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## **Deconstructing Zombies of Capitalism : the Walking Dead and New Views of American Zombies**

Jennifer Daly  
*Montclair State University*

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## Abstract

This study of *The Walking Dead* comic book series intends to argue that the zombie of *The Walking Dead* resists classification within a Marxist schema through their blurring of social binary systems of class, race, and gender. Current scholarly criticism of zombie literature, film, and television has a tendency to utilize a Marxist lens to depict zombies as drones of capitalism, and mindless consumers.

The modern American zombie comes from Haitian myths in which zombies are raised to assist the slaves in the field during the day, but many critics have ignored the other half of Haitian stories in which the zombie are raised to assist in the revolution and fight for the freedom of the slaves. I propose to look closer into this part of the myth and utilizing Marxist theorists to offer a new argument to the zombie canon.

The zombies in *TWD* resist classification within any binary system, such as race, class, or gender. Their lack of speech allows them to recreate the world free of judgements. They have more freedoms than the surviving humans, particularly those who live amongst a group known as the Savivors.

I propose that the true mindless drones of capitalism are the Savivors, a group within the text who are led by Negan. Negan uses violence and terror to create a legion of laborers who follow Negan's orders without question.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

*/ Deconstructing Zombies of Capitalism: /  
The Walking Dead and New Views of American Zombies*

By

Jennifer Daly

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

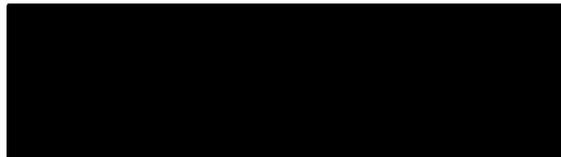
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For the Degree of Master of Arts

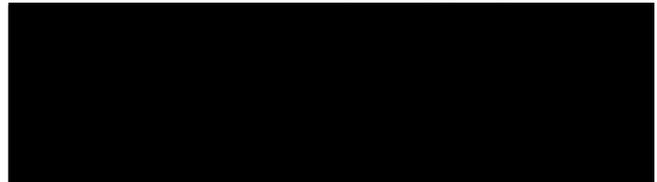
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Thesis Sponsor



Jeffrey A. Miller  
Committee Member



Adam Rzepka  
Committee Member

DECONSTRUCTING ZOMBIES OF CAPITALISM:

*THE WALKING DEAD* AND NEW VIEWS

OF AMERICAN ZOMBIES

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Masters of Arts

By

JENNIFER N. DALY

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2016

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*“To me, the best zombie movies aren’t the splatter fests of gore and violence with goofy characters and tongue in cheek antics. Good zombie movies show us how messed up we are, they make us question our station in society... and our society’s station in the world.”*

-Robert Kirkman, Introduction to *The Walking Dead* vol 1

Current Marxist scholarly criticism of zombie literature and film has a tendency to pigeonhole modern American zombies as the dregs of capitalism. Most often critics (Kyle Bishop, Steve Shaviro, James Parker, David Castillo and William Egginton to name a few<sup>1</sup>) tend to label the walking dead as zombies of capitalism, “bodies without a purpose...mindless, soulless consumers” because of the zombie’s roots in Haitian culture during Haiti’s occupation (Castillo, Egginton 3). I intend my approach to be quite different. *The Walking Dead* comic book series, written by Robert Kirkman, introduces a modern American zombie who resists an interpretation based upon the owner/slave dialectic, and places the modern American zombie in a position of freedom. A popular reading of modern American zombie literature would entail the freedom of the survivors while zombies retain the chains of the abused worker. However, I believe it is the zombie of *The Walking Dead* comic book series who is free due to the lack of societal structures, their resistance to gender binaries, and the way their labor is applied directly to their own survival as opposed to another’s capital gain. Their freedom exists in direct

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<sup>1</sup> See “Our Zombies, Ourselves: Why We Can’t Get the Undead off our Brains” by James Parker, “Dreamboat Vampires and Zombie Capitalists” by David Castillo and William Egginton, “Capitalist Monsters” by Steve Shaviro, “Dead Man Still Walking: Explaining the Zombie Renaissance” by Kyle Bishop, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires, and Global Capitalism* by David McNally, “When There’s No More Room in Hell, the Dead Will Shop the Earth: Romero and Aristotle on Zombies, Happiness, and Consumption” by Matthew Walker for some examples of reading the zombie as capitalism’s dregs of mindless consumers.

relation to their resistance to be cast as a specific group. There is more equality in the community of zombie of *The Walking Dead* than there is in the surviving human camps. *The Walking Dead* is a breakthrough comic book series that offers a new way of looking at post-apocalyptic America, and the comic book series itself also resists many stereotypes that exist in current zombie literature and criticism. *The Walking Dead* provides a platform for exploration of a multitude of readings of what the modern American zombie represents in society, what the survivor represents, and how they operate either against or with each other. The above quote from Robert Kirkman offers insight into his goal regarding *The Walking Dead* comic book series. The comic book series causes critics to question current literary criticism and interpretations of what the modern American zombie is and what it means to be a zombie in a world that was once a capitalistic society.

Furthermore, the modern American zombie was appropriated from Haitian culture and Voodoo. Zombies are more than slaves in Voodoo culture—not only were they raised from the dead to assist in the fields of the plantations, but it is also said they were raised to help overthrow the colonial occupation of Haiti in the nineteenth century (Davis 20). To read the zombies of *TWD* as slaves of capitalism does a disservice to Voodoo culture while simultaneously perpetuating the mythology involved with the transplantation of the zombie from Haiti to the Americas. The way in which they became the offspring of a capitalist regime is a story that modern zombie cinema and literature tell, but to the Haitians the zombie represents a wide range of existences. The zombie exists in modern American culture as a half of a binary capitalist system, but to the Haitians a zombie walks in the liminal area where definitions of good and evil are

muddled and categories of slave and revolutionary blur into one another. Many critics have ignored the parts of zombie history that include the assistance they offered during the revolution. I propose to look closer into this part of the myth and examine how criticism of modern American zombie literature and cinema has been misconstrued due to European colonization and appropriation.

While researching current zombie literature criticism, I began to see that *The Walking Dead* comic book series, by Robert Kirkman, did not fit conveniently into the mold that nineteenth century/early twentieth century American zombie culture forged. Though a strict bourgeois/slaves of capitalism model can be used for *Night of the Living Dead*, which is directed by George A. Romero, or *White Zombie*, which is directed by Victor Hugo Halperin, (two iconic pieces of zombie film), restricting the entire genre to one specific reading allows for many missed interpretative opportunities that would reveal a multitude of ways zombies reflect fears. After reading "The Cyborg Manifesto" by Donna Haraway, and its namesake "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism" written collaboratively by Sarah Juliet Lauro and Deborah Christie, I came to the conclusion that I did not completely agree with the constrained theory surrounding zombies. If any post-human being fits into the vision that Haraway sets forth in her iconic essay "The Cyborg Manifesto" it is the zombie of Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead*.

I intend on revealing a new space for the modern American zombies, one that Marxist theory accounts for only after the revolution succeeds: those who are completely free of societal constraints, such as the binary restraints of race, class, and gender. *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital, Volumes I, II, and III*, written by Karl Marx, share a

common goal in which labor will no longer be an exploitation, where the population will exist as one community, a world where binaries of gender, class, and race no longer exist: “the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against existing social and political order” (*The Communist Manifesto* 103). My claim lies in the notion that the zombies of *TWD* are the beings living in a world free of the hierarchical categorization that capitalism supports, which includes race, class and gender. The zombies of *TWD* are resisters to all conventional analyses of the modern American zombie of capitalism. I propose that the true zombies of capitalism in *TWD* are the Savivors, a group within the text who are led by Negan. Negan uses violence to enforce his rule and has essentially zombified his people into mindless beings who act without questioning, who dare not speak unless what they say supports Negan’s goals, and they simply labor without questioning. Bodies become commodities and commodities become humanized in Negan’s world.

## **The Colonization of the Zombie**

The modern American zombie and its history did not originate in Northern America, though the zombie is prevalent in literature and cinema found there. From cult classics, like *Dawn of the Dead* directed by George A. Romero, to books like *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* written by Max Brooks, to the *Resident Evil Universe* created by Shinji Mikami, which began as a video game and was transferred to film, the modern American zombie has evolved and been continually reborn. It is important to understand the birth of the modern American zombie to reveal the nature of the criticism directed at the modern American zombie. The origination of the modern American zombie is one steeped in stereotypes and capitalistic regimes, which is telling of zombie criticism that involves the portrayal of zombies as the dregs of capitalism.

The exact birthplace of the idea of the zombie is unknown, but is most prevalent in Haiti within the belief system of Voodoo (Davis 61). The Haitian zombie is the direct influence for the modern American zombie, for reasons which will be explored shortly. What happened to the idea of the zombie from the time it left the shores of Haiti and reached the shores of America reveals an interesting journey, one rooted in the stigmatization of the black body, and one that sought to demonize Haitian culture and use it as a form of propaganda. The modern American zombie was birthed from racial tensions, a fear of the revolutions that had the potential to crush global capitalism, and the desire to continue slavery as a means of free labor that yielded an inordinate amount of capital for plantation owners. As Davis writes, “popular books...cast the entire nation as a caricature” and books, such as *The Black Republic*, written by Spenser St. John, perpetuated the notion that Voodoo was responsible for the slave uprisings and that black

republics, such as Haiti, could not survive on their own (73). These books pointed to the theory that white occupation was a necessary front in dealings with black populations because these black communities were not capable of surviving without white intervention.

One of the more iconic books published during the era of unrest after the Haitian Revolution is W. B. Seabrook's *The Magic Island*. It became a strong influence for the zombie's representation in American culture, and remains a cornerstone of criticism for zombie literature and film (Davis 72, Kee 14, Bodart 139). Seabrook was an American adventurer who published travelogues of foreign and exotic lands that became sensational in America (72). What is problematic about Seabrook's account is how he presented his text as fact with no references to support his work (Bodart 140, Davis 72). "Much of Seabrook's work is characterized by sensationalism rather than solid research" claims Bodart (141). It remains that Seabrook had written a text that served to support to the American notion that the Haitians were not to be trusted because of the fanciful beliefs they held, and this simultaneously offended the Haitian people by using their beliefs as the basis for this fantastical text ( Davis 72). Seabrook records an account of zombie labor in the cane fields and his Haitian source, Polynice, provides the following definition: "The zombie, they say, is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life—it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive" (Seabrook 93). Seabrook's account became the foundation for *White Zombie*, the first zombie film in American Culture directed by Victor Hugo Halperin and released in 1932, and zombie films to follow that maintained the notion that zombies were slaves in the plantation fields.

Published in 1938, Zora Neal Hurston's anthropological account of Jamaican and Haitian life titled *Tell My Horse* refrains from offering a specific definition of the zombie within Haitian culture. For Hurston, the Haitian zombie exists on a multitude of plateaus. Her anthropological training allowed her to observe the Voodoo ceremonies and the culture of Haiti without criticizing it or casting it as fantasy. Hurston's narrative of Haitian culture and Voodoo ritual enriches the history of the Haitian zombie to provide a more rounded picture of what the zombie means to Haitians. It explains that the plantation work was only an example of the zombie's acts in Haiti. Hurston asks the reader to sit in the marketplace in present day Haiti "and notice how often some vendeuse cries out that a Zombie...has filched her money, or her goods, or the accusation is made that a zombie has been set upon her or someone of her family" (179-181). There are "big zombies who come in the night to do malice" and "little girl zombies" who are sent early in the morning to sell packets of coffee (181). While Seabrook's account narrowly defines zombies as slaves of the field, Hurston explores the many stations the Haitian zombie occupies in everyday life.

There are quite a few reasons someone is brought back from the dead as a zombie in Haiti, Hurston claims. One reason that the dead are awakened is because "somebody required his body as a beast of burden" (Hurston 182). Another reason one could be raised is as an act of revenge against the family or the person directly (182). Another example is as a sacrifice, the "culmination of 'ba' Moun'" which is a sacrificial ritual in which one gives their body in replace of another, or because another is not available (182). It is a sacrifice one makes so the rest of the family can be kept safe. The Bocor, or those who practice dark magic in Haiti, hold onto the souls of those they turn in order

to maintain connection to the body for control (183). For Haiti, zombies represent a multitude of ways in which one can be enslaved, but they also represent the sacrifice one makes for the good of the family or community. In Voodoo, balance is needed and it is understood that one cannot be either good or bad, but a culmination of all (Hurston 189). It is often extremely difficult to tell a Houngan (a true priestess of Voodoo who utilizes good forces to perform magical ceremonies) from the Bocor (who utilizes the dark forces to perform evil): "Often the two offices occupy the same man at different times" (189). It is also necessary for the Houngan to understand dark magic and for the Bocor to understand the positive forces, for it not possible to enforce good without understanding the evil and vice versa (189). The lines between good and evil are indistinct because each require the other to exist, and because there must be a combination of the two to maintain balance. It is important to understand this angle of Voodoo when thinking about how the modern zombie is portrayed in American culture. The modern American zombie was originally cast as abused worker in the class binary system of capitalism, which is seen in movies like *White Zombie* and the zombies of *The Magic Island*. When considering the origin, however, it is important to note that the Haitian zombie does not exist as a half of any binary system, and neither does the ideology that supports its existence. The Haitian zombie actively resists any sort of exact answer because Voodoo resists any sort of exact answer. Voodoo is an amalgamation of good and evil, life and death. Hurston notes in her opening of the chapter on zombies: "Here in the shadow of the Empire State Building, death and the graveyard are final...But in Haiti there is the quick, the dead, and then there are zombies" (179). As I posit that zombies retain freedoms because of their inability to occupy a specific half of a binary system (such as

race, class and gender), Voodoo becomes more important to that argument because of the way the religion resists any sort of direct classification. As Hurston points out, death is final in America, but in Haiti there are levels of death, and death itself may never be final. Just as good and evil exist within one person, death is simultaneously present with life in the Haitian zombie.

Hurston's experience in Haiti with zombies and Voodoo practices lead her to be certain that zombies do exist while many of her critics treated her work as folklore and folly (Davis 67). One critic of her work claimed she was "very superstitious...Miss Hurston herself, unfortunately, did not go beyond the mass hysteria to verify her information" (66). Hurston's anthropological collection *Tell My Horse* was judged as fiction by the outside world, laying claim to the notion that there must be a scientific explanation for what she and the people of Haiti were witnessing (Davis 67). Seabrook's account, on the other hand, was not questioned the way Hurston's account was (Kee 14). Seabrook's travelogue was "sympathetic to the peasants," which assisted in his presentation to Americans, but this sympathy, when joined with his presentation of the text as fact, went on to offend the Haitian intellectual (Davis 72). Seabrook's account went on to great popularity because of the way it fanned American's desire for the exoticism of Haiti (72). Hurston's text was released in 1938, and Seabrook's was released in 1929. To compare them side by side reveals the staggering differences in the representation of information. While Hurston appeals to Haitian culture and the power of Voodoo within their culture, Seabrook portrays Haitian life as a caricature. The illustrations alone reveal the goals these two separate texts have:



Figure 1 (Seabrook 99)



Figure 2 (Hurston 180)

Hurston's text contains photographs, a chapter devoted to "Songs of Worship to Voodoo Gods," and even a bibliography. Seabrook's account provides caricature like cartoons of black men and women with large noses and engorged lips. For Seabrook, zombies are slaves to the fields, but for Hurston zombies exist as a part of Haitian culture that extends outside the realm of slavery. The popularity of Seabrook's account is due to its sensational treatment of Haitian life and the desire of the American public to find entertainment in the exotic (Kee 14).

In order to understand the roots of Voodoo and the reasoning for such different portrayals of zombies we must look to the history of Haiti. *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*, written by Wade Davis and published in 1988, provides an insightful look into the history of the occupation of Haiti, and Haiti's own

revolt against colonization and slavery. Columbus arrived in Haiti and saw paradise—as did many of the other white settlers who reached it (Davis 15, 17). As with all new settlement, disease was rampant and many of the indigenous peoples were killed by either sickness or the cruelty of the settlers (15). The Spanish sought to expand their agricultural exports and established plantations on the rich Haitian soil shortly after the first settlers arrived (17). “As early as 1517 Charles V had authorized the importation of 15,000 black slaves to “replace the dwindling stock of Indians” and so began the importation of Africans to Haiti to work the fields of cane and other agricultural commodities (17). It is said that “one African was worth four Indians” (17). Haiti’s birth is one that began in blood, and the vein of slavery runs deep in its history. It is understandable why critics would utilize the metaphor of zombie as capitalist slave when the history of Haiti and the Haitian zombie is so entrenched in the slave trade.

An event occurred in 1791 that shook Haiti and the European occupation of it, as well as the global market for slavery. This event would be “the only successful slave revolt in history” (Davis 18). The war that ensued lasted twelve years and the slaves raised arms to destroy the occupation of Haiti in one of the bloodiest defeats (18-19). Napoleon himself planned to stop in Haiti, then known as Saint Domingue, and quell the revolt on his route to Louisiana to complete the Louisiana Purchase (19). Napoleon’s troops of 34,000 men were sent to disarm the slaves and end their uprising; however, a mere 2,000 were left when Napoleon decided it better to retreat rather than suffer any more losses of his men (19). French command in Haiti declared war on the slaves, training dogs to devour black men and women, and ordering all slaves thought to be anti-establishment to be destroyed (20). The slaves of Saint Domingue did not go quietly and

the French had lost 60,000 men before they officially retreated and gave up hope of continuing occupation in Haiti (20). Davis claims that this incredible defeat is accurate as such, and though never denied, it is often overlooked because of a lack of explanation (20). One account offers sickness as the leading force behind the defeat (20). However, the European troops had battled in a great many lands where sickness was rampant and they had not had so many men fall (20). The other explanation is that the bodies of the slaves joined to create a single horde that was guided by a spirit (20). This explanation involves Voodoo and the supernatural, and it is where the tale of zombies assisting in the revolution began (20). In the end, 60,000 European soldiers were defeated by 18,000 slaves (21). The revolution left Haiti “ranked as the only independent black republic for one-hundred years” (26). This provides another aspect of the Haitian zombie’s story within Haitian culture that cannot be overlooked. As was mentioned above, zombies do not represent one aspect of Haitian culture, but, instead, have become representative of a host of explanations within Haitian culture. Zombies are not only slaves, but revolutionaries. They helped to bring Haiti back from colonization and European occupation.

Voodoo became more than a spiritual experience for the Haitians. It became a political movement, a language, a way of resisting the culture that tried its hardest to suppress the people (Davis 224). Voodoo was “the cement which bound the members of the conspiracy” (225). Voodoo ceremonies became meeting places of the revolutionaries, and it allowed the slaves an open space to converse about the impending battles (225). From the inside, it was a saving grace, but the appearance from the outside was terrifying. The sheer power of a belief system to join peoples from across the

republic became terrifying to the colonizers. If this momentum had spread to the Americas it would have crushed the global slave trade in crippling ways. Therefore, it must be cast as evil in order to stop the penetration to other parts of the globe. Haiti's revolution was proof that white occupation was not the most powerful of forces, and in return, the colonizers could never let the revolution look like a success (Kee 11).

Literature, such as Seabrook's *The Magic Island*, amongst other zombie and Voodoo tales, became supposed proof of the evils that existed in the newly found freedom of the Black Republic.

The friction between Haiti and the Americas only increased after Haiti's revolution. The Haitian government fueled fires of animosity by supporting the release of slaves (Davis 28). America attempted to ensure a revolution like that of Haiti's could never happen on home soil by trying to stop trade with Haiti, but the Haitian government responded by intercepting slave ships from Africa to America only to purchase the slaves and set them free in Haiti (28). The Americas deeply feared the power Haiti had gained in disrupting the slave trade, and in response they demonized the people of Haiti as sorcerers delving into black magic. There was no other way to depict the scenario in which a republic built on the backs of slaves could one day free itself of the yokes of slavery.

Fear led to an infatuation with the Black Republic, and Haitian culture became entertainment for Americans (Davis 72). "Haiti was like having a little bit of Africa next door": it was a piece of exoticism that was close enough to look at, but far enough to not incite too much fear (73). Any person who travelled abroad suddenly became a writer because of the high demand for any literature that included magical and fantastical stories

from Haiti (73). American writers began caricaturizing the Haitian people—the stories told were exaggerations to enhance the romantic appeal of the republic, but they served a political purpose as well (73). The books that were published during American occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) aimed for a specific goal: to reveal to the public what would happen should such a country assert its own freedom by revolting against occupation and to demonize the black body that freed itself as a force of evil (73). Though a great deal was written as “firsthand account” of life in Haiti, most of the publications were fictitious, relying on gossip and other publications for anecdotes (Kee 12). The message of these works being “any country where such abominations took place could find its salvation only through military occupation” (Davis 73). Haitian culture and Voodoo ceremonies were distorted into horror-movie material as a way to portray Haiti as a republic that needed to be saved before it self-destructed (Kee 13). These stories became the basis of the modern American zombie, which was representative of the slaves of capitalism and the fear of the black body.

The zombie that came to America was a representation of the fear of the white body’s inability to control the black body (Kee 10). Haiti became the first “black-ruled independent nation in the Western Hemisphere” and was seen as unruly and unable to be dominated (Kee 10). Zombies became the embodiment of the demonization of Haitian culture and provided the physical evidence of the corruption of the people. The literature that was translated and brought to America chose to represent Haitian zombies as such—the mindless body who labors for an owner. There was also a sinister underlay to these tales that meant to keep the fear of the black body alive. It is obvious now why the Haitian zombie would be frightening to white-ruled republics. The Haitian zombie, along

with Voodoo and Haitian culture, has been appropriated to represent the repercussions of resisting globalization and capitalism. The first American zombie movie, *White Zombie*, is an excellent example of the excitement of “the exoticism of the Caribbean, the fear of domination and subversion, and the perpetuation of the imperialist model of cultural and racial hegemony” claims Kyle Bishop, a critic who has explored zombie culture extensively (“The Sub-Subaltern Monster” 141). The influences of Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* are woven throughout the film “accentuating the prevailing stereotypes of the ‘backwards’ natives and the western imperialist superiority” (141). Zombies, as a part of Haitian culture, must be vilified in order to retain a fear of the slave’s revolt, and, in turn, prevent something similar from happening in America. The slave revolt in Haiti provided an example to the global trade of what is possible should the slaves ever desire their freedom. For Bishop, “the true horror in these movies lies in the prospect of a westerner becoming dominated, subjugated, and effectively ‘colonized’ by the native pagan” (“The Sub-Subaltern Monster...” 141-142). The notion that the white body may one day be dominated by the black body was a hypocritical notion rooted in the racist ideology that the black body was not equal to or superior to the white body. The white slave owners of America deeply feared that the tables would turn and they would one day be the slaves.

The Haitian zombie was used as a tool of entertainment to sway a population to “cast an entire group of people as beings without humanity” (Kee 17). If the modern American zombie is based on misleading information, then our criticism using these propaganda-like texts can also be considered misinformed. When one uses, for example, *The Magical Island* as an authoritative reference when analyzing zombie literature, critics

are basing their readings of modern American zombies on information that was not accurate. Modern texts, such as Wade Davis' *Passage of Darkness* and Thomas O. Ott's *The Haitian Revolution*, provide a more well-rounded account of the range of possibilities for the modern zombie's existence within American culture.

The modern twenty-first century zombie tale explores the malleability of the zombie, and its ability to evolve (Kee 20). The Haitian zombie shifts personas, existing in a liminal area exclusive of being typecast as representing one side of any binary system, such as race, gender, or class. Instead, as Hurston's text, as well as Davis' text, reveal, there are many more ways to read the zombie of modern American culture. The zombies of *White Zombie* may be representative of the slaves of capitalism because they are based on Seabrook's text, but with new information arising, or rather, information being recorded more accurately, there is a shift in how the modern American zombie comes to be represented within society. Instead of being cast as the forgotten, lost souls, who were chewed up by capitalism and spit out as mindless beings, let us look at the modern American zombie in terms of their freedom from the binary systems of race, class, and gender of capitalism. Let us allow the zombie to reclaim their history.

## Freeing the Zombies

This study wishes to release the zombies of *The Walking Dead* from their current analogy of zombies of capitalism and see them with a fresh perspective, one in which the zombie of *TWD* are seen as free, instead of chained to their consumerism. Castillo and Egginton claim in their article “Dreamboat Vampires and Zombie Capitalists”: “today’s zombie hordes may best express our anxieties about capitalism’s apparently inevitable byproducts: the legions of mindless, soulless consumers who sustain its endless production” (4). Steve Shaviro writes in “Capitalist Monsters”: “vampire-capital can only extract its surplus by organizing its legions of zombie-labour” (282). Limiting the relationship of all zombies to consumerism only maintains the theory that the modern American zombie must be equated with the colonized zombie predecessor that Seabrook brought to life in *The Magic Island*. Dunja Opatić writes in the article “Zombies in Revolt: The Violent Revolution of American Cinematic Monsters” that “as a mixed category defined by its liminality and the disruption of the binary opposition between life and death, zombies resist classification” (1-2). The modern zombie’s existence within “the hymenal space of floating indetermination,” as Opatić puts it, makes for a wider view of the modern American zombie’s life within the apocalyptic world and within present day society (2).

Ideas of race, class, and gender are social constructs set forth by society through language. As Ferdinand De Saussure explains, “In itself, thought is like a swirling cloud, where no shape is intrinsically determinate. No ideas are established in advance, and nothing is distinct, before the introduction of linguistic structure” (131). The zombies of Robert Kirkman’s apocalyptic world do not have the power of speech, but a lack of

language is not a hindrance when looking at the way in which the zombies of *TWD* resist the social structures of race, class and gender. For Kyle Bishop, in his detailed article “The Sub-Subaltern Monster: Imperialist Hegemony and the Cinematic Voodoo Zombie,” a zombie’s lack of speech acts as another way in which the zombie is without freedom (146). For Bishop, because there is a lack of interaction between zombie and master in the Voodoo zombie model, and the zombie’s lack of speech is another way the zombie becomes imprisoned because it does not have the vocal power to resist the enslavement (145). While this evaluation is certainly interesting in terms of the enslaved zombie model that is seen in *The Magic Island*, a lack of language can also be seen as another way the zombie of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries break down the barriers of classifying binary systems, such as race, class and gender. If there is no language to determine gender, class, or race how does the zombie identify any one of themselves as such? According to De Saussure, these ideas swirling around in the mind are nothing until we assign a linguistic term and symbol to them. The zombie does not use language to communicate; therefore, they have no way of perpetuating the hierarchical systems that exist in society today. The only necessary differences to discern are food from fellow zombie. Language constructs the world around us, and assists us in discerning our realities.

For the zombies of *TWD*, their silence indicates they have no need for language in their world. They have no need to label, or oppress through language, they have no need for classifications in their world. They can recreate the world with no prejudices of the past. Language helps humans to judge others, as well. Carol, a member of Rick’s group, points this out in the following panel:



Figure 3 (Kirkman vol 7)

This panel comes after Carol has attempted suicide after her lover left her for another woman. The other members of the group criticize her and begin to judge her as an unfit mother, and label her a risk to the other members of the group (Kirkman vol 7). The other members of the group have lost their trust in Carol. Carol seeks solace in the silence of the zombie in this scene<sup>2</sup>. The weight of judgement is lifted off of Carol as she knows this zombie will not be trying to label her. The lack of language makes Carol feel more comfortable. Carol decides to join the zombie legion and steps just a bit closer:

<sup>2</sup> The zombie in this panel is tied to a stake so the members of Rick's group can observe it and learn anything they can from it.



Figure 4 (Kirkman vol 7)

Carol's choice to become a zombie is based upon her need to be free to judgement that is associated with language. The lack of response she has from the zombie relieves Carol of the weight of judgment from her peers.

The zombies of *TWD* consume flesh—this point cannot be negated; however, the reason for their consumerism is survival and reproduction. While the zombie of *TWD* consumes, it creates new zombies to add to the population. As Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry write in "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism": "the urge of self-preservation is united with the propagation of the species: the urge of the body is the same as the will of the collective (99). The zombie's consuming is twofold and necessary for the survival of their kind. When the

zombies' eating habits are viewed as "consuming for consuming's sake," we distort the motive behind the act. A zombie's consuming in *The Walking Dead* is not sinister in its motives, nor is it blindly consuming constantly. Gerry Canavan discusses zombies' eating habits as well in the article "'We Are the Walking Dead': Race, Time, and Survival in Zombie Narrative" and writes of the zombie: "it does not hate, nor seek revenge, and does not even 'want' to hurt us" (434). Hershel, a farmer Rick encounters, defends his reasoning for not killing the zombies that walk onto his property: "You don't even know what's wrong with them. Nobody does. We don't know a damn thing about what happened or what's going" (Kirkman vol 2). There is a great unknown in the world of *The Walking Dead*: the question remains, what do the zombies want? Hershel argues that killing the zombies without understanding what they want, or what they are, would be wrong. Hershel defends them as living beings, and insists on understanding the zombies before putting an end to their lives. Rick tries to reason with him, saying "that thing in the barn...it's not your son" (vol 2). However, Hershel responds "we don't know what they're thinking, what they're feeling...we don't know shit!" (vol 2)<sup>3</sup>. This conversation allows the reader to call into question previous notions about zombies and the objectives of the zombies. Hershel is adamant that there may be something inside of the zombie, while Rick is sure that there is nothing human left. It becomes a question of morals, and whether ending the lives of the zombies would be justified or murder. This conversation between Hershel and Rick forces the reader to question what is more horrifying: being the surviving human, or the zombie who is misunderstood?

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<sup>3</sup> Hershel is a farmer that Rick's group encounters on their travels to find a safe place to rest. Hershel has been collecting zombies in the area, and holding them in a barn on his property to protect them until they can be "normal again" (Kirkman vol 2). He refers to them by their names and protects them.

The consumerism of zombies of *TWD* is not in direct relation to capital, but in relation to utility. For Marx there is a distinct difference between a use-value and a commodity in terms of things and objects<sup>4</sup> and the act of consuming. Marx writes in *Capital Volume I* “he who satisfies his own need with the product of his own labour admittedly creates use-values, but not commodities” (131). By equating the consuming nature of zombies to the consumerism of commodities it negates the fact that the zombies of *The Walking Dead*’s consumerism of flesh is of actual use-value: their consuming is necessary for survival. These zombies do not see things or objects as having capital value, but, instead, see food for survival and a way to reproduce. As Lauro and Embry claim, the zombie labors for no one (99). According to Marx, labor “has a dual character: in so far as it finds its expression in value, it no longer possesses the same characteristics as when it is the creator of use-values” (*Capital Volume I* 132). The zombies of *TWD* are utilizing what Marx would call useful labor, which exists outside the realm of capitalism because its product is for survival as opposed to capital gain (132). This is another example of the way the zombies of *TWD* do not participate in a capitalist system. They cannot be categorized as the dregs of capitalism because their labor resists the very notion of consumerism and commodification.

The zombie’s lack of societal rules and norms allow for a place free any sort of social classifications. Judith Butler’s theories of gender in her seminal book *Gender Trouble* break down the way in which gender assignment is a product of social interaction and language. For Butler, “gender is not a noun, but neither is it a free floating set of attributes,” and instead it is a “regulatory practice of gender coherence”

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<sup>4</sup> The difference between things and objects will be explored more thoroughly in the coming sections concerning Lucille, Negan’s baseball bat, and the Savivors.

(34). For one to exist as a gender, one needs to have a definition of said gender, a label, and a set of distinctions that define that gender. For Butler, gender is a social construct designed through language. The zombies of *TWD* exist as androgynous, asexual beings, and their role within the horde is not inhibited or progressed by the sexual parts they have. Intercourse is not necessary to bear offspring—their bite is sufficient for procreation. The zombie's system of procreation "rewrites maternity" because it does not require joining of male and female, nor does it necessitate a birth vessel (Jones 44). In this way there is no scientific or social need to designate a categorization of sex or gender. Steve Jones, in his article "Porn of the Dead: Necrophilia, Feminism, and Gendering the Undead," quotes Margrit Shildrick's book *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*: "the very presence/existence of the monster...is enough to disturb the expected normative binaries" (45). The zombie of *TWD* defies gender norms and rewrite the idea of maternity is enough to shatter the gender binary within their world. There is no need to identify as either/or, as male or female, because those titles are completely unnecessary from a reproductive perspective. There is no language to decipher between genders or sexuality, and the zombie of *TWD* exists in a state of androgyny. They simply exist as beings in opposition to fulfilling typical societal roles of male and female through their lack of societal structures that govern such distinctions.

The modern American zombie's existence questions binary systems and, in turn, asks us as readers and viewers to question how these binaries of gender or class operate within our social world. According to Jessica Murray in her article "A Zombie Apocalypse: Opening Representational Spaces for Alternative Constructions of Gender

and Sexuality” the zombie “reminds us that binary oppositions, such as those between male and female, fantasy and reality, life and death and normal and abnormal, are ‘constructed illusions’” (4). Within the zombie community there is no outcast “other” because social structures do not exist in a way that creates organizations of power within the community. A zombie is a zombie, not a female zombie, not a president zombie...just a zombie in the world of *The Walking Dead*.

Present day discussions of monstrosity tend to focus on binary relationships, specifically the “us” and “them” mentality (McNally 11). This path of thinking only preserves the binary relationships of gender, class, and race (11). By narrowly focusing on the idea of the “other” within a binary system it leaves a wide range of possibilities unexamined. The zombie’s critical attention is a perfect example of a narrow focus of the monster’s existence within a society. The zombies of *TWD* explode the binary systems set forth of race, class, and gender through their very existence as living dead beings. They straddle the line, blurring male and female descriptors through their ability to bear offspring no matter their sexual organs. Kirkman’s zombies in *The Walking Dead* cannot speak, and they no longer have the necessity to define racial parameters or social power structures. The zombie is the beginning of a revolution that deconstructs binary social constructs.

Jacques Derrida’s theory of undecidables, which he postulates in *Positions*, can help us to understand the indeterminate position of the zombie of *TWD* within a world of binaries. Derrida writes “I have called them undecidables, that is, unities of simulacrum, ‘false’ verbal properties...that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and

disorganizing it, without ever constituting a third term” (43). When we apply Marx’s model to zombie literature and film, most often we perpetuate the binary model that Marx so craftily laid out without considering other options that lie at the outskirts. The zombies of *TWD* resist categorization as either proletariat or bourgeoisie. They cannot be grouped as the proletariat because they labor for no one. I would not consider them the bourgeoisie because they rule no one. They are the living-dead—their very name offers no explanatory classification. They offer no option because they contain all characteristics and no characteristics simultaneously. Opatić writes: “They are the (un)dead, resting within the empty space between parentheses” (2). They fit no mold, and give no explanation of their own existence; they are the third group, which are no group at all. They inhabit neither of Marx’s models, nor do they fit any other model presented. Because the zombie actively resists any sort of binary classification system, Marxism cannot stand alone in a critical analysis of zombie literature and film.

## **It's Their World—We Just Live in it: The Survivor's Guide to Living Among the Zombies**

The modern American zombie of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century comes to examine a life where the zombie and the human must coexist (Dendle 161). Peter Dendle aptly quotes a Bond and Collins article: “the idea that humans and zombies have little to distinguish them from one another and that only a savior that partakes of the nature of both the living and the undead can possibly save post-humanity” (161). The survival of the human race depends on the coexistence of zombies and humans. Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead* comic book series offers a new set of characters who suitably call themselves the Whisperers. The Whisperers live among zombies, wearing their skins as masks and clothing, moving among the zombie hordes invisibly and begin to embrace a life that is more animalistic than what we would currently define as human.

The Whisperers are a fairly new group to the comic book series; however, their development, thus far, has shown that their inhabitation of the zombie's world has been their greatest survival tool. They are first introduced in a panel in volume 22 of the *TWD* comic book series in which two security patrolmen for the Hilltop (one of the communities Rick leads) are lost, one of which is severely injured. Ken, who has badly injured his legs during a patrol of the Hilltop's lands, is being led home by Marco (Kirkman vol 22). They encounter a horde of zombies and duck into a ravine for safety. While crouched low in the mud, the rain pours down on them and they listen to the shuffling of zombie feet as the horde passes on.



Figure 5 (Kirkman vol 22)

Surprisingly, they hear a voice not their own. It says “Where they go?” (Kirkman vol 22). The panels zoom in from the splash page that illustrates the horde passing above, and the dialogue box enters into a close up of Ken and Marco with the previous phrase, as well as “Don’t know. Keep moving.” (vol 22).



Figure 6 (Kirkman vol 22)

With no one else around, who is speaking? The panel pulls out to show shadows of the dead stumbling above. Ken reaches the Hilltop for help, eventually, and when questioned by Maggie, the Hilltop's representative leader, Marco responds "It was the dead. They were speaking" (vol 23). There is no distinguishing between the zombie and the human in the Whisperer's first encounter with the Rick's surviving group. The Whisperers have seamlessly blended into the zombies, except for their voice. The Whisperers begin their role in *The Walking Dead* as a part of the zombie horde.

Jesus, a prominent member of the Hilltop, embarks on a journey to find Ken. Jesus is confronted by a group of Whisperers, whom attack him, and Jesus eventually defeats all but one, a young girl name Lydia, who he takes as a hostage to the Hilltop for questioning. It is in this interview that the reader understands who the Whisperers are and how they operate. Jesus asks "What the hell is up with this?" as he holds up her

mask made of a zombie's skin (Kirkman vol 23). Lydia responds "The skin makes the dead leave us alone. We travel with them. They protect us...and we protect them" (vol 23). The Whisperers move within the herd of zombies seamlessly because they understand the protection the herd offers. According to Opatić "the only way to gain access to the inside of a zombie network is to become one of them—to unknowingly accept their gift" which is the gift of protection through the sheer numbers (8). The Whisperers use the zombies as a shield. Their active and conscious decision to act as a zombie sets them apart from the other human survivors. Lydia explains to Jesus why they must wear the skins of the dead and claims "because that is the all that is left for us in this world. For us to live and them to not. We live together or we don't live at all. You haven't learned, but you'll see...we all learn or die" (Kirkman vol 23). The Whisperers understand the necessity of co-existence in order to continue living, and they have designed a way of life that supports life among the zombies and cohabitation with them.

The Whisperers must appear as zombies in order to live among them. Instead of becoming zombies, they act and dress as them and even eat with them, as Lydia points out: "sometimes the dead kill an animal and we share that" (Kirkman vol 23). Mikhail Bakhtin's theories surrounding carnival, which are included in his influential text *Rabelais and His World*, help to explain the idea of inhabiting another way of life—becoming another—through the experience at carnival. Bakhtin writes "carnival is not a spectacle seen by people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people" (7). For carnival to be successful everyone must participate. In terms of the Whisperers, participating is equivalent to survival. If one of the Whisperers

were to not participate in the act of wearing the skins they would soon find their human lives over. The Whisperers take the art of carnival and turn it on its head—instead of using costumes as an entertaining way to release the pressure of everyday life and invert the systems of power and oppression the Whisperers use the art of masking themselves as a unifying survival strategy. This inversion of the happiness of carnival into a grotesque form of endurance is what allows the Whisperers the ability to live among the dead freely.

The Whisperers, like the zombies, exist in the ambiguous existence between life and death, male and female, zombie and human. Bakhtin describes the art of carnival in a similar way, claiming that carnival “represents a certain form of life, which was real and ideal at the same time...They stood on the borderline between art and life” (8). For the Whisperer, as with the zombie, there is only existence as a being. When one becomes a Whisperer they must shed identities, including their names. The Whisperers eventually find Lydia at the Hilltop and after she is rescued, Lydia turns to her mother and says “I’m sorry. Thanks, mom, for coming to get me” (Kirkman vol 23). Alpha, Lydia’s mother, responds “You call me Alpha like all the rest” (vol 23). The binary structure of parent and child is eradicated, and, as Lydia explains, “there are no more children anymore. Childhood was always a myth brought about by the illusion of safety” (23). Carnival suspended the need for hierarchical ranking, identifying language (such as male, female; adult, child) and “all were considered equal” (Bakhtin 10). Carnival rid the people of dividing barriers set forth by binary social structures like class and gender (10). Bakhtin’s theories surrounding carnival are very similar to Derrida’s theory of undecidability in the way in which classifications are suspended; however, carnival

includes a major component: the art of masking oneself to become something or someone else. By wearing the skins of the zombie, the Whisperer can become the walking dead and exist in the same limbo-like existence of indistinctness and ambiguity.



Figure 7 (Kirkman vol 24)

The Whisperers skin the zombies, and clean and prepare the skin to be worn as a cloak of invisibility. The zombie-skin suit allows the Whisperers to move freely in both the world of the zombie and the world of the human. They appear as zombie to both the zombie and the human. Folk masks, according to Bakhtin, are related to metamorphoses, and “reject conformity to one’s self” (40). The transformative properties of the mask during carnival allow the participant the ability to shed their identity and obtain a new one, and the Whisperers skin-suits allow them to transform from human into the zombie. The Whisperers shed their humanness and occupy the lifestyle of zombie.

Another aspect of carnival that is applicable to the Whisperers is that of the grotesque. One major aspect of the grotesque is the culmination of binary oppositions,

such as death and life, old and new, and up and down (Bakhtin 20-21). The absurdity of the grotesque is what makes it successful, and one of the examples Bakhtin provides is of the Kerch terracotta<sup>5</sup>, which portrays images of senile pregnant hags (25). The contradiction of death and birth is viewed in one image with neither being resolved—life exists within death in this example (26). The Whisperers also inhabit a similar status: the human, alive, exists within a cloak of death, which is the zombie skin. The Whisperers are simultaneously grotesque images of the zombies and of the humans. They externally appear as zombies, but they are living beings inside. They are a grotesque inversion of both human and zombie as they exist as both. They are similar to the pregnant hags in that they appear dead on the outside, yet there is life inside.

Carnival was designed to provide the people with the chance to live an alternate life—the second life, as Mikhail Bakhtin refers to it—and offer the people a way to invert the systems of power (5-6). For the Whisperers, this second life is a survival tool. The apocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead* is in disarray—the dead are walking again, humans must impersonate the walking dead in order to survive, and any societal laws are non-existent. It is as if the world was turned on its head and any answer you had before does not exist anymore, but its opposition replaces its previous explanation. Dead no longer means life ceases, but instead, is defined as another type of existence. For Bakhtin, carnival's main component was laughter, which was the escape from monotony of life into a world where there were no more definitions of good and bad, elite and common, black or white. The zombie apocalypse reverses this, for laughter is no longer

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<sup>5</sup> The Kerch terracotta collection is a series of pottery which displays images of old, decaying women pregnant and giving birth. The culmination of life and death exist simultaneously in one image and Bakhtin uses this image to provide an example of the grotesque, which is the existence of binary oppositions in one figure.

the binding solution in a community of people. Survival now replaces the laughter, but acts as a similar adhesive joining the community. For the Whisperers, the need for survival bonds them in a perpetual masquerade.

## Zombies of Capitalism

The introduction of Negan in *TWD* is a violent one. When he is introduced to the reader, Rick has established a socialistic community, called Alexandria, that is more concerned with the community's survival than the collection of commodities. Goods, such as food and ammunition, are collected, but shared equally among the people for the common good of survival of the group. In stark contrast are Negan and his group, the Saviors. Negan has resurrected the capitalistic ideology that existed before the fall of society. He demands that Alexandria hand over half of their supplies, or meet a violent end, which will be discussed in more detail later. As Markus Giesler has pointed out in his article "Refraining the Embodied Consumer as Cyborg: A Post-humanist Epistemology of Consumption:" "the set of possibilities is not a given one but is reproduced by the very selections being feasible which recursively constitute (by being remembered, forgotten and re-invented) that set of possibilities" (663). Negan may not be defining his empire as capitalistic, but the New World order most certainly follows capitalistic principles. Negan describes the New World Order: "The New World Order is this... Give me your shit or I will kill you. You work for me now, you have shit—you give it to me. That's your job" (Kirkman vol 17). This can be directly connected to Marx's theory of the division of labor. In *Capital Volume I* Marx writes "the division of labour in the workshop implies concentration of the means of production in the hands of one capitalist" (476). In terms of the New World Order, Negan is profiting from the labor of a legion of workers within Alexandria, the Kingdom, the Hilltop, and also within

Negan's own community of Savivors<sup>6</sup>. The Savivors are sent to meet members of the communities at designated drop points to receive the goods. If the amount of supplies does not suffice, then violence is used to reinforce fear. Negan orders his Savivors to enact violent means should the load of supplies be insufficient. The communities are beaten into submission and while they struggle to feed their own communities, as well as the Savivors' laborers.

During one of Negan's pick-ups from Alexandria we see how detrimental this deal is for the communities. Denise, the doctor at Alexandria, says "Anything we might need...he's taken all that" and Negan responds "The fact remains, he's taken less than half of your medicine stockpiles" (Kirkman vol 18). Negan's worker has taken the important items—pain medicine, antibiotics, "anything that can be abused"—and left them with band aids, aspirin and cold medicine (vol 18). Negan replies to Denise and says "your big walls are all the medicine you need" (vol 18). This is why Negan's capitalistic society will not work: "The bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society...it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, this is has to feed him, instead of being fed by him" (*The Communist Manifesto* 78). The greed of Negan and the Savivors blinds them to the way they are essentially killing their laborers. Negan has left Alexandria with just enough to survive and continue laboring, but not enough for comfortable survival. By placating them through false reassurance Negan gains a stockpile of commodities and comfort items while the laborers (those who live in the

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<sup>6</sup> Negan and the Savivors sought out surviving groups and bullied them into a trade agreement in which the group would supply the Savivors with half of their goods and in return Negan and the Savivors would provide protection from the walking dead. The communities know of each other's existence and try to work together in fulfilling Negan's demands. This deal was established before Rick reached Alexandria with his group.

communities) risk infection and death because they no longer have the necessities required for proper medical attention. This sort of policy weakens the laborers into submission—if one does not have the energy to fight they cannot revolt.

The relationship that Negan has with his wives is one of inequality. In explaining to Carl, Rick’s son, Negan says: “I always wanted to be able to fuck a whole bunch of women” (Kirkman vol 18). It is as if he wants to collect them like trophies. For Negan, the laborers are not the only bodies who become commodities. Negan propositions the women of the Savivors with a deal: they give him their bodies and he provides them with food and necessities. It allows the women a chance at a more comfortable life, but it costs them freedom of their own bodies.

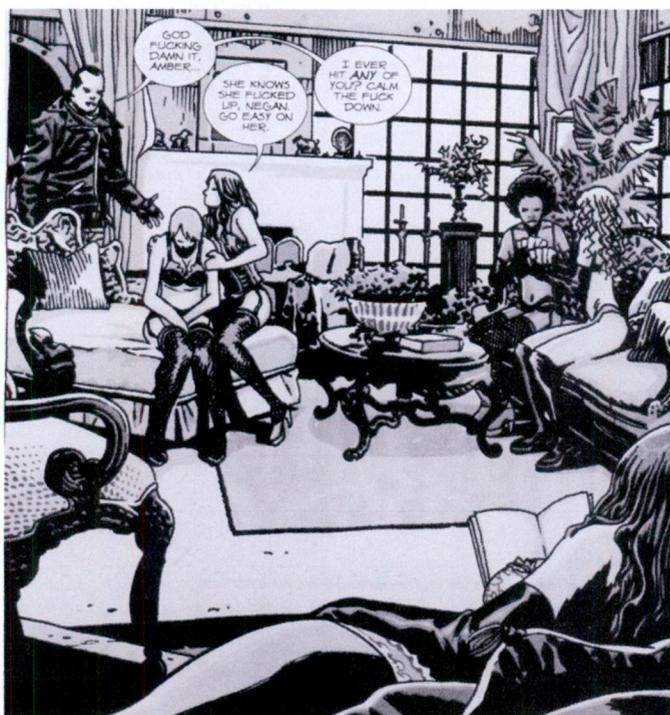


Figure 8 (Kirkman vol 18)

When the reader is introduced to Negan’s home the panel shows his wives on display, as if they are objects. They are dressed in scanty lingerie in a high-end looking penthouse at

the Savior's commune. One woman lounges on a couch reading a book that appears to have no words. It is indicative of the life they now have with Negan: empty. Just as the laborers are empty shells beaten into submission, so are the wives. Though the wives may not receive the physical punishments from Negan (though they surely watch the violent public shaming) they are punished in another way. They have no life, no room for decisions or for free thinking. This panel represents not only the emptiness, but also the way in which the wives become unthinking robots. They wield their sexuality and their bodies as capital. Negan does not choose his wives based on their intelligence or their warrior skills, but by their appearance. They become empty shells—objects—parading before him as tools of sexual desire. They use their sexuality as capital to exchange for food and other goods. Just as the capitalist zombie Seabrook brought to Northern America are portrayed as unthinking slaves, Negan's wives act similarly: once they decided to become Negan's wife they no longer decide any part of their lives on their own and Negan controls their every move.

Negan says to the women he takes on as wives “your position here is completely voluntary” (Kirkman vol 18). Once a woman agrees to live with Negan it appears as if they have the option to leave; however, his reputation for violence reveals that this choice is not really an option. Once a woman chooses the life of Negan's wife, she risks a violent punishment should she decide to leave. As we heard above, the New World order involves both violence and the idea that Negan is entitled to everything: “give me your shit or I will kill you” (Kirkman vol 17). By offering the appearance of choice, Negan is using an “empty symbolic gesture,” as Slavoj Žižek articulates in his book *The Plague of Fantasies* (36). Žižek writes “this paradox of willing (choosing freely) what is in any

case necessary of pretending (maintaining the appearance) that there is a free choice although in fact there isn't, is strictly co-dependent with the notion of an empty symbolic gesture...a gesture which is meant to be rejected" (36). Negan appears to be reasonable, often stating that he is. For example, on his first trip to Alexandria Negan says to Rick "I'm actually quite reasonable if you just fucking cooperate" (Kirkman vol 18). Negan's reasonableness extends only as far as he gets what he wants with no resistance. While his claim is that his wives have a choice, in reality their only choice is Negan's choice. He symbolically gives her a decision but there is only one answer he wishes to hear, and should she decide otherwise there would be a violent punishment waiting for her afterwards. The wives do not actually have the choice that Negan presents.

Whether she chooses to stay or leave does nothing to impact the punishment for the male who tarnished Negan's commodities. Once a man seeks one of Negan's wives, he must be publicly shamed for taking what is not his: Negan applies a hot iron to his face to permanently scar him, and he will forever be a walking reminder of who is in power. Amber's first husband, Mark, will be punished for sleeping with Amber after Amber had made the choice to become one of Negan's wives. The people gather to watch the punishment unfold like a twisted horror film and Negan stands before them and says "What you are about to witness is going to be unpleasant...I wish I could just let it slide, ignore the rules...but I can't. Why?" and the Savivors respond "The rules keep us alive" (Kirkman vol 18). Negan heats the iron in a fire and then proceeds to brand Mark's face. Half of the face of the offender is melted off to act as an apocalyptic scarlet letter, a reminder to those who look upon it that the punishment is brutal should they go against the rules, which means against Negan. After Negan is done disfiguring Mark, he

says “Mark will forever bear the shame of his actions on his face, all will know what he’s done” (Kirkman vol 18).

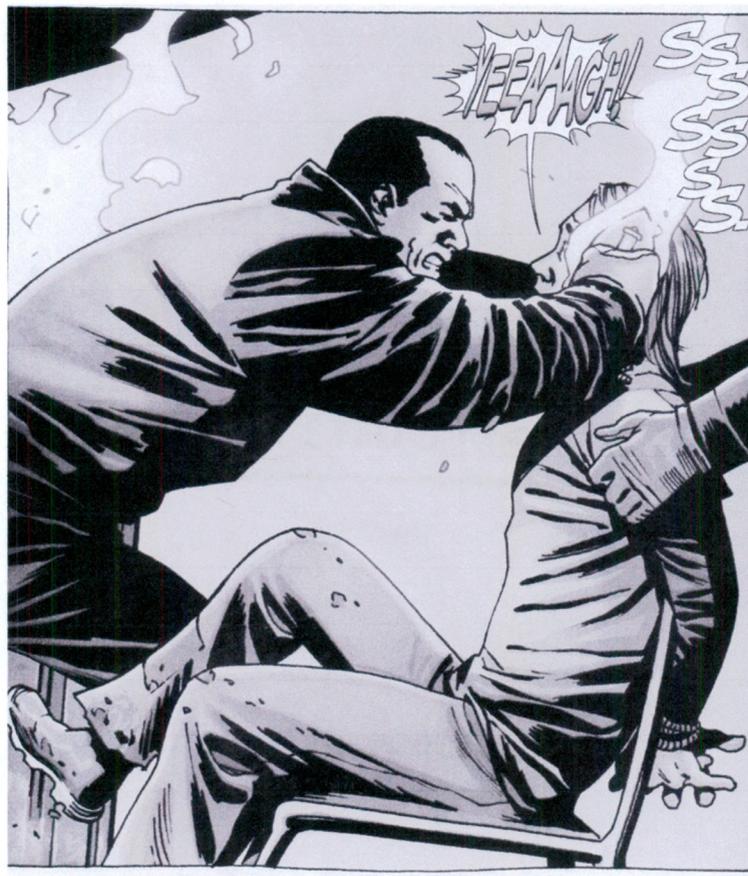


Figure 9 (Kirkman vol 18)

It is because of this brutality and the fear he instills that the Hilltop, the Kingdom, and many other communities have become zombie-like slaves to Negan. Dwight is a member of Negan’s Savivors who has felt the pain and shame of the iron as well. Dwight says “After that, I never did anything he didn’t ask me to. I never disobeyed him, I was a good soldier, I did as I was told. I was a coward” (vol 18). The act of instilling terror through violence is important to Negan’s role as dictator within not only the Savivors, but also in the Hilltop, Alexandria and the Kingdom. Negan’s use of terror through violent acts keeps the Savivors sedated. Out of fear they remain excellent laborers because there

are physical manifestations of Negan's wrath walking among them. If they are to ever consider expressing unrest at Negan's rule they must take a moment to look at Mark or Dwight's face and see the physical repercussions of revolting. Negan maintains his presence even when he is not in the room, for the evidence of his punishments exist forever etched into the minds and faces of the community. Negan successfully generates terror through both his violent acts and the way in which these acts leave the perpetrator as a walking reminder to fear Negan and keep the terror alive among the community.

The zombies of labor exist outside of Negan's empire as well. Ethan, a member of the Hilltop, has just come back from a delivery to Negan's Saviors. Negan has killed 2 members of the four-man delivery team and taken a third for hostage. Ethan is sent back to Hilltop with a message: "said it wasn't enough, said we weren't meeting our end of the bargain...they said they'd keep her alive, return her to us if I delivered a message to you..." Ethan says to the leader of the Hilltop, Gregory (Kirkman vol 16). The message is a knife to Gregory's abdomen and a hostage taken from the Hilltop. Ethan, as a member of Hilltop's community, has abandoned all loyalty to his people and become a drone for Negan. Steve Shaviro writes in "Capitalist Monsters:" "More and more living labour is transformed into dead labor, though the extraction and realisation of surplus value, and the zombification of the work force" (282). Ethan's betrayal to his people is done out of fear, but it is through this fear that Negan controls the people of the communities and turns them into mindless laborers. Negan controls through fear, and whether or not the violent order is questioned, it is always carried out. The above scene is a perfect example: Ethan turns against his own people and attempts to murder Gregory, the leader, because Negan has ordered him to do so. The Kingdom and the Hilltop have

been acquiescing to Negan's demands for some time before the Alexandrians meet the members of these other communities. Jesus explains how the original deal was struck between the Savivors and the Hilltop: "Almost as soon as the walls were built, Negan showed up...He met with Gregory, made a lot of demands and even more threats" (Kirkman vol 16). Out of fear, the communities labor for Negan and even if they do consider other possibilities, they always fulfill Negan's orders. The true zombies of capitalism in *TWD* are the laborers who serve Negan. In this way, Negan is more like the Bocor of Voodoo and his workers are more like zombies that Seabrook describes in *The Magic Island*. Negan controls his laborers through violence, and their fear prevents them from revolting.

When discussing the way capitalism creates mindless drones, Marx quotes Adam Smith in *Capital Volume 1*, and writes "The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations...has no occasion to exert his understanding...He generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become" (483). The monotony of life as a laborer within the system of capitalism creates mindless bodies who labor for the bourgeoisie. The laborers become unthinking slaves to the system because there are no other options for survival. The capitalist system removes the humanity from the human and turns them into producing machine. Negan has created a system that supports Marx's claim. Jesus says to Rick when explaining the situation: "Everyone here is too scared to stand up to them...so we work hard, gathering things to hand over to these madmen" (Kirkman vol 16). Negan has created a body of people who labor without fighting for a better way. Marx claims capitalism "converts the labourer into a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of

productive capabilities and instincts” (*Capital Volume I* 481). Their conscious thoughts and decisions have been removed and replaced by fear. In order for Negan to be successful, he must break each person in his laborious empire and force them into a mindless state of labor.

## Lucille: The Manifestation of the Fetish of Commodities



Figure 10 (Kirkman vol 19)

Lucille is a baseball bat wrapped in barbed wire that Negan uses to enforce his power. She is, however, more than just a baseball bat—Negan personifies Lucille and enters into dialogue with her, and speaks of her as if she is a person. “Lucille is thirsty,” Negan says in volume seventeen, “Lucille loves being sung to” in volume eighteen (Kirkman). Negan portrays her as the disciplinarian, ready to dole out punishments on a whim: “Lucille will have her revenge!” he says to Rick during one of Rick’s attempts to bring down the Saviors (vol 19). The relationship Negan shares with Lucille enters into a social relationship that extends Marx’s theory of the fetish of commodities. Negan treats Lucille as if she is alive and she transcends from inanimate object into the social realm of human relations. The following quote is taken from a scene in which Carl, Rick’s son, has shot Lucille during an attempt to kill Negan and stop his reign:

You may think this is an inanimate object. An inconsequential piece of wood wrapped carefully in barbed wire...not something to be cherished...and you’d be dead fucking wrong. This is a lady...but at

times, yeah she ain't so nice...truth is...Lucille is a bitch. But she's my bitch. She's the only bitch I've ever truly loved.

(Kirkman vol 19)

Commodities are things that have transcended into the realm of social status, and “appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own” (*Capital Volume I* 165).

Though a baseball bat could be equated to a use value because of its use for survival, Lucille transcends this relationship and becomes commodity through her transformation from “an inconsequential piece of wood” to “a lady” (Kirkman vol 19).

The process of commodification is an inversion. When an object changes from a use-value to a commodity through a socialized process, the object is inverted from inanimate to animate. One of Marx's more recognized quotes illustrates this: “So soon as it steps forth as a commodity it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities it stands on its head, evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than ‘table-turning’ ever was” (*Capital Volume I* 163). By framing the commodity within the realm of social, it creates “material relations between persons and social relations between things” (166). This reversal gives autonomy to objects. The moment the baseball bat was wrapped in barbed wire and named Lucille it transcended the world of use-values and entered the realm of commodities. The bat and the barbed wire can be seen as use values because of the protection they would provide the user, and even wrapping the baseball bat in barbed wire could be seen as use-value. However, because Negan has named this bat, and given it a voice, a gender, a personality, it entered the social realm.

The social space that commodities receive takes the “thingness” from the object, and humans no longer “bring the products of their labor into relation with each other as values because they see these objects merely as the material integuments of homogenous human labour” (*Capital Volume I* 166). These objects contain the human labor used to create them; therefore, they contain a piece of their creator. In order to understand this social level of the commodities, we must see the invisible and recognize the humanness the object contains within itself. A table cannot shape itself from a tree, and it certainly cannot take itself to market, but the human labors for it, and speaks for it at market. The human gives the table action and voice and, during this process, transfers a bit of its human self to the table. Jacques Derrida writes in *Specters of Marx*: “If one does not give oneself up to this invisibility, then the table-commodity, immediately perceived, remains what it is not” (187). Refusing to acknowledge the human traces within commodities refuses to acknowledge how very social and human they become. Lucille contains a piece of Negan and acts an extension of him. Negan gives her voice—for the baseball cannot speak, but Lucille can. It is only through Negan that she has any voice at all. Referring back to Kyle Bishop’s essay “The Sub-Subaltern Monster: Imperialist Hegemony and the Cinematic Voodoo Zombie” it can be seen that Lucille is a member of the sub-subaltern category that Bishop lays out. Bishop argues that zombies are “subservient due to their lack of will and autonomy; they also lack the power of speech” (146). Lucille cannot act without Negan, cannot speak without Negan, and she does not exist without Negan. Therefore, she can be more accurately described by Bishop’s theory than the zombie he discusses can. As I argued earlier, the zombies of *TWD* are free beings doing as they please, and the lack of speech a zombie possesses is not a

hindrance, but liberation of the suffocating social structures of race, class, and gender. Lucille, however, is not free—she kills at Negan’s bidding, she speaks but only through Negan and his voice, and she is trapped as a fetishized commodity because she does not have free will. Negan controls Lucille the way a Bocor would control the zombie in Haitian literature.

Traces of humanity run throughout all human made things. The issue at hand is the commodity, and the transference of power to an object. Once the table leaves the wood worker, for example, and proceeds to the market (with help from its maker) it begins to “play actor,” as Derrida says, and it begins to “become someone, it assumes a figure” (188). The transference from thing to supernatural object is where the transcendence occurs. Up until this point the table was simply a table. When it enters into the social schema of the market it transforms. This transcendence takes the object and “renders it the non-sensuous sensuous” and it is at this point that the invisible ghosts that were mentioned above become visible (189). This haunting of specters, as Derrida calls it, is the product of the traces of humanity in the object itself—the humanity it acquired during its birth. Where once there was a bat and barbed wire, there is now Lucille. This is how the capital character represents itself (189). These ghosts are what matters in terms of things and commodities. When the commodity receives a voice it then becomes commodity. It was not until Negan gave Lucille voice that she became a commodity herself. “The Thing is neither dead nor alive; it is dead and alive at the same time. It survives” (192) and it does this because humans continue to give voice and status to objects. The object remains somewhere in the middle, a ghost of humanness and a ghost of thingness. It has human qualities because humans attach such qualities to it, but

it remains unthinking and unable to respond on its own. Humans give it a voice to do as such, but it remains a puppet in the capitalist structure for it can only do and act as the human commands it. If capitalistic ideologies were to crumble it would kill off any living qualities the thing has. The ghost of the object cannot be seen, but it is heard. The reason that Lucille has a specter at all is because of her relationship to Negan and the way she is enslaved to him.

Lucille stands as a symbol of Negan's power. "You even made me drop Lucille. You have any clue how much she hates being on the ground? She's like an American flag that way" Negan says of her (Kirkman vol 18). Lucille has become a physical manifestation of the ideology surrounding the capitalist regime that Negan rules. She is a symbol of oppression to the people and a reminder that Negan is the only ruler. Lucille's value to Negan, the ruler of the Savivors, is what makes her a social symbol and is another way in which she becomes a fetishized commodity. She is valuable because of what she stands for, which is his power to oppress the people, and it is through his use of her that he asserts this. Though Negan compares her to the American flag, a symbol of freedom in America, Lucille is a tool of oppression. As much as the flag is a symbol of freedom, however, it is also a symbol of America, a capitalistic empire. In keeping with Geisler's theory that societies are reproducible because they are remembered and re-invented, Negan has perverted what he remembers of American society into something darker (663). He has taken the very image of America and its capitalistic empire, and re-invented it, making Lucille the symbol to stand for his rule over his zombie legions of workers.

## **Conclusion: And the Dead Will Rise**

The zombie is an ever evolving cultural character according to Peter Dendle in his essay "And the Dead Shall Inherit the Earth" (159). As zombies evolve, so must our understanding of what zombies represent within culture. Confining a critical analysis of zombies within the metaphor of zombie as capitalism's waste only perpetuates the colonized zombie myth of propaganda. In the contemporary world, a Marxist evaluation should also look for ways in which cultural beings break the binary molds of race, class, and gender. Because Marx's volumes of *Capital* cast the people into two groups (the original binary class system of proletariat and bourgeoisie), Marxist readings of zombie culture tend to reinforce the idea that one must only fit into the either/or scenario that Marx critiques. The eventual aim of the revolution Marx desired was to explode the binary system that separated society into hierarchical groupings with the final product being a society of equality and freedom. Robert Kirkman's zombies of the *TWD* comic book series are representative of the post-human state, and they resist the "very binaries that defined the old Cartesian model" as new modern zombies do in film and literature according to Deborah Christie in her essay "A Dead New World: Richard Matheson and the Modern Zombie" (68). When one begins to question the nature of the zombie, and how a Marxist reading of the zombie operates, we begin to question not only the application of Marxism, but also the Marxist model itself.

As we saw in the earlier section "Colonization of the Zombie," there is a part of Haitian mythology that provides an explanation for the Haitian's ability to overthrow the European colonizers with little to no tools and a minimal fighting force. The zombie was raised in order to assist the Haitian people during the revolution. It is said that "hordes of

black rose as a single body to overwhelm the more 'rational' white troops" (Davis 20). Lauro and Embry also point out that the original zombie myths not only represent the idea of mindless slave labor, but also represent rebellion: "The Haitian slave literally threw off the yoke of colonial servitude" (Lauro, Embry 97). The zombie can be representative of revolution as well as slavery, and this provides yet another binary system that zombies resist. It is impossible to classify a being, such as a zombie, because at every turn they are breaking the very systems that attempt categorize them.

Zombies also act as a hindrance to the advancement of capitalism. Essentially, the zombies are stopping the capital from gaining value by halting the progression of a capitalistic society through expansion of their own species. The rate of return dwindles as more walkers are born—more workers who do not follow societal rules. Part of the deal that Negan strikes with the communities is that he and his savors will destroy zombies on the perimeter of the community: "Me and my guys wait, but while we're doing that...we take out a few of these fucks, these dead fucks, who could have possibly killed one of you" (Kirkman vol 18). Negan must deplete the zombie community in order for his own empire of mindless laborers to grow. Negan understands that he needs the living to survive because without the living he would have to gather supplies by himself. Negan says "I don't want to kill any of you...I want you working for me, and you can't very well do that when you're fucking dead, now can you?" (Kirkman vol 17). Negan cannot control the zombies because they are free; therefore, they are deemed a threat to his system. Their reproduction, in turn, takes precious commodities away from Negan in the form of both laborers and future goods. In this way, zombies actively resist the model of capitalism. According Marx, the laborers become a form of capital because

their labor is worth more than they are worth as human beings and “these labourers...are a commodity, like every other article of commerce” (*The Communist Manifesto* 72). Steve Shaviro supports this when he quotes Michael Hardt and Toni Negri in “Capitalist Monsters”: “all of nature has become capital” (285). In terms of Negan and his collection of commodities, the communities who labor for him become another addition to his collected capital. Zombies and their relationship to society “create a dilemma for power relations and risk destroying social dynamics” because their reproduction allows them to expand their own numbers by turning the living into the walking dead (Lauro, Embry 90). Because Negan cannot control a person once they become a zombie, they represent a threat to his dictatorship.

While I have argued here that zombies are freer beings than many have previously considered, zombies, and monsters in general, are an ever evolving species because “the monstrous body is pure culture” (Cohen 4). The monster directly reflects a culture’s fears, which was revealed earlier through the history of the zombie’s American debut. The monster will always signify something other than itself because it becomes a hieroglyph for social fears, a manifestation of fears (Cohen 3). As societies evolve and grow, fears shift, and when fears shift so do monsters and what they represent. We have seen the zombie begin as the manifestation of colonial fears of the black body’s revolt, and then shift to the representation of the fear of consumerism in *Night of the Living Dead*. Robert Kirkman’s zombies reveal the fluid nature of the zombie itself and the way it retards the progression of capitalism, instead of perpetuating it. The twenty-first century zombie also represents a fear of a society without societal structure. The zombie hordes exist as an anti-society due to their lack of societal guidelines. The absence of

language within zombie culture effectively eliminates social structures. These social structures, such as race, gender, and class, are constructed through the use of language, and without language these things do not exist.

For Donna Haraway, in her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," the cyborg is the answer to removing such societal structures as race, class and gender. However, the success of a Marxist revolution must be human to remain loyal to Marx's work, as Louis Althusser points out in *For Marx*: "The revolution must no longer be political...but 'human' ('communist'), if man is to be restored his nature, alienated in the fantastic forms of money, power and gods" (226). The cyborg blends human and machine, human and object, in a way that resists the necessity for separation between humans and objects. Haraway justifies her embrace of the joining of human and machine by claiming "none of 'us' have any longer the symbolic or material capability of dictating the shape of reality to any of 'them'" (157). Humanity, according to Haraway, has come to the point that a need has arisen for outside intervention in the form of machine-human hybrid: humans, as a collective whole, can no longer solve issues created through the class system and hierarchies. The revolution must be human if it is to succeed; meaning the very ideology that runs society must be shifted away from objects. For Jean Baudrillard in *The System of Objects*, the world of automatons and robots becomes a "'schizofunctional' world" with "nothing leaving a trace but obsessions" (121). Once we reach a point of robots "the technical balance of objects is upset" (122). Automatons "open the door to a whole world of functional delusion" (121). Because robots are only acting in human form, they are merely a ghost of human. Their physical appearance represents the manifestation of

human obsession with machine, but robots do not solve problems created by unequal social structures like race, class, and gender. The blurring of human/machine lines leaves humanity in an even more confused state because machine has now assumed role of human. When looking for a Marxist revolution, one must look towards humanity and nature to fix itself without relying on mechanical additions. Zombies are human, and when considering a world in which binary categorizations exist, zombies, those specifically in *The Walking Dead*, seem more apt to shatter societal preconceptions of the binary systems of classification. When looking for a post-human being that would replicate the revolution that Marx wrote of, I would be inclined to argue that zombies would be more suitable because of their human composition. The zombies require no machine, or addition of an object, to resist the binaries that divide the people.

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx clearly outlines his distaste for the machine: “Owing to the extensive use of machinery...he becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him” (72). The idea of stitching together machine and human would not only go against the natural world, but would turn the human into the very thing that Marx feared: a machine themselves. The world of commodities, Marx claims, is what started the bourgeoisie economic system, oppression, class struggles, and political turmoil. If the commodity, the object, is what has created this great chasm between oppressed and oppressor, why would we want to join that with humanity and, in turn, wipe out the general human population only to replace it with another cog in a greater machine?

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