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The Rising Multitude: Zombie Invasion and the Problem of Biopolitics in Max Brooks's *World War Z*

Abstract: This essay outlines the transnational history of the zombie, arguing for the figure's revolutionary potential. Approaching the zombie as a complex social practice, I recall its ritualistic African and Haitian roots, the figure's transposition from Haitian folklore into American ethnographic writings, and its later Hollywood reconfigurations. Insisting on the zombie's proto-biopolitical character, I propose to see the figure's continued cultural currency as predicated on its articulation of political dynamics in the globalized world. Noting the historically inscribed rebellious potential of the zombie, I hold that the newest zombie novels suggest that the zombie horde can be seen as a new political subject in the era of late capitalism—the multitude, heralded by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. The transnational nature of the zombie multitude is explored in this essay in the context of Max Brooks's *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006), which capitalizes on the possible awareness-raising potential of the modern pop-cultural evocations of the zombie.

Keywords: zombie, invasion, multitude, biopolitics, Max Brooks, *World War Z*

In October 2010 the news of a cholera outbreak in Haiti spread across the world. Devastated by an earthquake only ten months earlier, the country was unable to stave off the epidemic, which as of November, 2014 has affected more than 700,000 people, claiming over 8,500 lives (Ministère de la Santé Publique et de la Population). Recalling his experience of the outbreak for Partners In Health—a non-profit health organization, Dr. Charles Patrick Almazor, a Haitian, wrote in 2013:

> The patients—the lucky ones who were taken to a clinic—were transported by family and community members on traditional stretchers, a straw mat on an iron bed supported by two thick sticks and carried by four men. Our patients' eyes were sunken into their skulls, their skin as parched as the dry season. Because of their appearance, they were referred to as *zombi lage*, fleeing zombies. Patients of all ages laid [*sic*] on their cots, throwing up what they hardly found to eat, since for most of them food is a scarce resource. ("Reflecting on the Cholera Outbreak in Haiti")

In this account of human suffering, the reader finds a striking evocation of what any American will immediately identify as a stock horror figure—the gruesome plague bearer of the US entertainment industry. Yet this process of identification is complicated by the references to lacking infrastructure, dire poverty and the physical ordeal of cholera victims, which ground the zombie in a more tragic setting.

Interestingly, the seemingly atypical association has its roots in Haitian folklore, where rather than as the industrial ghoul, the zombie functions as a captive of enslaving sorcery; either a body raised from the dead or a captured spirit that can be stored in a bottle, it is a servant, whose services depend on the maintenance of specific rituals by its master. If not properly cared for, this dehumanized figure is nonetheless capable of rebelling and escaping. The cholera-stricken patients of Dr. Almazor's account are cast precisely in this role of the defiant zombies—harried yet seeking deliverance from the dehumanizing disease.

In this way, Dr. Almazor's article hints at an interestingly kaleidoscopic cultural optics at work in the modern world. By linking social realities with medical concerns and pop-cultural productions, this optics brings together the imaginations of Haitians and Americans, consequently unsettling their geopolitical and cultural insulation. Indeed, the cultural and political walls separating the more economically developed countries from those less developed begin to crumble when we turn to further investigate the figure of the zombie. In fact, the convoluted history of this popular monster unveils the porous geopolitical structure of global society. In this essay, I outline the transnational history of the zombie, arguing for its proto-biopolitical and hence performative character. Approaching the zombie as a complex social practice, I explain its continued cultural currency and relevance for the modern globalized world. To illustrate my point, I turn to one of the more famous zombie novels of the twenty-first century, Max Brooks's *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006), to capitalize on the possible awareness-raising and revolutionary potential of the modern pop-cultural evocations of the zombie.

A Brief History of Cultural Contagion

Despite being often referred to as "a fundamentally *American* creation" (Bishop 12), the zombie is in fact a product of African culture. Searching for its origins in the countries of West and Central Africa, Hans-W. Ackermann and Jeanine Gauthier unearth a heterogeneous lexicon of words similar to *zombie*, which denote variously "the creator god of many Bantu people," cataleptic individuals, fetishes, corpses or bodies without souls, and spirits or revenants (Ackermann and Gauthier

467–469). The zombie seems thus to be grounded in pre-Bantu-migration West or Central Africa and retains strong links with the Kongo religion. The latter, like Haitian Vodou, sees the soul and body as animated by a "force [that] can inhabit objects and animals as well as human beings," and that can thus be employed as a technology of power (MacGaffey 13). This technology is, crucially, a ritualistic practice instrumental in the establishment of power relations among the BaKongo (the Kongo people, a Bantu group), specifically the division into those powerless, including inhuman zombies, and those in power—again not only humans, but also "objects" such as *minkisi* (MacGaffey 13). *Minkisi*, identified by Elizabeth McAlister as "one of the cultural sources of the zonbi" ("Slaves" 463), are often misinterpreted as fetishes, or objects infused with personhood, but according to Wyatt MacGaffey, they constitute rather "ritual complexes" (12). MacGaffey's views on *minkisi* help shed some light on the related notion of the zombie:

> instead of asking why BaKongo and other Africans violate the Cartesian distinction between persons and objects, we might note that among ourselves (in the capitalist West) the distinction between real rights and personal rights, between things and persons, is not given in nature but in law.... To begin to translate and understand Kongo rituals... is to recognize how deeply our own thought is embedded in praxis[.] (14–15)

Minkisi and zombies need thus to be seen as illustrative of social (contractual) construction of life—so powerful as to collapse distinctions between human subjects and objects.

We see a variant of the same process of collapsing distinctions between persons and things in the Western society, notably in the institution of slavery. Interestingly, figures of former slaves are also the reference for the earliest nineteenth-century records of the word *zombie* in the West. One of the sources mentions Zumbi of Palmares (Southey 24), the courageous leader of a seventeenth-century slave settlement and presently a national hero in Brazil, where the anniversary of his death is celebrated as the Day of Black Awareness. Another source evokes Jean Zombi—a mulatto officer during the Haitian Revolution, later included among the lwa, or spirits of the Vodou religion (Dayan 36–37). But simultaneously, the docile zombie slave stories appear in the United States. In the US newspaper reprints of the 1838 British short story "The Unknown Painter" the zombie figures as a ghost of African folklore, a figurative representation of the story's mulatto protagonist—Sebastian Gomez (Kordas 16–17). Strikingly, as a fictionalized account of the discovery of a famous seventeenth-century Spanish painter's talent, Gomez's story complements the stories of Zumbi of Palmares and Jean Zombi, all of which recount the passage from the economically determined objecthood of the slave to historical and political agency. These nineteenth-century Western zombie tales

begin to articulate the formation of a culture of the Atlantic diaspora and the disoriented transnational agency of subaltern people.

Such a positive reading of the zombie obviously contrasts with the figure's identification with a brainless (but craving for brains) walking corpse. In fact, it is only at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the wake of the US occupation of Haiti (1915–1934), that American travelers, notably William Seabrook, and ethnographers, such as Zora Neale Hurston, introduce the American public to the gruesome living dead. The new incarnation of the zombie is thus a result of a culture clash between two former slave colonies that leads to the interpenetration of disparate cultural realities. Having encountered in Haiti the tales of utilizing the souls of the dead, both Seabrook and Hurston read it through the distinctly American lens and construe the resurrected dead chiefly as victims—be it victims of greed-driven Haitian sorcerers, Haitian culture (Seabrook) or the Haitian social order (Hurston). Although by emphasizing the contractual character of zombification, which casts human life in the context of economic exchange, Hurston does succeed in de-exoticizing the zombie to some extent, she fails to capitalize on how "the living take charge of their history when they mimetically perform master-slave relationships with spirits of the dead" ("Slaves" 464). Likewise, both Hurston and Seabrook take no notice of the "morally benign" or neutral uses of zombies e.g. for healing, and occlude the zombie's potential for rebellion.[1]

Indeed, it is only as a slave, whose status is sanctioned by the sinister Haitian religion, that the zombie enters Hollywood through such horror movies as *White Zombie* (1932) or *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943). Although instrumental in the establishment of some of the most common zombie movie conventions, these cinematic depictions of the theme center on the zombie-master, to whom all the attributes of the monstrous slave-owner are ascribed. By combining Haitian folklore with the European monster tradition and American political concerns, these productions pave the way for Americanocentric reworkings of the zombie motif in the latter part of the century.

It is with George Romero's movie *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968) that the zombie becomes fully integrated into US culture. The movie eschews the zombie-master figure as well as explicit references to other countries, instead confining the action to the US countryside. There, a group of survivors (white, except for the main protagonist) is pitted against a horde of the resurrected and human-eating dead. Interestingly, in the movie the rise of the cannibalistic dead

1 We find in Hurston no mention of such attitudes as the one expressed in an interview with Elizabeth McAlister by one *bòkò* (Vodou practitioner), who maintained that he would have nothing against becoming a zombie (a captivated spirit), since "if you take the *zonbi* of someone who liked to work, they feel happy because they didn't like to sit around doing nothing" ("Spirits" 105).

is purported to be the result of cosmic radiation transferred on board of a NASA explorer satellite—a rationale that places Romero's monsters within the tradition of 1950s science-fiction movies that evoked the political menace of communist invasion (Bishop 101). Still, even though they are never referred to as zombies, the living dead in *The Night* fit the zombie tradition not only due to the Romero's (apparently unintended) use of zombie-movie conventions such as the white catatonic woman victim, the characteristic zombie walk, or the unsettling close-ups of eyes (referencing *White Zombie*), but also due to the movie's foregrounding of the issue of race relations through its focus on the assertive Black American protagonist Ben (Duane Jones). *The Night* comments on the confrontation between the country's calcified racist politics and the rising multitude of black civilians fighting for legal equality within the Civil Rights Movement and African American militancy (Bishop 21–22). This reconfiguration once again shows how because it is predicated on the performative vision of human agency vis-à-vis the power system, the zombie continually proves a potent convention for articulating the power-subject dynamics.

Indeed, with the advent of the 1980s and the emergence of the often dismissed genre of splatstick zombie comedy, the zombie transforms into a figure of outrageous pop-cultural performativity (Bishop 181). Along with the corporeally fixated and visually-conscious cyberpunk, splatstick taps onto the offensive-rebel sensibility of the adolescent generation of the 1980s. For Kyle William Bishop, the narrowly articulate yet grisly zombies of Dan O'Bannon's hip *The Return of the Dead* (1985; developed into a series of five movies), who divulge that they eat brains to alleviate the pain of being dead, prepare the ground for thinking about zombie subjectivity as they "deflect the horror of zombies through both humor and satire" (Bishop 181). In other words, owing to the arrival of splatstick, zombies can be finally simply fun.

Accordingly, the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century abound in both funny and scary zombie productions. These range from survival horror games (*Resident Evil, Dead Island*, *Last of Us*), horror movies such as Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002), zombie comedies such as *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), or *Zombieland* (2009), and even novels both in the horror (e.g. Jonathan Maberry's *Patient Zero* from 2009) or the satirical tradition (Max Brooks's *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead* from 2003, or Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* from 2009). What is characteristic for these newest zombie practices, interestingly, is the focus on the zombie as a biological creature, a subject for medical examination, but also a strange biological force. To an extent, zombie narratives merge with the killer virus and medical thriller fiction that erupted in the 1990s. Enveloped in the epidemiological shroud, the newest zombie productions reimagine the threat posed by the zombie as the problem of

contagion, in other words a biopolitical danger befitting the age of transnational politics.

An old-fashioned medical term derived from the Latin *contagio* "a touching, contact" and denoting "interpersonal transmission of infectious microorganisms" (Pernick 859), contagion still holds powerful cultural resonance as a term for dangerous penetration of self's boundaries. An invasive mechanism of pathological replication, it reflects the movement of appropriation by the Other. Consequently, as the defining mode of being of the modern zombie horde, the mechanism links notions of biological life and subjugation, calling for the consideration of biopolitical status of modern existence.

Biopolitics of the Zombie

The above abridged outline of the many evocations of the zombie illustrates its astonishing malleability in the face of changing political conditions. This malleability seems to be predicated on the ritualistic or performative nature of the zombie, which reveals how the different systems of power work. But what does that mean?

When Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry observe in their tongue-in-cheek zombie manifesto that the zombie questions the subject/object division by holding it "irrevocably in tension" (94), they effectively criticize the narrowly ontological considerations of the figure. The zombie must, in contrast, be seen not as this or that thing, but as the proper subject for ethics and politics. Be it as the Haitian zombie, the result of zombification ritual, or as the modern plague-carrier which incarnates the mechanism of infection, the zombie helps articulate interpersonal and political dynamics, mapping the field of human agency. As such the zombie is a powerful proto-biopolitical figure and to explain this idea, we need to turn to the work of Michel Foucault.

Foucault coined the term *biopolitics* to explain a transformation of power that had taken place in the latter part of the eighteenth century in the West (242). The roots of this change could be found in the increased pressure exercised on the state apparatuses by the growing masses of subjects, the development of statistics, as well as the economization of life. Political subjects began to be considered not as individuals, or bodies to be disciplined by the state apparatus, but rather as a population. The new technology of power has addressed itself to "a global mass... affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on" (Foucault 242–243). Relying on the science of statistics, biopower now intervenes at the level of population, introducing mechanisms of regulation and normalization of life of its citizens, in this way governing the global mass (Foucault 249).

The development of this global society, the proper subject of biopolitics, is interwoven with the transnational history of the zombie. Not only is the zombie a product of power's hold over the fluidity of life, or life understood as transmissible force (in Haitian religion), but in its newest interpretations as contagion it discloses the dynamics at work in the global society. Fittingly, the story of cross-cultural appropriation of the zombie culminates in modern times in the emergence of the character of the zombie horde, or the biopolitical nightmare, that devours everything in its way. Yet it is this zombie horde, with its historically-inscribed rebellious potential, that can be seen as bearing the seed of yet another political transformation, for according to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, we are now witnessing the emergence of a new political subject—the diversified multitude (xiii).

The multitude, only hazily outlined by the two authors, can be seen as more clearly articulated in the modern zombie science fiction. Largely due to its legacy as the literature that addressed the problems of the emergent democracy at the beginning of the nineteenth century and that subsequently transformed into popular (mass) fiction in the twentieth century, science fiction has proven to be a potent vehicle for the consideration of the growing biopolitical sensibility in the West. In order to analyze how said biopolitical sensibility helps us envisage the rebellious multitude, it behooves us to look at Max Brooks's *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006). The novel, I argue, capitalizes on the limits of modern nation-state politics and raises questions of the status and agency of the modern political subject. Showing how transnational dynamics transforms the world, *World War Z* manages to posit an interesting perspective on global politics.

Zombie War

Blending zombie comedy and multicultural perspective, *World War Z* continues the multifaceted tradition of zombie fiction. Using the uncommon form of oral history, or a collection of interviews with survivors from different countries, Brooks's narrator recounts the course of a zombie pandemic from its outbreak in a remote village in China, through its rapid escalation into a global emergency and its apparent ultimate suppression. *World War Z* aligns itself with Brooks's first zombie novel *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003) in its mock-serious treatment of the zombie plague, but it also expands the premise of that first book into a fully-fledged satire on international politics. In this satirical exploration of political mechanisms, *World War Z* echoes the proto-science fiction writings of such writers as Jonathan Swift, who in his mock-travelogue *Gulliver's Travels* satirized

early modern politics of his native country. *World War Z*'s caustic depiction of bureaucratic paralysis and multiple failings of national strategies devised to deal with a global health emergency clearly points to the inadequacy of state apparatuses to address global problems of this kind.

The novel's premise is set out already in its "Introduction" chapter, from which the reader learns how the zombie crisis over a decade earlier nearly eradicated the human race, as well as how the collection of interviews comprising the book came to be published. The publication, as it turns out, resulted from a conflict between the narrator-interviewer, employed by the UN to draft the "United Nation's [*sic*] Postwar Commission Report" recounting the course of the zombie pandemic, and the UN Commission's chair, for whom the majority of the data the narrator had gathered was "too intimate" for the purposes of an "after-action report" (Brooks 2). Arguing for the indispensability of what the chair referred to as "the human factor," the narrator insists on an ethical dimension of the inclusion of the personal perspective:

> By excluding the human factor, aren't we risking the kind of personal detachment from a history that may, heaven forbid, lead us one day to repeat it? And in the end, isn't the human factor the only true difference between us and the enemy we now refer to as 'the living dead'? (Brooks 3)

In this way, the "Introduction" chapter already stages for the reader the authority conflict that lies at the heart of *World War Z*: the clash of international political structure of nation-states and the subversive transnational character of human agency, which cannot be treated as a mere factor in biopolitical calculations.

And yet humanity is treated variously as a negligible or a manageable resource of national states throughout *World War Z*. We see this already in the first interview with a Chinese doctor, Kwang Jingshu, who recounts the story of his encounter with the first victims of the zombie plague, the inhabitants of the village of New Dachang. Significantly, the outbreak in New Dachang is traced back to the village's troubled geohistory. Originally located in an area designated for submersion after the erection of the Three Gorges Dam[2] on the Yangtze River, the village has been relocated by the authorities and rebuilt as a museum, with no concern for its former inhabitants. Forced to eke out a living in the vicinity of the museum and the submerged area, the inhabitants of Dachang have turned to diving into the dam reservoir in hopes of reclaiming some of their goods, and it is from one of such excursions that one boy returns marked with a strange bite (Brooks 8).

2 The world's largest power station, Three Gorges Dam is an actual building whose construction (started in 1994 and completed in 2012) demanded relocation of more than 1.2 million people and has raised many controversies among ecologists.

The plague thus emerges out of the economic misery of the subaltern population. Having been treated as part of the landscape that can be altered according to the central government's vision, the inhabitants of New Dachang turn into a different, nightmarish kind of element—the zombie horde.

Exhibiting the permeability of a virus, zombies then spread to different countries by both legal and illegal means. The latter include, for instance, illegal transplants of organs garnered from Eastern countries (including China). The story of Fernando Oliveira, a doctor carrying out such transplants, furnishes one of the more horrifying explanations for the spread of the plague that indicts Western society's callous attitude toward the rest of the world. Similarly indicting is Nury Televaldi's story of how he would smuggle the Chinese to different countries in the early days of the epidemic. Televaldi's explanation for why people chose to flee to the West testifies to the dramatic consequences of the world division:

> [The Interviewer:] You say they didn't call for a doctor, that they were afraid they'd be sent back, but then why try to find a cure in the West?
> [Televaldi:] You really don't understand a refugee's heart, do you? These people were desperate. They were trapped between their infections and being rounded up and "treated" by their own government. If you had a loved one, a family member, a child, who was infected, and you thought there was a shred of hope in some other country, wouldn't you do everything in your power to get there? (Brooks 14)

Televaldi's ultimate remark that those who had been smuggled "simply melted into the host country's underbelly" or "First World ghettos" serves only to underscore the uncanny connection between the poor and zombies (Brooks 15).

This link becomes all the more strongly pronounced in the nation-states' varied but unchangingly short-sighted initial responses to the news of the zombie outbreak. If the Chinese attempt to cover up their outbreaks, the Americans, suspecting a ploy on the part of China, first trivialize the problem, acknowledging some danger only later, and even then limiting their response to the deployment of the so-called Alpha teams tasked with eliminating plague carriers "with extreme prejudice" (Brooks 51). A more comprehensive approach, one involving mobilization of national resources and, possibly, a less isolationist tactic, is never implemented; instead, to calm the increasingly panicked society, the US government backs the sale of a fake vaccine, Phalanx, and only when the plague starts to actually ravage the US soil do the authorities begin to act.

But the actions undertaken are misdirected. Faced with an immediate biological threat, the US government still fails to conceive of the nature of the zombie and confronts the plague as if it were an enemy, deciding to undertake military action. The Battle of Yonkers, set to be televised as the US Army's spectacular

victory over the zombie, proves to be a "catastrophic failure of the modern military apparatus" (Brooks 103). The gruesome description of the effects of a thermobaric bomb deployed as a last recourse in the battle cannot fail to remind one of the effects of the ill-famed application of chemical weapon in Second Battle of Ypres. But for Todd Wainio, a survivor and veteran of the battle, Yonkers is a massacre comparable primarily with Little Bighorn—the defeat of the US Army by combined forces of the subaltern Native Americans.[3]

The jarring inadequacy of the nation-states' approach underscores a kind of bureaucratic automatism that leads national authorities to employ war logic in the face of a global emergency. This kind of interventionist tactic operates within the field disciplinary power, which takes the body as the focus of the technology of power. Such a disciplinary approach fails to account for the zombie's fluid status. The grotesque depiction of the battle with waves of zombies never stopping to emerge anew is thus a powerful illustration of a clash of planes: the calcified nation-state structure and transnational agency, whose epiphenomenon is the zombie.

In fact, the zombie needs to be understood as enacting certain revolutionary dynamic changing the face of the world. As the spread of the zombie shows, global space cannot be seen as synonymous with international space—space parceled by nation-state sovereignty and mapped by borders, whether natural or artificial. Global space, as the theater where the history plays itself out, has to be understood as the space of economic, biopolitical and other flows, and hence a social practice. As Henri Lefebvre explains, "[l]ike all social practice, spatial practice is lived directly before it is conceptualized; but the speculative primacy of the conceived over the lived causes practice to disappear along with life" (34). In *World War Z*, in turn, this speculative primacy is reversed and it is the *lived* experience of space, both the practice of noxious divisions and the current imploding those divisions, that gains primary importance.

The late realization of the role of this spatial practice leads national governments to atrocious as much as successful eugenic resettlement plans inspired by a document known as the Redeker Plan. An Afrikaner, Paul Redeker[4] is the author of the revised "Orange Eighty-Four" Plan—"the doomsday scenario for the country's white minority, the plan to deal with an all-out uprising of its indig-

3 Yet not only the US, but also other countries undertake disastrous actions in the wake of the plague. Ahmed Farahnakian, formerly a major in the Iranian Revolution Guards Corps Air Force, tells the narrator how the inability to control the stream of refugees from Pakistan escalated into a nuclear conflict between Iran and Pakistan, which left him stateless.

4 The reader meets him in his guarded cell in a psychiatric hospital. Following acknowledgement by Nelson Mandela, the man, who is apparently not the devil incarnate, suffered a psychotic breakdown and has assumed a different personality.

enous African population" (Brooks 106). When the zombie epidemic begins to take over South Africa, Redeker is called by none other than Nelson Mandela and asked to present his zombie emergency plan, which, unsurprisingly, amounts to a transposition of the earlier Orange Plan's eugenic approach. The Redeker Plan's main premise is that only a fraction of civilians is to be evacuated and placed in guarded safe zones:

> not only to provide a labor pool for the eventual wartime economic restoration, but also to preserve the legitimacy and stability of the government, to prove to those already within the zone that their leaders were 'looking out for them'.… Those who were left behind were to be herded into special isolated zones. They were to be 'human bait,' distracting the undead from following the retreating army to their safe zone. Redeker argued that these isolated, uninfected refugees must be kept alive, well defended and even resupplied, if possible, so as to keep the undead hordes firmly rooted to the spot. (Brooks 109)

In the cynical plan Redeker thus seeks to herd and manage not the zombies, but the country's civilian population who can, after all, be infected and can thus destabilize the political base of the nation-state. The zombie war, as it is called throughout *World War Z*, surfaces in fact as the permanent state of emergency to which a given national country's own civilian population is subjected.

The Redeker Plan effectively institutes a new kind of spatial practice, a Redeker camp. What is the status of this camp? For Giorgio Agamben, the concentration camp is central to the biopolitical constitution of power (123). The camp is the paradigm of biopolitical space—it exists outside the juridical system within which individuals possess inalienable human rights, and yet it is constitutive of the power of the state over its citizens (Agamben 168–169). The Redeker camps are in this light a poignant illustration of Agamben's further claim that "[t]he camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule" (168–169). They reflect the modern nation-states' treatment of citizens as a mere resource.

Yet in *World War Z* we also see another side of the resettlement camp—the refugee camps of Cuban and Israeli. The former were devised for the many predominantly US refugees, who had fled the zombie plague and arrived in Cuba. "Officially," we learn from Seryosha Garcia Alvarez, "the camps had been created to contain the spread of 'infection,' but that wasn't the kind spread by the dead" (Brooks 231). What thus entered Cuba were the seeds of democracy which, fuelled by the money from the country's weapon industry, launched a systemic transformation and democratic transition in Cuba. The strategy of Israel has proven equally transformative. Already in the early stages of the epidemic, following an evacuation from the entire occupied territory, the country granted asylum to

"any foreign-born Jew, any foreigner of Israeli-born parents, any Palestinian living in the formerly occupied territories, and any Palestinian whose family had once lived within the borders of Israel" (Brooks 37). As we learn from one Palestinian, Saladin Kader, the asylum-seekers were initially placed in refugee camps, but subsequently the pressure of the masses of these people resulted in the country's political transformation and the creation of the state of the Unified Palestine. For Israel and Cuba, two countries with a difficult heritage of biopolitical conflicts, the masses of refugees have turned out to be agents of democratic change.

It is toward this notion of mass-inspired democratic change that the novel appears to lean. Through its inclusion of the mosaic of testimonies, *World War Z* succeeds in bearing witness to a difficult and grotesque political process at work in the modern society. Juxtaposing the stories of those agents traditionally omitted from the grand narrative of history, the novel expands the Western perspective and forces the reader to think about the ethics of global world that need to take into account the subaltern and marginal agencies of refugees, mercenaries, smugglers, or even samurai *hibakusha* (survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings). The fact that the accounts of such persons are collected in an oral history is thus doubly significant: not only is the reference to oral history a deft comical gesture on the part of Brooks, since one can hardly imagine a creature more orally fixated and less articulate than a zombie; it is also instrumental in challenging established notions of history and politics. As historian Paul Thompson explains:

> Since the nature of most existing records is to reflect the standpoint of authority, it is not surprising that the judgement of history has more often than not vindicated the wisdom of the powers that be. Oral history by contrast makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now also be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated. It provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account. In so doing, oral history has radical implication for the social message of history as a whole. (6–7)

If it would obviously be ridiculous to argue that the oral history of the zombie war provides a more "realistic" perspective on the conflict, it is nonetheless true that *World War Z* throws the life of the under-classes right in the face of the Western citizen and manipulates the narrative in such a way as to problematize that citizen's comfortable detachment from global politics. In this, the novel mirrors the strategy employed by Dr. Almazor in his article on the actual cholera epidemic: it seeks to raise awareness and mobilize readers.

Painting a picture of global insurgency, Brooks simultaneously orients theoretical considerations of a new political subject, the multitude. As "the living alternative that grows within [global] Empire," the multitude is not a homogenizing force:

> rather it provides the possibility that, while remaining different, we discover the commonality that enables us to communicate and act together. The multitude... might thus be conceived as a network: an open and expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common (Hardt and Negri xiii–xiv).

"Composed potentially of all the diverse figures of social production" this new agency capitalizes on the legacy of guerilla and survival tactics of subaltern people. Indeed, Lauro and Embry's dismissal of any liberatory potential of the zombie seems in this light premature: the dis-oriented citizens of the West have much to learn from the survivors of centuries of oppression. They can, for instance, learn to express themselves through kaleidoscopic narratives, which even though replete with stereotypes, succeed in inspiring the vast sections of society. They can, further, learn the performative tactics that rework the experience of subjugation by reenacting it.

But maybe the process has already started. Considering the annual global processions of zombie aficionados known as zombie walks and organized frequently for a charity cause, one cannot fail to marvel at the power that this circulating presence exercises over human imagination. But if our imaginations have been consumed by the zombie, perhaps it is time we acknowledge our own place in the horde. Then, it could maybe finally become the revolutionary multitude.

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