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«ЗОМБИ»-НАРРАТИВЫ: КРИТИКА КАПИТАЛИЗМА
ОТ «РАССВЕТА МЕРТВЕЦОВ» ДО «ОБИТЕЛИ ЗЛА»

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ZOMBIE NARRATIVES: CRITIQUES OF CAPITALISM
FROM “DAWN OF THE DEAD” TO “RESIDENT EVIL”

В статье дается анализ фильмов о зомби в их отношении к капитализму. Фильмы ужасов 1970-х гг., особенно фильмы о зомби, отражали экономическую, политическую и социальную структуру своей эпохи; однако со временем характеристики фильмов о зомби изменились. Вначале проводится сравнение созданного в 1970-е гг. Джорджем Ромеро фильма о зомби «Рассвет мертвецов», известного своим комментарием товарного фетишизма и общества потребления. Затем, в этом же ключе, исследуется серия фильмов 2000-х гг. «Обитель зла» для выявления кодов современных фильмов о зомби и изменений, произошедших в понимании «зомби»-метафор. Анализ охватывает все фильмы серии, но особое внимание уделяется первому фильму «Обитель зла» (Андерсон 2002) и третьему фильму «Обитель зла: Вымирание» (Малкэхи 2007), для того чтобы рассмотреть новые темы угроз, такие как биотехнологическое и вирусное оружие, которые используются для представления современного политического и финансового влияния капитализма в глобальном масштабе.

In this work, my aim is to analyze zombie films in relation to capitalism. 1970's horror films, especially zombie films were reflecting the economical, political and social structure of its era; however, the characteristics of zombie films have changed through time. Primarily, I will compare George A. Romero's zombie film, Dawn of the Dead (Romero, 1978) from 1970s which is famous with its commentary on commodity fetishism and consumption society. Then, in its light, I will investigate Resident Evil Series of 2000s to explore the codes of contemporary zombie films and understand what has changed through time in comprehension of zombie metaphors. My analysis will be on all Resident Evil films, but I will especially focus on the first film, Resident Evil (Anderson, 2002), and the third film, Resident Evil: Extinction (Mulcahy, 2007), to examine new threat themes, such as bio-technological and viral weaponry, used to represent the contemporary political and financial influences of capitalism globally.

Ключевые слова: нарративы о зомби, современный капитализм, общество потребления.

Keywords: zombie narratives, contemporary capitalism, consumption society.

Zombies and Capitalism

Zombies appear as mindless, flesh-consuming, walking dead bodies in books and popular culture. Stories of zombies are based on Voodoo which is an Afro-Caribbean spiritual belief system. A zombie is a dead person who “can be revived by a bokor, or sorcerer” and they “remain under the control of the bokor since they have no will of their own” (Wikipedia). There is also another definition which states that the soul of the zombie is “part of the human soul that is captured by a bokor and used to enhance the bokor’s power” and “the bokor can sell [it] to clients for luck, healing or business success” (Wikipedia) which resembles to definition of the proletariat in Marxist theory.

Zombie as a Popular Symbol of the Alienated Proletariat

Zombies become a useful metaphor of the relationship between the bourgeois being the bokor and proletariat being the zombie as Marx states “Capital is dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks” (Marx 1867). There is even something called *zombie functions* or *zombie processes* in computer science that are defined as “multiple functions including:

1. Term used to describe a process that is doing nothing but utilizing system resources.
2. A computer that has been maliciously setup to do work of another program or users...” (*Computer Hope*)

These functions are also named after the metaphoric information of zombie which is something/somebody that is only utilized when it is taken advantage by another program or user. The zombie becomes a popular symbol of the alienated proletariat where the division of the labor converts “the worker into a living appendage of the machine.” (Marx 1867) The alienation begins as the proletariat cannot act in accordance to his/her own will, and serves for the benefits of the bourgeois.

Zombies and Consumerism

Certainly, “zombies function in *Dawn of the Dead* as a *lumpenproletariat* of shifting significance, walking symbols of any oppressed social group” (Harper, 2002) but there is also another side to the zombie metaphor. It does not only represent the alienated proletariat, but it also defines the bourgeoisie society by its consumer characteristic.

The zombie is not only the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, it is both of them because “zombie resembles both brain-eating consumer and zombified worker in one” (Lauro 2008) In addition, the zombies act as both the consumers and the consumed objects because they are both the cannibals that consume human flesh and “turn their victims and their bodies into *objects of consumption*.” (Lefebvre 2005) A zombie is “neither mortal nor conscious, is a boundary figure” (Lauro 2008) which is consumed by the virus. They consume living humans as zombies and their bodies are consumed by the zombie virus. A zombie challenges the symbolic duality being both living and dead, object and subject, consumer and consumed.

George A. Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*

In 1970’s, George A. Romero directed many zombie films which reflected the economical, political and social structure of their era; for example *Night of the Living*

Dead (Romero 1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978), *Day of the Dead* (Romero, 1985) and *Land of the Dead* (Romero 2005).

Romero's films, especially *Dawn of the Dead*, are interpretations and critics of consumer society and alienation caused by capitalism. *Dawn of the Dead* passes in an American shopping mall which becomes the shelter of human survivors who are attacked by zombies. Zombies, unconsciously, longing for human-flesh, by instinct, come to the shopping mall as they always had done in their human-lives. Because of their instinctual habits, zombies are under the influence described as “depoliticizing effects of commodity fetishism” which were caused by “the baleful impact of capitalist production.” (Harper 2002)

George Ritzer defines supermarkets as our temples (Ritzer 1994) and Zygmunt Bauman adds to his theory:

«The shopping lists are our breviaries, while strolls along the shopping malls become our pilgrimages. Buying on impulse and getting rid of possessions no longer sufficiently attractive in order to put more attractive ones in their place are our most enthusing emotions. The fullness of consumer enjoyment means fullness of life. I shop, therefore I am. To shop or not to shop, this is the question» (Bauman 2011).

Zombie apocalypse as a metaphor of the failure of the forces in power

In Romero's *Living Dead* movies, the civilians gather together to fight against the apocalyptic state where the government and military fails to save them. All zombie stories point out to actual life governments which are in times of crisis. “The narrative of a zombie apocalypse carries strong connections to the turbulent social landscape of the United States in the 1960s when the originator of this genre, the film *Night of the Living Dead*, was first created.” (Wikipedia)

The zombie apocalypse is defined as “a particular scenario of apocalyptic fiction” where “a widespread (usually global) rise of zombies” is a huge “assault on civilization.” (Wikipedia) Zombies reproduce by biting human beings and turning them into zombies. When bitten, victims become zombies themselves. But the important part in this situation is the growing social and political crisis.

Marx defines superstructure:

«In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society — the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness» (Marx 1859).

The world of zombies represents the consuming society which bases on the fact that zombies consume everything and they are also the ones that are consumed. With this base, the superstructure is a consumed one, in other words the social, political and intellectual life is zombieified. The “zombie plague” consumes military, government and law enforcement organizations leading to a world of hostile wilderness. The

survivors live in a social and political environment that has no rules, and therefore they have to find a new way to survive. This is why zombie film productions increase at the time of social, economic and political crisis.

Representation becomes reality

Significantly, when I was preparing this article, riots in United Kingdom appeared. (Between 6 and 10 August of 2011) The riots were burning down buildings, especially shops, and collecting goods from the shops (the goods which symbolize the wealth, a good way of living: such as cameras, play stations, LED TVs, computers, etc.) Many social theoreticians commented on the riots and shop-liftings. Slavoj Žižek wrote an article, “Shoplifters of the World Unite,” to understand the meaning of these riots on *London Review of Books*. Zygmunt Bauman commented about the nature and development of the riots in *Social Europe Journal*.

Žižek describes the causes of the riots stating that “We are told again and again that we are living through a debt crisis, and that we all have to share the burden and tighten our belts. All, that is, except the (very) rich.” (Žižek 2011) And he adds that the riots are not an organized revolutionary act, but an act of irrational, unthought outburst.

Zygmunt Bauman in his article in *Social Europe Journal* affirms that “These are not hunger or bread riots. These are riots of defective and disqualified consumers.” (Bauman 2011) And Žižek agrees with him declaring: “This is why it is difficult to conceive of the UK rioters in Marxist terms, as an instance of the emergence of the revolutionary subject; they fit much better the Hegelian notion of the ‘rabble’, those outside organized social space, who can express their discontent only through ‘irrational’ outbursts of destructive violence — what Hegel called ‘abstract negativity.’” (Žižek 2011)

Žižek describes the political, economical and social situation of the UK riots asking: “Can we even imagine what it means to be a young man in a poor, racially mixed area, a priori suspected and harassed by the police, not only unemployed but often unemployable, with no hope of a future?” (Žižek 2011) Stuart Hall in his article in *Guardian* supports Žižek’s description and replies to his questions by analyzing the new state politics of UK:

“For the public sector...there will be massive redundancies, a wage freeze, pay running well behind the rate of inflation, pensions that will not survive in their present form, rising retirement ages...The old must sell homes to pay for care; working parents must buy childcare; and incapacity-benefit recipients must find work...Wealthy parents can buy children an [...] education: but many other students will go into lifelong debt to get a degree...Meanwhile, social housing is at a standstill, housing benefits will be cut and council rents allowed to rise to commercial levels in urban centers. Many will move to cheaper rentals, losing networks of friends, child support, family, school friends and school places...Amenities such as libraries, parks, swimming baths, sports facilities, youth clubs and community centers will either be privatized or disappear” (Hall 2011).

Stuart Hall defines the changes in UK politics; however, when I took the English names of the schools out of the text, I found out that these politics apply to many countries of the world, particularly European and United States of America.

Are global politics turning the world into a Zombie universe?

Stuart Hall describes this politics as neoliberalism and explains it: “Neoliberalism is grounded in the ‘free, possessive individual,’ with the state cast as tyrannical and oppressive.” (Hall 2011) Are global politics turning the world into a Zombie universe? As in zombie films, the people of the world try to define their identities by their wealth and how they consume.

Zombies are direct symbols of consuming societies in Romero’s films, so what are the survivors? In *Dawn of the Dead*, the zombies are inter-edited with mannequin dolls; Romero’s intent was to show the zombies similarities to dolls: they are chic but dull. In the middle of the film, the survivors take over the mall and clear it of zombies. As time passes, they become consumers, too. And again Romero inter-edits them with dolls. They are not brainless zombie bodies, but the way they act and their political, economical and social standing became zombified. At the end of the film, other survivors enter the shopping mall, but these are some low-income, gang members of the society. And their reaction is just like the riots of the UK.

Žižek inquires: “What is the point of our celebrated freedom of choice when the only choice is between playing by the rules and (self-)destructive violence?” (Žižek 2011) Žižek quotes Norman Tebbit: “Man is not just a social but also a territorial animal; it must be part of our agenda to satisfy those basic instincts of tribalism and territoriality.” And defines what ‘back to basics’ was really about: “the unleashing of the barbarian who lurked beneath our apparently civilised, bourgeois society, through the satisfying of the barbarian’s ‘basic instincts.’” (Žižek 2011) With simple basic instinct, zombies go to places they used to go in their alive lives: shopping malls and the low-income survivors turn the shopping malls into trash.

Resident Evil Series

Thus far, I analyzed Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* and compared it to riots which actually happened in the UK. Subsequently, I would examine the zombie metaphor in *Resident Evil Series* which are made in 2000s to understand contemporary capitalism and its effects.

Resident Evil Series are a media franchise which is mainly famous with its video games, but it also appears in various multimedia: films, novels, comic books, even action figures.

There are five films of *Resident Evil: Resident Evil* (Anderson 2002), *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (Witt 2004), *Resident Evil: Extinction* (Mulcahy, 2007), *Resident Evil: Afterlife* (Anderson 2010) and upcoming *Resident Evil: Retribution* (Anderson 2012.)

The first *Resident Evil* film was made due to the success of the video games of *Resident Evil*. These video games are classified as “zombie horror” subgenre in the “survival horrors” genre where “the player has to survive an onslaught of opponents, often undead or otherwise supernatural, typically in claustrophobic environments in a third-person perspective.” (Adams 2010) Survival horror in video games was mostly inspired by movies of George A. Romero who has directed *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero 1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978), *Day of the Dead* (Romero 1985) and *Land of the Dead* (Romero, 2005). In addition to Romero’s films, Japanese horror movies and Italian horror movies of Dario Argento and Lucio Fulchi had huge influence on the world of *Resident Evil*.

Capitalism as an infectious virus

In contemporary films which use technological enhancements and their threats in their narratives, like *Resident Evil*, zombies are often portrayed as being created by an infectious virus. The movie starts with a voice-over narrating “At the beginning of the 21st century the Umbrella Corporation had become the largest commercial entity in the United States. Nine out of every ten homes contain its products. Its political and financial influence is felt everywhere. In public, it is the world’s leading supplier of computer technology, medical products and healthcare. Unknown even to its own employees, its massive profits are generated by military technology, genetic experimentation and viral weaponry.”

***Resident Evil* Series and Capitalism**

The prologue defines the world of *Resident Evil* as a global capitalistic world where an imperialist company holds power in every area of life like Marx has mentioned “Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth — the soil and the laborer.” (Marx 1867) Umbrella is a capitalist company and even its name connotes the globalization. It covers the entire world with its products. The film continues with scenes where an important serum is stolen and some kind of a virus discharged in the holes of a big medical facility. All the laborers in the building get infected and become zombies. “The mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.” (Marx 1859) The laborers of Umbrella Company, according to the mode of production they are working in, become zombies in their social beings. As Marx stated, at the beginning of the film they were trapped by the capitalist production and the globalization of Umbrella, and with the discharge of the virus they become trapped metaphorically in their own bodies and literally in the building.

Resident Evil narrates the contemporary threat themes of capitalism: global commercial entities; capitalist production of computer technology, medical products and healthcare; unknown and dangerous military technology; genetic experimentation; bio-technological and viral weaponry.

Zombie movies and economical crisis

The defense system called Red Queen* shuts all the doors and gives out a gas that kills all the living creatures in the facility. Red Queen symbolizes the governmental control of the system. In the world of *Resident Evil Series*, governments fail their citizens they are sworn to protect and moreover the agent of the governmental force, Red Queen, tries to kill all the citizens to fix the problem. Similarly, as mentioned before in this text, in Romero’s *Living Dead* movies, the civilians gather together to fight against the apocalyptic state where the government and military fails to save them.

* The protagonist Alice gets her name from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, the Red Queen’s character was added into the film’s story as a homage to *2001: A Space Odyssey* an allusion to HAL 9000.

Both *Living Dead* and *Resident Evil* stories point out to actual life governments which are in times of crisis. The first Romero film, *Night of the Living Dead*, was created on the turbulent social landscape of the United States in the 1960s and *Resident Evil Series* were produced between 2002 and 2007 when the Bush government was in charge. Bush governmental politics resulted as Iraq War and an immense economical crisis, starting in United States and spreading globally.

Women of resident evil series

“Women are often the victims in the horror genre of film and games, yet both of these franchises [*Living Dead* franchise and *Resident Evil* franchise] have created complex and assertive female characters to convey their stories.” (Adams 2010) Beginning with Alice, the *Resident Evil* women (both in films and video-games) are portrayed as strong, fighting, clever women. They are very like *Final Girls* of Clover but there is a difference that makes them politically in question. They are presented as hypersexualized spectacles with their sexy outfit. The first time we see Alice in *Resident Evil*, we see her naked legs before her face. The camera travels on Alice’s unconscious naked body. *Resident Evil Series* try to follow George A. Romero’s films’ footsteps, creating assertive female characters who are “fighting side by side with men” (Adams 2010) but they cannot succeed as George A. Romero films do. George A. Romero brings social messages with his films but *Resident Evil Series*’ fails in the process. *Resident Evil* films can be seen as feminist texts insofar as their female characters are “powerful and active roles who resist and even attack patriarchal forces” (Harper 2007) like the scene where Alice pushes a pen into a young male scientist’s eye or the scene where she is spotted on a CCTV monitor by a security guard and she returns the guard’s gaze, staring back at the camera causing the guard’s nose and eyes to bleed. However *Resident Evil Series* loose their battle, first being based on video-game series which are very powerful products of consumer society and, secondly showing their female characters as consuming objects. “The gender politics of ... *Resident Evil* films are complex but ultimately troubling” (Harper 2007) but, still, they bring new questions to power-plays on issues of race, gender and sexuality.

Conclusion: The Way to Revolution

Yet the *Resident Evil* films are found differing largely from the Romero movies, [for example: “the gender politics of ... *Resident Evil* films are complex but ultimately troubling” (Harper 2007)], however they still hold some social critique. In conclusion, I ask if *Dawn of the Dead* once, unintentionally, presented today’s reality, what *Resident Evil Series* predict about our world’s social, political and economical future, while representing the contemporary political and financial influences of global capitalism.

If we return to the metaphor of zombies being dialectic symbol where they are both living and dead, subject and object we can find the political characteristic of them being both slave and slave rebellion at the same time. Towards the end of the third film, *Resident Evil: Extinction*, Alice finds out that the company is making clones of herself. The company clones her because they think that Alice is immune to the T-Virus (the zombifying virus) and she developed special supernatural abilities. But the real reason they are making clones of Alice is that they want to use her special powers to their own

benefit making a new working class by transforming the T-Virus. Marx's and Engel's saying at the beginning of the Communist Manifesto suits this situation: "A spectre is haunting Europe; the spectre of Communism." (Marx and Engels 1848) The global Umbrella Company has created the bases for a rebellion, first creating the T-Virus and causing the infection and then cloning Alice. Alice transformed with the T-Virus became more aware of the Umbrella's evil plans. In addition, Umbrella has created its own rebellious and conscious group by making more Alice's. Alice taps into the virtual board meeting of Umbrella and declares to the capitalist leaders that she and her friends are coming for them. The rebellion starts as Alice and one of her clones look at the rows of pods containing other Alice clones.

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