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Title: Zombies

The Zombie is defined by Webster as a speechless human who has been died at some point in time and reanimated supernaturally. The typical representation of a Zombie is that of a walking dead person. Zombies are found in the works of literature, fantasy and horror genre work. The term has its roots from Haitian folklore when a dead body was reanimated by the way of magic. The Magic Island (1929) by W. B. Seabrook was the first book that is said to have given exposure to the concept of0 voodoo zombie in the Western Culture. History documented that this book introduced the concept of zombie into American speech. Moreover, they have a complex literary heritage. A number of Hollywood movies, books, and fiction literature is based on the concept of Zombies, where they are depicted as the mindless, unthinking henchmen. By the time, the new versions of Zombies have been demonstrated in the video games and movies in the 1990s led to a renaissance of zombies in popular culture. Zombie archetype has been romanticized and humanized where they are also shown as friends of humans. This research essay is based on the exploration of the concept of the zombie as a representation of underlying American fears.

Zombie is a creature that inspires fear, by its physical nature. The looks of Zombie can be summed up as a gray-skinned and bloodied character, often missing a limb. It is wearing tattered clothes and seeking flesh. Amid a group of gangling bodies, generally, they are walking unsteadily while chattering their teeth. However, an analysis of the history of Zombies as a character, one is able to assess it is more of a political commentary than just an aesthetic horror. The zombies and undead have been used by the writers and filmmakers to depict some major fears of the nation, communism, racial sublimation, globalism, atomic destruction, and mass contagion and each other in some cases.

The many cultures, the concept of dead have been used from the past centuries, however, Americans have adopted this idea from 19th-century Haitian voodooism (“Zoinks! Tracing The History Of ‘Zombie’ From Haiti To The CDC”). According to the rural Haitian spiritual belief system, people who die from any reason other than the natural cause linger in their graves. This belief system was created by the millions of West African slaves brought by French to the country in the 17th century. During this time, a witch or bokor could revive the body to make it a personal slave. This creature suspended between life and death was called a zombie by Haitians. Haiti was declared as a threat to imperialism and after the S occupied Haiti, the Voodoo culture was eradicated by the Catholic missionaries in 1915. During this time, William Seabrook made America aware of the term, zombi. He wrote a text in 1920 sharing his experience of visiting the Haitian sugar company.

The first movie based on the Zombie was released in 1932, named White Zombie, and its genre was declared as a horror movie. It was largely based on the concept of a zombie given by Seabrook. The movie shared the story of a white couple who visited Haiti and the plantation master converts the woman into a zombie for the reason that he fell in love with her. In the end, the voodoo master is made to die and the couple is rescued. After this movie, American's fear of voodooism strengthened and that spiritual belief system into a horrible idea. Now Haiti is considered a place where Zombies run rampant. In the movie, the most significant tradition of marriage is disrupted by black magic. As a result, a range of voodoo-fear-inducing movies was released in the 1930s and ’40s, such as Ouanga (1936), and I Walked With a Zombie (1943). Until the 1940s, the zombies only reflected the fears of voodooism, however, as the political climate in the US changed, zombies symbolized so many things (Crockett).

Zombies have been considered as the representation of the Generational monsters. Since the 19th century, every generation has created some fictional enemies to reflect discomfort with some scientific or cultural development. For instance, the massive increase in Chinese immigrants in the US and Europe resulted in the "Yellow Peril" villains such as Fu Manchu. As the industrial revolution progressed, authors such as H. G. Wells, started taking into account the future of scientific innovation and its impacts on mankind. During the cold war, this concept reached its height with the increase in the use of invasions from space and Radiation-mutated monsters. Some films reflected on the transformation of enemies to the most powerful companies or government organizations such as "The Parallax View" and "Three Days of the Condor” (Crockett).

The character of zombies used in the stories from the past 4000 years but this concept developed after the works of H.G. Wells, H.P. Lovecraft, and Poe in the 20th century. M Keith Booker in his book argued that “the golden age of nuclear fear,” will solve a number of world’s problems (Booker). However, modern society is the living example of the collapse of this faith. The modern society is dominated by supreme anxiety resulting from unpredictable scientific development. The breakthroughs that were welcomed in the last century are bowed the evil and people have lost faith in scientific progress.

Another greatest fear of Americans is that of Globalization. Apart from numerous benefits being obtained from globalization, challenges emerging from social and economic dislocation is also a considerable factor. Meanwhile, the political institutions are unable to handle these challenges. Although globalization is destructive yet it creates new links between people making people question their own lifestyles (*How Our Zombie Obsession Explains Our Fear of Globalization - The Washington Post*). The zombies are also used to represent the fear Americans preserve for each other. The key example of this notion was visible in the movie, The Walking Dead when the survivors realized that they are all infected and will eventually return after death even if they are bitten or not. In all the series of the show, the zombies are shown to be the least of survivor's issues. The post-apocalyptic world is one where everyone is focused on their own self-preservation. The majority of the audience can suspect that zombies generally represent the plague of humanity, zombies really are us focused only on consuming the world. Thus, like other creatures, Zombies hold Americans' attention because it raises a question about the nature of zombies and human response to it. As if they are looking at themselves.

In addition, a hidden metaphor observed in many zombie films and TV dramas is that the zombie is a symbol of dirty, lowly things or people we feel uncomfortable with and avert against but inevitably permeates our lives. For example, a metropolitan nouveau riche may deem country farmers lowly and unworthy but couldn't completely avoid contact with them say his/her family go on a trip to crowded places where people from the countryside also join and they had to share a dinner table. Another example would be that a quiet, well-educated, self-occupying young man may abhor neighbors with party-throwing, alcoholic behaviors but somehow ends up with those people in the same apartment. These are just generic examples and realistically "the dirty thing" may be completely sublime and idiosyncratic to a particular individual. The point is, far from being simply personal life inconvenience, there are things on an abstract level we want to banish from our lives but struggle to do so difficultly.

The main story here is, after the fall of the Soviet Union, a confluence of cultural and political factors made it even harder for American media to depict any real human group as subhuman. In video games and then everywhere, zombies became one of the only acceptable groups that could stand-in for whatever person-on-person aggression and group distrust and xenophobia the storytellers or audiences wanted to explore. Almost by definition, they are what we used to depict bad guy groups as, whether they were Soviets or Vietnamese or Nazis or Confederate soldiers or black people or Native Americans. Zombies also allow storytellers to appeal to every human group on the planet without risk of offense. That is why zombies permeate American culture as much as they do right now, they would do so more except for the fact that zombies are so damn boring.

In the 1960s through ‘80s, Americans faced the constant nightmare of, The World Is Going To End In Nuclear Fire And There’s Nothing I Can Do To Survive. Zombies offered a relatively lighthearted way of poking fun at the world ending and, at the same time, they offered hope: since most zombie series/movies had a fair number of survivors winning out in the end because they were tough and good-hearted. Zombies provide a way for us to acknowledge the fears about our future without getting overwhelmed by them since it’s clear they’re just fantasy. They also provide a nice vehicle for us to sit back and watch a bunch of “people” getting “killed” in violent ways without having to feel bad for most of the victims because they were really nasty with no redeeming characteristics and they were technically already dead.

Since monsters in movies and literature are usually representations of what we fear in ourselves and our own lives. That is why not all monsters are hits or have lots of works made about them. If one just have a spectacle, and nothing to say about it underneath, people will tune it out. For zombies, it's probably connected to a fear about what consumerism does to individuality (Harper). When we're all connected, and something goes viral (like an idea, a meme, or a fad) what does that say about our own originality and uniqueness? A very powerful idea in Western philosophy is Descartes's "I think, therefore I am." So, when there's something telling people what to think or what to desire (advertisements, talking heads on cable news, Twitter feed, etc.) what does that leave them doing? Zombies also touch on fear of addiction and compulsion. Zombies are always looking for new things to consume, but it's a mindless and insatiable behavior. Many people have direct experience with some form of addiction, and losing control over your behavior, due to a desire you can't explain, is a very scary thought.

Zombies represent zombies; a fictional brain-eating flesh loving monster (*How Our Zombie Obsession Explains Our Fear of Globalization - The Washington Post*). Depending on the movie or book, they represent different things. Taking an example of the Dawn of the Dead, the plot displays survivors taking shelter in a mall that is ultimately swarmed by zombies. In that film, the zombies represented mindless consumers. In one fashion or another that general metaphor (though not always consumers specifically) has remained throughout the years; the mindless masses, tearing each other apart without emotion or conscience. In the last decade or so the stories of Zombies have been more concerned about the survival side when society as a whole crumbles. The zombies themselves, while certainly still an enormous part of the equation, have taken a back seat to the larger survival story. At this point, it's almost more survival fantasy than zombie fiction. There are certainly exceptions and some really clever twists at that, but generally, in most zombie stories, the danger is equal parts zombie and opportunistic, violent survivors. What you're probably seeing when you see the word zombie is a reference more to a prepper and survivalist culture. A lot more people than one could imagine are preparing themselves for survival situations. Certainly, it does not pertain to a real zombie apocalypse, but they are very well aware of the fact that it is better to rely only on themselves for disastrous events. They no more rely on governments and preppers have filled their closets with food, firearms, ammunition, and water filtration systems; hoping for the best but preparing for the worst. This is what the zombie world represents modern American culture.

To sum up, there are various opinions on what the Zombies represent. Like all monsters and similar creatures symbolize different things, zombies represent a different notion in every piece of literature. For instance, in Shaun of the Dead, it represents people who are unaware of what is happening. This shows that it is used as a metaphor for groups of people. In Western culture, Zombies are thus used to represent a range of fears in society such as consumerism, communism and racism, etc. (Harper). Similarly, the African version of Zombies is the fear of enslavement and losing control of themselves and becoming like a society that creates zombies (“Zoinks! Tracing The History Of ‘Zombie’ From Haiti To The CDC”).

The American concept of Zombies has evolved from that of Haitian voodoo into a deadly creature aimed at devouring everything in its wake. Fear is the new symbology Americans have given to zombies over the years. This makes the study of zombies very interesting in terms of historical fears of Americans. But one thing that has remained constant is that zombies scare humans by cleansing their darkest deeds, and in this process, one really questions what it means to be a human. If we have not turned into the zombies, zombies reflect on what kind of monsters humans have become.

Sources Used

This paper has obtained information from a number of academic and non-academic sources and the research is based on the incorporation of previously stored information with new knowledge learned. The popular websites such as vox, Washington Post, New York Times, NPR, etc have been consulted. These websites provided detailed background information pertaining to the concept of zombies in American culture and each share a different viewpoint on what zombies represent as of now. In addition, the way the concept of a zombie has evolved over time was also elaborated. The academic sources used for the purpose of this essay include books and research articles, two of them have also been cited. The book makes a reference to the American's assumptions of what technology could bring to them while the article reflects on the zombies and American's fear of the culture of consumerism. Vox shares multiple viewpoints with regard to the relation of zombies with American fears. While other sources relate it to one or more events and fears. Collectively all the sources helped in developing an understanding of zombies concept in America.

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