

TRAUMATIC SEXUALITY IN SAMARIA

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Abstract

In his fictional films, Kim Ki-duk, one of the most acclaimed South Korean directors of contemporary transnational cinema, usually focuses on transgressive deeds that are themselves traumatic and cause other traumatic events in turn. In other words, Kim Ki-duk's narrative films represent transgression and trauma as two sides of the same coin. Kim Ki-duk is not the kind of director who adopts a stable moral stance. Suggesting certain attitudes towards certain occasions by confirming some deeds while disconfirming others that are in accord or discord with the current sociocultural prohibitions is a style of narrating he does not embrace. Rather than simply condemning subversions that have traumatic consequences, rather than rendering subversion and trauma as mutually exclusive for praising subversions and condemning trauma-inducing events, Kim Ki-duk perceives them always as interpenetrating phenomena that trouble unilateral morality. It seems that he tends to display fictitious worlds in which deviation from the law, on the one hand, paves the way for unconventional (bodily/psychic) experiences, and, on the other, entails violence, emotional breakdown, guiltiness, (self-) punishment and vengeance. Along these lines of thought, this paper discusses the depiction of female prostitution in Kim Ki-duk's *Samaria* (*Samaritan Girl*, 2004). By borrowing some tools from psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, the paper shows that the film, in the context of deviant-traumatic female sexuality, leads its audience to a margin where they find themselves unable to reach generic moral answers regarding the relationship between the law and transgression.

Keywords: *Samaritan Girl*, *psychoanalysis*, *prostitution*, *trauma*, *law*, *transgression*.

Fedakar Kız Filminde Travmatik Cinsellik

Öz

Çağdaş ulusötesi sinemanın en çok takdir edilen Güney Koreli yönetmenlerinden biri olan Kim Ki-duk, kurmaca filmlerinde, genellikle, hem kendileri travmatik olan hem de buna mukabil başka travmatik hadiselerle neden olan yasayı ihlal edici edimlere odaklanır. Bir başka deyişle, Kim Ki-duk'un kurmaca filmleri ihlal ve travmaya bir paranın iki yüzü olarak yaklaşır. Kim Ki-duk, sabit bir ahlaki duruşu empoze eden yönetmenlerden biri değildir. Mevcut sosyokültürel yasaklarla örtüşen ya da örtüşmeyen edimleri onaylamak ya da yermek suretiyle belirli olaylar karşısında belirli tavırlar öneren bir anlatım tarzını benimsemez. Travmatik sonuçları olan ihlalleri basitçe yermek ya da travma yaratan hadiseleri yeri yasa ihlallerini övmek adına ikisi arasındaki rabitayı koparmak yerine, Kim Ki-duk, ihlal ve travmayı, tek taraflı bir ahlak anlayışını bozuntuya uğratacak şekilde iç içe geçmiş fenomenler olarak algılar. Yasadan sapmanın bir yandan konvansiyonel olmayan (bedensel/psikik) tecrübelerle zemin hazırladığı; öte yandan şiddeti, duygusal yıkımı, suçluluk hissini, (öz-)cezalandırmayı ve intikamı beraberinde getirdiği kurmaca dünyalar sergilemeye çabaladığı izlenimi verir. Bu makale, önceki satırlarda belirtilen çıkarımları takip ederek, Kim Ki-duk'un *Samaria* (*Fedakar Kız*, 2004) filminde kadın fahişeliğinin resmedilişini irdelemektedir. Psikanalizin ve postyapısalcı düşüncenin bazı kuramsal araçları ödünç alınarak, filmin seyirciyi, sapkın-travmatik kadın cinselliği bağlamında yasa ile ihlal arasındaki ilişkiye yönelik genelgeçer ahlaki cevaplara ulaşmakta başarısızlığa uğradığı bir sınırdan dolaştırdığını göstermek amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Fedakar Kız*, *psikanaliz*, *fahişelik*, *travma*, *yasa*, *ihlal*.

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Prostitution as an ungraspable phenomenon

Samaria introduces two adolescent girls, Jae-yeong (Yeo-reum Han) and Yeo-jin (Ji-min Kwak), who seek to make some money for a journey to Europe. In order to reach their goal Jae-yeong voluntarily works as a prostitute, whereas Yeo-jin arranges her friend's meetings with the clients and is on the lookout during the meetings for avoiding an unexpected police raid. One day Yeo-jin neglects her duty and a police squad suddenly raids the motel where Jae-yeong is having sex with a client. Instead of surrendering, Jae-yeong jumps out of a window and is deathly injured. Subsequent to her friend's death, Yeo-jin begins to feel guilty. Most probably for relieving her conscience through self-punishment, she begins to return all of the money that the clients paid for having sex with her friend, and decides to sleep with them herself without demanding any payment. In the meantime, Yeo-jin's father, who is a policeman, recognizes what her daughter is doing and becomes devastated. He decides to follow Yeo-jin confidentially to learn who her clients are. After a while, he begins to assault the clients and eventually murders one of them. The film proceeds with Yoe-jin's trip to the countryside with her father, during which she seems like she is sensing that her father has already realized her prostitutions. Besides, primarily two features of the narration evoke suspicion in the audience whether or not the father planned the trip for murdering or torturing his daughter at a secluded place. By previously presenting the father's assaults and murder of the client, the film shows his violent tendencies and creates room for the audience to think that he might even kill or torture his own daughter to punish her. In addition, Yoe-jin's implicit bodily expressions of fear during the trip, which are apparently arisen from the uncertainty about her father's emotional orientation towards herself, are frequently framed and this mode of visualization helps to reinforce the suspicion in question. Especially with the help of the shots that picture the father's sorrowful yet loving physiognomy, we might claim that the film also implicitly highlights his vacillation between the alternatives of showing mercy to Yeo-jin or torturing and killing her. Because of the ambiguity about the father's intentions in relation to his daughter, many scenes in the sequence of the countryside trip become loaded with an intense tension. Even in the scenes of insignificant events —e.g. removing the rocks obstructing the wheels of the car in the middle of the trip— an anxious expectation that the father will instantaneously attack his daughter is induced. However, the film does not

actualize this expectation. In the end, the father denounces himself to the police. The law catches the father and leaves Yeo-jin on the threshold of a new life, which will be factually devoid of paternal restraints. Moreover, since the father does not attempt to murder Yeo-jin, another possible interpretation of the father's sorrowful and loving appearance could be articulated as well: he is sad because he killed a man, yet he behaves as if he is cool perhaps in order to create an impression that there is nothing wrong with him and thus, until he is caught, to prevent his daughter from acknowledging the murder he committed. By the same token, the father's emotional instability might be linked to his expectancy of imprisonment and to his worry concerning Yeo-jin's future life without him. Perhaps he arranges the trip for preparing his daughter to learn how to take care of herself whilst simultaneously mourns for his potential separation from her. From this point of view, one might argue that Yeo-jin's future life will be devoid of not only parental pressures but also parental care.

We might claim that the film, in the first place, invites us to focus on the different interpretations of prostitution: the voluntary choice of being a sex worker, on the one hand, accentuates individuals' rights over their own bodies and troubles the conservative discourse on sexuality that facilitates sociocultural dominance over the bodies by considering sexual intercourse desirable and acceptable only within the context of affairs ideally monogamous and based on non-monetary mutual benefits, such as love and marriage. On the other hand, it evokes the conventional feminist notion that prostitution contributes to patriarchal ideology, which, among other things, reduces some women's bodies to the status of mere commodities, bought and sold for men's pleasure. Accordingly, patriarchal ideology, although apparently forbids prostitution and polygamy, indeed over sexualizes low-income and undereducated women by means of prostitution in order for men to enjoy polygyny in the back room of married life, at the same time the monogamy of *wives-mothers* are explicitly institutionalized by the bond of marriage itself. Without this excessive and concealed enjoyment allocated to men, monogamous family conventions could not be sustained (Somay, 2014, p. 202). Thus, from the perspective of conventional feminism, prostitution could be viewed as the economic and sexual exploitations of the (female) subalterns for the sake of patriarchal sexual norms. For the same reason, although it might be practiced voluntarily, what is at stake is always already a forced prostitution because of the fact that vital economic needs, as external factors, could compel one to engage in the sex industry (MacKinnon, 2007, p. 157-159).¹

¹ We should bear in mind that the film does not endeavor to explicitly enunciate and privilege either of these ideas. Paradoxically, however, their absence in the narrative

Overall, the prohibition of prostitution could trigger the prohibition against either sexual deviation (in the discourse of sexual conservatism), or forced or/and voluntary commoditization of one's own body (in the discourse of conventional feminism). Whereas the primary aim of the former is to abolish prostitution for the sustainment and consistency of the existing norms of sexuality, the later is based on the idea that the sex work itself is the product of capitalist-patriarchal dictates giving rise to the victimization of underprivileged individuals, and thus should be inhibited. Despite of their dependence on different justifications, both positions advocate the same antagonism against prostitution. Thereby, we might claim that the conventional feminist conception, because of perceiving it only as victimization, ignores the deviation that prostitution might embody and by approving the prohibition of prostitution, welcomes the part of the enunciation that the conservative discourse on sexuality sets against prostitution. In this regard, when it comes to prostitution, the conservative discourse on sexuality and conventional discourse of feminism have the common antagonistic attitude, despite of their contrasting stances.²

These two contrasting yet intersecting perspectives that run counter to prostitution are undermined in the terrain of the film. The *weakness* of the motivation behind Jae-yeong's voluntary choice of being a sex worker—making money not for surviving but just for a trip to Europe— generates a traumatic surplus, which deciphers prostitution as sexually-economically desirable for women, and thus troubles both the conservative and feminist conventions.

In psychoanalysis, trauma is materialized through “an event in the subject's life defined by its intensity, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it...” (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, p. 465) or, according to Lacanian account, it is experienced as an encounter with the Real that ruins the entire process of signification (Lacan, 1991a, p. 164). In order to clarify these definitions of trauma we might take a look at our relation to the excess in the film: in the eyes of many, the purpose of gaining a holiday budget should not be the real stimulus for being a sex worker, especially for a high school girl who looks shy, decent and extremely optimistic. Thus, we require further explanations regarding Jae-yeong's engagement in prostitution. The lack of

creates room for the audience to imaginarily incorporate and discuss them during and after the process of viewing.

² Tuna Erdem's article titled *Fahişeleri Kurtarmaktan Vazgeçin (Quit Rescuing Prostitutes)* has inspired my deductions concerning the feminist and conservative versions of antagonism against prostitution, and their intersecting discourses: <http://sloganbozan.blogspot.com.tr/2012/05/fahiseleri-kurtarmaktan-vazgecin.html>

satisfying enchainment of cause and effect, in return, directs us to elaborate on the possible reasons other than the film presents— the reasons, which are not visualized or articulated in the film, yet might dissolve the discrepancy between Jae-yeong’s manifest *decency* and her *notorious* practice. However, there always occurs something ungraspable in every effort to touch the ground of the truth lurking beneath the surface. For instance, even if we can be sure that she involves in prostitution simply for financial gain or, more accurately, for transforming sexual pleasure into cash, then perhaps we will expose inability to comprehend how having sex with strangers who may not be attractive could be desirable for a girl like Jae-yeong, in terms of either the trivial intention of collecting holiday budget or receiving sexual pleasure.

The death of Jae-yeong occasions other traumatic consequences because of the similar narrative *weakness* have been being discussed so far: What is the motivation for Yeo-jin to sleep with the clients without demanding any payment? As briefly summarized above, she was not keeping a lookout when the police raid resulted in Jae-yeong’s death took place. Therefore, perhaps she feels guilty and in order to punish herself she begins to provide unpaid sex service. What Yeo-jin does seems like a moral deed at first glance. However, polygamous sexuality or unpaid prostitution as self-punishment is not a comprehensible moral approach. It does not fit into the widespread patterns of morality. For instance, in terms of Kantian philosophy, an act is ethical as far as it is “beyond all criteria of usefulness, efficiency and suchlike” and “in the structure of the act there is no place for any pleasure or satisfaction” (Zupančič, 2010, p. 91). Yeo-jin, in contrast, does not abandon the possibility of having pleasure because of leaning in unpaid prostitution as self-punishment. On the other hand, since the feeling of guilt might have caused her to involve in prostitution, neither could we motivate her decision with simple hedonistic explanations. In addition, in as much as she does not demand any payment, it might not be even possible to define her sexual experiences as prostitutions either. Besides, Yeo-jin does not present the stereotypical notions of what a whore is. Rather, she is more close to the conventionally attributed asexuality of childhood: she is a virgin, she goes to bed with her teddy bear, she seems like she lacks affection for men, and before the death of Jae-yeong she decides to distance herself from being a sex worker. However, despite of her apparent asexuality, in one of the scenes, she and Jae-yeong are depicted while they are kissing nakedly. Alongside this lesbian undercurrent, as emphasized before, Yeo-jin begins to have sex with men after the death of her friend and lover, Jae-yeong. During the trip to countryside, she entirely relinquishes her (bi)sexuality, and asexual childishness occupies her demeanors once again. Thus, she oscillates between exposing asexual immaturity and practicing

hyperactive polygamous sexuality. In other words, likewise her friend, there occur discrepancies between Yeo-jin's appearance and her sexual preferences as well.

The inconsistencies of the characters (decent appearances-deviant deeds) and the lack of well-established narrative configuration of causation that would otherwise dissolve the inconsistencies³ reveal the traumatic dimension of prostitution, because of which identifying with the characters becomes almost impossible. Identification herein refers to the two means of positive relation between the self and the other, namely, *centripetal* and *centrifugal* (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p. 205-208; cited in Friedberg, 1990, p. 39). "Centripetal identification is introjective, incorporating the other, as an external ego ideal; whereas centrifugal identification is projective, projecting narcissistic self onto an external object" (Friedberg, 1990, p. 39).

In order for incorporation and projection to operate in a film—for one to recognize one's self in the other—the characters on the screen should be transparent to the audience. The opacity of the characters in the film, on the contrary, prevents the audience from acknowledging them either as an ego ideal available for incorporation or as an external object available for narcissistic projection. The opacity, in this equation, undermines the existing rhetorical-mental schemes of empathy and distances the audience from the characters or their experiences as sex workers. Nevertheless, their opacity is also a veil giving the impression that it hides something and fosters the desire to uncover it. For instance, because of showing extreme optimism (she even smiles before jumping out of the window), we might suspect whether Jae-yeong lacks the mental ability to have the awareness of the situation she finds herself in, or whether Yeo-jin sleeps with the clients without demanding any payment because she suffers from insanity after losing her beloved one. Needless to say, these suspicions are the indicators of seeking to find reasonable explanations for the arbitrary prostitutions that the film pictures. However, the film does not let us draw any obvious conclusions based on these kinds of suspicions and keeps us expecting solid justifications for the characters' involvement in prostitution but never provides one. In so doing, *Samaria* reveals that there is a traumatic nothingness (the Real) not any logically proper presence behind the veil. After all, "beyond the signifying network, beyond the visual field, there

³ This lack leads to the persistence of the inconsistencies (decent appearances-deviant deeds). The inconsistencies in question would be dissolved by means of the explanatory logic of cause and effect that ensures the overlap between the appearances and deeds. In other words, in conventional visual and verbal narratives, the harmony between how the characters look and what they do might require the re-construction of dichotomies: a decent girl must not become a whore unless she has a strong reason for it or a whore must look like a whore rather than a decent girl.

is, in fact, nothing at all. The veil of representation actually conceals nothing; there is nothing behind representation” (Copjec, 1994, p. 35). Yet, the veil that hides nothingness is the condition for the emergence and sustainability of the desire as well as the subjectivity. The Lacanian notion of desire is everlastingly insatiable because of the structural absence of its objet (*objet petit a*/nothingness) that supposedly supplies permanent satisfaction. The structural absence of the absolute object of desire guarantees the production and preservation of the desire, which assures the establishment and sustainability of the subjectivity in return. The subject remains as subject to the extent that s/he fails to fulfill and thus retains the desire to reach beyond the surface that consists of signifiers (the veil), despite of and owing to the nothingness that the same surface conceals (Lacan, 2006a). Or rather, “The subject is the effect of the impossibility of seeing what is lacking in the representation, what the subject, therefore, wants to see” (Copjec, 1994, p. 35).

That is to say, although the conventional processes of identification are not present, the audience’s attention to the opaque characters is established in the film as the desire to render them transparent. In the same vein, the subversiveness of the characters’ practice of prostitution originates from the lack of identification with them while the very same lack simultaneously ensures the attention to them in the form of desire for rationalizing their engagement in prostitution. This means that the film prevents the audience both from being indifferent to and sympathetic with the characters. The former audience positioning would render ineffectual the above-mentioned subversion/trauma that the characters personify and the latter would render pathetic or ordinary their engagement in prostitution. By means of the opaque presence of the characters, in contrast, the film positions the audience as being neither able to withdraw her/his psychic-mental investment from the film nor bear an all-seeing look that allows her/him to experience the Metzian illusion of transcendentalism, which could be decoded as the imaginary mastery over the images displayed on the screen (Metz, 1996, p. 48-52). What is at issue in the film is thus the absence of the gaze on the side of the audience, which not only promotes the audience’s desire for interpenetration but also avoids the satisfaction of this desire.

The absence of the all-seeing gaze in the film also disturbs the existing sociocultural categories of female sexuality, which exert power over women’s desire by limiting and hierarchically arranging the repertoire of the sexual choices available to them. As I mentioned above, according to the conventions of female sexuality, prostitution is undesirable or practiced only as an outcome of the victimizing external (patriarchal/economic) forces that make prostitution inescapable for the subalterns. On the contrary, since the narrative

reasons for the characters' involvement in prostitution are not convincing, the film presents prostitution as desirable for decent teenage girls who do not experience economic difficulties in covering their vital needs. This means that one's economic condition and sociocultural position do not necessarily anchor one's desire. In as much as the symbolic order could not provide the object of absolute gratification, there might occur a gap between *who I am* for the others and *what my desire is*. This is the gap that avoids the overlap between conscious and unconscious, signifier and signified—the gap that constructs both the subject and the interval in which the subject could be out of the (assumed-imaginary) sight of the law's⁴ gaze that restricts the flow of desire (Lacan, 2006b, p. 690-694).

In sum, the discrepancies between the facades of the characters (decent) and their sexual orientations (deviant), on the one hand, erode the boundary between the decent and the subversive, and thus undermine the sexual conservatism. On the other hand, the *weaknesses* of the narrative enchainment of cause and effect in motivating prostitution (because of which the discrepancies in question are sustained rather than eradicated, and thus the opaque characterizations are nourished in the film) also function to emphasize the subversiveness of the characters' choice by undermining the conventions of feminism regarding prostitution. Engaging in prostitution not for surviving but just for collecting a holiday budget and providing unpaid sex service as a moral deed disturb the aforementioned feminist recognition of the characters as evident victims of socioeconomic conditions, which would otherwise tame the prostitution under the guise of victimization and disavow its potential to violate socially acceptable sexuality.

Sadism or paternal reaction against ungraspable prostitution

The extreme version of dealing with the opacity of the characters, which makes us wonder as if they harbor something that we could not disclose, is epitomized in the film in the father's violent reactions. To begin with, we could theorize the assaults and the murder that the father committed through the lens of two concepts: *jouissance of the other* and sadism. The former is a Lacanian notion expressing the illusion that the other enjoys something that I lost—the illusion that the other enjoys the ultimate gratification of being unified by means of *the thing* that is stolen from me, and this theft transforms me into a lacking subject (Žižek, 1994, p. 71; cited in Somay, 2010, p. 192). We must keep in mind that the subject divided between conscious and unconscious is

⁴ Throughout the article the law indicates both the dominant sociocultural values-prohibitions and the institutional-written law.

primordially lacking in Lacan's theory indeed. The feeling that *something is lost or stolen* is an illusion. Without the structural lack, the subject does not come into existence. Thus, in terms of the symbolic impossibilities, complete enjoyment, becoming whole is unattainable or attainable only at the expense of the dissolution of the subjectivity. On that account:

The sadist does not act for his own enjoyment; his stratagem is, rather, to elude the split constitutive of the subject by means of the role of the object-instrument in service of the big Other (a historico-political example: the Stalinist Communist who conceives himself as the tool of History, as the means of carrying out historical Necessity) (Žižek, 2010, p. 220).

In other words, sadism is a form of self-objectification that might function as the transgression of the law for the name of the law itself (Žižek, 2010, p. 225). The sadist aims at revealing the lack in the victim, perhaps in order to terminate her/his own illusion of the *jouissance of the other* but not for her/his own enjoyment, rather, for the sake of another illusion—the illusion that the law is superior and its desire must be fulfilled. Therefore, sadist is the one who convinces her/himself that s/he knows what the superior law desires and that s/he could provide the law with ultimate satisfaction or enjoyment by means of her/his own transgressive deeds. Accordingly, although transgression is prohibited, it becomes permissible insofar as it is staged for the fulfillment of the big Other's presumable desire.

We might claim that the father, as a policeman, who is traumatized by his daughter's incomprehensible engagement in an illegal sexual practice, begins to transgress the law through assaulting the clients and murdering one of them, paradoxically, for enforcing the law prohibiting prostitution. However, it is never clear whether he embraces the conservative or feminist conventions in the course of his sadistic actions: does the tendency of defending women's rights against a patriarchal culture or omnipresent family values against a sexual deviation encourage him to punish the men who slept with Yeo-jin? On the one hand, he is a caring and loving father who treats his daughter kindly and attentively even during the trip that takes place after he realizes that she has sex with strangers. Besides, at the end of the day, he harms only male clients not his daughter. On the other hand, in one of the scenes, while smacking one of the clients in the face, he articulates that the existing social order is shattered because of the *pedophiles* like the one he is punishing and embarrasses the man before his family members. Thus, it is undecidable whether he is an avenging guardian of women's rights or patriarchal morality. Owing to this undecidability, the film designates the insignificance of excusing principles in discussing sadism: whenever there are law and prohibitions there

is always the assumption of the *perverse-evil* other's *jouissance* and sadist intends to cancel out this presumed *jouissance of the other* regardless of what kind of justifications s/he postulates for her/his own sadism.

It is possible to improve the analysis of the father and his sadism in the light of preceding thoughts: since the mother is dead/absent in the film, we might claim that the father is paternal yet maternal and thus takes both of the parental roles, of course, in the sense of discursive performance. This situation strengthens the link between him and Yeo-jin, which is also simultaneously weakened by the taboo of incest, however. That is to say, Yeo-jin's sexual awakening threatens the father-daughter union indeed. Flow of her libidinal energy towards the others outside the family dyad that she is part of inevitably brings the impairment of the psychic-emotional connection between Yeo-jin and her father. When he learns what Yeo-jin is doing, perhaps the father begins to feel like he is losing the father-daughter symbiosis because of his *mandatory* exclusion from his daughter's sexual experiences (the taboo of incest). At the same time, he also commences to hold grudge against the clients who break the law through having sex with Yeo-jin (the prohibition of pedophilia-prostitution). Thus, Yeo-jin's hyperactive polygamous sexual interactions with adult males might reinforce the father's sense of exclusion and resentment — she gets intimate with numerous men who must not be her companions for sexual intercourse, likewise the father himself. The father's sense of exclusion might cause him to experience the illusion of the *jouissance of the other*. He probably imagines that the clients possess *something* that he lost (Yeo-jin) and by means of this *thing*, they become fully satisfied. For ceasing the so-called wholeness or absolute gratification that he imaginarily attributes to the clients, the father assaults the clients and murders one of them. Beyond the moral reasons he might have internalized (avoiding the exploitation of women by patriarchal norms vs. protecting the existing social order), in short, the father aims at punishing the ones who allegedly enjoy *the thing* (Yeo-jin) that must be sexually inaccessible to them (the prohibition against pedophilia-prostitution) just as it is inaccessible to the father himself (the taboo of incest). For the same reason, in the sequence of trip to countryside, we begin to suspect that the father might also murder his daughter since she also disobeys the law regarding sexuality together with her male sex partners.

Law and transgression

What we witness during the trip to countryside sequence is, in fact, the encounter between two kinds of transgressions— that of the daughter against the law and of the father for the sake of the law itself. Due to their encounter, the anxious expectation that the father will violently punish his daughter is evoked

in the audience. The audience's expectation in question and the encounter of the transgressions compose a triangle, which demonstrates how the subjects cling to and short-circuit the law at once through their transgressive deeds.

Let us consider how to conceptualize transgression and its relation to the law in the first place, in conjunction with Lacan's famous maxims: "Nothing forces anyone to enjoy (*jouir*) except the superego. The superego is the imperative of *jouissance*- Enjoy!" (Lacan, 1999 p. 3; cited in Žižek, 2006, p. 79). If the superego commands the subject to enjoy instead of imposing moral restrictions on the subject, in what way does the regulative power of the law influence and restrict the decisions and deeds of individuals? It seems that two opposing yet mutually constitutive authoritative voices are at work in the formation of one's psyche and performative decisions. Without the transgressive command of the superego (enjoy), the subject might not submit to the restrictions that the law disperses. And without the external prohibitions (the law), the superego, which paradoxically commands the subject to enjoy or to transgress the law, would not become an authoritative psychic agent in the subject.

In other words, roughly speaking, because of the aforementioned structural and constitutive absence/impossibility within the symbolic order (*objet petit a*), the subject constantly fails to enjoy or to fulfill the above-mentioned command of the superego. Since transgression does not bring enjoyment, it is *useless* and the subject of transgression feels guilty because of disobeying the law's explicit demand for *nothing*. The ineffectuality of transgression that engenders the feeling of guilt forces the subject to embrace the law. The subject's guilty embracement of the law functions to disguise the structural absence/impossibility in question with an external obstacle—the law. The law in the guise of external obstacle produces the wrong supposition that the enjoyment might be possible if this external obstacle (the law) is surmounted. However, in order to actualize the command of the superego, once the subject tries to experience enjoyment by means of transgression, s/he again faces the fact that the impossibility of enjoyment is immanent both to the symbolic order and to the subjectivity, and thus it could not be rendered possible by simply suspending the law in a certain context. This means that the subject questing for complete enjoyment or wholeness is always already destined to failure. Besides, since the "superego is real, the cruel and insatiable agency that bombards me with impossible demands and then mocks my botched attempts to meet them" (Žižek, 2006, p. 80), the feeling of guilt is experienced insofar as the subject realizes that s/he is not able to accomplish the command of the superego, that s/he could not achieve enjoyment. What binds the subject to the law is thus her/his guilt arisen from

her/his own inherent inability of enjoyment. We have already returned to the very beginning. The false supposition that the enjoyment is attainable by breaking the law is constructed, which, in turn, yields the subject's desire for transgression and attempt to transgress the law results in the sense of guilt, and so forth. Therefore, the circular relation between the law and transgression is incessantly repeated.

The circulation between the law and transgression is discernible in the father's and Yeo-jin's behaviors as well. To begin with, we might claim that from Yeo-jin's perspective her father, as a policeman, as a representative of the law, is an embodied delegate of the big Other that does not have an actual existence indeed and operates through the subject's submission to the sociocultural prohibitions and regulations. On Yeo-jin's side, as long as the big Other (Yeo-jin's literal father in her case) does not recognize the transgressions that supposedly bring forth enjoyment, they can be performed as if they are not performed and thus without being exposed to any psychological or external sanction. Nevertheless, Yeo-jin begins to feel guilty after her friend's-lover's death. Along with her aforementioned failure to be on the lookout, she probably blames herself for being distanced from practicing prostitution while Jae-yeong was alive. In other words, despite of her apparent reluctance to practice prostitution before the death of Jae-yeong, she had a desire for practicing prostitution. This means that Yeo-jin desire *the thing* that her significant other, Jae-yeong desires and blames herself for betraying her own desire. Thus, after the death of Jae-yeong, she engages in prostitution for extinguishing her feeling of guilt. We should also keep in mind that the moment at which Yeo-jin decides to return the clients' money and provide them with unpaid sex service is illustrated as if she is going to carry out an obligation. Voluntary involvement in sexual intercourse as an obligation might be perceived as an indicator that Yeo-jin aims at fulfilling the command of the superego. She seeks enjoyment and completion, or to be more accurate, tries to compensate the loss of her friend, her beloved one by means of hyperactive and polygamous sexuality. Actually, she is dragged into melancholia. "Melancholia refuses to acknowledge loss, and in this sense "preserves" its lost objects as psychic effects" (Butler, 1997, p. 182) and the melancholic "[...] begins to mime and incorporate the lost one, refusing the loss through that incorporative strategy [...]" (1997, p. 161). Thus, as a way of disavowing the loss, Yeo-jin makes a melancholic effort to preserve Jae-yeong in/on her own body by taking Jae-yeong's place and thus by engaging in prostitution as Jae-yeong did. Yeo-jin's melancholic engagement in prostitution is without doubt a way to put up resistance to the symbolic prohibitions. She repeats the performance of prostitution that symbolic authorities aim at canceling

out. However, her unavoidable failure to compensate the loss and to enjoy strengthens rather than extinguishes her sense of loss and guilt. Thus, she ceases to have sex with the clients after she returns all their money. Following her sexual intercourse with the last client, she throws away the phone book that contains the contact information of the clients and she wanders off before the camera with a sorrowful and exhausted facial expression. Furthermore, during the trip to countryside, she recognizes that her father is aware of her prostitutions and as she begins to be afraid of being punished by her father, her feeling of guilt becomes even more severe. Despite this fear, by her father's car, she tries to follow the police vehicle that is taking her father away after his arrest and thus she gives the impression that she does not want to be separated from her father. That is to say, she clings to the father (the law) through her own transgressive deeds.

On the side of the father, the same circulation might be observed: the father's sadism, as I tried to emphasize above, has nothing to do with moral principles, in the well-known sense of word (it is not decidable whether he is a feminist or conservative vigilante). Since the superego is "the anti-ethical agency, the stigmatization of our ethical betrayal" (Žižek, 2006, p. 80) and its "pressure demonstrates that we effectively *are* guilty of betraying our desire" (2006, p. 81, italic emphasis in the original), what holds sway over the father is also the superego. After he realizes that Yeo-jin engages in prostitution, he probably transforms his inherent inability of enjoyment (which is disguised by the symbolic prohibitions and creates the impression that enjoyment is obstructed by external symbolic barriers) into an attempt to satisfy the so-called desire of the law. In other words, he begins to desire to fulfill the presumable desire of the law, which, he probably believes, encoded in the law's explicit demand. We might claim that, according to the father, even though the law forbids transgression, it latently desires for transgression. What we have here is the projection of the desire indeed: to recapitulate what was said earlier, perhaps the father does not acknowledge his inherent inability of enjoyment and presumes that he could not enjoy because of the symbolic prohibitions. In spite of that, by paying attention to the law's so-called latent desire, he decides to punish the subjects who do not obey the demand of the law (the taboo against prostitution- pedophilia), instead of enacting a subversive transgression as his daughter does. It seems that he projects his own desire for transgression to the non-existent big Other. And he transgresses the law in order to ensure its enjoyment. However, since the law, the big Other is not a tangible presence, the father could not guarantee the enjoyment of the law. Even if he is unconsciously enticed by the fantasy that the big Other has an autonomous and actual presence, he could not be sure whether he successfully

occupies the position of the instrument that supposedly supplies enjoyment to the law, simply because he could not locate any empirical evidence proving that the law is provided with enjoyment by means of his sadistic deeds. Eventually, the law, the big Other does not actually exist: “In spite of all its grounding power, the big Other is fragile, insubstantial, properly *virtual*, in the sense that its status is that of a subjective presupposition. It exists only in so far as subjects *act as if it exists*” (Žižek, 2006, p. 10, italic emphasis in the original). Thence, the father’s betrayal against his desire or failure to ensure enjoyment both for himself and for the law is transformed into the feeling of guilt with respect to the assaults and the murder he committed, and forces him to denounce himself to the police. The father, in short, likewise his daughter, submits to the law through transgression.

Submissive and subversive transgressions

One might ask: if both the father’s and Yeo-jin’s transgressions are submissive at the end of the day, why have we been defining Yeo-jin’s sexual orientation as subversive? In order to answer this question we should take the third corner of the triangle into consideration: the falsified expectation that the father is going to harm his daughter during the trip.

When we recognize that our anxious expectation that the father will punish Yeo-jin is a false one, we are probably relieved but also we feel a little bit guilty. The father who we think is a cruel vigilante and going to kill or torture his daughter does not meet our negative expectations. He reports himself to the police and surrenders on his own will. It turns out that, rather than a monster, the father is a conscientious person who admits the crimes he committed. Thus, we might feel guilty because of perceiving the father wrongly as a cruel man. There is an obvious twist here: the father relinquishes his sadism when it comes to his daughter and this twist, without a doubt, functions to vindicate the father in our eye by rendering him a concerned parent assaulting and murdering *only pedophiles*. However, our feeling of guilt for perceiving the father negatively or our compassion for him is elicited just before the law catches the father and separates him from his daughter. As we begin to cling to the father emotionally, we also begin to lose him.

This narrative configuration and audience positioning might remind us the primitive fantasy about the origin of the sense of guilt that Freud posits in his seminal work, *Totem and Taboo*. Accordingly, once a father possessed all the women in the community. He was the absolute father withholding the objects of desire and avoiding the enjoyment of his sons. The envious brothers, eventually, banded together and killed him. This patricide was the

source of the brothers' enduring sense of guilt. They organized totemic rituals as a way of recalling their father and overcoming their remorse. Nevertheless, these commemorative rituals not only kept the memory of the murdered father alive but also reminded the moment of patricide and functioned to preserve the guilt of the brothers. Furthermore, in order to live in peace, to avoid a possible antagonism among themselves for taking the place of the deceased father who possessed all the women, the community of the brothers declared a prohibition—the law against claiming right to have all the women or take the position of the primordial father (the taboo against incest and polygyny). The rituals in question, among other things, also emphasized the validity of this primal prohibition that held the community of the brothers together. In this scenario, the death of the father who does not have any lack (who have all the women) designates not only the initiation of the sense of guilt but also the beginning of the sociocultural regulations. These regulations aimed at suppressing the subjects' aggressions to one and another, forced them to learn how to live without consuming each other by means of the fear of punishment that was supposed to prevent the male members of the community from insisting on reaching all the *things* they want (Freud, 2001, p. 164-170). That is to say, in this scenario, the sense of guilt is the indicator of the absence of the omnipotent primordial father and the presence of the sociocultural regulations that exert power over the subjects. In Lacanian terms, this scenario offers a fantasy that stages the initial replacement of the authority of the other (of the blood-and-flesh father) by that of the big Other. In so doing, it involves another fantasy as well—the fantasy that the primordial father is outside the sociocultural prohibitions and thus he occupies the position of the omnipotent authority that is devoid of all the restrictions of the law and has limitless enjoyment. On the other hand, the scenario in question also houses a significant paradox about the beginning of the sense of guilt and the law. If this scenario allegedly pictures the first murder in the history, which initiates the law in relation to the sense of guilt, the law could not yet exist at the time of the patricide. This deduction reveals two questions: if the law did not yet exist when the brothers killed their father, how were they to feel guilty for their deeds? Is the sense of guilt possible without the existence of the law? We should summarize the Derridean understanding considering the law's presence before discussing the possible answers of these questions.

According to Derrida, the source of the law is inaccessible. It is not possible to reach a presence or an occasion that is the ultimate producer of the law. In addition, the law could not answer any question regarding its own presence. For instance, the law could not answer why the existing prohibitions are necessary and what their certain functions are. On behalf of the source,

only the representatives or the guardians of the law could claim the essentiality of sociocultural prohibitions. Besides, in order for the source (the producer) to generate the law (the product), its presence must be external to that of the law. In other words, the source of the law must be present even when the law does not yet exist. Therefore, gaining an access to the source requires reaching a constitutive presence, which is prior to the establishment of the law itself (Derrida, 1992). As the above-mentioned Freudian scenario about the origin of the sense of guilt indirectly points out, since it is not possible to mark where and when the law begins, it is also impossible to reach the source, which must be present before the law comes into being.

Derrida's thoughts are key to answer the questions stated above: the sense of guilt is the indicator of one's prior attachment to the law and without the sense of guilt the subject would not submit to the law. That is to say, it is not decidable whether the sense of guilt causes the submission to the law or the submission to the law causes the sense of guilt at the very beginning. This means that the subject is always already restricted by the law's demands. Since the subject comes into being through acquiring language and language is a non-neutral medium that harbors symbolic restrictions within, the subject inevitably internalizes the demands of the law in the process of subjectivation (Lacan, 1991b, p. 89-90; 2006c, p. 413-414). Otherwise, the subject loses its subjectivity, its symbolic foundation, like in the cases of psychosis and some other pathological instances. In this regard, the split of the speaking subject does not only designate the gap between conscious and unconscious but also indicates the distance between the self and Ego-ideal (the internalized extension of the law), and allows the subject to simultaneously take the positions of both the critical authority and the object of criticism, which enables self-criticism in return (Lacan, 1991c, p. 140-141). Accordingly, the subject that is absolutely devoid of the restrictions and prohibitions of the law is always already an impossibility. This impossibility does not simply originate from the external prohibitions that the guardians of the law impose on the individuals by means of using brute force. Conscience or the internalized moral extension of the law paves the way for self-criticism and self-inhibition without the mediation of any external enforcement. Overall, we might draw the following outcome from the ongoing interpretations: apart from pathological circumstances, alongside the structural impossibility of enjoyment, submission to the law and the construction of conscience (the internalized extension of the submission in question) is another *sine qua non* of the subjectivity. The primordial father in *Totem and Taboo* is thus a phantasmagoric articulation of an impossible subject position. No flesh-and-blood father could be an omnipotent being ultimately devoid of external or/and internalized restrictions of the law.

We shall turn back to the last scene of the film within the framework of our sense of guilt regarding the father's self-denouncement and his decision to surrender to the police. It might be claimed that the audience's sense of guilt for wrongly expecting the father to punish his daughter designates the loss of the father's authority indeed. We begin to feel guilty as we acknowledge the father's sense of guilt that causes him to criticize himself. The father's sense of guilt and self-criticism forces him to surrender to the police and begins to render him absent in return. This *mise en scène* reveals the gap between the other and the big Other. It materializes the impossibility of the position of the primordial father who is allegedly devoid of any kind of (external/internal) restriction and ultimately withholds enjoyment. The effect of the disclosure of this impossibility is the loss of the power of the father. Because of his sense of guilt that makes him to denounce himself to the police, the father's presence and personal power over Yeo-jin begin to disappear at the end of the film. In other words, in this scene, the power of the father as a flesh-and-blood symbolic authority is replaced by the big Other's virtual power and presence. What is striking here is that the father's failure of furnishing the law and himself with enjoyment does not simply cause him to feel guilty or simply force him to attach to the law. In his attachment to the law, we might also observe the operation of the critical psychic agent that probably accuses the sadistic self of the father. Thus, the father's authority is undermined not only through emphasizing his failure of gaining an access to enjoyment on behalf of the law but also by transforming this failure into the failure of taking the position of the primordial father who allegedly avoids the other's presumable enjoyment as an absolute sadist lacking conscience and self-critical psychic agency.

Now we can discuss the reasons for labeling Yeo-jin's sexual orientation as subversive despite of her submission to the law in the end. To begin with, from Yeo-jin's perspective the above-mentioned replacement of the other with the big Other takes place even before the last scene of the film. While she is arranging her friend's meetings with the clients and engaging in prostitution herself, she probably recognizes that she and Jae-yeong could escape the gaze of the law as long as the guardians of the law (the police) along with her father do not recognize their sexual deviation. In other words, the entwinement of Yeo-jin's sexual orientation and decent appearance uncovers the fact that submission to the law does not avoid deviation. Thus, Yeo-jin locates the blind spot of the law that reveals the father's lack of physical and moral control over his daughter's life. In so doing, she makes her father to face with the limit of his power, which is the limit of his sadism as well. He could not punish or harm Yeo-jin simply because she is his daughter and he surrenders to the

police considering the assaults and murder he committed after he faces with this limit. Yet, the last scene of the film implies a significant transformation for Yeo-jin. Until the countryside trip, she tries to preserve both her attachment to the father and her subversion by trying to conceal her direct and indirect involvement in prostitution. During the countryside sequence, in contrast, she recognizes that her father knows what is going on. This means that her sexual deviation is already inscribed into the symbolic network. Without this inscription, the separation of the father from Yeo-jin would not have actualized. This separation has two meanings for Yeo-jin: the end of parental pressure and the loss of parental care. Although she tries to follow the police vehicle at the end in order to defer the separation and the loss, by means of the very same separation and loss she also gains personal autonomy that gives her the opportunity to decide in which contexts to embrace and in which others to undermine the existing sociocultural restrictions.⁵ In short, since she frees herself from the symbolic authority of the father by means of her direct and indirect involvement in prostitution, Yeo-jin's sexual orientation is subversive despite of her submissive attitudes during the trip and in the last scene.

Conclusion

Samaria invites us to focus on the ambiguous effectuality of the law, which at once produces and avoids sadism, prohibits and creates room for subversion. Accordingly, the circulation between transgression and the law is not an enclosed one that does not produce any deviation from the norm. In contrast, this circulation both preserves the existing norms and fosters their suspension. The inability of the law to answer any question regarding its own presence discloses its virtual existence and creates room for deviation, whereas the guardians-representatives of the law attempt to ensure its consistency. Without the entwinement of deviation and consistency, the law could not guarantee the distance between the subjects, which prevents them from consuming each other. This means that the law is not a monolithic phenomenon and could not be absolutely suspended. For instance, the case of Jae-yeong and Yeo-jin does not entirely invalidate the feminist terminology that is at odds with prostitution. There exists, of course, many circumstances involving the victimization of sex workers. However, the film, by focusing on the instances of arbitrary prostitution, discloses the blind spot of the perspectives that generically anchor prostitution as being subjected to male domination without consent. Thus, the film makes us to simultaneously espouse conflicting ethical

⁵ Although the subject can never be entirely free from the symbolic constraints, the structural absence of the power as an all-seeing and omnipotent being gives rise to the agency of the subject, which might function either in favor of or against the norms of the dominant discourses.

illations. We recognize that we should both keep the law in order to avoid the exploitation of sex workers and mark the dead end of the prohibition against prostitution for assuring the presence of marginalized bodies that voluntarily practice prostitution. The film constructs this ambivalent ethical positioning of the audience also in the context of the relations between trauma and subversion, desire and symbolic barriers. Taking into consideration the case of two teenage girls in the film, we might praise trauma owing to its subversive potential. However, we cannot approve the father's sadistic attempts that traumatize the others, especially when we begin to suspect that the paternal violence might tend toward Yeo-jin as well. Besides, sadism is not presented as means to ensure enjoyment: the father feels guilty because of his sadistic actions and surrenders to the police on his own will. Furthermore, by rendering prostitution preferable for decent teenage girls who do not experience financial difficulties, the film manifests the fluidity of desire that invalidates the symbolic barriers produced by the dominant discourses on sexuality. On the other hand, transgression of the symbolic barriers is not pictured as a source of permanent satisfaction either, and the inherent insatiability of desire is preserved: Yeo-jin ceases to perform prostitution after a while and gives the impression that she could not access enjoyment or compensate her loss (Jae-yeong) through performing prostitution. The film pictures the traumatic and subversive potential of prostitution without idealizing it or without ignoring the structural insatiability of desire; pictures both the sadistic and liberating dimensions of transgression through the mediation of the sense of guilt. Overall, *Samaria* keeps the audience from reaching univocal answers concerning trauma, prostitution, desire and the sense of guilt, and succeeds in depicting the ambiguous relations between the law and transgression.

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