietzsche expresses the contractual relationship “between *creditor* and *debtor*, which is as old as the conception of a ‘legal subject’ and itself refers back to the basic forms of buying, selling, barter, trade, and traffic (Nietzsche F. , 2006: *A note on the revised edition*, p. x).” Considering the reflections of this relationship between the opposing parties, Steve Choe explains the functioning of the theory as the following:

“Based on this primitive ethics, the violent punishment dealt to the transgressor becomes justified via the mythic law of compensation, an equivalence whereby juridically the moral obligations between debtor and creditor are neutralized, “paid up” as it were. Revenge participates in this attempt to “get even” by exchanging and transferring debt from one person to the next (see Choe, 2016: part 5, p. 96).”

So Geum-ja determines her way of paying for her 'debts' as a mother, as a contributor of a brutal act on the side as a debtor and collecting for all the unreasonable sufferings that she had to struggle as a violent creditor.

As a debtor, Geum-ja performs the apologies creating one of the most triumphant moments through the simultaneous English translation of a captured Mr. Baek ironically. Through her deadly enemy's voice Geum-ja expresses her most intimate feelings to her daughter and apologizes from her for three times. In her speech Geum-ja tells Jenny that she felt growing up Jenny like a treasure in her belly when she got pregnant and loved her at the very first moment that she found out about her existence. Then she explains why she had to go to the prison and give up on her, and in that way caused her to grow up without a mother. That is also part of her sins because of what she does not deserve to be together with her daughter again as an atonement. Geum-ja tells Jenny that she will bring her back to Australia. Park raises the tragedy of this impossible blood reunion by his rotating of mother and daughter's face images to each other and to the audience as well to pose the ethical question on the scene to the spectator. The question here bares double meaning emphasized the state between the characters and also for the socio-historical background of the two Koreas suffering from the separations of blood and kinship with an impossibility of reunion. At the end of this dramatic scene Geum-ja confesses about her help to Mr. Baek in his murderous acts of young children and that's why now she is going to kill him. Then she kneels down and reach her daughter's face to say sorry for three times. We see that Jenny is counting the number of apologies with her fingers while embracing her mother.

While explaining the meaning of atonement to her daughter Geum-ja says "If you commit a sin, you have to make atonement for that sin. Atonement, do you know what that means? Big atonement for big sins. Small atonement for small sins. Understand?" And she demands not less than Mr. Baek's life for killing an innocent young boy, causing Geum-ja to lose her innocent and separating her from her Jenny. For executing her final act as a creditor, she starts to prepare her captive (Geum-ja captures Mr. Baek with the help of her inmate friend Yi-jeong who accepted to become Baek's partner and live with him to be able to trap him for Geum-ja) for

his last moments after sending her daughter away from the scene. During these moments Mr. Baek's cell phone rings and Geum-ja discovers the charms hanging down from his mobile. The orange marble among them gets her attention as during the interrogations of Won-mo's case; she was asked about the color of his lost marble for numerous times. With this small hint, Geum-ja has gone through an enlightenment and realized that there has been more than one child murdered by her vicious captive. He owes big atonements to these children's families according to Geum-ja. From that moment on she decided to share the moment of revenge with all the families deprived from their beloved kids.

For this step of her retaliation, she gets help from detective Choi whom she met by chance at the bakery that she works in after her release. Detective and Geum-ja first met during Won-mo's murder investigation. In one of the flashback scenes we see that during the investigation, detective Choi sensed there was something wrong about Geum-ja's confession. He even had a moment proving her hesitance about the details of the action while observing her performance of the murderous act at the crime scene in front of authorities. In those days, detective somehow consented to accept her guilt in the murder. Yet, looking at the issue from the present moment and his approach to this so-called murderer proves that he actually never believed her conviction to be right. Detective's consent of this false-conviction as a man of law creates a similar perspective with the one in the previous movies. Here Park pictures the law and its executors as ineffective again through the characterization and actions of Choi during the investigation. This is also one of the reasons for the protagonist (and the other protagonists of the previous stories as well) to search for ways to restore justice individually without any dependable third party to be trusted upon. The twisted functioning of the law and its executive forces are targeted through the succeeded manipulations of the murderer and his unwilling partner in crime and the espousing manner of the detective.

Nevertheless, Geum-ja asks for help from the detective in doing the *right* thing for this time. So, in a way Geum-ja and Choi get together again to uncover the guilt that they covered for years ago. With the help of the police force, the hidden bodies of victims were found one by one; and their families were gathered

at the deserted school building into the woods where Geum-ja keeps Mr. Baek as her captive in one of the rooms. They seated the families at another room that was wired with special sound system that sends the audio of this meeting to the room of the captive. There are also video player and the video cassettes of the tortures and killings committed by Mr. Baek. We see the family members sitting at the desks accompanied by detective Choi. The camera zooms in their faces one by one. With each zoom we observe a short flash forward belongs to the character that was zoomed in. This time not the flashback but the flashforward moments are used to escalate the effects of strong emotions that family members experience while seeing the moments of torturing and murdering of their children/ grand-children by a cold-blooded man on the screen.

Families share great suffering, and their suffering create a collective support, a unity between them. We watch them hugging and helping each other at the moments of nervous breakdowns during the video screening. The scene closes with mournful cries of the families. In the following scene, family members are seen back at their seats in the room. After telling them how Mr. Baek used to find his victims from the wealthy areas on purpose and even kill the children right away mostly upon recording their voice to use at the background during the ransom negotiations with their families on the phone; Geum-ja offers two options to the families. She says “If you want him to be punished according to the laws, we will hand him to detective Choi right now. But if you want him dead quicker, in a more personal way, we can do it here.” From that moment on, the family members at the student desks become both the jury and the judge of Mr. Baek, the murderer, who is listening to his own trial in the next room. While discussing what way to take, they also discover no great motive behind Baek’s brutal acts apart from his hate of children and dreaming to buy a yacht with the money collected from the families. One of the comments during the discussion emphasize the perspective of the police force and law again as it goes “Police has great power in hand, but does not know how to use it. If we leave this to them, we won’t get anything other than never ending courts and cases.” In the end families decided on punishing the perpetrator

themselves. In order to leave a private time for each member they determine their turns of killing through a lucky draw.

During the execution of the collective punishment, families are seen sitting in the order of execution outside the captive's room. They are fully equipped with their stain protective costumes and their personally chosen weapons differ from one another according to their desire of performance. They even discuss the effectiveness of each other's weapon on the target with the useful advice of a professional, detective Choi. The collective deed becomes automatically legitimate in a sense just like sacrificing an animal for salvation. Here, families act on their great resentment with an undeniable urge that carries them to the sharp edges of homicide to sooth their pain. We see Won-mo's mother, who got scared from Geum-ja when she cut her finger off, attacking to the trembling Mr. Baek to wound him fatally. Each member of the group exposes their own way of vengeful violence with their personal reactions some calmer and some quite hysterically. Just similar to Nietzsche pointed out in *GM* about the relationship between anger and punishment causing one another is as older and stronger in mankind than the idea of criminal's responsibility or will of choice about committing the crime. Here the ruling reaction comes from the *mythic violence*, pure anger (Nietzsche W. F., 1994).

“Punishment has not been meted out because the miscreant was held responsible for his act, therefore it was not assumed that the guilty party alone should be punished: – but rather, as parents still punish their children, it was out of anger over some wrong that had been suffered, directed at the perpetrator, – but this anger was held in check and modified by the idea that every injury has its equivalent which can be paid in compensation, if only through the pain of the person who injures. And where did this primeval, deeply-rooted and perhaps now ineradicable idea gain its power, this idea of an equivalence between injury and pain? I have already let it out: in the contractual relationship between creditor and debtor, which is as old as the

very conception of a 'legal subject' and itself refers back to the basic forms of buying, selling, bartering, trade and traffic (Ibid: 40).”

While waiting their turn outside they watch over the ones coming out from the room in shock, but none of them hesitated to go in or to perform the vengeful violence on Mr. Baek. At one point, in the waiting hall among the ones who are sitting, an older sister of a victim boy turns to a well-dressed old lady waiting to take the revenge of her grandson and says “You all look wealthy. Look one of the women left her leather boots outside to avoid blood stain. Do you think it is still meaningful to care about such things?” She then tells her about their story as a poor family; how they “ran around like dogs to collect ransom money”, lost their houses and their relatives started to ignore them. The old lady replies telling about her own losses as her daughter-in-law killed herself and her son left the country afterwards because of this. And she adds “Everybody has their own stories”. Their dialogue finishes when the man between them eagerly stands up to go in.

The ritual of revenge continues with the removal and the cleaning of the mutilated dead body. The atmosphere of the scene keeps its irony at such moments when they take a group photo as a proof of their collaboration to make sure everyone shares the responsibility and keep their silence, but on the other hand they take the photo that will remind them of the time they surely want to forget. The absurdity is deployed by the director at the extremist moments of vengeful violence (hysterical, childish or clumsy manners family members expose during their attacks to Mr. Baek) even if he justifies its narrative. There is no *dignity* to observe in their legitimate retaliation. This way, Park provides a distance to create an alienation in his spectators towards the characters and their acts on the screen.

His aim comes clear if we look closer to the end of this scene. When the group put the tortured body into the soil and start to bury; Geum-ja, who has been watching aside from the beginning, rushes to the dead body with her handcrafted gun designed precisely to kill Mr. Baek. She fires the gun and shoots the head of the dead body couple of times hysterically. Geum-ja’s shooting over a dead body could be interpreted in two ways. For the first one, I can give the reference *Steve*

Choe used when interpreting a scene from one of the Park's movies before the trilogy, *JSA (Joint Security Area, 2000)*.

“It's unfavorable evidence to the South. Shot him again after he was already down. The murder was carried out in execution style. It's usually then when revenge is the motive.” So, remarks Sophie Jean played by Lee Young-Ae, in a scene set in a morgue in Park Chan-wook's 2000 film, *Joint Security Area*. She inspects the dead body of a North Korean lying immobile on an autopsy table and peers intently at the gaping bullet hole in the back of his head (*Choe, 2009*).”

So, Park actually comments on this kind of executions through one of his movie characters. We know that Geum-ja's shootings are not different from the shootings Sophie Jean is mentioning above. The motive is of course revenge. Yet, after all the torture that she witnessed towards Baek from the ones he owes; and his death even obviously is not enough to relieve Geum-ja's pain. She planned each step of her revenge meticulously for years and made her last decision of execution in a form that would bring fairness, a satisfactory payment of this crime to all parties. Nevertheless, she still finds herself in vain. Her hunger does not leave her; it still pushes her to shoot a dead body. At the end of a supposedly most climactic scene of the movie, the protagonist leaves the scene with a tired body and dissatisfied appetite for a relief. And this gives us the second interpretation of the shootings proving the perpetual nature of revenge keeping its parts away from a closure with only an unattainable promise.

At this point it is important to realize why the promise of ‘becoming even’ or we can say ‘restoring justice between the parts’ becomes unattainable for the protagonist. As I mentioned above Geum-ja does not act to make Mr. Baek to simply ‘pay up’ for his quilt in her revenge. It would be an easier compensation if it was just to exchange debts as *Choe* mentions while explaining the primitive ethic of the violent punishment, and it would also become one of the vicious circles in the end that we observed in the other pieces of the trilogy that sweeps away all the other feelings or aims in life and leave the characters trapped in an infinite

retaliation in which they ceaselessly try to make the other party suffer the pain that they suffer from. This retaliation never ends as this exchange of suffering does not provide characters the feeling of justice that deep down they may search for. Justice on the other hand is a more complicated concept to attain. That is why shooting Baek's dead body actually represents the unattainable restoration of justice that Geum-ja longed for. This indicates her dissatisfied conscious after the execution of vengeful violence towards her enemy as she obviously could not compensate her suffering through the punishment or we can say revenge. Nietzsche also comments on the function of punishment which could be useful to understand the concept of punishment given here which lacks from providing a 'better' restoration for the ethical evolvement of human beings. He said; 'What can largely be achieved by punishment, in man or beast, is the increase of fear, the intensification of intelligence, the mastering of desires: punishment tames man in this way but does not make him 'better'... (Nietzsche W. F., 1994: p. 56)'

We see the group at the bakery after their communal action. Geum-ja enters with a birthday cake that has tall candles just like the ones Geum-ja lights when alone in her apartment to beg forgiveness from the deceased soul of Won-mo. The irony of the atmosphere lies under a celebratory mood of a collective murder this time. The birthday song they start singing when they see the cake, or casually exchanging account numbers with Geum-ja to collect the money they had paid as ransom just heightens the irony of the scene. More political and moral economies hidden under the idea of being even are touched upon with these ironic parts of the narration. After their collective act of retaliation in order to make the guilty pay and leave the painful memories of their great losses in the past; it is actually strange for them to stay together. Considering what they have committed as a collective murder and their aim committing this act of violence is to leave their unbearable pain behind; spending more time together at the bakery in an atmosphere of a ritual, humble celebration even feels that they actually have not finished collecting their atonement, yet. At the table, one of the members asks Geum-ja if they would be able to reach their ransom money back or not. Geum-ja gets the account numbers to deliver the money collected by Mr. Baek from the families as ransom and kept

in a bank in order to buy a yacht for himself one day. We witness the financial economy of being even together with the emotional demand collected previously. Yet, the strangest part of the scene follows as the camera zooms in small memoirs members secretly collected from the crime scene for themselves. With this move the concepts of forgetting and remembering intertwine. When Geum-ja's young assistant Geum-shik enters the store unaware of what has been going on there, as an outsider; families suddenly direct their attention to the outside, and they start talking about the snow and the day ahead of them. It just takes a moment for them to get back to the ordinary flow of the world outside and leave the bakery saying goodbye to each other casually as it was a random gathering which we, as a spectator, know that would not be repeated. Park creates a contradiction between taking a memoir from the scene of the murder and the aim behind the action as leaving an undesirable pain of a memory in the past in this scene. The contradiction could be interpreted as the struggle of a civilized human being between the active force of forgetting and the need of effective remembering to anticipate the future. Again, in his work *GM (Genealogy of Morals- Essay II)*, Nietzsche claims that 'man', as a creature tamed by civilization, had to resist the active force of forgetting in its nature through an effective force of remembering. And this resistance only happens through experiencing "blood, torture and sacrifice, including 'disgusting mutilations'" in the history to be efficient (Ibid: xxiii). He says 'a thing must be burnt in so that it stays in the memory' (II, 3). We observe the characters having the dilemma of forgetting the unpleasant memory of the unfortunate losses and their act of bloody retaliation for those, and at the same time, keeping a reminder of their collected repayment for the future. This clash of the two active forces occurring in the human nature creates the cognitive side of reciprocal, and never-ending continuity of the vengeful feeling falling far away from a satisfactory closure in the end. We witness a revenge that is as bloody as its conducive crime; and both create unforgettable effects on memories of the characters on the screen and their spectators. In this perspective, according to Park's narration 'taking revenge' is not reflected as a glorified way to salvation.

Geum-ja is now in the bathroom at the bakery cleaning her make up for the first time since the beginning scene of the movie; she drops the marble that once belongs to Won-mo (the collected memoir of herself) on the floor. The camera follows the marble on the floor until it stops by hitting a man's shoe. The vision of a man turns into Won-mo as a young boy again and smoking the cigarette that Geum-ja was trying to light at the beginning of the scene. Young Won-mo is now sitting on the floor with the cigarette, and Geum-ja kneels down in front of him. At this moment, it becomes clear that Geum-ja has been lighting the candles to meet Won-mo spiritually in order to beg forgiveness from his soul. However, when she attempts to speak finally; Won-mo gags her. Then the young boy turns into an adult man again. He extinguishes the cigarette on the floor, stands up and looks at Geum-ja for a moment with an understanding manner, then leaves. The impossibility of an apology for such acts is determined with the repeated gagging in this scene which we watched during the previous scenes at a quite similar moment between Geum-ja and Mr. Baek. After interpreting the apology of Geum-ja, as a mother, to Jenny; Mr. Baek attempts to speak to Geum-ja. Yet, she gagged him before allowing him to verbalize any word of repentance. The impossibility here is both for a satisfactory revenge and for a consented apology. While presenting forgiveness as a way of releasing oneself from the consequences of an ill-doing committed without the awareness of the doer; Hannah Arendt suggests 'that men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgiveable (Arendt, 1998: part 33, p. 241).' The unforgiveable act is described as "radical evil", and such offenses cause radical destruction where they appear (Ibid). The concept of unreasonable destruction becomes visible in Mr. Baek's murdering of the innocent children and his vicious abuse of Geum-ja for all those years. So, as the victims of a "radical evil" neither Geum-ja nor Won-mo has the capacity to show forgiveness for the perpetrators. The repeated acts of gagging in the movie could be accepted as the way of expressing this impossibility for the characters.

Towards to the final scene, Geum-ja leaves the bakery with a cake box in her hands. Geum-shik follows her. Geum-shik (the young assistant boy helping Geum-

ja and the owner of the bakery who reveals his naivety during his dialogues with either Geum-ja or Jenny), from the moment he appears to the end of the movie, stands out with his remarks of abjuration, living a righteous life as a woman or a man in the society. He is characterized as the voice of rigid social and religious conscience. And Geum-ja responds his questions or expectations in this scope with a complete contradictory idea or an action each time in the manner of great ignorance towards his words and beliefs. During one of the previous scenes, we see them sitting at an outside of a dining hall. Geum-ja tells Geum-shik about her conviction. Geum-shik tries to tell her that it is important to feel repentance then asks: 'You did a wrong thing and served prison for that. And you will swear not to do such a thing again right? This is the flow of life, right?' But Geum-ja replies saying 'I'm planning to kill one more.' His rigid ethical approach is not different from the priest's religious dictations to Geum-ja as offering just an incompatible disguise for a salvation she searches for. So, throughout the movie Geum-shik being attracted to this rebellious woman follows her and just remains as a pale outside voice remaining ineffective for the character. In this last scene though Geum-shik joins to the scene with his romantic song while walking behind Geum-ja on a snowy night. The song is followed by a voiceover when Geum-ja sees Jenny walking to herself and starts to run towards her daughter. The voice explains; 'Geum-ja made a great mistake in the past by using other people to reach her own goals. However, she never reaches the peace she has been longing for.' At this moment we see Geum-ja reaches and hugs her daughter, and the voice continues as 'Despite this, actually I loved Geum-ja'. The voiceover belongs to the adult version of Jenny. After hugging and crying for a while, Geum-ja offers a white cake inside the box she carries to her daughter and says 'be white and live white like this cake'. Jenny tastes the cake with content and offers some to her mother, but Geum-ja struggles herself and cannot taste it. Then Jenny turns her head up into the snowing sky and shouts 'More white!'; she opens her mouth to taste the snow. Geum-shik standing behind them repeats the same movement with Jenny. Geum-ja watches the sky with them in sadness. And with a sudden movement she buries her head to the white cake with a great hunger. She eats and cries while Jenny is hugging her to calm.

This climactic scene of eating a white cake bears the points of resolution in Geum-ja's journey as the protagonist.

Offering a white cake to her daughter as a sign of the mother's good will for a bright new future ahead bears resemblance with the tofu offered to Geum-ja herself by the priest at the beginning of the movie. But this time, the object symbolizing a pure, bright, new beginning does not belong to a certain tradition or religion. It is made by Geum-ja herself. And there is no certain dictation behind the object like a repeated tradition of a certain religious and ethical practices. Park explains the intentional contrast between the two offerings with his following comment;

“I wanted to convey the notion of salvation in this final installment, but I actually think this is an anti-religious film. There is a contrast between the white tofu that was given to Geum-ja at the beginning of the film as a means of purification and the cake she bakes toward the end of the film. The tofu is salvation from a supreme being, which she rejects, while the cake, after the climax, is judgment and forgiveness for herself by herself. People often ask if the film is Christian or Buddhist to which I reply, it's Geum-ja religion (Far East Films, 2006).”

With the cake Geum-ja bakes and offers as a sign of her redemption, she makes a way for her own forgiveness not by a religious or a political amnesty. She attains her daughter's underivative forgiveness and compassion that would bring her more than a succeeded act of revenge would do.

Another important point of her climax is the moment she finally set her hunger for a new beginning free through her overwhelming appetite for the white cake. When Jenny tastes the offering with her finger, it was a soft delightful movement with compassion. Yet, when Geum-ja digs in with her whole face and starts eating the cake and crying hysterically, we see her great hunger hidden behind her effort of forgiveness by her daughter. Her moment of climax comes not through the destruction of her enemy but through the compassion of her beloved one. She

feeds her appetite to salvation with the cake finally, and we see her fulfilled with satisfaction for the first time throughout the movie. The unexpected climax that Geum-ja goes through in this scene has two basic factors which are love and forgiveness that comes through it in her relationship with her daughter. Arendt proposes forgiveness as the exact opposite of vengeance in her book *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1998: p. 240). She explains the contradiction between the consequences of the two as the following;

“Forgiveness is the exact opposite of vengeance, which acts in the form of reacting against an original trespassing, whereby far from putting an end to the consequences of the first misdeed, everybody remains bound to the process, permitting the chain reaction contained in every action to take its unhindered course. In contrast to revenge, which is the natural, automatic reaction to transgression and which because of the irreversibility of the action process can be expected and even calculated, the act of forgiving can never be predicted; it is the only reaction that acts in an unexpected way and thus retains, though being a reaction, something of the original character action. Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven (Ibid).”

Even if Park creates a succeeding execution of a revenge through his protagonist this time, it is obvious that he does not aim to provide a praiseful depiction of vengeful acts. He creates an absurdity in the most triumphant scenes either by the inconsequent dialogues that intervene or the states of parody that cause the estrangement of the spectator. The difference of his last protagonist from the previous ones in the first and the second movies actually lies under her experiencing of a failure without destroying herself or harming the beloved ones around her. Geum-ja, even if she fails to experience a fulfillment through her revenge and

accepts that she has no way in the present or in the future to make the right of what has been done wrong; reaches salvation through her acceptance of her reality and also as the voiceover emphasized 'liked' by his daughter no matter what. In this way, the protagonist is not driven with the impossible *aporia* of salvation through atonement or revenge, but instead finds strength in love and unexpected forgiveness by her daughter. This unconditional forgiveness makes a way for the character to forgive herself and also, encourages her to have a closure with her past and to be able to feel the hope for the future again. I believe there are more than one reason why Park chooses to attain a different, more capable and positive message to his female protagonist.

The heroic ability of the character to sympathize for in the movie is actually her capability of facing and accepting herself ripped off from all the pretentiousness with the adaptation of the dictated religious, ethical or social conventions. After all her effort and experience for achieving an elaborative revenge for her own salvation, she ends up finding the relief and the way to be able to progress in life with consent of a self.

When we see her walking away at the end of the movie towards the unknown on a snowy night, it evokes hope in contrast with the disappointment and anguish surrounded the atmosphere at the end of the second movie, *Oldboy* while Oh Dae-su and Mido are walking away under the shadow of the hidden incestuous reality on a snowy night like the one Geum-ja walks away.

CONCLUSION

Park creates his protagonists in pain, fear or grievance and raises their victimization to the state of great resentment. The feeling of resentment becomes the source of their unbendable anger reaching at its level for the characters to put their epic revenge plots in action aiming to sooth their pain and anger. With each movie the director threads the motives of the revenge in different themes as I explained in the previous chapters of this study in detail. The resentment in the characters caused by various reasons in public or private interactions leading to

their victimization is a concept which I directly relate to its more local equivalence in Korean culture called as '*Han*' meaning 'unresolved suffering' or 'feeling of inferiority'. *Han* is born through cultural and historical processes that the country and its people experienced. Park actually links the concept of *han* in his own culture with its equivalence, the concept of resentment, in a more global scale through his narrations. In the first movie while threading his narrative centering the concept, Park emphasizes its position and function with the themes of capitalism, citizenship and nationalism. In the second movie the resentment is the central focus of the themes of masculinity, mobility and resistance. And in the final episode we observe the focus of resentment turning itself to the feeling of revenge with a perspective engaging more into femininity as an alternative perspective to the previous examples (here the concept of femininity although being symbolized with many aspects through the protagonist, Geum-ja; is given as an alternative attitude, approach to deal with the sufferings in their lives.) and the resistance towards religious doctrines. Steve Choe maintains 'the meaning of *han* gains global and philosophical depth when thought in relation to contemporary Korean cinema (Choe, 2009).' He includes the link that was built by Hye Seung Chung between the concept and its mobilization in melodrama as the following;

"From the point of view of genre studies, *han* can be better understood as a historically and culturally specific mobilization of what Peter Brooks defines as the 'melodramatic imagination' or 'melodramatic mode.' *Han* indeed connotes melodramatic affect and sensibility in the Korean context (Diffrient & Scott, 2015)."

So, as we can observe that the function of the concept *han* overlaps with the desire of the victims' search for a way to discharge their sufferings. The content of the narrations matches with the melodramatic aspects of the cinema at this point. However, in the progress of Park's narration we encounter contradicting results of the journeys taken by victimized protagonists when compared to their popular equivalences in other popular examples such as in Kill Bill series of Tarantino or in most of the western movies. Considering this more popular perspective which

could be used to interpret the victorious moments that the heroic characters experience through the commitment of their absolute power against their rivals or enemies by all costs to restructure the expected justice on the screen; we can understand that the feeling of satisfaction followed by the execution of violence on the screen is a way to fulfill a legitimized expectation of the spectator's gaze. However, in Park's trilogy, he avoids building such a clear expectation and as a result fulfillment of satisfaction for his audience through the execution of vengeful violence on targeted individuals. And, at the same time, he does not allow his characters to become capable heroes or heroines to restore justice by all means through their vengeful acts. As oppose to the justification of vengeance in melodrama, Park's movies stand out to make a critic of it. He expresses his critic mostly with the failures of his heroes to provide salvations for themselves or with the absurdity and parody of the most eminent moments of vengeful executions to break the chances of audience identification and in this way of their satisfaction through vengeance. When looking at his characters' journeys in one composition, the precise message of the trilogy becomes clear. The eclectic connections of three revenge stories that are presented by the director in the trilogy in terms of reciprocity in vengeful actions only reach to an unattainable promise of themselves to restore justice for the suffering parties. The resolution is given through an alternative perspective offered to reach personal salvation in the last piece of the trilogy.

In his first movie, Park chooses to embody the victim and the perpetrator as one. Ryu and Don-jin both are the leading protagonist rivals, meaning there's no precise antagonist in the narration. Their class position is the exclusive reason of the adversities they encounter in the movie. And also, the director prefers to use the transitivity not only in the roles of victim and perpetrator for his characters but also between their different identifications. We observe the systematically victimized Ryu becomes a merciless killer of his enemies and the responsible one for an innocent child's death. While trying to restore justice for himself and his poor sister suffering from a fatal disease; he becomes a criminal in the system and loses his sister, his girlfriend and even his own life in the end. His boss, Dong-jin, bears

the identities of a victim and a perpetrator in the flow of the story with his transformation from being a successful industrial boss ready to make sacrifice for keeping his business alive under the circumstances of difficult market economies to a desperate father in pain who ends up as a determined hunter at the end. He loses everything together with his own life just like Ryu. To overcome their vengeful fury; the exchange of resentment between the main characters drags them on the edge of more radical acts executed against each other and also against the ones whom they find responsible for their misery. (Dong-jin tortures and kills Ryu's girlfriend Yeong-mi and Ryu hunts down then murders the members of the organ mafia mercilessly). As a result, in Park's first movie of the vengeance trilogy, the exploitive nature of the concept *han* in those victimized protagonists; or in other way the great anger coming out of resentment turning itself into an unstoppable desire for revenge, brings more destruction to its defenders rather than a chance of restoration; more unrest and losses rather than a victory and satisfaction. For Ryu and Dong-jin, as long as they move according to stimulation of their deep resentments, no matter how hard they push their limits; there is no way to escape from what the society determines for them. Their rebellion could only equalize their position in suffering with their acts of retaliation which brought no more than their own destructions, deaths.

Together with these forthrightly failing results of the extreme acts of vengeance for the characters; Park threads his narratives around certain motifs such as nationalism performed through the acts of sacrifices to clarify the message he aims to convey with his trilogy. In the setting of the first movie, two male protagonists fit into their socio-economical identities perfectly. Ryu seems quite brilliant in finding ways to adapt himself to the challenges of social and financial environments. He even uses his physical handicap as a way to deal with certain challenges. And we also see Dong-jin as a confident boss who does not hesitate to sacrifice his personal life for the sake of his professional, financial stand point. Then transforms into a character ready to lose everything he has including his own life. These two relatively capable members of the society turn into skillful avengers with the effect of certain emotional crisis. During their transitions we observe them

traumatized and feeling deep destruction because of the losses they experienced. At the moment of these crisis, both men cry and lose their control. We observe their skills of torturing, killing or hunting with an adamant endurance just like soldiers in war. While expressing the allegorical usage of the mutilations of body parts and blood splitting of the Asian cinema, specifically Korean cinema, with the patriotism; Se Young Kim suggests the point made by Giorgio Agamben while conceptualizing the citizenship in France (Se Young, 2010: p. 13). In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben suggests two ways to define citizenship ‘either through place of birth or through lineage i.e. blood (see Agamben, 1995: p. 26). Most of the characters either bleed or are mutilated in the movies to pay their parts as a member of the society. Combining with nationalistic allegory of the mutilated body parts which could be also considered as the *commodification* of human bodies in a capitalist society and the adaptation of the male characters for either their roles determined in the socio-economic angle or their extreme executions of violence for the sake of their deep resentment; it would be rational enough to realize the emphasis on an order of masculinity that reigns over and inside the characters. Yet, at the end of their showdown none of the two is able to make a way for his own salvation or relief through all the sacrifices they make physically or spiritually. Comparing the similarities and differences between his protagonists Park does not only relate these failures with the destructive nature of revenge. He relates the failures of revenge more with the self-destructive nature of masculinity that leads to unreasonable execution of violence. If we consider the progress of the vengeance stories for each protagonist, we can eliminate that all the male characters either destroy themselves or the ones around them while making their steps forward to achieve their goals.

Only in the last movie, Geum-ja as a female protagonist manages to compensate for her mistakes against her own daughter (Geum-ja fulfills the condition of apologies asserted by her daughter; moreover, she never hesitates to face her daughter’s anger and disappointment along the movie) and restore the peace in their relationship. She also manages to collaborate with her friends against her enemy and protect them brilliantly at the time of danger (Geum-ja, at the time

of danger-after Mr. Baek's attack to her friend or when contracted thugs attack on the street-, somehow achieves to defend and protect her faithful inmate friends helping her in applying the elaborate revenge scenario). So, although the idea of revenge is condemned with dissatisfaction at the end of the last piece in the trilogy as well; there is still a distinct divergence between the characterization of male and female protagonists. In this context, the movies take the issue of revenge in a form of brutal act of violence under the issues of class and gender.

When considering Oh Dae-su's manipulated relationship with his daughter in the second movie, *Oldboy*; it becomes obvious how the male characters are deprived of the ability to build or restore peaceful and safe relationships with their beloved ones in contrast with Geum-ja. They even cause harm or the destruction of their loved ones as we can observe in the stories of Woo-jin's sister committing suicide because of rumor spread by Oh Dae-su about her incest relationship with her brother or Ryu's girlfriend Yeong-mi who is tortured and killed because of her boyfriend's mistake. Although Woo-jin carries out an unimaginable revenge against the responsible person for his sister's death, his potency is not enough to make a way for his own to continue. Similarly, Ryu's effort to save his sister's life ends up in great disappointment considering that his sister also committed suicide seeing herself as a burden for him.

From the director's explanation in the following lines about Geum-ja we can observe the diversity he aimed to build between his female protagonists and his male ones;

“The film is a story about a woman whose actions are ethically unacceptable, then she seeks atonement in the wrong ways. Her efforts to find redemption end in vain. But I wanted my audience to tell the film's heroine at the end, ‘It was a nice try.’ I wanted to say her efforts weren't worthless, that they were valuable after all, even though they ended in failure. That's my definition of hope.”³

³The idea is adapted from late American film critic, Roger Ebert's web page. Accessed September, 2020: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/atonement-2007>

Park shows clearly that the actions Geum-ja takes to pay her atonement to Won-mo's family (cutting off her fingers which turned out to be a paradoxical scene in the end) or to execute an elaborate revenge plan which would bring her the chance of relief from her great resentment and fury bring nothing but the failure and dissatisfaction to the character. However, this time the director does not restrict his protagonist with the retaliation; he endows his character with a different perspective. One of the most apparent indicators supporting the distinctive position of Geum-ja occurs when we follow her relationship with friends and family; we constantly see well-appreciated attitudes no matter what. First of all, even if she puts some of her loyal inmate friends in danger like Ye-jeong who takes over the role of being Mr. Baek's partner in order to reach him from the closest distance; there has been no catastrophic consequences for them. Geum-ja manages to help Ye-jeong out when she is beaten and sexually harassed by Mr. Baek in his apartment after he discovers her collaboration with Geum-ja. Despite Baek's trap for them, these two women achieve to counteract the man and capture him for the final scene of the revenge ritual that is waiting for him. Whenever Geum-ja needs help or her collaboratives find themselves in danger, we observe their prevailing collaboration brings out victory for them, for Geum-ja for her imminent goal.

On the other hand, when we observe the concept of *collaboration* among male characters in the movie; we find a completely different frame. As an example, for a seemingly collaborative act; the priest comes out as the agent working for Mr. Baek. After Geum-ja casts him out from her life, we see the priest following Geum-ja and her friends secretly, taking their photos then reporting them to Mr. Baek. It is the priest who informs Baek about the hidden relationship between Geum-ja and his partner Ye jeong. However, during the scene we see the priest and Mr. Baek together, they show no content or loyalty about each other's company. Mr. Baek offers money to the priest for his useful service, and the priest pretentiously rejects it. After this mild rejection, Mr. Baek does not hesitate to take the money back immediately and show him the way. The priest leaves the room in disappointment. In this short scene revealing the secret collaboration between these two men, it is emphasized that their bond has distinctive differences considering the collaborative

bond between the female characters of the movie. Male characters have no loyalty or communication among each other; they also do not have any sense of compassion or understanding between themselves. Their bond depends on self-interests and money which, apparently, they also are not capable of fulfilling for themselves either. As a result, we witness Mr. Baek's failure in his counter-plan to the collaborative act of Geum-ja and Ye-jeong. Neither his domestic brute-force nor his hired thugs' attack succeeds in the end. Similar to Mr. Baek's, Park offers more incompetent partnerships in his first two movies of the trilogy. In the first movie, there's a collaborative relationship between victimized father of a dead girl, Dong-jin and the detective investigating the child's death. In that relationship, we could only observe the system of justice and the police force cooperating ineffectively to bring resolution of the agitated father's search for justice. The praiseful words of the detective for not being in Dong-jin's place indicates that his collaboration only remains on the level of witnessing with no actual consent to corroborate for the other's struggle.

Contrarily; the first two movies, the assistance and the devotion of the female characters in the struggles of the protagonists are remarkable. Yeong-mi's devotion for the two siblings' (Ryu and his sister) salvation costs losing her own life as a consequence. Mido's support and love for Oh Dae-su again brings her not much than a desperate journey to another unknown. Yet, we see both of the characters defending their beloved ones' causes to the end. The consent and the collaboration are sincere and effective in their support.

In Geum-ja's case the effectiveness of collaboration and support between the characters definitely constructs one of the indicators for the idea of *hope* that Park aims to refer through his female protagonist's journey.

Apart from the succeeding collaboration as a theme, there is a more critical point about Geum-ja's characterization. Among all the protagonists, she is the only one who could deal with the insatiable nature of revenge without losing herself in it. As I mentioned in the third chapter, we observe Geum-ja is still deprived from a feeling of full satisfaction even after the collective act of vengeance she carried out brilliantly with all the suffering sides. Her deprivation becomes visible when she

couldn't help shooting Mr. Baek's dead body for several times during the burial scene. Following that, she also has an encounter with the spirit of victimized Won-mo that she yearned for from the beginning of the movie which resulted in her silenced effort of expressing repentance by the victim himself. Experiencing all these dissatisfying results about her expected restoration of justice through her acts of violence and an apology following it; her great endeavor should bring her on the edge of self- destruction that was already experienced by the other protagonists. Nevertheless, we see Geum-ja in great hunger for her own individual new beginning with her triumphant scene of eating the white cake that she bakes for her daughter symbolizing a pure new beginning.

At this point, it is crucial to consider the implications of her personal salvation from the destructive circle of revenge, and more importantly from the desperation of resentment captured her being as a lone and inferior female character in the society. Park places certain features on Geum-ja's character that would serve her own way to salvation. As I briefly mentioned above, one of them is sincere collaboration with others. And this only becomes possible through her previous selfless support for the others who are in trouble. Inside Geum-ja's story Park includes many other stories of women in the society with the flashback moments belongs to the individual past of the female inmates. Spectator is given a chance to witness and analyze their sides of the stories, their sufferings and more importantly their social positioning. This side of his narration actually bears the hidden macro perspective inside. As I explained in the Introduction, Park builds his movies in his local social and cultural spaces even if he manages to reflect a more global perspective through it which is shared by the other countries with developing economies around the world. Attaining the idea of hope and salvation to a female character and exposing various struggles belonging to the women in the society is part of a macro perspective he builds in his individualistic narration. One of the most painful victimization of Geum-ja is being separated from her daughter. And if we consider the theme of separation in a wider scale, we can easily see the reference of separation of the Koreas that is the most eminent reason of the suffering and grief causing years of war and destruction and bringing the mode of inferiority

with the lingering feeling of *han* for the people living in both sides. So, Geum-ja's execution of a violent revenge is a reference for the exploitative nature of a collective enduring from oppression that is accumulating in Korean society that I pointed out with Nancy Abelman's interpretations about East Asian countries representations of identity in the introduction part (Abelman, 1993).

Another crucial point in her experience is being abused by a male authority. In the last movie, there is a divergent positioning of Geum-ja and Mr. Baek as the opponents of a revenge circle comparing to the other movies. In the other movies, we can observe that the characters on both sides of the retaliation are given certain justifications for their acts. Yet, in Mr. Baek's characterization we observe no valid story of a victimization or specific suffering that would cause him to commit violence on others. It becomes even more obvious when one of the suffering family members from his child murders asked about his aim of collecting ransom money from themselves. As the answer from Geum-ja is 'to buy himself a yacht'. Respectively, Geum-ja is exposed to an unreasonable masculine violation of Mr. Baek. There is an obvious representation of 'pure evil' in Mr. Baek's characterization that we could observe with many other examples. The extent of Baek's possible violation of a pregnant teenage girl, Geum-ja, becomes clearer with his observable maltreatment to his new female companion Ye-jeong. In this respect Mr. Baek can be seen as the representation of the concept 'radical evil' with no reasonable cause or story that leads to his brutal acts (see Arendt, 1998: part 33, p. 241). Yet, he commits such cruelty that affects and transforms others' lives dramatically. The obscurity in Mr. Baek's motive to commit the violence against the weaker, innocent others also made visible in his description as a character by the director. Mr. Baek is the only character that is not given in depth by Park. So, in the last movie Geum-ja becomes the protagonist trying to make up for the crime that has no way to be restored justice about.

There is also a reference to the perception of gender in the oppressive relationship of Mr. Baek with the women in the last movie. Throughout the movie we could only observe Ye-jeong and Mr. Baek inside Mr. Baek's home. The only time that we could observe Ye-jeong outside is when she meets Geum-ja. However,

even in this meeting scene we realize a male gaze over the two women through the secret following of the priest on behalf of Mr. Baek. Together with this constant male gaze, Ye-jeong is observed as an object of pleasure in all means. In the house scenes the two are constantly at the table eating the food that Ye-jeong prepares with no oral communication. When Mr. Baek feels sexual desire towards Ye-jeong, he engages in sexual intercourse revealing no sign of affection to his voiceless partner. Park carries the scene to the extreme by showing Ye-jeong in an effort to keep the dinner table stable with all the plates during the intercourse with no clue of pleasure or engagement for the action. In this respect, Ye-jeong could be considered as a null object of Baek's consumption just like the food on the table. In the broader sense, this binary construction can be accepted as a reference of the women's position in the masculine capitalist society. When taken into consideration on the side of a historical context, Park's reflecting the male abuse on female characters through various distinct stories included in the movie, and his framing of a female character as an only source of *hope* for the salvation from retaliating violence can be seen as his personal homage to femininity and all the sufferings of Korean women in the country's sorrowful history. In her article '*Korean Han and the Postcolonial Afterlives of "The Beauty of Sorrow"*', Sanra Chi Kim points out the historical conjunction *han* and the suffering of women in Korea as the following:

“Korean American studies scholars tend to define *han* with a political angle that calls out racial and neocolonial injustices. Grace Cho, in *Haunting the Korean Diaspora* (see Cho 2008: v.25, p. 191), defines *han* as “accumulated grief and rage” and “the knot of emotional residue” of Korean history. She circles around the concept of *han* in order to connect the far-reaching, haunting legacies of the abuse of Korean women under occupation, first as “comfort women” prostitutes for the Japanese Imperial Army, and then later as “yangongju” prostitutes for American military camp-towns after World War II (Kim S. S., 2017).”

When evaluated in a broader respect we can associate certain references for exploitation in Park's narratives happening between the characters to the exploitations brought by the invasions (Japanese & Chinese), wars (between Japan and also two Koreas after the separation) and colonization policies (by the USA over south Korea) over his own country's existence among other countries and opposing military or economical forces in the history. In the scope of exploitation though, he pays the greatest eminence to the sufferings of women. Also, if considered closely, there is a critic of masculine reign, authorization as an operating power as well. Geum-ja's dexterity to reach her own salvation could be accepted as a reference to the necessity of leaving this operating masculine logic in order not to be trapped in retaliating destructive violence caused by resentment over and over for individuals in various different scenarios.

By salvation of the character, of course it wouldn't be a correct interpretation to mean a social or religious type of salvation as those are the areas of critique for Park. We observe the hunger of the character for a new beginning, and she has her daughter's sincere blessing together with a closure of her guilty past to achieve the beginning she yearns for. This is the point the director aimed to reach about his critical perspective of promoted violence under the reign of masculine logic. It would be a far-fetched commentary to consider that Park aims to offer a certain alternative to follow. We can only assume that there could be a better alternative to be experienced; but according to the moral of the trilogy, it is more important just to escape the intoxication of a vengeful hunger in the first place.

From the Park's description Geum-ja is a character who accommodates all necessary features to finally open herself a way for another possibility in life. She shows selfless compassion for other's sufferings; she faces her mistakes towards her beloved ones and tries hard without giving up her honesty and openness. And more importantly she is not driven by pure egoism in her revenge that could lead her to a way of eternal destruction of a self in insatiable hunger for executing violence. This could be seen in her decision to leave the actual act of violence to the families who she thinks she could pay for her part to in this way. Even if she also has the feeling of vengeance for the captive, she manages to control herself

throughout the communal execution. When all the other vengeful actions by Oh Dae-su and Woo-jin or Ryu and Dong-jin considered the way Geum-ja discharge her vengeful anger becomes a non-melodramatic reclamation. In this extraordinary characterization of a heroine, Park offers the viewer an alternative narrative that does neither praise the satisfaction followed by vengeful acts nor the heroes that are committed to such acts; but instead he suggests an alternative to strip ourselves from all of these unrealistic reflections of mythical satisfaction popular on the screen and open up our minds to more realistic alternatives. While all the characters, apart from Geum-ja, one way or another execute their vengeful power over others to prove their sovereignty in a society where competition, pride and the show of strength are populated predominantly among men and reigned mostly by them; the white cake Geum-ja offers in the end opens up an entire new possibility of manner (see Choe, 2016: part 5, p. 213). In one of his interviews, Park comments on this offering as ‘an antidote to the masculinity, impulsive violence and explosions of rage and hate in the first two films. So, *Lady Vengeance* is about femininity, atonement and the search for forgiveness and salvation (Jafaar, 2012).’

Park’s prominent aim of bringing about a critique of revenge and considering a different alternative as individuals is more of a global matter than a matter only belongs to Korean culture or social life. Through his settings of modern city life with allegorical characterizations of modern societies who are moving with undetermined time and space, Park makes his point in a more global scale. He places revenge at the center of international politics as we can see clearly from his following explanation in which he says; ‘I believe that vengeance defines twenty-first century Korea, but that vengeance stories are a central metaphor for life anywhere: from the UN to a gang of people on the street (see Choe, 2016: part 5, p. 214).’ He problematizes revenge on a global scale obviously and continues his views as the following:

“I’m also opposed to the opinion that sees the themes of sin and redemption or guilt and obsession as Western concepts. Those concepts are already exceedingly well established as routine in our lives as well. I feel that perhaps the time has come for us to show them in our own way. More than that, from

the director's viewpoint I would be happy if audiences reacted by viewing it as questioning in a somewhat peculiar way the ethics of judging what is right and wrong (Kim K. H., 2009).”

With the alternative he proposed as opposed to the vengeful judgement comes out as a form of forgiveness in the end which differs from its dominant forms in the society and remains more private and inexplicable with its most explicit metaphor; *the white cake*.

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