

8 The Transnational Zombie: Postcolonial Memory and Rage in Recent European Horror Film

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Few popular cultural trends rival the current zombie rage. An ever increasing number of films, books, and scholarly works dealing with the undead have appeared in the last decade, making the zombie the very incarnation of American popular culture on a global scale (cf. Drezner 2). What I plan to show in this chapter is that the zombie is also a surprisingly complex sign for transnational movement and multidirectional cultural flow. While the zombie may appear as the very epitome of American cultural production and influence, a mindless movie monster born of a vapid stream of Hollywood B-horror, the zombie has a rich transnational history and an eloquent figurative resonance that have fed into its current ubiquity as cultural sign. This chapter reviews that history and then examines some of the ways that the zombie figure has traveled between the Caribbean, where it emerged, the United States, where it was translated into a film device of startling pathos and horror, and Europe, to which it owes some of its most interesting recent innovations. In the second half of this chapter, I will focus on the recent emergence of the rapid and enraged zombie, arguably the most important of these European contributions to the zombie tradition.

As a cultural metaphor, the zombie has signified a wide range of political and social meanings: slavery, occupation, exploited labor, consumerism, postmodernism, and conformity, among others (cf. Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic*). Recently, it has emerged as a powerful trope for the global underclass, the proletariat, or the detritus of human populations as they become redundant or displaced by neoliberal policies and the fallout of military conflicts (cf. Giroux, McNally). The appearance of the enraged zombie in 2002 with the films *Resident Evil* (Paul Anderson, Germany-U.K.-France) and *28 Days*

Later (Danny Boyle, U.K.) represented a significant European mutation to the zombie trope. It transformed the otherwise affect-less shuffling zombie of the George A. Romero tradition into a figure of pure rage that rendered it far more terrifying. This kind of zombie seems to have struck a nerve in audiences and filmmakers alike, and most European zombie films made in subsequent years—e.g. the Spanish *REC* (Paco Plaza and Jaume Belagueró, 2007), the French *La Horde* (Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher, 2009), the German *Rammbock* (Marvin Kren, 2010), the Greek *Evil* (Yorgos Noussias, 2005), the British *The Zombie Diaries* (Michael Bartlett, 2007), and the Polish *Wataha* (Viktor Kiełczykowski, 2011)—continued with the fast zombie convention, which also travelled quickly back to the United States. For example, Zack Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead* (2004), a remake of Romero's 1978 film, was among the first U.S. films to use fast zombies in the wake of the success of the earlier two European productions. With his finger ever on the pulse of popular culture, Stephen King wrote his 2006 novel *Cell*, his tribute to the zombie genre, also with enraged and fast-moving zombies. And, as a sign of the power of this trend, *World War Z* (Marc Forster, 2013) altered Max Brooks' original novel, which had traditional, slow zombies, to make them ultra-violent and fast, like Boyle's. Finally, I would argue that it is no coincidence that the latest wave of European zombie films tends to be located in ghettos, gritty urban spaces, low-rent apartment buildings, and working-class or multicultural neighborhoods. This can be seen as symptomatic of how popular culture functions as a political unconscious of the society that produces it (cf. Jameson). In this light, we could see the enraged zombie as a signifier of postcolonial and proletarian anger in an age of neoliberalism and intensified global dispossession of the working poor.

Zombie Origins

With this hypothesis in mind, it is worth recalling that the origins of the zombie myth lie in the violent encounter between Europe and its colonial possessions. While descended from African religious beliefs, the zombie tradition emerges in the New World and is thus inextricably linked to the traumatic experience of Africans brought to the Caribbean to be worked to death. The zombie belongs to the Haitian religious

tradition of vodou (or voodoo),¹ which is a hybrid religion containing elements of African religious beliefs, Christianity and indigenous religious practices. In fact, some scholars trace the origins of the zombie tradition back to the original Taíno people who lived on the island when Europeans arrived (cf. Cosentino).

If vodou is a cultural formation closely linked to the colonial encounter, the zombie is more precisely a figure of enslavement, entailing the loss of one's will and agency to another. As Jamie Russell puts it, for centuries in Haiti the zombie was a "powerful symbol of fear, misery and doom" (11), a fate worse than death. The zombie entered the Western cultural imagination in the 1930s directly as the result of the US occupation of Haiti (1915-1934), which in turn produced two important cultural texts: William Seabrook's travelogue *The Magic Island* (1929) and David Halperin film *White Zombie* (1932), generally acknowledged as the first zombie film. Seabrook's vision of Haiti is heavily marked by the ambivalence towards the so-called primitive typical of his generation of modernists, who were both attracted and repulsed by it. Seabrook's attraction to some vodou practices (though not zombification) stemmed from a perception that they offered ecstatic and authentic experiences lacking in European and North American life. Anticipating the current use of the zombie trope as a metaphor for the deadening aspects of life under late capitalism, Seabrook describes Westerners as being on their way to becoming "mechanical, soulless robots" (48). In contrast, some of the vodou ceremonies he observed allowed practitioners to enter exalted and rapturous states that he clearly found fascinating. The repulsive aspect appears in a different section of the book where Seabrook describes "poor unhappy *zombies*" (96) dragged from their graves by native-born headmen (overseers) to work in the factories of the Haitian-American Sugar Company (HASCO), one of the American businesses protected by the occupation. As Jennifer Fay puts it, for Seabrook zombies are "a modern industrial practice of occupation culture" (90). However, they are more pitiful than terrifying, represented as tragic victims. Nevertheless, their vacant expressions and unseeing eyes render them uncanny and deeply unsettling.

¹ According to Christopher M. Moreman and Cory James Rushton, the correct spelling is "vodou," while "voodoo" should be used only to signify the sensationalist versions of it imagined by racist stereotyping (cf. 3).

Widely read at the time, Seabrook's account also formed the basis of the Hollywood movie made three years later by the director Victor Halperin, *White Zombie* (1932), which featured a villain ominously named Murder Legendre (played by Bela Lugosi), who was both the owner of a hellish sugar mill staffed by black zombies and the practitioner of the vodou spell that enslaves them. What is interesting about the film is that the zombies depicted are used mainly for labor, and in fact most victims are either black or former members of the occupation government (e.g. chief of police, executioner) who were enemies of Legendre. Although Legendre is presumably Creole, the fact that Bela Lugosi plays him effectively Europeanizes him. Part of the horror of the film is meant to be due to the fact that Legendre, ostensibly a white man, now turns his black arts against other whites, first a white American woman and then a French neighbor. Thus, although the film portrays the practices to have originated among the natives, the villain is a Europeanized Creole who has appropriated them for his own profit and lawless desires, which extend to both women and men. In fact, Legendre is a figure for modern capitalist greed, a predator whose relationship to other people is exclusively exploitation and domination.

David Halperin revisited the zombie figure in another production, *The Revolt of the Zombies* (1936), four years later. This time Halperin located the practice in Cambodian folklore and gave the zombie a militarized and weaponized potential. The film begins during World War 1 and presents a scene of zombified "French Cambodian" soldiers at the Franco-Austrian front who are impervious to bullets. By shifting the cultural context of zombification from the Caribbean to Cambodia, the film seems to suggest continuity between colonial occupations in the Caribbean and in Asia as well as the malleability of the zombie as a trope for postcolonial relations and its expropriation of freedom and labor. Moreover, it anticipates the contemporary association of zombies with terrorists, which I will discuss later in this essay, and the popular trend of Nazi zombie films in recent years. Most importantly, however, the ease with which the zombie could be displaced from the Caribbean to Asia suggests to what extent the zombie was linked to colonialism in the American imagination from the beginning. The main character and villain is a student of dead languages who uses the secret formula to hypnotize the living and bind them utterly to his will. Over the course of the film he enthralls a small army of natives as well as nearly all the

white men around him. When he releases them in an attempt to win the love of a woman he has forced to be his companion they sack his house in rage and kill him. The film thus uncannily anticipates the current trend of enraged zombies and suggests that this rage is one of the legacies of European colonialism.

That the zombie was linked to colonialism in the European imagination is apparent from Jean Paul Sartre's referring to it in his preface to Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1961. Sartre writes:

Europeans, you must open this book and enter into it. After a few steps in the darkness you will see strangers gathered around a fire; come close, and listen, for they are talking of the destiny they will mete out to your trading-centres and to the hired soldiers who defend them. They will see you, perhaps, but they will go on talking among themselves, without even lowering their voices. This indifference strikes home: their fathers, shadowy creatures, your creatures, were but dead souls; you it was who allowed them glimpses of light, to you only did they dare speak, and you did not bother to reply to such zombies. Their sons ignore you; a fire warms them and sheds light around them, and you have not lit it. Now, at a respectful distance, it is you who will feel furtive, nightbound and perished with cold. Turn and turn about; in these shadows from whence a new dawn will break, it is you who are the zombies. (11-12)

The passage begins by identifying the colonial subjects of an earlier generation as "shadowy creatures," "dead souls," and "zombies," but then turns the trope around to identify the European as the real zombie, banished to the cold and night, outside the perimeter of the fire, symbolically outside society itself in the new social order that Sartre sees on the postcolonial horizon. What is at stake in this scene is humanity itself and the protocols that accompany interactions between humans. If at an earlier period, during colonial occupations, the European did not listen and did not deign to speak to "such zombies," it is now the European who will struggle to be recognized as human, who will no longer be heeded or addressed.

If Sartre provided a theoretical example of the uncanny reversibility of the zombie trope, it was the European horror film that gave it life. Two years before George A. Romero's cult classic *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Hammer Film Productions released *Plague of the Zombies*

(John Gilling, 1966), which takes place in Cornwall and involves an Englishman who has brought vodou arts back with him from Haiti and is using them to kill and enslave his neighbors. In this film, like the earlier American productions, the horror of the zombie phenomenon is generally based on the unacceptable prospect of white zombies. Black or native zombies are frightening and uncanny but not shocking the way white zombies are to other white characters. Natives are already abject and Other, having been enslaved and stripped of their subjectivity by colonial regimes of power, and their zombification does not provoke the outrage and resistance the way white zombification does. Moreover, these early films (such as *White Zombie*, *Revolt of the Zombies*, *King of the Zombies* and *Plague of the Zombies*) all inevitably imagine a white practitioner of vodou, tacitly acknowledging that the violence associated with the will to enslave is actually European/Western in origin.

Zombie Cannibalism

Although my focus is on European contributions to the zombie canon, in order to show that the vectors of cultural influence moved to as well as from the United States, it is impossible to pass over George A. Romero's 1968 zombie film *Night of the Living Dead*, which significantly modified the zombie trope and set it on a course that is still vital today. One should point out that Romero's film was not a Hollywood film, but an independent production created by a group of friends. The film features reanimated corpses but erases the colonial connection by setting the story in rural Pennsylvania. The source of the animation is not black magic, but radiation from outer space, an unforeseen consequence of contact with what president John F. Kennedy called the New Frontier, a substitute for the original colonial frontier (as was the war in Vietnam in 1968). Most importantly, there is no witch doctor who controls the zombies for his own profit. In fact, Romero never uses the word "zombie" at all, preferring the oxymoronic "living dead" or the term "ghoul."

Two other main innovations introduced by Romero include invasion and cannibalism, the latter ironically creating a more subtle but still discernable link to colonialism since cannibalism was the defining feature of the savage "Other" in the New World. In fact, the words

“Caribbean” and “cannibal” have the same etymology, the word “Carib” given to a tribe by Christopher Columbus after being described as anthropophagous by their long-standing enemies, the Arawaks (cf. Arens 45). The imputation of cannibalism was then used as a justification by Europeans to enslave the Caribs, according to anthropologist William Arens (cf. 50-54). Thus, although the colonial association goes subterranean, as it were, the link between Romero’s living dead and slavery remains intact. The cannibalism theme also connects the zombie trope to a long-standing English tradition of political satire, beginning with Jonathan Swift’s “The Modest Proposal” (1729) and revived in the 19th century with the story of Sweeney Todd in Thomas Prest’s *The String of Pearls* (1846-7), in which cannibalism reflects capitalist greed in a ruthless dog-eat-dog world. The other major innovation of *The Night of the Living Dead* is the invasion theme, along with the motif of survivors—often strangers—having to band together in a seemingly safe place. I say “seemingly” because of course it never is completely, and in fact, the danger often turns out to be from within the group itself, building on the earliest zombie narratives, which, as I pointed out, often featured white villains creating white zombies.

Romero continued to develop his apocalyptic story with two sequels, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and *Day of the Dead* (1985), but sandwiched between the two appeared an important Italian contribution to the zombie cycle, and one that significantly anticipated the darkness of the critique Romero would make in *Day of the Dead*. Lucio Fulci’s *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (1979) was originally marketed in Italy as *Zombi 2*, and pretended to be a sequel to *Dawn of the Dead* (released in Italy as *Zombi*), which it was not. However, while respecting many of the conventions introduced by George A. Romero, Fulci’s film resurrects the Caribbean origins of the zombie motif. Although it begins and ends in New York, *Zombie Flesh Eaters* follows the tracks of a mysterious boat carrying a zombie outside New York Harbor back to its Caribbean point of departure and locates most of its story there. Again, the European zombie film reminds us of the history of the zombie, this time going as far back as the original encounter. When the dead start emerging from the ground, it is in an abandoned Spanish cemetery dating back to the fifteenth century. As the protagonists realize to their horror, they are being attacked by corpses of the original conquistadors who colonized the island. Thus, the European zombie film, serving as a

kind of political and historical conscience to the zombie genre, seems to insist that we see the destructiveness of the zombie as a white colonial infection that was brought to the Caribbean from Europe and activated, as it were, in the colonial encounter. To reinforce this message, several of the main zombie killings on screen are of white men by white zombies (such as that of the doctor, by his friend, the “only other white man on the island,” as the doctor describes him). If Romero initiated the zombie invasion narrative, Fulci’s film beat him to the finish by being the first to make the zombie invasion truly apocalyptic, with the protagonists on their way back to what they think is safe New York only to discover by radio that the city has already been over-run by zombies, leaving their fate uncertain.

Zombie Apocalypse

We turn now to the heirs of this apocalyptic strain of the zombie film. If the end of the world was inherent to the zombie invasion narrative as Romero conceived it, the world’s demise has sped up and become more violent in recent years. It became customary in the last decade to say that 9/11 changed the world as we knew it, but no genre has registered that fact more vividly than the horror film. Two recent developments in the horror film can be traced to the influence of the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center: the found footage framing device and the rapid and rabid zombie (cf. Wetmore). The latter trend was inaugurated by two films, both European and released within a year of 9/11: *Resident Evil* and *28 Days Later*. The first is based on a video game and heavily influenced by the aesthetics of gaming technology, while the second is very much a product of the early 2000s and resonates with fears about viral outbreaks like SARS. Although both films are technically about contagions rather than the usual zombie resurrection, they resemble zombie films enough to have been thoroughly assimilated to the genre by most critics. Two years later, Zack Snyder’s remake of Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* also used rapid zombies and consolidated the consensus that these were indeed zombie movies. *28 Days Later* begins with newsreel footage of global riots and social breakdown, political allegories often used in the zombie genre, which *Dawn of the Dead* reprises and makes more specifically Muslim

by showing scenes of Muslim prayer and Arab-looking attackers killing journalists in an opening news sequence, drawing a direct link between the zombie contagion and terrorist violence. The politics of these scenarios are highly ambivalent, gesturing in many different ideological directions at once, thereby making any particular political reading problematic. However, what is clear from these crude visual associations between Islam and zombie infection is that the new speed and viciousness of the post-9/11 zombie is tacitly linked to those attacks by the filmmakers.

And yet, this line of reasoning does not fully explain why zombies have become faster and more aggressive. They no longer behave like victims of a lobotomy but more like angry rioters. They often travel in packs or even hordes, a phenomenon that achieves a kind of aesthetic apotheosis in *World War Z*, where the CGI zombies are almost always shown as swarms so large that they can scale huge walls by sheer accumulation of bodies in upward moving piles. They are also, ironically and uncannily, more human in their appearance when they are fast because they resemble angry people rather than the living dead. As a matter of fact, the people they resemble most are people in a riot or some kind of violent urban unrest. The main difference between slow zombies and fast zombies, then, is that the fast zombie displays affective behavior that the old zombie did not: rage. We may therefore ask ourselves why has popular culture become so interested in this figure of the enraged zombie?

I believe that the answer can partly be found in the European films that have continued in the direction developed by *Resident Evil* and *28 Days Later*, i.e. fast zombies in urban areas. The American zombie film seems to have taken a different turn, at least according to a recent essay by Kyle Bishop. In a recent volume of *Gothic Studies*, he argues that the American zombie film has gone on the road. It has left behind the convention of the small band of survivors barricading themselves in a single location and has tended to depict protagonists travelling to some distant location or indefinitely (cf. Bishop, "The New American Zombie Gothic"). Again, *World War Z* offers an excellent example of how the zombie film has embraced not so much specific geographical movement but in fact globalization, as the main character travels around the world in his quest for a cure (again a significant departure from the novel, which offered a geopolitical perspective but not any one character

travelling anywhere in particular). In contrast, the European zombie film has opted to explore urban disaster scenarios in the grand metropolises of Europe. Moreover, unlike American films, which, before the advent of the zombie road trip, tended to focus on survivors holed up in a single family home (*Night of the Living Dead*) or a shopping mall (*Dawn of the Dead*; George A. Romero, 1978), or an underground laboratory (*Day of the Dead*; George A. Romero, 1985), the European zombie film has pitched its last stand in that most European of living spaces, the urban apartment building. The three films I want to focus on in this last section are the Spanish *REC* (Paco Plaza, Jaume Balagueró, 2007), the French *La Horde* (Yannick Dahan, Benjamin Rocher, 2009) and the German *Rammbock* (Marvin Kren, 2010).

The Apocalypse Comes Home

In all three films the entire action takes place in an apartment building with neighbors or strangers thrown together and forced to collaborate to some degree despite mutual mistrust or simple indifference. In *REC*, which is a found footage narrative set in Barcelona, a female television journalist is trapped inside a building with her cameramen where they have gone to film a segment on firefighters at night. The firemen respond to a call about a woman's screams, and when they arrive in the elderly woman's apartment, she unexpectedly attacks and bites one of them. By the time the firemen and journalists have returned to the lobby downstairs, the building has been sealed off by the authorities and covered by a giant plastic sheet. One of the major themes of the film, besides the uneasy relations between suspicious and frightened neighbors, who begin to suspect each other along vectors of racial prejudice, is the inexplicable behavior of the authorities, who refuse to explain what is happening even as they threaten to shoot anyone attempting to leave or even stand near a window. The transformation of citizens into "bare life" (Agamben) to be contained, experimented on, and if necessary, exterminated by authoritarian and military forces is a common theme in both *Resident Evil* and *28 Days Later* as well as *REC*. The underlying anxiety seems to be about population control and biopolitics of the kind Giorgio Agamben has discussed in recent years, when persons with a social identity, *bios*, are reduced to bare life, *zoe*, or

to the status of *homo sacer*, a being that can be killed with impunity (cf. 7-11). Films like *REC* seem to tap into contemporary fears among Western European populations that they too can be transformed into the equivalent of colonial subjects by governments whose agendas are often far from democratic and benign, an anxiety that has palpably increased in the age of neoliberal economics, where most Western governments have colluded with corporate power (cf. Bauman 1-2).² In the United States, the situation was even more dramatic with the passing of the Homeland Security Act, but American popular culture has long expressed misgivings about state authority. As Donald Pease writes: “The Homeland Security Act regressed the population to a minority condition of dependency upon the state for its biopolitical welfare” (648), stripping citizens of their civil liberties in the process.

The fear of being reduced to bare life, with no civil rights or social status, is made explicit in the film *REC* with the heavy-handed quarantine tactics and even more so when a disease control agent enters the building in a full-body bioterrorism protection suit to take a brain sample from one of the unconscious but still living victims of a bite. The final segment of the film, which takes place in a mysterious attic apartment, reveals that the contagion has to be linked to medical experiments conducted in the apartment for years on a young girl believed to be possessed. The experiments—inevitably recalling for a European audience the history of Nazi medical research conducted on prisoners of concentration camps—were apparently conducted on the authority of the Church and possibly in collusion with the government (which is now responsible for making the residents prisoners in their building, effectively transforming it into a kind of *ad hoc* detainment camp). The specter of concentration camps, according to Agamben the most important site of the reduction of humans to *zoe* in the 20th century, is further reinforced visually by the appearance of the supposedly possessed girl, now a skeletally thin monster, uncannily evoking associations with photos of Nazi camp victims liberated at the end of the war (cf. Agamben 123).

La Horde situates the zombie apocalypse even more explicitly in a postcolonial framework by setting the story in a condemned high rise on the outskirts of Paris, a neighborhood populated by the immigrant

²For a discussion of the “divorce of power and politics,” see Bauman 1-2.

working class and the site of a blood feud between corrupt local police and African drug dealing gangsters. The police officers have come to assassinate a gangster who killed one of their colleagues, but they end up captured by their prey, only to find that they must work together to fend off the furious zombies that have taken over the city. A character they meet in the building and whose apartment they occupy for most of the rest of the film, a veteran of the French war in Indochina, serves as a reminder of French colonial history. When they first encounter him in the hallway, he is splattered with blood and carrying an ax, and they are not sure if he is a zombie or not. When he speaks, he begins by saying that he is not one of “them” and that he hopes the gangsters have given them a “good hammering” (*une bonne branlée*). He then conjures up the ghost of French colonialism by mentioning the French defeat at the hands of the Viet Minh in 1954 and by comparing the zombies to the Vietnamese. The English-dubbed version of the film alters the words here in an interesting way, perhaps assuming that English-speaking audiences will not know the history of the most famous French colonial defeat. While the French version says “*On se croit à la réu de Dien Bien Phu*” (“you’d think we were at a Dien Bien Phu reunion”), implying that the French are being overrun once more, the English version simply translates this as “It feels good [to kill zombies]! Kind of like Dien Bien Phu!” This would allow an English spectator who did not know better to think that the French defeated the Vietnamese on that occasion instead of losing to them.

Regardless of how it is formulated, the reference to Dien Bien Phu and the gun-crazy French war veteran remind us that the poverty-stricken masses of first and second generation immigrants living in this Parisian outskirt are the result and legacy of those colonial ventures. Official political and social indifference to their fate has made this French neighborhood appear like a colonial territory or frontier. In fact, when asked what he is doing with the axe, the veteran says that he is “guarding the outpost.” When the band of survivors look at the news on TV and hear that the French capital is being evacuated, they ask sarcastically, “Where’s our evacuation route?” They can see the capital burning from their window, but being in the *cité* (French for “projects” or “housing estate”—in a word, a ghetto) they are as far from Paris, symbolically and practically speaking, as if they were in Africa. There will be no evacuation for them or for any of the working-class

immigrant neighborhoods on the outskirts of Paris.

Visually, the film is one of the most unsettling zombie films in the last decade because of its emphasis on the sheer numbers—the hordes—of zombies attacking. This is a new and dark variation on the *levée en masse* that characterized the beginnings of the French nation state. The signature image of the film, which was featured on much of its publicity, is a man (in fact, the one “good” policeman) being swallowed by a dense swarm of rabid zombies. The fact that most of these zombies come from the neighborhood nearby makes them mostly dark-skinned and Asian, creating a startling visual image of the French postcolonial other swallowing up the last representative of French law and order. The bleakness of this film is reinforced aesthetically by the darkness of the palette—most scenes being filmed indoors at night—and several shots from the top of the high rise where we can see the Parisian night sky lit up with fires across the city. This is the twilight of the legacy of the French Empire.

Finally, *Rammbock* also features fast and aggressive zombies as well as an apartment building setting, this time with an inner courtyard where horrified neighbors watch victims being mauled and devoured by the infected. Like in *La Horde*, there is an apocalyptic shot of the city burning near the end of the film, only this time it is Berlin. The story focuses on a man who has come from Vienna to return his ex-girlfriend’s apartment keys, in the hope of winning her back, and finding himself trapped in her apartment with a young plumber’s apprentice who happened to be doing some work there when the infection broke out in the city. The neighborhood is not a ghetto by any means, though a modest area with mainly white residents, but they find themselves facing many of the same ethical dilemmas that the slum-dwellers in the French movie faced. How much danger should one risk to help someone else? Is it better to barricade yourself inside alone or to band up with others and pool resources? Early on in the film, a television journalist asks the chief of police, “Is this our September 11?” The question implies politically motivated terrorism, and the policeman answers that the people involved in the violent actions do not seem to have any political claims. Nor, indeed, does the film itself, making far fewer gestures towards any kind of political reading than the two previously mentioned. Instead, the film focuses on an examination of the more elemental social dynamics that appear in many zombie films: self-interest vs. altruism, cooperation vs.

betrayal, etc.

However, one of the more original features of this film is the explicit focus on rage as a feature of the new zombie; anger is in fact the trigger of the zombification. In the story world the infected do not have to turn into zombies as long as they stay calm, making a search for tranquilizers and anti-anxiety medication one of the central and unique features of the scenario. Anger is thus a key issue of the film, which begins with the protagonist rehearsing the speech he plans to make to his ex-girlfriend in front of a male friend, who tells him that it won't work because he gets too angry each time he delivers the speech. The protagonist, clearly a European Everyman—unexceptional, slightly heavy-set, balding, around thirty years old—is remarkably calm throughout most of the film, but the one thing that does upset him is the loss of his girlfriend. At one point he finds her hiding with another man in the attic of the building, and his aggrieved resentment of her rejection is palpable. In other words, he is not mourning her loss but raging against it. The film's allegorical resonance can be located around this theme of loss and anger. But what has the European Everyman lost in recent years? Europe had already had to give up its colonies decades ago (and even longer ago, in the case of Germany). Still, judging from the run-down state of the apartment building in which the film is set, one could say that Europeans have lost their sense of security, both in physical and economic terms.³ In the wake of 9/11, Europe experienced terrorist attacks in Madrid and London. During the same decade it experienced fears of viral contagion with the SARS epidemic. And since the beginning of the 2000s, the monetary system has been experiencing a financial crisis that only got worse in the wake of the U.S. American recession of 2008. The dilapidated Berlin building in which the film was shot makes that precariousness especially visible.

In short, as many social scientists are telling us, the West is experiencing a bewildering moment of cultural liquidification (as Zygmunt Bauman calls it), in which traditional certainties such as the welfare state, community, a secure pension, and a better world for one's

³ The building is actually a Berlin landmark, and its name is clearly visible in the first scene: Sendelbach-Höfe. It is notorious for being mostly abandoned and run down after a series of owners, and has on occasion served as a squat. Local residents believe the building is deliberately being neglected as part of a land speculation scheme (cf. Haeusler).

children are melting away (cf. Bauman 1-4). Like Americans after 9/11, Europeans too have realized that the violence—literal and economic—they once associated with the Third World *can happen here*. The anger of the periphery, legacy of former colonies and the greedy redrawing of world maps after World War I, have seeped back into the centers of the former colonial empires. And the residents of those metropolises are themselves getting restive after three decades of neoliberal policies forcibly imposed on Europe by the European Central Bank.

To conclude, the path on which European cinema has taken the zombie apocalypse film in recent years complements the social critique associated with George Romero's strain of zombie cinema but orients it in a new and more terrifying direction. Fast zombies may be the new face of social satire but they are no laughing matter. Thus, the zombie, seemingly mindless, with no memory or reason, continues to serve as the bearer of European postcolonial memory while evolving into a popular culture avatar of the postcolonial dispossessed as well as of the metropolitan denizen now worried that he is about to join them. Finally, although the modern zombie film was born in Hollywood, Europe has been an avid and innovative contributor to the genre, helping to keep the zombie alive and its seemingly inarticulate moans meaningful.

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