Abstract

Spectral Hybridity: Third Space as Cultural Memory in *Revenant*

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This project examines the South Korean television series *Revenant* (2023) through the lenses of cultural memory, Third Space, and Media theory to explore how horror functions as a tool for reasserting marginalized identities. By weaving Korean shamanism into its narrative, the series transforms supernatural elements into not just mere devices of fear but embodiments of collective trauma, historical repression, and unresolved grievances. Hybrid figures like Gu San-yeong, fusing modernity with ancient forces, and the juvenile spirit Lee Hyangi, a victim wielding antagonist tools for reclaimed agency, navigate colonization's legacies and social inequities. Through this lens, the series reclaims space for historically marginalized Korean cultural practices, using shamanistic rituals and symbols as a means of resistance. Ultimately, *Revenant* reasserts a formerly subjugated nation's identity, positioning Korean folklore and belief systems on a global stage as a counter to hegemonic modern narratives. Thus, the show acts not only as a supernatural thriller but also as a medium for cultural reassertion and the reclamation of lost historical agency.

SPECTRAL HYBRIDITY: THIRD SPACE AS CULTURAL MEMORY IN *REVENANT*

Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this project, entitled "Spectral Hybridity: Third Space as Cultural Memory in *Revenant*", is a record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms Athira Babu, Assistant Professor, Department of English.

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CERTIFICATE

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Introduction

With the advent of the *Hallyu* wave came a flood of shows across countless genres. Yet in the vast landscape of global television, few have so deftly woven folklore, horror, modernity and the shadows of repressed grievances into a haunting tapestry as the South Korean series *Revenant* (2023). It stands at a critical intersection between classic horror tropes and distinctly Korean cultural expressions. While drawing on timeless conventions of horror-possession, haunting and lore, it resists homogenization by rooting its supernatural narrative in Korean shamanistic belief systems, ancestral rituals, and communal memory. Ghosts here are not framed as flat archetypes but as echoes of human flaws like greed and envy; the horrors arise from the return of the forgotten and erased, the persistence of the past within the present. In this way, *Revenant* presents a narrative that transcends the juvenile horror genre, emerging instead as a form of postcolonial resistance.

The narrative follows a young woman who inherits a cursed artifact from her late father and unwittingly becomes the vessel of a malevolent entity that feeds on human desire and desperation. Alongside companions, she embarks on a quest to free herself of this predicament. A quest during which they uncover a legacy of horrific crimes committed by an older generation at the expense of the innocent. Thereby disclosing there is more to the spirit than what meets the eye-that the spirit is not a mere antagonist but a consequence of one such horrific crime.

Drawing on Korea's subjugated past and the spirit's grievances, the project examines the series through the lens of postcoloniality-encompassing Third Space,

Cultural Memory, Hauntology and Media theory. Through shamanistic practices, sacred objects and rituals, it uncovers suppressed history, both national and personal.

The series operates within a liminal zone, blurring city traffic with rural quiet, the protagonist with the antagonist, the powerful with the powerless. This hybridity is mainly embodied in the protagonist, Gu San-yeong, whose possession by the spirit of Lee Hyangi created a site where neither the modern self nor the ancestral spirit is fully repudiated. This dynamic reflects both the conflicted identity of the spirit as well as South Korea's postcolonial struggle. In this sense, the series shows that identity is not something fixed or inherited; instead, it is constantly negotiated. However, this blending of identities is not neutral-it is deeply tied to power and ideology.

Shamanism, usually a tool in the hands of the elite, is depicted here as a tool that gives voice to the subaltern. Looking at it through media theory, this depiction within contemporary media serves as a cultural commentary on how the subaltern, once silenced by cultural erasure, repurposes indigenous belief systems and asserts their presence on a global stage. Ditching cheap scares, *Revenant* encourages viewers to think, using shamanism to pull back the curtain on what was forgotten.

Despite the growing body of work on the *Hallyu* wave, a significant research gap existed regarding how contemporary Korean horror utilizes shamanism specifically as a postcolonial tool for cultural memory art. Most scholarship focuses on the cinematic "K-Horror" tropes of the early 2000s, leaving a void in the analysis of how serialized television negotiates the Third Space between global procedural formats and local folk religion. This project seeks to address this gap by asking: How

does *Revenant* utilize the liminality of spirit possession to articulate a postcolonial identity? And in what ways do shamanistic rituals function as a medium for cultural memory in the digital age?

The key argument of this research is that *Revenant* redefines horror as a mode of cultural negotiation and hauntology where the act of viewing becomes an act of remembering. By synthesizing Bhabha's Third Space with Jan and Aleida Assmann's cultural memory framework, this study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology. This project uses textual and visual analysis to show how the "fraying-haired shadow" and ritual objects act as symbols of a suppressed history that refuses to be forgotten.

This project unfolds across four chapters. Chapter one lays the groundwork with key theories: Bhabha's Third Space, Assmann's Cultural Memory, Derrida's Hauntology, Hall's Media theory and Althusser's ISAs. Chapter two applies Cultural Memory and Hauntology to the series, showing how shamanistic rituals and sacred objects unearth suppressed histories and past injustices. Chapter three dives into possession as a third space, where hybrid, liminal identities collide with Althusser's ISAs to reveal a rigid hierarchy of power. Finally, the conclusion weaves these threads together, arguing that *Revenant* turns horror into a postcolonial resistance-using traditional tools to reassert a once subjugated past, now amplified through contemporary media.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Memory, Hybridity, and Media

The concept of "culture" traces its roots to Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*, where the ancient Roman orator articulated the idea of *cultura animi*-the cultivation of the soul-likening it to nurturing a field. According to *The Well-Known Anthropologist E*, this agricultural metaphor grew with thinkers like Samuel von Pufendorf, who saw culture as "all the ways in which human beings overcome their original barbarism and, through artifice, become fully human". A proper understanding necessitates reference to Rousseau's social contract: society is organized through the collective will of its members, for the common good, and it is through such social artifice that man evolves beyond a state of barbarism. This perspective aligns with the view that to be cultural, entails intensive cultivation of a locale-an incremental process spanning decades or even centuries through deep and sustained human connections. Correspondingly, the *Cambridge English Dictionary* defines culture as the way of life, particularly the shared customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time. In this sense, culture shapes how a group is perceived across time and contributes significantly to the formation of their collective identity.

Building on this foundation of culture as a cultivated shared identity, John Locke's ideas of memory from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* add a crucial personal layer. For Locke, personal identity hinged on experience accumulated in the mind by a psychological process; it is this present consciousness of past experiences that makes a person the same individual they were before. Identity relies not on physical ties, but on the mind's persistence, and as he puts it, "The continuity of a person is

nothing but continuity of mind (or soul) and continuity of body" (Afronza 2). This is tantamount to stating that an individual remains the same individual only as long as this psychological continuity endures. He remains 'him' for so long as his mind remains unaltered. This concept can be better illustrated through an example which, though factually brief, is emotionally burdened by its reality: an individual in the grip of dementia. As their memories slip away, pieces of themselves fade as well. Then there comes a point when the body and face stay the same, but they have become a shadow of who they were. In such a context, a question that commonly arises is- Are you still you even after you have forgotten everything that once made you 'you'?. Locke boils it down to-memories are what make a person who they are.

Building on culture and memory, Cultural Memory takes these ideas to the collective level. To comprehend this idea, one would have to sift a bit into "a promised land"(Tamm 1): the interdisciplinary field of memory studies. Though systemised around the millennium, it gained canonization with *The Collective Memory Reader* (2011) edited by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, proving the field not fading, but thriving as a unifying force. At its core, cultural memory is a form of collective memory shared by a group of people who share a culture. The concept traces its roots to Aby Warburg's notion of "social memory"(qtd in Assman 125), which later evolved to what is now termed cultural memory, a concept refined within Halbwach's "Communicative memory"(qtd in Assmann 128). Expanding on this idea, Jan Assmann argues that Cultural memory operates as a form of collective memory, as a repository of knowledge that substantiates an unifying cultural identity (Assmann 130). This further reinforces the earlier idea of perception.

Given that culture and memory are so intrinsically woven into human existence, it is unsurprising that they resurface in literature. Building upon subsequent research, it was Astrid Erll who formalized literature's role as a medium of cultural memory, a concept further developed by Ann Rigey. A noted figure in contemporary English-speaking academic circles, she defined it as "working memory"-"continuously performed by individuals and groups as they recollect the past selectively through various media and become involved in various forms of memorial activity, from narrating and reading to attending commemorative ceremonies or going on pilgrimages"(Tamm 462). Returning to core subject matter, Tamm argues that cultural memory best explains the relationship between history and memory, viewing history as a cultural form that produces memory, a perspective shared by Assmann. This approach gave rise to "mnemohistory" a term coined in his work *Moses, the Egyptian* and is defined as "Unlike history proper, mnemohistory is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered. It surveys the storylines of tradition, the webs of intertextuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past"(Tamm 464). Ultimately, cultural memory sustained history through traditions, songs, stories and rituals handed down through generations.

To contextualise how this concept is spatially and socially enacted, consider Bhabha's Third Space, a term elucidated by Lazarus as " a fighting term, a theoretical weapon which intervenes in existing debates and resists certain political and philosophical constructions"(Lazarus 4*).* This liminal space was not merely a location, but a site of cultural negotiation-a space that resists binary divisions such as colonizer/colonized or East/West.

Drawing from sociocultural psychology (Lillis 2003), Bhabha reframed it postcolonially: the third space functions as an ambiguous middle ground that produces cultural hybridity and subverts colonial domination. This theory was proposed by the theoretician as a direct challenge to subvert colonial domination.

> as an in-between space of the cultural encounter of the colonizer and colonized which he calls the third space of cultural enunciation. This space primarily undermines "the binary thought essentialist identities produced by colonial knowledge "(p. 276). It deconstruct the binary of the self and the other, the colonizer and the colonized, or the East and the West…space of ambiguity, uncertainty and the renunciation of colonial authority and deconstruct the authentic and essentialist oppositional polarities. (qtd in Bhandari 172)

In other words, the third space is a space of in-betweenness and hybridity, where new identities emerge through the negotiation of colonizers' and the colonized' cultures. This is not merely a fusion but a "creative, malleable indeterminacy involving feelings of simultaneously repulsion and desire that exists at the interface between self and other or between the polarities of unequal world that we still inhabit, of what Bhabha calls the 'ongoing colonial present'"(qtd in Bhandari 172). Such hybridity transforms into a weapon of resistance when, as Derrida notes, it "interrogates the dominant meaning of hegemonic culture." It erodes authority, undermines the colonial power's monopoly on meaning and existence. Derrida frames it as "a problem of colonial representation…that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledge enters upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (qtd in Bhandari

172). This disavowal of the colonizer's dominance occurs through a new narrative form, which, according to Bhabha, is where the "transformational value" of the third space lies.

Complementing this, Derrida's hauntology deepens the framework by emphasizing how the past haunts the present-never fully gone but never entirely present either. In *Spectres of Marx* (1993), he argued that the past's spectres-ideas, movements, and ideologies that seem lost-continue to influence and shape contemporary discourse even after seeming to vanish. This spectral presence, much like Bhabha's third space, unsettles fixed identities and meanings, making way for new forms of engagement and representation.

The significance of this narrative form resides not solely in its thematic reclamation of identity, but equally in its mode of dissemination. In contemporary culture, these processes of reclaiming voice and negotiating identity increasingly unfold within mediated spaces-film, television and digital media-that shape how narratives of marginality are viewed and understood. Stuart Hall's Media theory explores this phenomenon, positing that mass media perpetuates the hegemony of the dominant groups while marginalising the subordinates. Hall further contends that even academic papers claiming to be "pure science with no presuppositions" are shaped by similar agendas (Hall 8). A particularly influential aspect of his work is the concept of "encoding/decoding," which profoundly impacted cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s.

> Basically, where traditionally the meaning of the media message was viewed as static, transparent and unchanging throughout the communication process, Hall

> argues that the message sent is seldom (if ever) the one received and that communication is systematically distorted (Hall 8)

Hall dissects the linear communication model- from "sender" through the 'message' to the 'receiver', challenging its premise of a fixed, transparent meaning. Instead, he contends that in practice, the receivers actively interpret messages in diverse ways-so meaning is not solely determined by the sender, messages lack full transparency, and audiences are hardly passive. A critical gap arises between the encoding and the decoding, where distortion can happen. The theory posits that messages have no fixed meaning until the recipient interprets them; only then do they have an 'effect'.The same applies to television discourse, which relies on the multi-accentual nature of language.

While Hall and Bhabha illuminate how audiences and hybrid spaces negotiate meaning and identity, Althusser redirects attention to the institutional scaffolding of dominant ideologies. In *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970), he conceives ideology as a material force operating through institutions, such as family, education, religion and media, shaping individuals' beliefs and behaviours to support existing power structures. Via these Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), hegemony endures not by force, but by securing consent: individuals 'recognize' and embrace their roles within the system.

Chapter one explores how memory, identity and power intertwine to form culture. It dissects Assmann's cultural memory, Bhabha's Third Space, Hall's encoding/decoding in media, and Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses-showing how traditions, narratives and institutions preserve, negotiate and contest dominant meanings.

Chapter 2

Shamanism, Cultural Memory, and Horror in *Revenant*

The South Korean television series *Revenant* (2023) is a horror series that follows the story of the character Gu San-yeong, a young woman who receives an unexpected supernatural inheritance from her father, a juvenile spirit. A malevolent spirit which, over an extended period of time, increasingly assumed control at the cost of the host's autonomy. Consequently, the rest of the series encompasses her quest to free herself of this power that has gradually and systematically rendered her powerless. At first glance, the series plays like classic horror: a carefully constructed image of the conventional horror story- there is the malignant spirit, the victim, the ensuing possession, and the grand finale, the exorcism. Yet, the series breaks from global horror narratives by grounding its supernatural world in Korean folklore and shamanistic tradition, weaving a tapestry of belief systems, one that reflects cultural memory.

This dark chapter in history sets the stage for understanding Korea's cultural wounds and how *Revenant* brings them back to life. There was a period in history when the grand Korean Peninsula bore another name-*Chōsen*, (Japanese reading of *Joseon*), one that was imposed during Japan's colonial rule from 1910 to 1945. An era that dawned with the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876 and crystallized through the 1905 protectorate treaty, which ultimately established a protectorate with, contradictorily, no autonomy. Japan then methodically transgressed boundaries and systematically disregarded, and erased Korea's rich culture and heritage. As anticipated, this outcome was achieved through conventional propaganda-*Nissen dōsoron* or the Theory of Japanese-Korean Common Ancestry. A doctrine that fabricated an idea of shared ancestry between the Koreans and the Japanese. It was a methodical attempt to

commence the process of Japanisation, strategically framing the annexation as a return to roots instead of colonization. Korean origin myths and figures were slowly discredited, and the unique aspects of Korean culture were slowly being distorted and recast as extensions of Japanese history. Although shamanism evaded direct assault, the aspect warrants mention due to the broader marginalization and displacement of other similar indigenous practices and traditions. *Revenant* mirrors this marginalisation in its treatment of the juvenile spirit, in how her voice and existence slowly erode.

Building on the earlier discussion of cultural memory, its role as a repository of knowledge serves to anchor and unify a group's cultural identity. In *Revenant*, Korea's ancient shamanistic practices-known formerly as *Musok*-form the skeleton of the show's narrative. It is through these practices that the past is conveyed, through the possession of Gu San-yeong, the rituals for the creation of the juvenile spirit, the spirit's actions, and its consequent exorcism.

The show paints *musok* as clinging to life in remote, dying villages like the *Baekchagol* village, in Season 1 episode 4, it is the remaining elderly generation that is frantically trying to preserve centuries-old traditions. The practice is framed as something recorded only in old news articles, existing today only in limited online archives or as a niche expertise of folklore professors like Yeom Hae-sang and Gu Kang-mo. With the new wave of technology and industrialisation, this once-dominant belief system is shoved aside. An event that had already played out in the past, with the early suppression of *Musok* by Confucian elites in the Joseon period and by Christianity in the late 19th century (Kim 140). From a postcolonial lens, this echoes the 20th century Japanese occupation of Korea, when the practice of shamanism was elevated from a deeply localized and antiquated aspect of Korean culture into a site of cultural

and psychological resistance. The idea that *Musok* represented Korea's ancient religion and embodied its national culture was later adopted and further spread by *Mudang*. *Revenant* revives this spirit of resistance-Musok was once Korea's way of safeguarding its identity, and here, it becomes Lee Hyangi's weapon.

A superficial observation of the series would reveal a juvenile ghost story: a malevolent spirit, a victim, possession, and the ensuing adventure to 'defeat' the dark spirit or a *yeommae* However, a comprehensive examination reveals a layered interpretation, in which the spirits exist not solely as dark entities meant to haunt or harm those around. *Revenant* repurposes them as embodiments of unresolved grievances, collective trauma, and historical memory. Possession becomes a record of the history of those who were lost and haunting is the means through which they communicate and assert their identity and existence. It is through haunting and possession that the dead-otherwise erased from memory-are able to voice their stories and exercise agency. This pattern is illustrated repeatedly in the series, like in Season 1 Episode 2, in the case of Jung Hyunwoo, the boy who committed suicide. At first, it is chalked up to school bullying, but it is later recontextualised through the protagonists' investigation-a decision prompted by the subsequent haunting. The underlying proves a calculated attempt to trigger a police probe into the abuse suffered by his sister. Then there is the main spirit, Lee Hyangi, whose every action speaks to a need, a deprivation suffered by the person. In keeping with this sentiment, the series reframes horror as not the fear of the unknown but confrontation with forgotten or repressed cultural histories. In doing so, it subverts global horror conventions, specifically Korean ones, to portray fear as something that arises from the unresolved past, creeping into the present.

In the series, shamanism acted as the medium through which subjective history

was articulated. Rituals like *yeommae*(the act of cursing someone by making a doll using hay or parts of a tree) or *Baekchagol* straw doll ritual; sacred objects like pear seed hair accessory, *Dukdali* tree, records found in dated newspapers, old archives like *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty,* and oral accounts preserved by individuals and their descendants all contribute to this process. Through these tools, the suppressed narrative is made known.

For example, the central spiritual entity- juvenile spirit or Lee Hyangi. At first, nothing was known about her. She is not perceived as human, but treated as an 'it': a one-dimensional dark shadow with floating hair. Only when the protagonists uncover the ritual remnants that birthed her does her buried story emerge. Hyangi was a girl from a poor rural farming family in a drought-stricken village hit hard by typhoons and looming famine. Timid, with a quiet love for art despite their hardship, she became the shaman's price for intervention- a human life in exchange for relief. As a result, Hyangi is sacrificed and repurposed as a juvenile ghost bound to the very wealthy family that pulled the strings behind the horror.

Here, the spiritual becomes a powerful tool for reclamation and cultural self-assertion. *Revenant* weaves its narrative tightly with authentic Korean lore- illustrated through sacred objects such as: traditional ribbons, sacred straw ropes, jade hairpin, glass bottle, pottery piece, black rubber band, red hair accessories alongside ritual practices like yeommae (spiritual manifestations involving children's spirits). The show employs an indigenous system long sidelined by dominant religions or modern secularism to tell a deeply rooted story. Throughout the series, shamanism is not depicted as a novelty or quaint lore; it is portrayed as a living form of cultural knowledge. It is what the Yeom family turns to amid financial ruin, villagers clinging

against famine, and it is what multiple generations of families believe in. Beyond illuminating lost traditions, it channels the spirits' unresolved grievances, thereby giving a voice to what history tried to silence.

Bringing Derrida's Hauntology into focus sharpens this further. *Revenant*'s shamanism doesn't just carry history forward-it drags the raw grievance. The juvenile spirit is a victim of structural coercion, rooted in social and economic inequalities. The very elements that chained her in life are the ones that ultimately drag her to her death and twist her into an undead force. Those unhealed wounds-deprivation, abuse, neglect-break through time's barrier, surfacing in Gu San-yeong's possession: the spending spree, the screams out of thirst, desperate pleas to exist. These hauntings make her story readable: pieced together through the stories passed down by village elders, shamans, and their descendants and in the lore surrounding sacred ritual objects. Surviving characters face not just the ghosts, but the systemic failures that produced these spirits. In Gothic media studies, such incorporation of cultural narratives is understood as a means by which media reflects cultural anxieties and values, transforming horror from theatre into cultural commentary.

This chapter positions *Revenant*'s horror within Korean cultural memory, using shamanism to channel historical grievances, collective trauma, and sidelined traditions. The series reframes supernatural fear as a reflection of past injustices and social inequities, transforming into a medium for engaging with history, identity and inherited cultural narratives.

Chapter 3

Inhabiting the Third Space: Liminal Bodies, Possession and Cultural Mediation

The hierarchical dynamics between Japan and Korea during early 20th-century colonization find a stark parallel in *Revenant,* through the Yeom family's relationship with Lee Hyangi, where shamanism functions as a tool of institutional power. Facing financial instability, the Yeoms commission shamanistic rituals that demand human sacrifice- a young village girl bartered for food, livestock and cash. The ritual's brutality is as follows-"An old shaman kidnapped a girl from a nearby village and starved the girl for 17 days….. .killed the girl ... .finger was used as a host"

("Episode 9" 00:34:17-00:34:38). To the Yeoms and shaman, this constitutes fair exchange; to others, it is murder.

Against this hierarchy, possession emerges as Bhabha's Third Space. In *Revenant*, shamanism's liminal space becomes a site that exposes how the Yeom family's institutional power directly exploits the vulnerability of the possessed-echoing Bhabha's Third Space. Here, neither side is ignored nor repudiated. Instead, they are questioned, their differences acknowledged and creatively combined. Possession embodies hybridity, a shamanistic third space mirroring Korea's subjugated past.

Hybridity is presented throughout the narrative:city landscapes, lit up with neon lights transition into traditional villages or places of ancestral rituals. Scenes of modern life-such as people using mobile phones-are intercut with a police procedural style, along with symbolic imagery drawn from folklore. This blurring extends to characters as well-most strikingly Gu San-yeong and Lee Hyangi's fused existence and Lee Hyangi's repurposed juvenile form.

Gu San-yeong initially appears as an urban host preparing for civil service examinations, an individual worn down by the financial and social restraints. Through possession, she gains a semblance of power, albeit at the steep cost of her autonomy for increasingly prolonged periods. Her body thus constitutes a site of hybridity, engendered by structural violence and coercion. She exists as a bridge between the urban and the ancient: a resident of a world of high rises dragged into the realm of shamanism. In engaging with Korea's traditional culture, she becomes a living embodiment of the hybridization of the two worlds.

Lee Hyangi similarly manifested liminality through her death (her murder) and the subsequent rituals (yeommae), which repurposes her a "guardian" spirit intended to bring prosperity to the Yeoms. Following this repurposing, Hyangi-who was barred from entering the towering gates of the Yeom family's ancestral home in life, is now allowed to possess the heirs; she is revered now, submitted to and she now occupies a position of power unreachable to her while alive. This position enables her agency, agency that she exerts via the violence she commits while possessing Gu San-yeong- her spending spree-" I used your card to buy pretty clothes...evil spirit told me that I was satisfying my own desires. Back then, I could confidently say that I had no such desires. But then I received my grandmother's inheritance.... That was when I finally realized that this was what I had desired"("Episode 6" 01:01:58-01:01:45). This spending spree, the possessions alongside the murders of the Yeom family heads, Gu Kang-mo, his mother, the police officer, Yeom Hae-sag's mother, the fraudster- all are acts that represent a visceral reclamation of power. Within this state, Lee Hyangi weaponizes her newly gained powers-ones received as a result of the ancient ritual-in such a way that she inverts the social hierarchy.

This dynamic exemplifies Bhabha's concept of "transformational value" within the Third Space; Hyangi's spiritual existence is a means of adopting a new narrative, she appropriates her oppressors' ritual 'language' to subvert their authority and forges a new narrative. Nevertheless, akin to the postcolonial subaltern, she remains fundamentally chained- unable to ever truly return to a precolonial state. Hyangi can never truly be free. Despite her formidable power, she is bound by the Yeom's safeguards, and lacks an independent body of her own. She occupies the paradoxical position of a deity, who is simultaneously revered and subordinated by her oppressors.

This tension plays out through *Revenant*'s visual storytelling as a tool of resistance. From a media theory perspective, the series shows how ambiguity and symbolic depth beat out cheap "jump scares" every time, blending global horror's suspense with spectral imagery that lingers. By foregrounding marginalized epistemologies and contested histories, the series aligns with postcolonial works that resist monolithic cultural narratives. While it does not explicitly reference colonial history, it positions indigenous folkloric belief against hegemonic modernity, creating a narrative tension that privileges neither. Korean shamanism is not a cheap decorative headpiece, it is an heirloom that has been passed down through generations. It is through these rituals, practices, lore, and sacred objects that the story unfolds. By intertwining the world of lights with straw dolls, flags, and sacred threads, *Revenant* creates a space where the two realities coexist.

The setup perfectly captures Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) in villagers' blind acceptance of the fatal ritual. As seen in ("Episode 7" 23:46-27:53), the compliance of the villagers, the detectives, and even the victim's own family is secured through desperation and financial incentive. The shaman

steps in as the ISA's voice; her words are enough for them to accept, to an extent, the demands of the Yeoms. Though they are aware of the child's gruesome fate, their milieu provides a narrative that absolves them of any wrongdoing.

Stuart Hall's media theory snaps it all into focus here, showing how shamanism works just like news or other mass media to sustain dominance of the elite. He argues that mass media maintains elite power and in *Revenant,* shamanism plays that role- as the Yeoms' channel for controlling everyone lower on the ladder, with rituals and sacred objects becoming the broadcast that keeps the hierarchy humming.

Through this lens, a series produced by a nation once crushed under cultural erasure mobilises one of the tools (an indigenous system of belief) it had historically relied upon to preserve its identity. That same tool that Korea had once clung onto is now being repurposed to construct a narrative that asserts and announces their cultural presence worldwide. Hall's framework of encoding and decoding, further suggests that the series and its constituent elements possess an independent existence: they don't dictate meaning, they negotiate it. Sacred objects and rituals are "encoded" with the Yeom's hunger for prosperity but are "decoded" by the victims as sites of trauma and resistance. This complex interplay of media theory ensures that the supernatural elements are never just "ghost stories" but are instead forms of resistance of the formerly colonized- a symbolic act through which a formerly colonized nation reclaims, articulates and inscribes its cultural roots on a global media landscape.

Ultimately, *Revenant* enacts the third space through liminal bodies, possession, and cultural mediation. Characters like Gu San-yeong and the juvenile spirit Lee Hyangi are not just plot devices, they are walking hybrid identities, tangled up in power plays, subjugation and agency. Through shamanistic rituals, folklore and sacred objects, the

show negotiates historical trauma, social hierarchies and marginalized voices. Drawing on Bhabha, Hall and Althusser, the series illustrates how cultural memory, ideology and media converge to produce narratives that resist dominant power structures, transform horror into reflective engagement and assert Korea's cultural identity on a global stage.

Conclusion

This project has demonstrated how *Revenant* (2023) transcends conventional horror to function as a postcolonial media. Through its strategic deployment of Korean shamanism, spectral figure and ritual practices, the series constructs haunting as a narrative language through which suppressed histories and marginalized subjectivities are articulated. Rather than treating ghosts as mere spectacle, *Revenant* grounds haunting within the structural violence of colonial legacies, social hierarchies and ideological coercion that continue to shape contemporary Korean society. By rooting these elements in shamanistic rituals, folklore, and communal memory, the series resists the global tendency to exoticize non-Western spiritual systems, instead presenting them as a vital narrative through which the past, injustice and trauma become legible. In doing so, *Revenant* transforms haunting from mere theatrics into a medium that insists on recognition rather than suppression.

In addition, the project also presents how *Revenant* embodies Homi Bhabha's concept of the Third Space. Here, hybridity is generated not only through narrative content, but also through the series' setting-the blending of global genre forms with localized culture practices. This hybridity reflects South Korea's postcolonial condition-positioned between the culture of the colonizer and that of the colonized, modernity and ancestral traditions shaped by colonial repression. The possessed body, particularly that of Gu San-yeong exemplifies this dynamic, functioning as a space of negotiation rather than liberation where binary oppositions-modern/conditional, human/spirit, victim/antagonist- dissolve into unstable intersections that generate new meanings.

This project argues that *Revenant* offers a compelling case of how visual storytelling itself operates as both an ideological apparatus and cultural mediator. Drawing on Althusser and Hall, this approach highlights how belief systems and narrative structures both sustain power relations and enable resistant interpretation-simultaneously reinforcing hierarchies and subversive readings. Through Korean shamanism-a tradition historically marginalized under colonialism, Confucian orthodoxy and modern secularism-a formerly colonized culture can repurpose mainstream platforms to assert its cultural and historical presence .

In this respect, *Revenant* stands as a powerful example of how popular media can transcend genre boundaries to engage critically with history, power and identity. By transforming horror into a medium of cultural memory and hybrid resistance, the series demonstrates the potential of television to act as a Third Space-one in which suppressed voices are given a new voice, indigenous knowledge systems are reclaimed and the act of viewing becomes an encounter with the unresolved legacies of the past. This project thus contributes to broader discussions in postcolonial media studies by illustrating how horror, far from being a marginal or juvenile genre, can serve as a vital site for cultural reflection, negotiation and remembrance in the global media landscape.

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