

Biopolitics of the Zombie Corpses: Collectivity, Contagion, and Alterity

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Abstract. Inasmuch as the society is considered as a body today, social problems should be defined accordingly, as problems of hygiene and cleanliness. In this regard, various representations of zombie corpses in zombie movies can be conceived as concrete examples of threat and a perception of disease. In this article, I claim that the zombie figures in cinema bear a positive potential for the social life of humanity, and I will define this potential as a new opportunity for meeting the absolute alterity. Within this context, I analyse *28 Weeks Later* and *The World War Z* and *The Girl with All the Gifts* to put forth the idea that what enables emancipation of humanity is contagion and alterity. Rather than destroying the capitalist rationalization without offering any alternatives, zombie corpses enounce the birth of a new form of social life as analysed through *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.

Keywords: *Zombie*, Corpse, Contagion, Alterity, Biopolitics

Zombių lavonų biopolitika: kolektyviškumas, užkratas, kitybė

Santrauka. Kadangi šiandieninė visuomenė yra laikoma kūnu, socialines problemas reikėtų apibrėžti atitinkamai kaip higienos ir švaros problemas. Šiuo atžvilgiu daugybė zombių lavonų vaizdavimo atvejų zombių filmografijoje gali būti suvokiami kaip konkretūs grėsmės bei ligos suvokimo pavyzdžiai. Šiame straipsnyje teigiama, kad zombių atvaizdai kine turi teigiamo potencialo žmonijos socialiniam gyvenimui, o šis potencialas apibūdinamas kaip nauja galimybė susidurti su absoliučia kitybe. Šiame kontekste nagrinėjami filmai „Po 28savaičių“ (angl. „28 Weeks Later“), „Pasaulinis karas Z“ (angl. „The World War Z“) bei „Naujoji karta Z“ (angl. „The Girl with All the Gifts“) iškeliant mintį, kad būtent užkratas ir kitybė įgalina žmonijos emancipaciją. Vietoj kapitalistinės racionalizacijos griovimo nepasiūlant jokių alternatyvų, zombių lavonai skelbia naujos socialinės formos gimimą, kuris tyrinėjamas pasitelkiant filmą „Puikybė ir prietarai, ir zombiai“ (angl. „Pride and Prejudice and Zombies“).

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: zombis, lavonas, užkratas, kitybė, biopolitika

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Introduction

Three ground-breaking moments define the history of the zombie movies: one is when Victor Halperin directed *The White Zombie* (1932), inspired by William Seabrook's *The Magic Island*, which presented black slaves as zombie bodies "staring dumbly, like people walking in a daze" (1929: 95). Interestingly, Seabrook's presentation of black people as zombies under the title of "...Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields" (McNally 2011: 260) is the frame upon which Halperin created his own zombie image on screen. It is evident that the history of the zombie figure literally begins in the cane fields with slaves in forced labour as reflected by both the novel and the movie in question. As political theorist Mark Neocleous underlines, what is horrifying here in relation to zombie bodies is that they are not only being forced to work throughout their lives but even when they are living dead (2016: 53). Also, it is no coincidence that the publishing date of Seabrook's novel is 1929 when the American occupation in Haiti still continued. Therefore, zombie-like black people are not only exploited but also colonized figures. Thus, it would be both efficient and appropriate to identify this first moment as the exploitation and colonization phase in the history of the zombie.

The second defining moment in the history of zombie movies comes with the *Living Dead* trilogy of George A. Romero. Through his zombie movies, we first observe cannibalism as a distinctive feature of the zombie figure, and, more importantly, zombies act collectively as masses, and not individually (as it was in the earliest examples of this genre). These newly introduced characteristics of the zombie figure increase its potential as a threat especially in the context of social change. As Neocleous puts it, it is proper to evaluate the collective quality of zombies in the rebellion-political threat dynamics: "the power of this threat of rebellion lies in the potential to rise up against the masters as a *collective* force. The Zombie lacks individuality to such an extent that it can function and threaten only as a group. In the figure of the Zombie lies the bourgeois fear of the mass" (Neocleous 2016: 57). As one of the leading American cultural critics and film theorists Steven Shaviro notes with an appreciation of the potential of rebellion in Romero's movies, his zombies "mark the rebellion of death against its capitalist appropriation" (2006: 83). Shaviro's emphasis on death is noteworthy here since zombies "are dead people who are not content to remain dead," and, with their rebellion, they carry the death to the world of the living (2006: 84). But even though the living dead trilogy presents zombies as figures destabilizing structures of power and domination (Shaviro 2006: 102), "they are empty shells of life that scandalously continue to function in the absence of any rationale and of any interiority" (Shaviro 2006: 86). Thus, the second phase in the history of zombies marks their character as a massive and threatening force.

The most recent phase in the zombieness on screen is set in a biopolitical context that is based on contagion as reflected in such movies as *28 Days Later* (Boyle 2002), *World War Z* (Forster 2013), and *The Girl with All the Gifts* (McCarthy 2016). Zombies are now turned into carriers of a contagious disease, and this is why we should not ignore Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz's identification of the zombie figure "as an ideal replacement for

the plague” (2017: 135). Roberto Esposito’s immunization paradigm, which brings about a new philosophy of community based on immunity and contagiousness, provides a solid framework to discuss the new zombie figure. Building upon this background, it is accurate to define this stage in question as the phase of contagiousness, which will be discussed as the main critical focus of this article through various recent movie examples.

As these three phases of zombie movies point to the adventures of consciousness of zombie corpses, we witness that zombie corpses who act unconsciously and individually in the first examples gain consciousness attain the ability of moving collectively, develop intended and planned modes of action, and gradually increase their motor skills. Finally, they acquire language skills at the level of hybridization of life and death, man and animal, body and corpse.¹ Underlining this idea, Boluk and Lenz argue that shuffling and unconscious zombies are things of the past, and new zombies of the contagion era “operate at the extreme limits of human capacity” (2017: 140). There is an evolution from the subservient corpses of forced labour, the absolute enemies of humanity to be destroyed, to the social actors in which hybridization or negotiation is inevitable.

Moreover, hybridization and contamination are presented as an antidote function to save humanity from the zombie apocalypse in the last period of the zombie films, in which zombieness as an absolute position of alterity is reshaped through the logic of contagion. Not only do these recent zombie movies contain significant implications to bring a hybrid sociality into existence, based on difference and plurality around the logic of contagion, but they also offer another alternative interpretation of contagion rather than causing disease, end of humanity, or loss of human character. Furthermore, the category of hybridization also obscures the limit of life and death as well as that of the human and the zombie. For example, we observe that at least in two of the recent movies – such as *The Girl with All the Gifts* and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* – zombies gain the ability to speak. Despite the fact that zombie theorists Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karem Embry argue that becoming zombie is an anti-catharsis, and, accordingly, their ‘zombie manifest’ “cannot call for positive change, it calls only for the destruction of the reigning model” (2008: 91), I rather consider that the zombie apocalypse has a constituent character. Becoming a zombie does not necessarily require one to “lose subjectivity and the ability to rationalize” (Lauro & Embry 2008: 91). Also, it is no longer enough to define zombies as a reanimated corpse or as a lack of free will as June Pulliam does in the entry of the *Zombie* (2007).

Within this frame, the main aim of this article is to reveal that the recent zombie movies suggest an alternative path for a hybrid society, based on difference and plurality, contrary to immunitary biopolitics offering security and quarantine-based thanatopolitics for a possible zombie apocalypse. Since the disease and threat implications brought by the concept of contagiousness are crucial for the establishment of such immunitary biopolitics, I will first discuss today’s dominant immunitary biopolitics with reference to the transformations of the concept of contagiousness.

¹ Jean and John Comaroff analyse zombie corpses’ deprivation from language in a double sense: as a mutation – from human to non-human – and as becoming mute – losing the right to speech. For more details, see (Comaroff & Comaroff 2002: 787).

Contāctus, Contāgiō, Contāminātus

In his seminars collected under the title *Society Must Be Defended*, Michel Foucault points out the distinctive character of state racism which targets the elements belonging to the society itself: “This is the internal racism of permanent purification, and it will become one of the basic dimensions of social normalization” (Foucault 2003b: 62). In this context, the structure of the traditional war undergoes a radical change. It is no longer against external enemies, but it seeks to eliminate ‘internal enemies’ and defends the society against internal threats. Foucault detects here a retreat from the historical to the biological; from the constituent role of the war to the medical one (2003b: 216). In the Foucauldian sense, the dominant categories of war and politics are biology and medicine, in transition from the traditional power to biopower.² Neocleous places Foucault’s arguments on the debate of racism within the context of class politics, and he diagnoses that classes threatening the social structure are treated by the power within the terminology of the disease logic. Therefore, the threat does not only risk the biological health of the society, but it also has the potential to displace political power and destabilize the political structures which constitute the social field. As a consequence of medicalized power, the social actors who are potential threats to social structure might be re-named by disease terms (Neocleous 2003: 33). The term *contagious* is of great significance. Indeed, the biopolitical power limits the concept of contagiousness to a content of a negative meaning, relating it with disease and contamination. However, contagion does not necessarily entail contamination, but rather it refers to spread, expansion, and influence.

Contamination comes from the Latin origin *contāminātus* and signifies not only being polluted and impure but also being defiled and degraded.³ It might also mean the rapid dissemination of an emotion or a doctrine. *28 Days Later* would be a good example to display the innate relationship between emotion and movement. The movie starts with a laboratory scene where chained monkeys are put through some experiments, and, after the intervention of animal rights activists, the virus of animals passes on to humans and begins to spread rapidly. The name of the virus is *rage*, and it connects bodies with each other as an emotional movement. But, as a virus, it is coded as a contagious disease from the very beginning; so, the zombie corpses, infected by the rage virus, lead to a doomsday

² In this context, one should note that Foucault’s analyses are especially related to genetic degeneration. Within this background, the aim of state racism is not just the aim of fighting infectious contagion. It is also about eliminating “genetic degenerates” in addition to perverts, unbalanced and immatured ones from the society (Foucault, 1978: 17). Foucault further emphasises this kind of racism, by distinguishing it from ethnic racism, in his *Abnormal* seminars. This racism, which stems from the 19th century psychiatry, fundamentally fights against the abnormal of the society (Foucault, 2003a: 316–317). In his *Security, Territory, Population* seminars, Foucault also states that to prevent a contagion and an epidemic it becomes necessary to calculate possibilities, while carrying out disciplinary mechanisms and vaccination procedures to isolate the sick from the healthy (Foucault, 2009: 60–62).

³ Therefore, the problem of contamination is about degeneration, too, and, for this reason, on the one hand, it is necessary to think of contamination within the context of degeneration. In terms of the biopolitical paradigm, which we focus on this article, we need to think of these two dimensions. However, I focus mostly on Roberto Esposito’s biopolitical paradigm which arises from the problem of immunization rather than Foucault’s biopolitical analyses which concentrate also on the moral degeneration underlining the sexuality as a constituent component of biopower.

atmosphere in the following scenes, and this apocalypse has a dual character: it is both an epidemic and a rebellion: “It started as rioting, and right from the beginning you knew this was different” (Boyle 2002). It might be considered as an uprising, but eventually it is an epidemic, and sooner or later it should be defeated, and the corpses carrying this disease must be exterminated. It seems that the current language of biopolitics has reduced *contagion*, *contamination*, and *contact* to the mere negative meanings by way of invoking a logic of contagion while shelving all the possible positive contents of these terms.

Zombie corpses are also stigmatized as diseased bodies; so they must be immediately reduced to naked life – namely, be dehumanized. Following this idea, Jodi A. Byrd’s (2011) discussion on zombie narratives through the boundary between the human and the non-human explains this point: “zombie narratives have yet another function at the boundaries between human and inhuman, legal and illegal, sacred and bare life that exist in the no-man’s-land that constitutes the states of nature and exception” (225). Here we grasp the core of the zombie figures as the ambiguity of what is human and non-human, as Sherryl Vint says: “these abject posthuman figures – most evident in the reconfiguration of zombies from the living dead to the infected living – deconstruct the binary of living and death” (2013: 134).⁴

Furthermore, in almost all the zombie movies, the non-human (or inhuman) character of the zombie corpses is insistently emphasised; and the main reason of this choice is nothing more than justifying their murder by the human beings in some form or another. We can see this justification in our very political realm as, in our world, all the subjectivities considered to be a threat to the population can be legitimately destroyed after a ‘zombification’ – namely, a dehumanization process. For example, *Men Against Fire* (Verbruggen 2011), which is the fifth episode of the TV series *Black Mirror*’s third season reveals the dehumanization process in a quite clever way. The leading role of this episode is a soldier (Stripe), and the main aim of the armed forces that he works for is to destroy all the so-called ‘roaches’. When they receive information about a suspected house, they conduct a raid, and the commander of the company (Medina) addresses the host (Parn Heidekker), who is suspected of hiding the roaches: “Every roach you save today, you condemn God knows how many people to despair and misery tomorrow.”⁵

After all, many ‘roaches’ in Heidekker’s house have been destroyed, but then the course of the story takes a striking turn. During the raid scene, a ‘roach’ which Stripe is about to kill grabs a device towards his eyes, and the light casted by this device causes an imbalance in Stripe’s behaviour in the rest of the story. Then we learn that this light is some kind of a software virus, and it paralyzes the military software called *Mass*, installed in Stripe’s mind. Actually, there are no roaches or zombies; it is the software that allows the soldiers to see the bodies of people who should be destroyed on behalf of the population

⁴ In this context, Jennifer Fay states that zombie is “the biological remainder of politically and legally denuded existence. Already dead, the zombie can experience neither life nor death, nor is it beholden to categories of justice” (2008: 92).

⁵ As Kaima L. Glover underlines, the zombie has an infinite suffering capacity because the deprivation of social rights, victimization and dehumanization defines his/her conditions of existence (2010: 59).

as roaches or zombies and to hear their sounds not as human voice but as growling. When these people are coded as roaches, their destruction is not a problem anymore because they are isolated from any human qualities just like what Agamben defines as the *homo sacer*, meaning someone “*who may be killed and yet not sacrificed*” (Agamben, 1998: 9) According to Agamben, the main quality of *homo sacer* is the “unpunishability of his killing” (1998: 73). Therefore, *zombie* also signifies a life in a paradoxical manner “that does not matter and in fact must be killed for the safety of ‘humans’” as Stefanie Fishel and Lauren Wilcox emphasize (Fishel&Wilcox, 2017: 6).

We have to admit that, when we watch a zombie movie, we unavoidably adopt or identify ourselves with the ‘I’ (or the human) position. This is why the corpses of zombies that are murdered, tortured, or broken into pieces do not arouse any sense of empathy for us. During the slaughter scenes of the zombie corpses, we do not see any problem in the continuous violation of the Levinasian ethical imperative “Thou shalt not kill.” Nevertheless, Levinas also states: “I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyzes the very power of power” (2007: 198). From this point of view, zombie corpses might signify subjects of the irreducible, absolute difference, and otherness, to the extent that they are completely independent of the subject *I*, totally beyond his power and paralyzing it. “Their existence entirely alien” as Jon Stratton says (2011: 270), and, as Juan J. Vargas-Iglesias suggests, the ‘highest aspiration’ of these monstrous creatures is “to become an absolute Other” (Vargas-Iglesias, 2022: 4). Therefore, killing a zombie also means destroying the difference and otherness; and, as a consequence, eliminating the potential of a community which is based on difference and plurality.

Although Deleuze and Guattari claim that “the only modern myth is the myth of zombies” (2003: 335), they barely deal with this myth in detail in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.⁶ Since zombies are coded as the common enemies of humanity, they offer one of the strongest resistance forms against the power and its expansion over the whole social space. On the other hand, zombies have the potential to overthrow this expansion of power. Therefore, Deleuze and Guattari are right when they point out that “the myth of the zombie, of the living dead, is a work myth and not a war myth,” but it falls short of explaining today’s zombie figures (2005: 425). There is no doubt that the myth of the zombie is a work myth with respect to the early zombie narratives, but today this myth does not explain the contagion moment of the zombies. Contagious and epidemical potential of the zombie corpses shows that the myth of the zombie is also a war myth for both its capability to constitute creative lines of escape and its explosive force which completely disables the linear organization of political power.

In this respect, it is more efficient to use the term of corpse instead of body while focusing on the zombie figures. *Corpus* in Latin not only signifies both the living and unliving body, but also refers to some mass, structure, community, corporation, and flesh. So, when we talk about *corpus*, we also mention something which is both massive/collective and

⁶ The word *zombie* is used three times in *Anti-Oedipus*, and twice in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

fleshly. It is highly significant to elaborate the flesh and collectivity character of the corpse as Roberto Esposito, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri do not neglect these qualities of the corpse, although they do not allocate detailed discussions on the zombie figure in their works. While outlining an affirmative biopolitics, Esposito concentrates on the flesh instead of the body and draws our attention to the irreducible heterogeneity of the flesh (2008: 160). Hardt and Negri define the multitude as “living flesh that rules itself, [...] rather than a political body with one that commands and others that obey” (2004: 100).

Yet another term related to the corpse is the Latin equivalent of the word *fūnus*. This term mainly refers to a dead body, but in its conjugation as *funera* or *funeri*, it also means a violent death, or a murder; it also signifies both destruction and ruin. When used in reference to human beings, it means a destroyer – but an immortal one. Another meaning of *fūnus* is the souls of the dead (*manes*). Hence, within the Latin context of *corpus* and *fūnus*, the actual usage of *corpus* does not only signify a dead body, but also covers all the following meanings: collectivity, flesh, a violent death, murder, ruin, destruction, and immortality. The cinematographic representations of the zombie corpses require critical attention as they fittingly project all these meanings. In various examples of the zombie cinema, we witness zombies killed in monstrous ways and exposed to severe torture acts, but, at the same time, we observe their destructive capacities and collective movements, and, finally, their uncanny immortality. Whatever you do, it is almost impossible to kill a zombie. Even though the zombie corpses can be thought of as *homo sacer* of the cinema when their destructive and collective character is combined with their immortality, zombie corpses resist to be reduced to such a passive existence.

***28 Weeks Later* and *The World War Z*: Destructive Potential of the Zombie Corpses**

28 Weeks Later (Fresnadillo, 2007) and *The World War Z* are two prominent examples of the post-2000 zombie movie generation, and are noteworthy for their representations of the zombies, contextualized particularly in two distinctive points: a) the zombies, which are represented in these movies, move extraordinarily fast, and they spread the virus rapidly; b) as a conclusion of this velocity, they lead to the collapse of the military and political power despite all its security precautions and quarantine procedures⁷ which are enacted to stop the epidemic. These special characteristics might be well interpreted in terms of Esposito’s biopolitics, which is shaped around his immunization paradigm. Esposito, in *Immunitas* (2011), points out that today’s healthy, secure, and self-identical social systems

⁷ Foucault analyses these procedures in relation with disciplinary practices in *Discipline & Punish*, especially under the title of Panopticism. Foucault says: “this enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism” (Foucault, 1995: 197).

are shaped according to the immunization logic. The assumption that these structures will be altered, transformed, and corrupted as soon as something or someone from the outside penetrates the social body is the basis of this logic (Esposito 2011: 2–3). For this reason, the society must be immune to all kinds of internal or external threats at any cost. The logic of immunization, therefore, puts a distance between disease and life, and marks the former as the external margin of life. All kinds of social interactions must be surrounded by extreme medical and security measures within the context of immunitary biopolitics (Esposito 2011: 15), and all types of elements that threaten the health of a social body must be eliminated. That is why the immunitary biopolitics transforms itself immediately into a thanatopolitics. Biopolitics inevitably produces death for the sake of ensuring the survival of the society. Paradoxically, the only way to preserve life is by constantly expanding the circle of death (Esposito 2008: 110).

The story of *28 Weeks Later* is a proper example of such an immunization paradigm as underlined by Esposito. In this movie, the spatial boundary between zombies and human beings is clearly drawn for the sake of the community. The rebirth of humanity is only possible in strict quarantine conditions after almost the entire population of Great Britain has been eliminated from the rage virus outbreak. For this reason, a military blockade is put in force, and this blockade is governed by strict rules as if in a state of emergency. On the other hand, this blockade is accompanied by medical mobilization. Therefore, this state of emergency, constituted in the name of protection from the disease, is not only military but also medical as is the Nazi thanatopolitics that is governed by not only politicians and military forces but also by doctors, as Esposito rightfully underlines. However, this military and medical blockade on the whole population is quite fragile contrary to its appearance. In the film, Alice (Catherine McCormack) is left to die by her husband Don (Robert Carlyle), but she survives because she is only a carrier and transmits the virus to her husband while being observed under quarantine. The disease spreads rapidly, and, when the epidemics gets out of control, thanatopolitics comes into action in its most radical form, and soldiers are ordered to fire without exception. The military forces that are responsible for protecting the population from the infected begin to destroy the healthy members of the population as the first step of the emergency plan is to kill the virus, and, secondly, to quarantine it. However, when the quarantine fails, the third step should be initiated: extermination. In the military and medical quarantine world of *28 Weeks Later*, every way goes to death. One of the striking moments in this film is the scene where the pilots drop napalm bombs over all the people without discriminating the healthy people from the diseased ones. Another feature of this film distinguishing it from the others is that it refers to hybridization as a means to rescue humanity. One of Alice and Don's children is both sick and healthy in his genetic make-up, and he is not only the carrier of the virus, but also preserves his human characteristics. It shows that the medical and military quarantine procedures are not the only solution to the epidemic; hybridization implies an alternative path for the society, and this path does not follow the route of the thanatopolitics.

The World War Z expands on this theme by depicting the measures taken to clear away the chaos of the epidemic as thanatopolitical. For example, the governors in North Korea

decide to remove the teeth of each member of the population to prevent the spread of the epidemic. Since the epidemic is transmitted through biting, this should be one of the easiest and yet most destructive ways to prevent it. Another instance of their preventive attempt in the movie is the enormous walls that the Israeli government erects around Jerusalem, and this evidently discloses the security policies of the immunitary biopolitics that aims to describe clearly what should be inside and outside of the social space so that to preserve the population from all the potential threats. The state of Israel gives permissions to healthy ones at the borders because every healthy person excluded is a potential zombie: "Every human being we save is one less zombie to fight."

Besides, in this movie, we witness that the zombie corpses move not only at a high speed, but also collectively. The ability to act collectively is crucial with respect to the evolution of the zombie figure since zombies now can overcome all security measures that exclude themselves from the social field as a massive unit. For instance, zombies climb over the walls around the Jerusalem by topping each other, and the so-called security policies of the social field are no longer valid for them. The rapid and collective mobility of zombie corpses confronts us with the fact that all kinds of security measures are useless against such a threat. Therefore, there must be another way to struggle with the epidemic, which leads us back to the theme of hybridization in *28 Weeks Later*. When the protagonist of the movie, Doctor Gerry Lane (Brad Pitt) watches the camera records about the epidemic, he detects that zombie corpses are not attacking the diseased people, and discovers that the problem can be solved by injecting a dose of the virus to healthy bodies. If there is not enough security or medical measure to separate the outside from the inside and to preserve the society, then it is necessary to merge the inside with the outside, the healthy with the sick. In other words, it leads to the idea that the society could survive if it embraces otherness and difference.

The potential political agenda illustrated in zombie movies presents complex stories based on the relationship between human beings and zombies, by pointing to their differences as shown in the form of hostilities like I vs. Other, Friend vs. Enemy, Same vs. Different. This relationship is almost always portrayed in war in most of these movies. The zombie figure is basically a stranger, and it seems almost inevitable that the only possible relationship with this stranger is through struggle and war. Still, we should keep in mind that, in all these films, such a war not only brings about death and destruction for the zombies, but also destroys the entire human world. In this sense, *World War Z* is highly revolutionary since it offers us an alternative for the emancipation of humanity, and this alternative is not to destroy or exclude 'the other', but rather to meet with 'the other', to make space for the stranger, to make an alteration of the self by way of addressing the difference, and, finally, to hybridize by way of contagion. In this background, we should try to read the chaos caused by the zombie corpses as a new starting point for the emancipation of humanity, not as a sign of an apocalypse. Moreover, the apocalyptic world scenes in the zombie movies may be interpreted in a positive manner as well. What if the zombies' invasion of the human world is not a kind of brutality, but rather a revolt against the conditions of the given world? This possibility is remarkably displayed in *28*

Days Later with the scenes of social protests and naming the spreading virus as rage. This zombie epidemic is actually no more than a rage outbreak, and this rage can be considered as the revolt of those who are excluded from the social wealth and prosperity, who are not seen as a ‘human being’, or – if we speak on the legal basis – not as a ‘citizen’ because of their gender, ethnic identity, or class position. In almost all the instances, after the zombie invasion, the money loses its value; luxury homes and cars become open to everyone; everybody can shop in the supermarkets as they wish without paying anything; the military and the police forces lose their power, as well as the politicians who are the architects of the unequal and unjust conditions of the given social world. We have to admit that, in these films, the world, which is dragged into chaos, and which is facing destruction, is the world of social inequalities, and once this world has been destroyed, we see that the social wealth is opened to the use of everyone more than ever before. These worlds that we witness after the zombie invasion are the worlds in which social injustice and the unequal distribution of property have disappeared, thereby directing us towards a utopian world rather than a dystopian one. Additionally, the alterity of the zombie corpses transforms the world through and through, and it is also possible to read this subversion as an opportunity for a new social beginning and an opportunity for pluralism, where I and the other, the host and the stranger are mutually hybridized. Especially, *The Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Steers 2016) and *The Girl with All the Gifts* present insightful examples to this idea as, in both cases, the carriers of a disease reveal not the end of humanity, but an alternative sociality.

***Pride and Prejudice and Zombies and The Girl with All the Gifts:* Constructive Character of the Zombie Corpses**

The zombies in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* come from the lower class and try to kill the members of the English noblesse, and they are capable of cognitive development – unlike other zombie figures – which is a remarkable turn in terms of zombie representation. The zombies who are so far usually presented as unconscious and acting with only motor skills are now replaced by the new generation zombies whose cognitive capacities continue to develop day by day.⁸ This film also shows that – not surprisingly – the carriers of the disease were the ones from the colonized countries, occupying the English territories. Another significant depiction in the film is the 30-meter-high walls erected around London to keep the zombies outside of the city. Beyond these walls there are also a lot of ditches with no man’s land between the walls and the ditches, and this territory is occupied by the zombies. Therefore, it is only a matter of time before the downfall of the security measures and the invasion of London by the zombies. The surprising part of the film comes right at this moment. On the verge of the ultimate battle between the zombies

⁸ Within this context, one should instantly think of *Land of the Dead* (Romero 2005), especially with respect to the collective mobility of the zombies and their tool use capacity. For a detailed analysis of this film, see (Lowenstein 2017).

and humans, Lieutenant Wickham (Jack Hudson) wants to play the role of a mediator between the zombies and human beings as the number of these hybrid figures who maintain their cognitive capacities and human characteristics is increasing day by day. Lieutenant Wickham warns the English noblesse: "It's only a matter of time before they outnumber us." This situation is truly terrifying for the power-holders, because, as Elias Canetti underlined (1981: 31), one of the basic qualities of the collective/massive existence of man is that he always desires to be superior to his opponents in number. Power is about outnumbering; when the majority is achieved, absolute dominance can be established on those who are few in number, but otherwise there is always a danger of losing power. This is one of the 'horrifying' aspects of the zombie movies: those who are diseased are increasing so quickly in numbers that the human population is always a minority in the face of the zombies. This concern lies at the basis of Lieutenant Wickham's compromise proposal, and, perhaps for the first time in a zombie movie, the zombies are described as an organized community – at least, potentially: "You must realize, if they were to organize, we cannot defeat them. The only hope is to find a way to coexist with them." Wickham's proposal to the English noblesse is to find a way to live together, whereas living together is not an option, but the only way for the emancipation of humanity. Wickham's words are really striking: "The day of the zombie has already broken. Wake and face the light, or slumber into oblivion." The zombies are increasing day by day, so it is only a matter of time before people find themselves in a minority position against the zombies. When consciousness and organization are added to this proliferation, defeat is inevitable on the side of human beings. Therefore, it is necessary to reach an agreement with the zombies. There must be a way to live together in such a way as to surround all other people, rather than exclusionary dichotomies, such as I vs. other, human vs. non-human, civilization vs. barbarism. Perhaps most importantly, as long as they are conscious beings, the zombies will no longer be reduced to inhumane categories. It is a hybridization process rather than losing the human quality, and this hybridization means that, in a post-humanist age, the human being loses its privileged position among living beings.

The Girl with All the Gifts, adapted from the novel by M. R. Carey on the screen, gains its distinctive quality with its emphasis on human beings losing this privileged position and the hybrid subjectivities on account of the emergence of a new humanity in the post-humanist era. In the film, a group of children are under constant control and surveillance on a military base, and they are used by physicians almost as experiment animals to be subjected to a series of tests. Caroline Caldwell (Glenn Close) is a doctor looking for ways to save humanity from the zombie epidemic, and Sergey Eddie Parks (Paddy Considine) is the military officer of the base. The distinguishing feature of the children is that they are second generation zombies. Unlike their unconscious ancestors, they have both human and zombie qualities. Therefore, they are hybrid creatures; they have developed such a level of consciousness that they are able to perform all kinds of human practices, but, at the same time, they have a tremendous desire for human flesh.

By the way, the main character of the film is Melanie (Sennia Nannua), a second generation zombie child. The intersection of childhood and hybridity in this film is also

noteworthy because both categories point to a beginning, which brings to mind Hannah Arendt's conception of natality and beginning (1998: 9; 1990: 205–206; 1962: 478–479). This semi-monster half-human being, both as a child and as a hybrid, evokes a new beginning, a miracle, and a rupture in the normal course of the existing social relations. The subjects of the new society rising on the destruction of the human world are hybrid children, such as Melanie, and the engine of this new society is alteration. Besides, the traces of this alteration process can also be observed in the virus, which is a kind of fungal infection in this film that transforms humans into zombies. This infection is transmitted by direct contact or by air, and it develops in a symbiotic fashion. This feature of the virus not only brings about interspecific hybridization potential, but also the fungus development phases exhibit a kind of the forest, jungle character. The infection is transmitted to everything that is breathing; it takes root in everything and makes everything common, and it forms itself as a partnership ground between species. It constitutes a common life among the different dimensions of life and creates a collectivity among species. Evoking Deleuze and Guattari's conception of rhizome, the mushroom is rooted in different places and completely different forms of life; but this rhizome finds itself in a kind of centre. This centre, this tree-like structure, which is nourished by the life of different species – or, perhaps, by the humans in a manner which, as Donna J. Haraway says, not like homos, but as humus, as composts of the earth (2016: 55) – and, at the same time, feed these lives, heralds the birth of a new mankind when being set on fire by Melanie. This is because when this rhizomatic tree-like entity is in flame, its sporangiums⁹ explode, spread to the air and bring humanity (as we know it) to an end. The final dialogues of the movie between Melanie, Dr. Caldwell, and Sergeant Eddie Sparks are quite significant in this background. While Dr. Caldwell tries to convince Melanie to experiment on her body for the emancipation of mankind, Melanie asks a question: “We’re alive?” When she gets the answer “Yes,” she follows it up with another question: “Then why should it be us who die for you?” This response shows that the end of the humanity, as we know, is the loss of the privileged place of human beings among all the living beings; because, as Haraway puts it within the concept of Chthulucene: “Unlike the dominant dramas of Anthropocene and Capitalocene discourse, human beings are not the only important actors in the Chthulucene, with all other beings able simply to react. The order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story” (2016: 55). Therefore, the interspecific hierarchy is destroyed, and, above all, every single life deserves living, and not some of them. On the contrary, it is a new beginning as Melanie says to Sergeant Sparks: “It’s not over. It’s just not yours anymore.” It seems to me that this final represents a peak in the history of zombie films as it now reaches a point where zombies represent not the end of humanity but the end of thanatopolitics and thanato-sociality which is blinded by the obsession of immunization.

⁹ Edward P. Comentale says that the “the rhythm of the zombie is the rhythm of diaspora – the spread, the sporing, of zombie culture as cultural politics” (2014: 278).

Conclusion

In the light of these arguments, we can identify the history of the zombie in the 20th century films in three categories. The first instances of this genre from Haiti are shaped around slavery and forced labour, and they represent zombies as unconscious and non-offensive beings employed day and night. The second era of the zombie corpses starts with George Romero in the '60s; and, in these movies, zombies already appear as cannibals desiring human flesh. It is worth noting this is the first time that zombies move collectively/massively thanks to Romero's conception.

The main characteristic of the third category that we discussed in this article is the theme of contagion and contamination. Within this frame, these recent instances present the zombies through their ability to act not only collectively but also rapidly and with their hybridization potential. Moreover, these abilities of zombie corpses also make the apocalypse an inevitable end in these films. Therefore, the common theme in these films is the idea that the thanatopolitical power mechanisms based on military and medical measures will collapse sooner or later.

The category of hybridity plays a crucial role on this new background of the zombie-ness as this generation provides implications for a new social life to the extent that they retain their human characteristics. On the other hand, these films, highlighting the logic of contagion in a positive manner, point out to the end of understanding the social life based on pure security and homogeneous identity. Of course, the main theme of these films is the apocalypse and the end of humanity. In this respect, one may argue that it is not possible to read these films through positive political implications; however, this apocalypse can be interpreted as a starting point for an alternative human life, or the Chthulucene, in which the Chthonic ones demonstrate the "material meaningfulness of earth processes," as also argued by Haraway (2016: 2), although it is the end of a certain type of it. This alternative life that meets otherness and difference, that embraces coexistence of the living conditions in all its richness rather than a model that relates all kinds of contact with death or disease, may be hidden in the hybrid figures put forward by zombie films. In this context, not as a common enemy of mankind but as an opportunity for a biopolitics based on affirmation and plurality, zombie figures might express an alternative social life that opens its doors to difference and diversity with their dirty, rotten corpses.

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