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The Zombie as a Modern-Day Metaphor

A B S T R A C T

Zombies as a sub-genre of horror, has been haunting our spirit as entity which provoke fear that exceeds the limits of horror sometimes. yet what if it is creation was not meant to be an act of entertainment as it is offered and being introduced by film makers and producers? What will we find if we dig deep into the essence of its creation from the beginnings? The fact that this kind of literature works on our deepest fears and uses our anxieties to reach its aim is obviously the means used by the writers to achieve what they want. Moreover the zombie is often linked to the concepts of capitalism and industrialization.

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الزومبي كأستعارة للعصر الحديث

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ملخص البحث

الزومبي كنوع فرعي من الرعب , يؤرقون أرواحنا ككيانات تثير الخوف الذي يتجاوز حدود الرعب أحياناً ، ولكن ماذا لو لم يكن المقصود من وجودهم عملاً ترفيهياً كما يتم تقديمه من قبل صانعي الأفلام والمنتجين؟ ماذا سنجد إذا بحثنا بعمق في جوهر نشأته منذ البداية ؟ من الواضح أن حقيقة هذا النوع من الأدب يعمل على مخاوفنا العميقة ويستخدم مخاوفنا للوصول إلى هدفه هو الوسيلة التي يستخدمها الكُتّاب لتحقيق ما يريدون. بالإضافة لذلك الزومبي غالباً مرتبط بمفهوم الرأسمالية والتصنيع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرأسمالية ، الرعب ، التصنيع ، الزومبي.

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1. Zombie: Myth and Origin

Roger Luckhurst in his book *Zombies: A cultural history* (2015) states that a zombie is a soulless creature, a dead body that used to be a human being when he had a soul, an undead who comes back to live a death in life situation with the help of some supernatural or pseudo-scientific trick.

This creature is voiceless, does not have a human intelligence and memory of previous history of the used to be a living body. Thus, it does not appreciate the past relations nor able to create present ones, and they blend into an indifferent mass that grows exponential. They are motivated by an empty yet compelling desire to hunt and eat the last of the living and expand their territory further (Luckhurst, 2015,7).

Horror fiction's most popular characters include zombies, vampires, and werewolves. From the most basic; zombies, to the more developed; vampires, to the almost-human; werewolves, there are various degrees of 'the undead'. The similarities between the three types, according to Nathan Moses Szajnberg (2012), are that they cannot be killed, that they must consume humans to be alive, and that none of them can ever become human. They differ in a few key areas that are thought to be important in determining their identities: Werewolves are the highest form of the undead; they live as humans for almost three weeks each month and transform only on full moon nights wherein they lose control and feed on humans; however, they behave strangely the next day because they wake up as humans again and remember the previous night's terror. This causes them to feel deep sorrow and regret. This demonstrates that werewolves have past guilt and future dread in a temporal sense (Szajnberg, 2012, 901).

Vampires are a higher level of being; they have the will to do what they want, they drink blood to stay alive, but also give their victims the sought "gift" of immortal death in life situation. In addition to having full memory of what they do and how they feed, they seem to enjoy their life and the look of fear in their victim's eyes. Zombies' position in the list of the undead is the last. Located in the bottom of the ferocious creatures. They are characterized by their lack of 'will power', they walk in a mechanical, frozen-jointed, masked-face gait, and have no feelings about devouring humans (Szajnberg 901).

Being a Zombie does not allow someone to remember what s/he did or what s/he was before, s/he does not have a collective memory of how does it feel to be a human being. S/he is also unable to decide which prey s/he is going to attack or transfer. S/he does not feel the joy of feeding nor the remorse after that. Zombies have no volition, concern, or consciousness of what they are doing (Szajnberg 905).

Historical records mention that Ancient Egyptian and Greek civilizations have been introduced to this terror of the 'walking dead'. Archaeology studies such myths and give proofs of ancient graves that contain Mummies or Skeletons that are pinned down by rocks or heavy objects to prevent the dead body from roaming around. Zombies, like the ghoul of North African or the vampires of Eastern European, are fringe folkloric beings that swing between undefined territories of modernity and ancient thoughts (Luckhurst 9).

Moreover, The *Epic of Gilgamesh* (2100 B.C.), a well-known literary work, consists one of the earliest versions of the zombie myth. This epic poem is inspired by a Mesopotamian legend that dates back to roughly 2000 B.C., according to Adam Woog in his book *Zombies* (2011). In one section of this long epic, the unknown author describes a troop of zombie-like creatures who are under the control of the goddess Ishtar. Ishtar's father, the sky deity Anu, is hesitant to give her something she desires: the holy Bull of Heaven. Unless her father changes his mind, the angered goddess threatens to raise the earth's dead and consume the living (Woog, 2011, 8).

Another early allusion to zombies may be found in *The Thousand and One Nights*, a well-known collection of tales. This epic work of fiction has been dated to at least the ninth century A.D., while other historians believe it may be earlier. "The History of Gherib and His Brother Agib" is one of the stories in this collection. It depicts the story of Gherib, an exiled prince who battles an extraterrestrial, flesh-eating entity described as "The-Ghoul-who-eats-men-we-pray-God-for-safety" (Woog 9).

The zombie as it is known, on the other hand, is the product of a mix of African myths and European colonial encounters. Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry write in their "A Zombie Manifesto" (2008), "We cannot take up the figure of the zombie without recognizing its appropriation from Haitian folklore" (Lauro and Embry, 2008, 96).

Mike Mariani argues in his essay "The Tragic, Forgotten History of Zombie" (2015) that "the zombie myth is far older and more rooted in history than the blinkered arc of American pop culture suggests." During the 17th and 18th centuries, the modern world knew the legendary story of the Zombie in Haiti.

Haiti was known as "Saint-Domingue" throughout the 17th century and was governed by France. Slaves from Africa were enslaved and forced to work on sugar plantations. Slave working and living circumstances were inhumane, and they were treated as animals, therefore the legend of the walking dead was revived to refer to those groups of slaves who lived in a living hell. Mariani argues that;

The zombie archetype, as it appeared in Haiti and mirrored the inhumanity that existed there from 1625 to around 1800, was a projection of the African slaves' relentless misery and subjugation. Haitian slaves believed that dying would release them back to *lan guinée*, literally Guinea, or Africa in general, a kind of afterlife where they could be free. Though suicide was common among slaves, those who took their own lives wouldn't be allowed to return to *lan guinée*. Instead, they'd be condemned to skulk the Hispaniola plantations for eternity, undead slaves at once denied their own bodies and yet trapped inside them soulless zombies (Mariani, 2015, 3).

Shanks Jeffrey as cited in Sara Molpeceres "The Zombie: a new myth in the making. A political and social metaphor" (2017) explains that, due to the United States conquered Haiti in 1915, the myth of Haitian zombie has become popularized in the American culture since the late 1920s and early 1930s. American marines, missionaries, and exiled citizens returned from Haiti, bringing with them "tales of odd voodoo rituals and enigmatic bokors, and even reports of zombies" (Molpeceres, 2017, 153-154).

Mary A. Renda states in her book *Taking Haiti* (2001) that Faustin Wirkus is one of a few American marines that kept a journal of his time in Haiti. Wirkus first shared his memories and experiences with the journalist Seabrook. Wirkus's story is outstanding and similar to the books of Joseph Conrad: an average Pennsylvania boy joins the Marines and ends up in the tropics where he would be crowned as king of Voodoo island. Later on, Seabrook made use of this story with many other details about Haitian traditions and beliefs and included them in his *The Magic Island*. Wirkus' memoir presents a wealth of information about the discourses that influenced United States invasion of Haiti. His memoir assists in comprehending how the American culture functioned in occupying Haiti and demonstrating the cultural forces that influenced the imperial brutality in particular (Renda, 2001, 4).

Kette Thomas argues, in her article "Haitian Zombie, Myth, and Modern Identity" (2010), that in Western Culture Zombies became common, particularly during the 20th century, as a symbol for people who are unable to think for themselves and were posing a threat to social structures. As a result, the zombie is known in most cultures in these traditional terms. However, the portrayal of the persona frequently ignores the zombification procedures as well as the wider implications of the behavior. Despite the fact that zombies have been explored in a variety of disciplines, scholars have not looked into their legendary contributions. The majority of mythological scholarship has concentrated on books from ancient Greece and other cultures that influenced Western ideology, making a study of Haiti's zombie myth practically impossible. The strained relationship between the United States and Haiti, when anthropologists first identified the technique in the twentieth century, hampered exchanges between scholars and practitioners that could have provided insight on the metaphorical manifestations beneath zombification (Thomas, 2010, 3).

The zombie grabbed the attention of the Americans when Seabrook's published *The Magic Island* in (1929). This book is a travelogue about the author's experiences in Haiti, where he claims to have encountered real zombies, or individuals who have been changed into mindless slaves by sorcery. Seabrook learnt of the existence of this "living dead" creature, a monster comparable to those seen in Europe but particularly original and terrible, thanks to his local guide, Constant Polynice. Seabrook writes:

I reflected that these tales ran closely parallel not only with those of the Negroes in Georgia and the Carolinas, but with the mediaeval folklore of white Europe. Werewolves, vampires, and demons were certainly no novelty. But I recalled one creature I had been hearing about in Haiti, which sounded exclusively local the zombie. it seemed [...] that while the zombie came from the grave, it was neither a ghost, nor yet a person who had been raised like Lazarus from the dead (Seabrook, 1929, 93).

Anna Brooks Creagh in her "American Zombielore: Voodoo, Cinema, and the Undeath of Race" (2015) states that the American Zombie is a former slave or freedman who is reported to visit plantations late at night, inciting slaves to run away and, in some cases, murder their masters. It is unclear whether this figure is directly associated with Jean Zombie in the oral narratives that circulated in the United States, but the related themes of slave revolt, revenge, and revolution make a connection seem likely. In the 1860s, the lowercase "zombie" first appeared in a dictionary of Southern American folk speech and was defined as a Black phantom

or ghost associated with the kidnap of white children from plantation nurseries, foreshadowing a concern with miscegenation that became prominent much later in zombie lore films (Creagh, 2015,258).

Barre Toelken in his *The Dynamics of Folklore* (1996) suggests that a serious examination of folklore must start with an attempt to understand the cultural implications behind it. The meaning of folkloric stories usually run deeper than the superficial plot that is known to everyone. Seabrook's *The Magic Island* prompts the early discovery and adaptation of zombies, but the idea of walking dead man is not something specific to Seabrook's book. Also, it is not confined to a mere flesh eating creature that has lost its soul. For instance, the idea could be referring to the Africans who would regain the power of their religion and forgotten magic to raise into power and reclaim their stolen land (Toelken, 1996,30-31).

Some non-fiction anthropological works and nineteenth century travel narratives contain vague and inconsistent zombie references. According to Kyle Bishop in his article "The Sub-Subaltern Monster Imperialist Hegemony and the Cinematic Voodoo Zombie" (2008), the publication of *The Magic Island* carries the zombie out of Haiti's misunderstood superstitions and into the mainstream of American culture, permitting white heroines to be enslaved by local Voodoo Priests. These intrinsically racist films horrified Western audiences by depicting what they most likely feared at the time: a slave revolt. Following WWII and long into the Cold War, similar films emerged, but instead of Voodoo sorcerers, these films featured hostile extraterrestrial aliens, like in Edward L's films. In Haiti and other colonial countries, the zombie operated as an allegorical symbol, a repressive ideological machinery, evoking fears of slavery and the loss of individual sovereignty in both black and white people (Bishop, 2008, 141).

2.Zombie: A Metaphor of Modern World

The zombie myth has been shown to be contagious as well as adaptive, as Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry explain in "A Zombie Manifesto" (2008). The change from a local to a global climate is a good example of this. The zombie, a being born from the particular of Haiti's traditions and religious rituals, can be seen as a transition of a deeply embedded political and religious body. And, beyond Haiti, it's a unique metaphor for a variety of social and political issues (Lauro and Embry as cited in Edwards and Vasconcelos, 2008, 28).

Bishop in his *American Zombie Gothic* (2010) argues that, Hans Ackermann and Jeanine Gauthier define a zombie as a "resurrected person who is drained of will, memory, and consciousness, speaks with a nasal voice, and is distinguished chiefly by dull, glazed eyes and an absent air" (as cited in Bishop, 2010, 48).

The zombie was written about and linked to Haiti in 1930, right at the start of the Great Depression. As Kelly Gardner explains in *Tropical Gothic in Literature and Culture* (2016), the dispossessed populace of the United States came to identify with the powerlessness of the zombie workers, the figure became a moral critique of capitalist exploitation. Similarly, the depression's social and financial instability led to racial tensions, leading to the development of "color stereotypes." In Seabrook's account, the zombie was synonymous with "disposable slave labor", toiling relentlessly at the command of the master (Gardner, 2016, 77).

Sara Molpeceres argues in her "The Zombie: A New myth in the Making. A Political and Social Metaphor" (2017), that men and women in the twenty first century are adapting and

repopulating ancient myths. When confronted with new realities, they construct new myths to clarify and recognize those new experiences. The zombie myth is an example of this; it was revised and adapted, just like every other myth. It “evolved from the voodoo zombie to the apocalyptic zombie of today.” (115) The latter is the most successful version of zombie myth, as it is the version that has crossed over into different discourses and practices including politics, and economy (Molpeceres, 2017, 151).

The zombie legend is often linked to the concepts of capitalism and industrialization. Garnet Weston writes in *White Zombie* 1932, the zombie lord Legendre says of his army of slaves, “They work faithfully and are not concerned about long hours.” (49) In Haitian Vodou, the bokor has his slaves’ minds controlled by him, mirroring by that, how the capitalist tries to control the worker by limiting his or her right to make decisions, demonstrate autonomy, or articulating free will. In this way, Zachary Graves in his *Zombies: The Complete Guide to the World of the Living Dead* (2010), states that the zombie legend can be seen as a criticism of capitalism, emphasizing how the common person is oppressed, being a subordinate part in the system, which loses humanity by time (Graves, 2010,49).

Zombies are the product of power colliding with science, which treats man as its object of research, exposing him to new power applications and techniques. In this way, Justin Vaccaro, in his “Modernity’s Automatization of Man: Biopower and the Early Zombie Film” (2012), argues that science both enlightens about bodies and how to manipulate them, while also expanding the “body” by objectifying more and more of the human being. The zombie is so understandable because of this latter pattern and the objectified and easily subjugated person it produces (Vaccaro, 2012,4).

The First World War was the first great war of the bourgeoisie, according to Historian Modris Eksteins (1989) “It is therefore hardly surprising that the shocking that the ideals of this middle class should have been the dominant values of the war, determining not only the behavior of individual soldiers but the whole organization and even strategy and tactics of the war.” (7) Yet, Soldiers were the bourgeois subjects and were transformed into Carpenter’s automatons by the trench. In their diaries and letters, front line soldiers reveal that their senses become so numb and dulled by the repeated attacks that after a while their reactions became no more than reflexes, whether in action or in routine duty. The soldier, thus, operates instinctively, and his reflexes and intuition are largely driven by his own surrounding (Eksteins, as cited in Vaccaro, 1989,7).

Life in the trench is transformed into disciplinary actions and reactions. Soldiers who survived more than a few weeks started to lose their human faculties, such as thinking and feeling. The most shocking part is that they turned off their desire for self-preservation. The automatic thinking of the soldier makes him like a machine that plays with death instead of taking it seriously. The trench of WWI is not the only place that can shut down the human faculties of soldiers and made it look like a precursor of zombie, but the modern trench as well with its modern tactics that consumes the soldier’s mentality. Attrition is one common strategy today as it was in the past, it had no clear aims in mind, such as territorial expansion. Its aim was to diminish the enemy’s wealth and minimize their productivity. It fought the enemy on a statistical base. Thus, WWI is an excellent example of the bio-political control in this regard (Vaccaro7-8).

According to several accounts, the United States assumed parental authority and power over Haiti. Furthermore, Sara Gerend argues in her “My Son, My Son!: Paternalism, Haiti, and Early Twentieth-Century American Imperialism in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*” (2009) that, viewers in the United States were encouraged to perceive the people of Haiti as harmless child-like ghosts that could be easily manipulated by white male magicians. In Herman Webber’s 1930 hysterical show, “Midnight Voodoo Party”, the public in American came to picture the occupied island of Haiti as a weak player on the world stage which was in need of the leadership of the white men. This inaccurate image was stereotyped due to different depictions of black and African inhabitants in the popular culture (Gerend, 2009, 21).

According to Bishop (2010), the zombie today is a marketable American monster, spawned by imperialism, slavery, and, most notably, the magic of Voodoo. From the 1930s and until after 1940s, the zombie was depicted by filmmakers to be based on Haitian social, cultural, and religious beliefs. The zombie creature can be seen as genuinely belonging to the Americans when seen in this way, as it has vital links to colonization, enslavement, and mysticism (Bishop, 2010, 38).

Conclusion

Zombies became common, particularly during the 20th century, as a symbol for people who are unable to think for themselves and were posing a threat to social structures. As a result, the zombie is known in most cultures in these traditional terms. However, the portrayal of the persona frequently ignores the zombification procedures as well as the wider implications of the behavior.

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The zombie legend is often linked to the concepts of capitalism and industrialization. The zombie lord Legendre says of his army of slaves. Zombies are the product of power colliding with science, which treats man as its object of research, exposing him to new power applications and techniques.

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