Death of the Enemy: The Spectacularity of War and a Zombie Enemy

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Abstract

The constructedness of the notion of 'enemy' specially during war times often includes demonization and propagandist characterization bordering on depicting inhumanity in 'them'. But in this paper, the move is from a human enemy to a nonhuman one - a zombie. Keeping in mind its nonhuman characteristics and inhumanity, the argument is carried on to how the ideological constructedness, the creation and destruction of the enemy is handled in the two South Korean Netflix drama series 'Kingdom' and 'Kingdom 2'. Further this paper attempts to study the event called 'death' as a posthumanising event. The 'creation' of the zombies who were meant to play the role of experimental 'subjects' to kill human-enemies, in turn became enemies threatening the survival of the very humans who created them. The main question is how the putting to death of the zombies, which was meant to redeem the 'human' in them from 'death', in fact itself becomes a moment when the non-/in-human asserts its precedence over the human. Finally, the concepts of 'enemy', 'death', 'human' and 'posthuman' are questioned in relation to each other to understand the ideology necessitated by wars. The above discussion is extrapolated to the historical situation of war in the Joseon dynasty during the reign of King Seonjo in the years between 1575-1592 A.D. The spectacularity of both – the human-deaths and the zombie-deaths – will be read as a tool to induce fear, suspicion and hatred for the 'enemy' among participating soldiers.

Keywords: Posthumanity of Death, Undead Enemy, Posthuman Gothic, Horror Cinema, Zombie, Enemy, Monster, Posthumanization through War, Identity Construction



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Introduction

"... Yet the dread Of dying, and being dead, Flashes afresh to hold and horrify...."

- Philip Larkin, 'Aubade' (1993)

In this paper, it is argued that the 'undeath' of the zombies is a nomenclature serving, not merely to delineate the threat of the end of the human species from its possible human and nonhuman 'others', but also to define the imminent confrontation with the 'other' under a war ideology. At first, it explains the position that during the urgencies of a war, the idea of the enemy is radicalised as a monstrous 'other' and constructed to meet the criterion of the *Diablo*. Then, it discusses how the screen depictions develop upon a negative portrayal of the enemy as the zombie and disseminate the war ideology. It particularly examines the state of *Joseon* Korea (1392-1910) as the dramatic site where this ideological play takes place, in the web series *Kingdom* and its sequel *Kingdom 2*. The posthumanism of the zombie deaths as events is a conclusion that is hypothesised.

Zombie-body as Other

The death of humans, according to the Platonic doctrine in 'Georgias' (Plato, 1997a) and 'Phaedo' (Plato, 1997b), occurs when the immaterial soul sheds the 'tomb' of the body to return to its original state (Masao & Dilworth, 1986). In positing the soul's immateriality, there is an assumption about the body's temporality and otherness, and the 'self'-hood of the soul. The creation of zombie monsters imagined the resurrection (Garcia, 2014) of the 'dead' body minus the soul; as literal figures of death. As they come into 'being' after the human 'dies', temporally they are the *post*-human animations of the rejected carcass (Lauro & Embry, 2017). Their resurrection may be explained as prolonged Lazarus reflexes; but this paper focuses on the death and possession of a body (own and/or another's) and so, takes the cause of zombification to be an occupation by a subhuman, often microbial, specie. So, the first question that arises is whether they can be considered the fearsome 'undead'.

As Micheal Sean Bolton (2014) points out, the dread of the posthuman Gothic is caused by the fear of what 'we' will *become* and what will be *left* of 'us' *after* 'our' demise. It is a fact taken up uncritically that the human faces a threat. The basic premise of human superiority would be challenged when the body, rejected by the 'soul' in hope of decomposition, gets usurped instead, thus raising the 'dead' from their graves. A 'death' of the human is a loss of the soul that represents selfhood. So, a necessary presumption for the creation of a zombie is their becoming *supra*human. Accordingly, the exploited, defiled and zombie body ultimately must decompose to a state of non-existence with the 'death' of the zombies to end this possibility of potential extinction. There is no fault line that allows the super-(post)human to *be*, except with an 'end' of the human. Death then marks the transition from being human to becoming a new entity – either spiritually divine and immaterial or monstrously physical.

Zombies in different legends and films have different origins but the most common narrative development seen is that the affliction first hits the 'other' humans who have

already been placed nearer the monster and, therefore, cannot be included in 'civilisation'. Here, it is contended that the posthuman in the zombie is only possible when the human person, whose material body is the basic constituent of the zombie, is already an alterity or approaching an alterity. That aspect of the human in the zombie, who is already outside the borders of normal and acceptable humanhood, therefore is the monstrous. The human 'other' is just removed from its kindred species and counted as part of the zombie which is the actualisation of that 'other'. The posthuman in the zombie is then, according to the contention, an actualisation of this alterity to its maximum, imaginable potential. This actualisation takes place by the posthumanising event called 'death'.

Zombie-Enemy in War

War ideology attempts to create a binary between the idealised group defined against another. The self must, by self-description, consider itself as the manifestation of ultimate order, sacredness of action and righteousness of purpose; and who is pitted against an enemy – the 'other' representing chaos, disorder and all monstrosity - who must be defeated or supressed. From a Freudian viewpoint, the *heimlich* (homely, familiar) may be said to be warring against the *unheimlich* (unhomely, uncanny). This binary is ideologically propagated like a negative reinforcement and instils fear and thereby solidarity among the group members against the enemy to ensure the community's mobilisation and cohesion during an actual socio-military crisis (Xiaofei 2011).

Thus, by portraying qualities of otherness and uncanniness in the enemy, the group's fear and preparedness is meant to be weaponised to prevent the *unheimlich* from crossing over into the boundary of the 'home' space; including the idea of what it is to be *human*. Creed (1993) observed that anything "which crosses or threatens to cross the 'border' is abject" and this idea potentially demonises such social groups which have been seen as threats to civilization and order (Kristeva, 2018; Cole, 2006; Vint, 2017). In view of this, Freud's statement can be proffered, that a human too can become uncanny "when we credit him with evil intent" under the condition that "this intent to harm is realized with the help of special powers" (Cole, 2006). The zombie in being the *post*human already is placed in the position of the abject.

The enemy is seen as a collective entity (Tally, 2010) capable of overpowering the group with its swarm-like progress in attacks. Under a war ideology, the collective and institutionalised body of the actual enemy-army coincides with the idea of the body; that is, the bodily other of the Platonic soul-self. The latter is assumed to be prone to hijacking, exploitation and possible conversion into a monstrous, re-animated entity. Similarly, the army body also is capable of self-definition by qualities of loyalties for the 'self' yet it can be prone to betrayals and disloyalties. As part of international politics, an ideology constructs the enemy as a deviant in the hierarchical order of civilization; thus, placing them completely outside of civilization and nearer the devil, wherefrom they attain or get attributed by association the aspects of the fiendish. From a theological point, this binary can be seen in terms of followers of the divine law poised against the diabolic army who follow Satan's chaos. The army which also is at the socio-political border of the society can be prone therefore to going astray.

The negative labelling and cultural depiction of enemies as monsters work oppositely to the reification of heroes (Ducharme & Fine, 1995). It obfuscates them into evil par excellence, condemns them irredeemably and denies causal, moral and spiritual legitimacy to their cause (Dovi, 2001). Placed on the boundary that separates the human from the animal and also from a cyborg-automaton (Haraway, 1985), the enemy is denied 'humanity' and given the uncanniness of an abject, human-animal hybrid; cinematically transformed into the zombie army. The enemy becomes the living 'dead', a zombie-enemy, who in their state of being dead keep intact their 'life' as persisting and persistent threats. So, the zombies who were seen as enemies as well as representations of enemies will now be seen as the posthuman selves with potential for underlining the otherness latent in the human as well as the societal and the military self.

The spectacularity of war in these narratives plays this very role of allowing the cultural assumptions of otherness to be enacted and confronted. The most vulnerable group, the army, is put through rigorous trials of showcasing inclusion into the group-self either by killing or by sacrificing. The deaths include gory dismemberments of the physical human body and the more gothic re-memberment of the dismembered body into a mock-human entity in the material form of the zombie. This enactment of the enemy's cultural reimagining over history, through processes of distortion of memory and of remembering of the anecdotal histories, highlights the negative cultural reinforcements passed as cultural memory that construct the ideology of fear around the enemy.

On the Screen

Televised dramas and cinema as cultural artefacts have contributed covertly to perpetrating violence against rival groups and cultures on behalf of a willing audience (Shaw, 2001; Xiaofei, 2011). International politics and rivalries are common themes around which some media representations are built revealing underlying socio-political signification. Zombies as the enemy and the enemy as the zombie are common tropes in war-themed, historical fiction genre of film narratives. The classic zombie film *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968) (and its sequels) by George Romero, gives what Bishop (2010) calls the 'primal narratives.' Dani Cavallaro (2002) argues that other films take their inspiration from it either to deviate or to inverse or to further the idea.

The zombie representations, in dramas and movies alike, can be also seen as metaphorical allegories of the socio-military onslaughts by the enemy. The zombie menace narratives can be read as offering some prominent ideological stances which the target audience – who by virtue of belonging to the culture or group which considers itself under threat – must be familiarised with. By dramatizing the uncanniness of the monstrous enemy and the monster-enemy, these narratives echo Mary Shelley's prophetic reminder about "the dangers of playing God and making monsters" from her 1818 book *Frankenstein* (Lippe, 2019).

They question the safety of 'our' homes and even its boundaries, where 'home' would refer to the defined space of safety and privacy. It may be individual, social, cultural, national or even planetary in scope, which is opened to the unfamiliar and the alien - the unheimlich - the zombies. As these creatures of defilement are brought so close and into the 'sacred' space, these films ironically judge the audience's privileged relation with both, death and its mediated image (Cameron, 2012). Placed within the war

ideology, it becomes a comment on the instability of feelings of purity - of body, identity and space - and also of comfort.

Depicting the mass conversion of humans into zombies by bites and infections, it sexualises the zombie-enemy as regressively, orally gratifying its repressed desires despite its asexuality. Through such representations, the potential for reproductivity and multiplicity by the enemy is magnified and the terror of the imagined threat among the victim/audience is peaked. The entry of the zombie-enemies into homes is filmed as equalling in terror with the attempts of 'dishonouring' the bodies of the living, and the deserted homes are given a dishevelled look which is often associated with the loss of 'purity' of the body after a rape.

The narratives work also as a warning that allows nothing except unbridled loyalty to the group, almost approving "atrocious retaliation" (Xiaofei, 2011). Falling prey to the enemy entails being forsaken or killed by the group. Showing early symptoms of 'turning into' a zombie brings death at the hands of the allies, who preserve the purity of the group from the dangers of infiltration, betrayals and treason, even when these are unintended or unavoidable. On the other hand, sacrifices for the group's safety are idealised.

These narratives secure the belief in the potential strength and intended (even if unethically executed) uprightness of the existent social, political, military and medical institutions. Hardly ever responsibility – ethical or otherwise – is deemed due for scenes where failed experiments while searching for cures or the mass murders of the humansturned-zombies are shown. These get portrayed as necessary evils to strengthen group security. The erasure of the monstrosity and savagery with the death of the zombie-enemies is called upon without establishing the causal explanation of their subhuman actions, merely because their subhumanity is presumed to be 'natural' to them. The necessity of their 'deaths' is normalised and looked forward to (Sigurdson, 2017), for the wellbeing and continuance of 'civilisation.' Simultaneously, it confounds the culturally established notion of the 'humane.' The killing spree occurs on both ends of humans and zombies, blurring their distinction.

They reinforce the ideology in projecting the necessity of the war efforts at the societal level, and the individual efforts required of the group members. It encourages cohesion and members believe in their inclusion when leaders plan strategic methods of war. The dramatization of the sacrifices and valour needed of members highlights the validity of the war against the imaginary enemies — imaginary because of their portrayal as monsters, and imaginary also because the threat from the real enemy is always potentially present rather than actually compromising border security. The challenging of the potential breach of security of the 'home'-space makes the war on the human 'other' and also the non-human 'other' necessary. Furthermore, the 'divine' retribution offered by the director-writer-god purges the group of its vengeance.

The dismemberment of the enemy on-screen provides catharsis - fear and pleasure - to the audience. The spectacle of dismemberment and disembowelment, which has been compared to pornographic presentation by Mcglotten and Vangundy (2013), of a monstrous enemy by a substitute actor rather than the 'actors' who would be in immediate harm – soldiers and civilians – provides cathartic effect on the audience by identification (Mulvey, 2010). Achieving effects of dismemberment is now a matter of

media technology (Cameron, 2012) but as quick death without trials is deemed to be the only way to end the evil that threatened civilization, it is unquestioningly accepted as ethical. The performance of control exertion by the state power reveals the formation of power-wielding institutions of modern society. Their control over the body by way of its definition, whether it be deemed a zombie or not, nearly explains Foucauldian 'biopower' (Orpana, 2017; Thacker, 2017).

The *re*-memberment of the zombie out of the broken, wounded and battered human body forms the cultural representation of the enemy, to form the patched, stitched and grotesque image. Also, in re-*member*ing the enemy image as the venomous yet inseparable part of the cultural 'body' of the group, it remembers the enemy even generations later. Contrarily to the above, it also works to override the novelty of the unnaturalness of the enemy into a naturalisation of its unfamiliarity. The zombie-enemy is already known to be gory; yet each time the threat is brought out in the open, the fear lurks in the present with bare connection to the past knowledge of the same threat. This renewed fear highlights the Freudian 'return of the repressed' at individual, social or often even cosmic levels.

The acquaintance-yet-strangeness of the enemy, and its position as simultaneously dead and undead, puts it in an instable situation like of Schrodinger's cat. The war ideology places the enemy within the unknown only so far that to be still identified. Thus, the zombie-enemy becomes a major construction out of a war ideology that drives a group to maintain a constant surveillance of its border purity. In the narrative of the recent Netflix-hosted South Korean drama series *Kingdom* and its sequel *Kingdom 2* which is discussed in detail in the last section, the *Joseon* dynasty (1392-1910) of Korea during the rule of King Seon-jo (1567-1608) is the historical setting and the Japanese Invasion (*Imjin waeran*) of 1592-98 is the highlighted war situation.

Analysis of Kingdom and Kingdom 2

The Netflix-hosted web-series *Kingdom* and its sequel, *Kingdom 2*, re-enact global rivalries and enmities to keep them afresh in the memory of a people. The drama relives the ancient rivalry that still exists between the Japanese and the Koreans in subtler forms. In this web series, the crucial years and their importance to Korean historical development have been brought back into present commemoration. A journalistic comment from Renaldo Matadeen of CBR in 2019 after the first season of the drama was that it made "even bolder socio-political statements than *The Walking Dead*."

The series dramatizes the understanding that was constructed and prevalent about the invading Japanese forces, about their ruthlessness and war-hardened nature. The Japanese forces are ousted by a zombie army thus celebrating the memory of the military stalemate of the forces and their withdrawal in the historical times. The politically mindless, egotistical and undignified attack by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (Turnbull, 2008), daimyo of Japan, is demonised into non-humanity when contrasted with the civilised, peace-loving and organised Joseon with its Ming heritage.

The depiction of the Japanese soldiers as zombies reflects the cultural construction used to demonise the enemy in a war context. The political schemes and military strategies also run parallel to the biologically forced change. The question is whether to term it as evolution or devolution. As devolution, it underscores the conversion down the 'chain

of being' into zombiehood which is similar in its position to bestiality. As evolution, it can be said to highlight the rising up of a specie into the supra-humans who have crossed the fact of death and a possible end into a specie which can never be extinct.

The demonisation of the enemy is literal through zombification. The process is defined and weaponised by way of gaining political, cultural and historical retribution. The conversion of own soldiers in a kind of socio-biological experiment or an experimental bio-war underlines an equalisation of the demonic power held by it to counter the other's monstrosity. But it also reveals the extent to which a group is self-haunted by the process and remains constantly under threat of completely converting into its own other. In the death of the enemy, there is a thrill of self-definition but it also pulls in magnetically its own members. That moment is when the deaths of own people become either sacrifice for or treason to the cause. In dying at the hands of the zombies, the conversion into zombies is a form of that betrayal to the cause of the group, which would in a 'real' war situation be akin to a situation of desertion of post or surrendering to the enemy or becoming prisoners of war.

In the blurring of the boundary between the actual enemy, the zombie-enemy and the self-turned-other emerges a space for the war ideology to dissipate into its own counter. The killing of all these enemies in a war situation questions the boundaries drawn between the self and the other, the group and the enemy, and the normalised human and the monster. Death which makes possible the conversion of the soul-self into the realm of its bodily other, the ideal group self into the savage group other, and the human self into the monstrous other, also can bring about a reverse conversion. But the death of the zombie-enemy-other to bring into life the human-normal-self posthumanises the former and decentres the latter into its own other. Under a war context this conversion is radical in its upturning of the very ideology in which it is played out.

The scars can prove useful evidence. The scars from the zombie-bites become the signifying marks of the decentred human, placed among all the other species as one *among* them, and not superior to them. The human gets liminally placed somewhere as a cinematic hybrid and a biological hybrid too. One who is human yet not quite defines the otherness in the selfhood of the de-zombified human or as he can be called the 'dead zombie' returned to the realm of the living. The scars leave open-ended the questions and the doubts regarding the position occupied by the zombie-enemy in relation to the human-self, sociologically, culturally as well as militarily.

Conclusion

This paper discussed that the creation of zombie monsters as personifications of the terror of the enemy group reflects the urgencies of war. This multiplied horror of the real enemy justifies the later cultural actions taken against them. It discussed the reasons that lead to the imagination of the enemy as a monster and how enmities beguile the cultural notion of the other group pitted against them. The death of the 'other' group results out of a concern for survival of the self. The overlapping images of a monster and an enemy are therefore to be seen as cultural practices meant for the preparedness of a people against their internal fears as well as external foes. Zombification of the enemy and the thrill in their deaths therefore also play an important part in the creation of a group identity.

The conclusion meant to be derived from the present discussion was the posthumanism of the death of the zombies. In the image of the zombie, there is an intersection of the enemy-other and the self, which is brought together and placed in equality. The death of the human body blurs the boundary which 'others' the monster. The diabolical representation of the enemy places it at par with the monster too. So, zombification makes both otherness in selfhood and selfhood in otherness possible in the same physical (bodily) or collective (military) entity. The death of the zombie becomes the actual posthumanising moment, where and when the humans-turned-zombies regain human-hood but cannot return to it completely. It is then that the self becomes its other and the other becomes the self. The evidence of it is given by the scars from the zombie-bites. In the posthumanisation made possible by the event called 'death,' there is a vast possibility of intervention and discussion still possible.

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