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Zombies and the Post-colonial Italian Unconscious

Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2* (1979)

"The horror... the horror" ¹

According to Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, the Gothic genre "was, from its earliest history in [...] Europe, fundamentally linked to colonial settings, characters, and realities as frequent embodiments of the forbidding and frightening" ². In other words, the European conquest and exploitation of the rest of the world was accompanied and justified by narrations that presented the other as a scary or monstrous presence. As Tabish Khair argues, the colonial characterization of monsters still persists in contemporary artistic production and "the Gothic and the postcolonial are obviously linked by a common preoccupation with the Other and aspects of Otherness" ³. This article aims to provide further evidence to Khair's point, by focusing on the frequent reference to colonialism in the zombie movie genre. In particular, I will analyse from a post-colonial perspective Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2* (1979), in order to evaluate whether it might be seen as a barometer of Italian anxieties towards the resurgence of the colonial past, which coeval historical studies and the beginning of immigration to Italy brought back to memory.

A Post-colonial Monster? Anatomy of a Zombie

In cinematic tradition, a zombie is a reanimated dead body, who has supernatural powers and usually a hostile attitude against the living ⁴. Franco Moretti tracks its literary precursor in *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) ⁵: like Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's monster, early zombie movies such as Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932) and Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), but also more recent examples such as Wes Craven's *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1987), feature creatures that are controlled by an evil sorcerer and eventually revolt against their master. Moretti argues that the representation of Frankenstein-like monsters recalls that of proletarians, who are frequently portrayed as unspeaking and hungry masses ⁶. John Cussan's analysis of zombie movies from the 1980s to present further confirms Moretti's assumption, claiming that the figure of the cannibal-zombie might be seen as a metaphor of the rebellion of the working class against global consumerism ⁷.

Early zombie movies also provide information about the origins of these monsters, by showing that corpses were first resurrected in Haiti. Peter Dendle argues that the subaltern status of black zombies in Haiti parallels that of African slaves who were brought to the Caribbean Island ⁸. Moreover, he suggests that the specific interest of American popular cultural in zombies might be related to the colonial occupation of Haiti by the United States between 1915 and 1934 ⁹. Significantly, the African cultural influence to United States has often been represented through metaphors of disease and contagion ¹⁰. By commenting on John Gilling's *The Plague of the Zombies* (1966), Kyle William Bishop further confirms that zombies might represent the ultimate colonised subject, since they are unthinking creatures, who lack inner will and are born of slavery, oppression, and capitalist hegemony ¹¹. In particular, Bishop argues that the early "inherently racist" zombie narratives "reveal imperialist anxieties" and "terrified Western viewers with the thing they likely dreaded most at that time: slave uprisings and reverse colonization" ¹².

Frantz Fanon, one of the most influential thinkers on the issue of decolonization and the psychopathology of colonization, also notices that the condition of colonised subject resembles that of zombies:

The colonized subject draws on the terrifying myths that are so prolific in underdeveloped societies as inhibitions for his aggressiveness: malevolent spirits who emerge every time you put one foot wrong, leopard men, snake men, six-legged dogs, zombies, a whole never-ending gamut of animalcules or giants that encircle the colonized with a real of taboos, barriers, and inhibitions ¹³.

CRITICA CINEFILIA E FESTIVAL STUDIES

Fanon argues that the internalized misrepresentation of colonised subjects – who are made to “feel” and “see” themselves as zombies – is perhaps the most devastating imposition of colonialism and plays “a key regulating role in ensuring the stability of the colonized world”¹⁴. He brilliantly resumes this idea by affirming that “zombies [. . .] are far more terrifying than colonists”¹⁵.

Jean and John Comaroff confirm that it is no coincidence that zombies originate in the colonial environment, but they also argue that their condition resembles that of people who are dispossessed not only in terms of class but also of race, such as immigrants, especially those of African origins¹⁶. Drawing from Giorgio Agamben’s notion of “bare life”¹⁷ – namely the condition of those who are deprived of any civil and human rights like the *Muselmann* in Nazi concentration camps, who are liminal beings between the human and inhuman –, Jon Stratton further argues that “what audiences find most frightening in the zombie idea is not the resurrection from death but that state of living death which is the fate of the zombie”¹⁸. Stratton argues that “the tremendous increase in the number of films released featuring zombies” during the 2000s might offer a commentary on the condition of “displaced people . . . predominantly from non-Western states, striving for entry into Western states”¹⁹. The specific condition of zombies – partly human and living in an interstitial space – might be seen as a frequent metaphor to exemplify the condition of asylum seekers, who are excluded from humanity in terms of race and lack legal protection by the state.

In order to further analyse the assonance between “zombie apocalypse” and “immigration” and between “colonisation” and “zombification”, it might be interesting to consider both the geographic and the historical setting of this genre. The relation between the center and peripheries, which is a crucial issue of post-colonial studies, is important in the zombie genre. As zombies might prevail if they reach populated centers, the human champions have to fight the living dead in the peripheries, where they might have a chance to survive. The impossibility of fighting zombies in towns is well represented in Frank Darabont’s TV series *The Walking Dead* (2010-2012), when sheriff Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln) tries to reach Atlanta in order to find other human beings, but a horde of zombies attacks him so that he must seek refuge in the countryside (Fig. 1)²⁰.



Fig. 1

CRITICA CINEFILIA E FESTIVAL STUDIES

Concerning the temporal setting of zombie movies, it should be noticed that their resurrection is frequently connected with the resurgence of past and violent events, which have been removed from the collective consciousness. Zombies are presences that change the natural course of events and bring back to life what was supposed to be gone or forgotten forever. Significantly, the modern English word “zombie” derives from the Kimbundu term *nzumbe*, which means “ghost” and refers to the resurrection of uncanny dead presences²¹. Slavoj Žižek clearly emphasises the ambiguous relationship with history in the zombie genre, and argues that “the return of the living dead” is the “fundamental fantasy of contemporary mass culture”, because they are “collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt”²².

For example, in the fourth and the fifth episode of the second series of *The Walking Dead*, Daryl Dixon (Norman Reedus) evokes the massacre of native Americans immediately before zombies attack a farm which is home to a small community of humans, to which he belongs. This episode clearly echoes the reclusion of the native population of the United States into reserves. Similarly, the appearance of an African-American female character near the end of the second season finale draws on the memory of slavery, as she is accompanied by two walkers being dragged behind her in chains, with their arms and lower jaws removed (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2

In the fifth episode of the second series of *The Walking Dead*, Shawn Green argues that the bombing of Atlanta in order to cleanse the city of zombies resembles napalm explosions in Vietnam. This excerpt echoes George Romero’s *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which presents news footage of napalm victims at the end of the movie, suggesting that there is a connection between the zombie apocalypse and the war. According to Adam Simons’ documentary *The American Nightmare* (2002), *Night of the Living Dead* also evokes the memory of slavery in the United States. Significantly, the only survivor of the zombie attack is an African-American man who is killed by soldiers in the mistaken belief that he is a monster. Romero’s movie seems to suggest that the real enemies are not zombies, but the American government that still discriminates against African-American subjects. The representation of traumatic historical events and the exploitation of subaltern subjects as the “living dead” might have literary origins,

CRITICA CINEFILIA E FESTIVAL STUDIES

as American novels of the 18th and 19th century portray native Americans as ghostly or non-human presences²³. Significantly, more recent African-American works, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*²⁴, also represent African slavery as an uncanny and ghostly presence.

A Case Study: Lucio Fulci's Zombi 2

As the previous section has demonstrated the zombie movie genre deals with issues that are crucial in post-colonial studies, namely the representation of the living dead as subalterns, the complex relationship between the center and peripheries, and the resurgence of the memory of forgotten histories connected to racism, colonialism and exploitation due to the resurrection of corpses. Zombies' roles as catalysers of issues that are crucial in post-colonial and subaltern studies is perhaps due to their condition of "in-betweenness", as they are neither dead or alive, they live in the present but remind of the past, and they are suspended between their Haitian origins and their American destination²⁵.

Following from these assumptions on the zombie-genre, it might be interesting to analyse Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2*²⁶ from a post-colonial perspective, and to investigate the "symbolic debt" that this movie might pay to Italian colonial history. The link between Italy and this movie does not seem to be apparent, because of the American setting of this movie. However, Bishop is right to argue that the zombie is a "monster of the Americas"²⁷ and this setting is part of the convention of this genre. Therefore, the American setting of the movie might conceal some issues that are connected to the country where this movie was produced, had unexpected success, and is the home country of most of the filming troupe, including the director Lucio Fulci and the screenplay writers Dardano Sacchetti and Elisa Briganti. In particular, this article will try to show that the "horror" in *Zombi 2* is strictly connected to Italian colonial memory, and that this movie provides a fictional shape to the repressed collective fears that might have in turn inspired contemporary racist propaganda against immigrants²⁸.

Inspired by early zombie movies, *Zombi 2* features monsters that come from a remote and exotic island in the Caribbean called Matul, and invade New York City. The plot of the movie can be briefly summarised as follows. Peter West (Ian McCulloch) is a journalist who investigates the mystery surrounding a ghost ship that has entered the New York harbour. He meets the daughter of the owner of the ship, Anne Bowles (Tisa Farrow), and they decide to go to Matul, following the indications of a note written by Anne's father. The two reach this island by yacht thanks to the help of two American tourists, Brian Hull (Al Cliver) and Susan Barratt (Auretta Gay). Once they arrive, they meet Doctor David Menard (Richard Johnson), who is attempting to find a cure for a disease that reanimates corpses. The situation quickly collapses: zombies eat Menard's wife, Paula (Olga Karlatos), they bite Susan and attack the other humans who find retreat in a missionary church. Menard and his assistant are killed. Brian is also infected, but Peter and Anne rescue and carry him (or his zombie) on a boat to New York. The radio announces that zombies have invaded the United States.

Although Fulci denied that it is a political movie²⁹, Phil Hardy is right to argue that post-colonial issues are central in *Zombi 2* since it reinforces "the North/South, US/Third World axis of the conflicts"³⁰. Significantly, during the zombies' final attack the main characters of Fulci's movie escape to a missionary church, which is a symbol of Western religious colonisation³¹. The reference to colonialism in *Zombi 2* is also evident in the *racialised* representation of zombies, as their black flashes are clearly set against the white skins of the living human beings. The camera often indulges on disgusting physical attributes, such as real worms coming out of the black corpses. Blackness is clearly associated to violence, death and monstrosity, by recalling racist stereotypes concerning the African alterity. This portrayal might be seen as a reactionary response to the representation of zombies as ordinary people in Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, which are both black and white and dressed in mundane clothes. Nonetheless, *Zombi 2* is not entirely constructed along the dichotomic representation of zombies as colonised and

CRITICA CINEFILIA E FESTIVAL STUDIES

humans as colonisers. For instance, the corpses of Spanish conquistadores in the cemetery of Matul attack and bite Susan, who is a mestizo character. The reference to colonialism in Fulci's movie is more symbolic: zombies cannot be strictly identified with the colonised subject, but the colonial overtones of their characterization bring back the memory of a past that seeks revenge in the present.

In other words, the representation of scary, exotically dangerous, contagious and partly human black subjects in *Zombi 2* resurrects derogatory imagery, whose traces can also be found in some Italian literary works about Africa. For instance, Mario Domenichelli's *Lugemalé* features a leprous Somali character, who is described as contagious and not entirely alive:

Vide il lebbroso. Gli venne incontro. Gli mostrò la faccia smangiata dalla malattia. Non aveva faccia. Lo abbracciò, il lebbroso, dicendo: "Italiani, somali, fratelli!". Non si sottrasse, rispose all'abbraccio: "Fratelli, fratelli!". Sentì un dolore forte al petto. Seppe di non avere più volto. Guardava da occhi che non c'erano [...] ovunque animali morti, carcasse rigonfie di pecore con la testa nera [...] Il cielo era contagiato. La lebbra vi apriva buchi di oscurità [...] Anche l'acqua era contagiata [...] il suo corpo si dilatava e si disfaceva [...] non aveva bocca, né orecchie, né guance, né occhi³².

Another significant example of this kind of representation can be found in Alessandro Spina's *Le nozze di Omar*, where the narrator affirms that "la morte porta la maschera dell'indigeno"³³.

Ennio Flaiano's *Tempo di uccidere*, one of the few texts to denounce Italian colonial crimes in Africa right after the Second World War, might have inspired Domenichelli's and Spina's representation of subaltern characters. For instance, in a significant passage of this novel a doctor advises the main character to shoot Ethiopians in the heads rather than in the stomach: "Ma se lei non gli spara alla testa, non conclude nulla con questa gente"³⁴. This passage is significant in relation to *Zombi 2*, as zombies cannot be stopped unless one shoots them in the head. Moreover, *Tempo di uccidere* describes native people from the perspective of an Italian soldier as a "groviglio di cenci e carni"³⁵ and the main Ethiopian female character as "un buon animale domestico"³⁶. It also features Ethiopian women whose hands are "già divorate da piaghe orrende"³⁷. Similarly, Africa is described as a land where one can find "morte"³⁸, "fetore"³⁹, "alberi abbastanza maledetti"⁴⁰, and "montagne asciutte come ossi"⁴¹. Although *Tempo di uccidere* was published in 1947, it echoes the dominant representation of colonised subjects after the promulgation of the racial laws⁴².

The legacy of the Italian colonial memory in *Zombi 2* – this time connected to the fear of the "black peril" – becomes clearer in two sexual aggressions against white women by zombies. In the first sequence, Susan goes scuba diving topless and a zombie attacks her. She succeeds in escaping thanks to a shark that engages in a fight with the zombie. This event is functional in order to visualise the bestial strength of zombies, by recalling the representation of colonised subjects as animals. In the second sequence, a zombie pulls Paula against a splinter that pierces her eye. This penetration is a metaphor for rape, as the camera takes the voyeuristic perspective of the zombie lingering lecherously on Paula's naked body while she is taking a shower before being killed⁴³. It should also be noticed that zombies later devour Paula's corpse, evoking the colonial stereotype of African subjects as cannibals⁴⁴. As Bishop rightly notices, in both of these scenes Paula is not represented as a subject but as the object "of male gaze" or "of biological sustenance"⁴⁵.

Considered from an Italian perspective, the threat of the "black peril" might be connected to the fear of miscegenation. The Fascist regime prohibited miscegenation not merely with a specific law in 1937 and with the racial laws from 1938 to 1943, but also supported them through an artistic campaign, which included cinema, literature, and visual arts⁴⁶. The fear of miscegenation – this time intended more in "cultural" rather than in "racial" terms – is also evident in the cause of resurrection of the zombies,

CRITICA CINEFILIA E FESTIVAL STUDIES

voodooism, which Doctor Menard defines as the fusion between African animism and Christian belief. In other words, *Zombi 2* suggests that the combination of different cultures might be dangerous. Significantly, zombies not only invade New York and affect the native population of Matul, but they also separate the only interracial couple of the group of living, namely Brian and his mestizo wife Susan. In this sense, the “horror” in *Zombi 2* seems to be connected to the fear of multiculturalism, multiethnicism and globalisation.

The Fear of Multiculturalism and the Resurgence of the Colonial Memory

According to Kyle William Bishop, the uncanny resurgence of dead persons in zombie movies often shows that the “true monster threatening civilization [is] humanity itself”⁴⁷. The invasion of the zombies forces human beings, who would have probably never met otherwise, to join together in order to survive. The creation of new communities is often the pretext to deliver a social commentary about human nature.



Fig. 3

For instance, the main human characters of *The Walking Dead* differ in terms of race, gender, age and cultural backgrounds (Fig. 3). In the ninth episode of the second series humans kill other humans in order to survive and deal with the risk of losing their humanity by denying the other’s humanity. Moreover, *The Walking Dead* represents some zombies as more human than humans themselves, such as Sophia’s zombie in the seventh episode of the second series. Similarly, in *The Night of the Living Dead* “the human survivors never unite to defeat the zombies”⁴⁸, and Romero claims that his movies have a clear political intention: “zombies represent what we, the global community, should really be thinking about: something like ... power to the people”⁴⁹. In other words, the zombie apocalypse in *The Night* is a pretext in order to reconsider the existing social order and possibly create a new one.

CRITICA CINEFILIA E FESTIVAL STUDIES

The invasion of the living dead in *Zombi 2* also disrupts the existing social order, but this destabilisation seems to lead to a state of utter confusion. Zombies are represented as evil black invaders that have to be stopped, and their existence does not seem to be aimed at raising existential questions about human nature, but rather to create a possible enemy of human beings. In this sense, *Zombi 2* fits in a dominant Western narrative tradition, which has often represented subalterns as uncanny corpses or ill bodies in order to exclude threatening and eccentric forces from the social order:

Death and [subalterneity] are culturally positioned as the two central enigmas of western discourse [...] [representing] that which is inexpressible, inscrutable, unmanageable, horrible; that which cannot be faced directly but must be controlled by virtue of social laws and art⁵⁰.

Through the characterisation of zombies as “black invaders”, “cultural norms are reconfirmed or secured [...] because a sacrifice of the dangerous [subaltern] re-establishes an order that was momentarily suspended due to [his or her] presence”⁵¹. Suggesting a similar opinion from the perspective of political studies, Mark Neocleous argues that conservative ideologies often promote themselves by constructing the alterity as a terrifying monster, who might “[disrupt] the politics of identity and the security of borders”, as it is “simultaneously inside and outside”⁵².

Zombi 2 does not show alternative human communities after the zombies’ invasion that are present in the post-colonial world, nor does it criticise the racist and misogynistic social order that a homogeneous group of white and middle-class heroes try to preserve. In this regard it might be interesting to analyse gender and race relationships between human survivors. The only role of women in *Zombi 2* is that of being victims of violence or of voyeuristic gaze. Anne stays alive only because she follows Peter’s instructions, and he “naturally” attracts her since the beginning of the movie. Paula confronts her husband about his attempt to find, in vain, a cure against the resurrection of corpses and he gratuitously slaps her in the face. Moreover, the camera morbidly indulges on the naked bodies of Paula and Susan before they are “raped”. To summarise, female characters in *Zombi 2* are secondary, reflecting only male attitudes and values.

Similarly, *Zombi 2* depicts clear race divisions, both in New York and in Matul. For instance, Menard’s black servant, Lucas, is deferential to his master and obeys his orders. Like the indigenous inhabitants of the island, he is described as superstitious and in opposition to Menard, who is the advocate of Western science. Similarly, when the first living corpse is found in New York, a white coroner vehemently and gratuitously disqualifies the work of his black subordinate (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4

CRITICA CINEFILIA E FESTIVAL STUDIES

If Moretti is right to affirm that “chi osa combattere il mostro diventa automaticamente il rappresentante della specie, di tutti gli uomini, di tutta la società”⁵³, the choice of white males as representatives of human beings is also problematic since it excludes minorities from the very concept of humanity itself. In this concern, Frederic Jameson seems right to argue that:

Gothics are ultimately a class fantasy (or nightmare) in which the dialectic of privilege and shelter is exercised: your privileges seal you off from other people, but by the same token they constitute a protective wall through which you cannot see, and behind which therefore all kinds of envious forces may be imagined in the process of assembling, plotting, preparing to give assault⁵⁴.

In other words, *Zombie 2* represents the fears of middle class Westerners concerning their privilege, which is threatened by the challenges of post-coloniality.

Although noticing this negative subtext, Peter Dendle argues in favor of Fulci, claiming that he anticipates Romero on a number of stylistic and cinematic effects:

There is sometimes an unfortunate colonial brutality implicit in the endless scenes of European survivalists gunning down native zombies, but on the whole [Fulci] concentrate[s] [his] energies precisely on those aspects of zombie films that have proven the most aesthetically powerful: provocative settings, the restrained appearance and blocking of the zombies, a mounting sense of claustrophobia and helplessness, and the careful pacing and rhythm of the escalating apocalypse⁵⁵.

However, the subordination of the social and political commentary to the intention of astonishing the audience shows that Fulci's zombie movies have “much less in common with Romero's classic than one would assume”⁵⁶. Fulci does not want a reflective audience but a thrilled audience, which enjoys explicit depiction of nudity and gruesome violence for the sake of the nudity and violence itself. Significantly, Brad O'Brian argues that *Zombi 2* created a distinct Italian subgenre of splatter movies, such as Andrea Bianchi's *Le notti del terrore* (1981), Claudio Fragasso's *After Death – Oltre la morte* (1988), Marino Girolami's *Zombie Holocaust* (1980) and Umberto Lenzi's *Incubo sulla città contaminata* (1980)⁵⁷. Moreover, the use of gore in connection to explicit female nudity might have inspired the zombie porn movies, such as Joe D'Amato *Le notti erotiche dei morti viventi* (1980)⁵⁸.

Zombies and 1979 Italy

As the previous analysis has pointed out, fear in *Zombi 2* is elicited by the invasion of a Western center by “black” presences, whose characterisation recalls the stereotypical description of colonised subjects. Fulci's monsters create the fear of the alterity, and urges for the need for social security. However, it might be interesting to scrutinise whether this fear might be connected to and inspired by precise social and historical circumstances, focusing on two main events that took place in Italy during the years of the release of this movie: the beginning of historical studies on Italian colonialism and African immigration to Italy⁵⁹. The colonial experience is a “living dead” or a removed event that haunts the Italian collective unconscious. Although the colonial experience in Africa started with the acquisition by the Italian state of Assab bay in 1882 (which the Rubattino Company previously bought in 1869, eight years after the unification of the country), studies analysing historical sources with a critical approach have been developing since the 1970s, thanks to Giorgio Rochat's⁶⁰ and Angelo Del Boca's⁶¹ seminal works. This “rivoluzione storiografica”⁶² demonstrated that “Italian colonialism was as pitiless, brutal and murderous as other colonialisms”⁶³. Nonetheless, the results of these studies still do not permeate the Italian public

CRITICA CINEFILIA E FESTIVAL STUDIES

consciousness⁶⁴, perhaps because direct reference to colonialism was not very present in Italian artistic representation over the four decades from the 1950s to the 1990s⁶⁵.

However, as Frank Burke's reading of Dario Argento's *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970) suggests, the traces of the memory of colonialism seem to have survived in some popular artistic productions, such as horror b-movies:

The Bird with the Crystal Plumage is not an analysis of colonisation *per se*; its allusions to historical instances tend principally to underscore a habitual mode of relating to the world (conquest, possession, projection of self onto other) that characterizes the present as well as the past⁶⁶.

It is not surprising that Italian movies deal with the issue of colonialism: one of the first Italian feature films ever made, Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914) was produced in order to celebrate Italy's colonial adventure in Libya⁶⁷. It is surprising, however, that two movies that resurrect the colonial memory were produced in the 1970s, and are both horror movies.

Concerning the development of the gothic genre in the 19th century, Fabio Camilletti argues that the birth of psychoanalysis was preceded by horror stories, which anticipated and provided a fictional shape to the anxieties that it brought to light:

Il racconto perturbante (o, più precisamente, fantastico) è, in qualche modo, un primo espediente di cui il XIX secolo si serve per esplicitare la propria relazione perturbante di fronte alla storia: è nella letteratura fantastica che il "fantasma" si fa segno per interpretare la sopravvivenza di un passato divenuto "altro"⁶⁸.

As ghost stories manifested disquiet at the beginning of 20th century in Europe, *Zombi 2* can be seen as a trace through which the Italian collective unconscious made explicit the uncanny relationship with its colonial past. In both cases, the uncanny serves as a narrative expedient in order to indicate an unhealed historical trauma. To quote Franco Moretti, fear in many horror stories generates from an unconscious removal: "il represso, dunque, ritorna: ma travestito da mostro. Dopo avere *cambiato forma*"⁶⁹.

Italian colonialism was also brought back to memory by the beginning of African emigration to this Mediterranean country. In 1972, seven years before *Zombi 2* was released, net immigration in Italy surpassed net emigration, which in statistical terms signalled Italy's conversion from an emigration to an immigration country⁷⁰. Fulci's movie seems to acknowledge this fact by representing the threatening arrival of foreign and uncanny presences in a ship. This sequence recalls the "most impressive episode" in Wilhelm Murnau's *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922), "in which the spectral ship glided with its terrible freight over phosphorescent waters" enters the harbour of Wisborg⁷¹. According to Siegfried Kracauer's fundamental study of German expressionist movies, *From Caligari to Hitler*, the coming of the vessel that carries the infectious vampire Orlok and rats might be seen as a metaphorical representation of the anti-Semitic feelings of 1930s Germany (Fig. 5): "The German soul [...] [is] tossed about in gloomy space like the phantom ship in *Nosferatu*"⁷². In this regard, it is significant to notice that the image of rats has often been used to represent both immigrants and colonised subjects. For instance, American comics at the beginning of the 20th century represented Italian immigrants as sewer rats (Fig. 6), and Italian comics justified the use of toxic gases by depicting Ethiopians as insects or rodents (Fig. 7). As rats in *Nosferatu* represent the Jewish alterity that invade Germany and bring death, *Zombi 2* represents zombies as immigrants that contaminate the West with the memory of colonialism. In this regard, it is interesting to notice that during the fascist period the figures of Jews and Blacks often conflate and were equally associated to the idea of disease or contamination⁷³. Fulci's reference to Murnau's work evokes a derogatory imagery whose origins might be found in the Italian past.

CRITICA
CINEFILIA
E FESTIVAL
STUDIES



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

In order to fully understand the extent to which Fulci's movie successfully provides a fictional shape to the fears of Italians about immigration, it might be interesting to look at some visual and conceptual similarities between the representation of zombies in *Zombi 2* and immigrants in some xenophobic posters of the 1990s.



Fig. 8

CRITICA
CINEFILIA
E FESTIVAL
STUDIES

The presence of some analogies in these works does not suggest that Fulci's movie was a direct cultural reference for the authors of these advertisements. Nonetheless, it signals that the derogatory representations of race survived in the Italian collective unconscious during the 1970 and 1980s thanks to specific popular productions, and partly explains the great success of xenophobic propaganda in the 1990s and 2000s by Italian extreme right wing political parties.



Fig. 9

For instance, a 1991 advertisement by the Northern League represented ships full of immigrants and claimed to “have stopped the invasion” (Fig. 8). This image uncannily recalls the cinematic representation of the phantom ship in *Zombi 2* (Fig. 9) and *Nosferatu* (Fig. 10). Another advertisement used by the



Fig. 10

Northern League in the 1990s and by Forza Nuova in 2013 claims that whites in Italy will become extinct because of integration, and shows how the population will increasingly become black. Like a zombie movie, this advertisement represents immigration as a contagious event, which increasingly transform white subjects into “others” (Fig. 11). A 2011 Northern League advertisement pictures a land invaded by immigrants, who force Italians to escape with a rubber boat (Fig. 12), and recalls one of the last scenes of *Zombi 2*, where Anne and Peter escape from zombies in Matul by boat (Fig. 13).

CRITICA
CINEFILIA
E FESTIVAL
STUDIES



Fig. 11

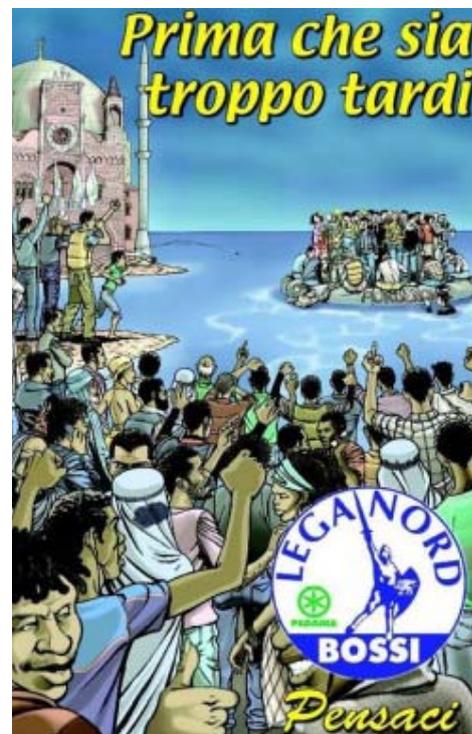


Fig. 12

More significantly, the poster of *Zombi 2* (Fig. 14) represents a crowd of zombies that are invading New York and resembles a 2009 Northern League advertisement, in which immigrants coming from Africa are invading Italy (Fig. 15). To put it in Fanon's words, the concern of *Zombi 2* about the invasion of black zombies seems similar to that of racist political propaganda at the beginning of the 1990s as it is more related to "the problem of Negroes, living among white men" and "the increase of Negroes, the problem of the Black Peril", rather than with the problem of "negroes exploited, enslaved, despised by a colonialist capitalist society"⁷⁴.



Fig. 13

CRITICA
CINEFILIA
E FESTIVAL
STUDIES



Fig. 14

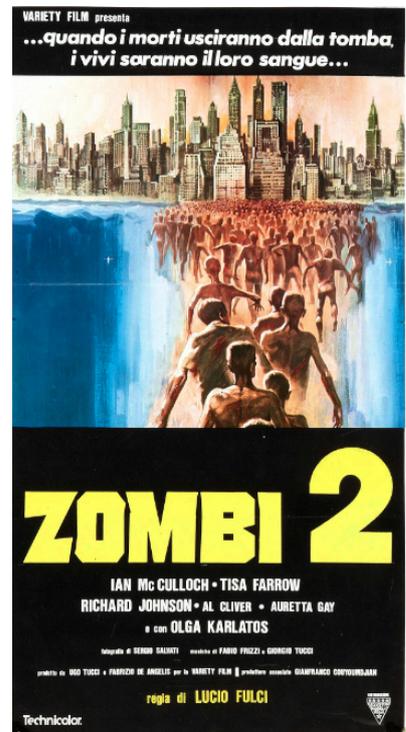


Fig. 15

In conclusion, this article has tried to demonstrate that it is no coincidence that Fulci's *Zombi 2* was released when immigration to Italy began and the first historical studies on Italian colonialism were published. In this regard, Franco Moretti argues that "il mostro [...] serve a spostare gli antagonismi e gli orrori che si manifestano *dentro* la società *al di fuori* della società stessa"⁷⁵. Fulci's movie is a barometer of the fears of Italian society towards the alterity. Drawing from colonial imagery, *Zombi 2* describes the invasion of scary and black invaders, and urges the maintenance of the social order as it is. In this sense, it is no coincidence that a clear visual assonance between the representation of zombies and the racist propaganda of the 1990s exists: both visual representations are aimed to scare their audience by portraying a "horror" that comes from abroad, rather than depict the "horror" within.

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Endnotes

1. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, New York, Norton, 2006 (1899), p. 69.
2. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic: the Caribbean", in Jerrold E. Hogle (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006 (2002), p. 229.
3. Tabish Khair, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness: Ghosts from Elsewhere*, Basinstoke, Palgrave, 2009, p. 3.
4. During the last decade, many surveys, monographs and critical anthologies and have been dedicated to the zombie genre, and provide useful insights for further research. For example see Kyle William Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture*, Jefferson (NC), McFarland, 2010; Stephanie Boluk, Wylie Lenz (eds.), *Generation Zombie: Essays on the*

CRITICA
CINEFILIA
E FESTIVAL
STUDIES

Living Dead in Modern Culture, Jefferson (NC), McFarland, 2011; Deborah Christie, Sarah Juliet Lauro (eds.), *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2011; Peter Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia*, Jefferson (NC), McFarland, 2000; Glenn Kay *Zombie Movies: The Ultimate Guide*, Chicago, Chicago Review Press, 2008; Shawn McIntosh, Marc Leverette (eds.), *Zombie Culture: Autopsies of the Living Dead*, Lanham (MA), Scarecrow Press, 2008; Christopher Moreman, *Zombies Are Us: Essays on the Humanity of the Walking Dead*, Jefferson (NC), McFarland, 2011; Jamie Russell, *Book of the Dead: The Complete History of Zombie Cinema*, New York, Fab Press, 2005. For a specific overview of Italian zombie movies see Jay Slater, *Eaten Alive! Italian Cannibal and Zombie Movies*, New York, Plexus, 2002.

5. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2008 (1818).

6. Franco Moretti, *Segni e stili del moderno*, Torino, Einaudi, 1987, p.109.

7. John Cussan, "Tracking the Zombie Diaspora: From Subhuman Haiti to Posthuman Tuscon", in Paul Yoder, Peter Mario Kreuter (eds.), *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, Oxford, Inter-disciplinary Press, 2004, p. 212.

8. Peter Dendle, "The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety", in Niall Scott (ed.), *Monsters and the Monstrous: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2007, p. 47.

9. *Ibidem*. For a specific discussion of the reminiscence of American Imperialism in Haiti in *White Zombie* see Gyllian Phillips, "White Zombie and the Creole: William Seabrook's *The Magic Island and American Imperialism in Haiti*", in S. Boluk, W. Lentz (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 27-40.

10. Barbara Browning, *Infectious Rhythm: Metaphors of Contagion and the Spread of African Culture*, London-New York, Routledge, 1998, p. 27.

11. K. W. Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

12. *Ivi*, p. 13.

13. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox, New York, Grove Press, 2004 (1961), p. 18.

14. *Ivi*, p. 20.

15. *Ivi*, p. 19.

16. Cfr. Jean Comaroff, John Comaroff, "Alien Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism", in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, n. 101, vol. 4, 2002, pp. 779-805.

17. Cfr. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford (CA), Stanford University Press, 1998; Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1999.

18. Jon Stratton, "The Trouble with Zombies: Bare Life, *Muselmänner* and Displaced People", in *Somatechnics*, n. 1, vol. 1, 2011, p. 188.

19. *Ivi*, p. 189.

20. For sake of coherence and clarity, I will refer only to Frank Darabont's successful TV series *The Walking Dead* (2010-2012), perhaps the most successful screening of this monster in recent times, and George Romero's *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968), an influential milestone of zombie movies, in order to exemplify my assumptions about this genre. The picture of Rick Grimes taking refuge in the surrounded tank might be seen as a metaphor for the United States being overwhelmed in its neo-colonial operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the faceless zombies matching the irrational fear of Muslims. In this regard, it is significant that the main character is a policeman, in fact a sheriff's deputy who rides a horse, fulfilling the archetype of the American hero played out in numerous Westerns. This archetype is further subverted as Grimes is rescued from the faceless horde not by the army, but instead by a young Asian-American.

21. Wade Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*, Chapel Hill, The

CRITICA
CINEFILIA
E FESTIVAL
STUDIES

University of North Carolina Press, 1988, p. xii.

22. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1992, p. 22-23.

23. Cfr. Renée Bergland, *Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, Dartmouth, Dartmouth University Press, 2000.

24. Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, London, Vintage, 2005 (1987).

25. Homi Bhabha, *The Locations of Culture*, London-New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 127.

26. This movie is known in the Anglophone world with the title of *Zombie Flesh Eaters*. Alternative titles are also *Zombie*, *Island of the Living Dead*, *Zombie Island*, and *Woodoo*. For further information concerning Fulci's zombie movies see Paolo Albiero, Giacomo Cacciatore, *Il terrorista dei generi: Tutto il cinema di Lucio Fulci*, Roma, Un mondo a parte, 2004, pp. 184-193; As Chianese, Gordiano Lupi, *Filmare la morte: Il cinema horror e thriller di Lucio Fulci*, Piombino, Edizioni Il Foglio, 2006, pp. 107-113; Stephen Thrower, *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci*, New York, Fab Press, 1999; Steven Zani, Kevin Meaux, *Lucio Fulci and the Decaying Definition of Zombie Narratives*, in D. Christie, S. J. Lauro, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-116.

27. Kyle William Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic*, p. 38.

28. The word "horror" is emphasised in this context in order to refer to Joseph Conrad's epigraph at the beginning of this article. *Heart of Darkness* is in fact one of the first texts of the Western canon to denounce Western colonialism in Africa, and to talk of its "horror".

29. *Dossier Nocturno n. 28. Zombi Apocalypse. Dizionario dei morti viventi*, Milano, Nocturno, 2003, pag. 61.

30. Phil Hardy, *The Encyclopedia of Horror Movies*, New York, Harper & Row, 1986, p. 341.

31. K.W. Bishop, *op. cit.*, p.162. Christian religion is also one of the main targets of Fulci's following zombie movie *Paura nella città dei morti viventi* (1980), written by Dardano Sacchetti, who also wrote *Zombi 2*. In this movie, the evil character is a priest, whose suicide causes the invasion of the living dead. As the zombies' birth parallels Christ's return to life, *Paura nella città dei morti viventi* mocks the belief of a life after death, which is a theme of particular relevance in a Catholic country like Italy.

32. Mario Domenichelli, *Lugemalé*, Firenze, Mauro Pagliai editore, 2005, pp. 92-93. All quotations from the original Italian have been translated by the author of this article. [A/N]: All quotations from the original Italian have been translated by the author of this article. TRANSL: [He saw the leper. The leper came towards him. His face was eaten by illness. He did not have a face. The leper hugged him, saying: "Italians, Somalis, brothers!". He did not back out of the hug, he returned it: "Brothers, brothers!" He felt a strong pain in his chest. He knew he did not have a face anymore. He was looking from eyes which were not there [...] dead animals everywhere, swollen corpses of sheep with black heads [...] The sky was contaminated. Leprosy opened holes of darkness [...] The water was infected too [...] his body expanded and broke apart [...] he no longer had a mouth, ears, cheeks, or eyes].

33. Alessandro Spina, *Le nozze di Omar*, Milano, Rusconi, 1973, p. 104. TRANSL: [death wears an indigenous mask].

34. Ennio Flaiano, *Tempo di uccidere*, Milano, BUR, 2008 (1947), p. 97. TRANSL: [if you do not shoot them in their head, you won't get anything done with these people].

35. *Ivi*, p. 98. TRANSL: [muddle of cloth and flesh].

36. *Ivi*, p. 37. TRANSL: [a good domestic pet].

37. *Ivi*, p. 139. TRANSL: [already devoured by horrible scars].

38. *Ivi*, p. 155. TRANSL: [death].

39. *Ivi*, p. 285. TRANSL: [stench].

40. *Ivi*, p. 32. TRANSL: [rather cursed trees].

41. *Ivi*, p. 26. TRANSL: [mountains dry like bones].

CRITICA CINEFILIA E FESTIVAL STUDIES

42. See Giovanna Tomasello, *L'Africa tra mito e realtà: Storia della letteratura coloniale italiana*, Palermo, Sellerio, 2004, pp. 208-215.
43. Concerning the use of the shower as a frequent setting of rapes in contemporary cinema see Sarah Projansky, *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture*, New York, New York University Press, 2001.
44. Concerning the representation of colonised subjects as cannibals see Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1993; Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, 1986; Steven Slemon, "Bones of Contention : Post-Colonial Writing and the 'Cannibal Question'", in Anthony Purdy (ed.), *Literature and the Body*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1992.
45. K. W. Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
46. G. Tomasello, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-213.
47. K. W. Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
48. Tony Williams, *The Cinema of George A. Romero: Knight of the Living Dead*, London, Wallflower, 2003, p. 22.
49. Giulia D'Agnolo-Vallan, "Let Them Eat Flesh", in Tony Williams (ed.), *George A. Romero: Interviews*, Minneapolis, University Press of Mississippi, 2011, p.155.
50. Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, Manchester (UK), Manchester University Press, 1992, p. 255. Bronfen's text only considers women as subaltern subjects, but a similar discourse can be valid for racial minorities.
51. *Ibidem*, p.181.
52. Mark Neocleous, *The Monstrous and the Dead: Burke, Marx, Fascism*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2005, pp. 31, 72-77.
53. F. Moretti, *op. cit.*, p. 105. TRANSL: [those who dare to fight against the monster automatically become the symbol of the specie, of all human beings, of all society].
54. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London and New York: Verso, 1996 (1991), p. 289.
55. P. Dendle, *The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia*, p. 8.
56. Donato Totaro, "The Italian Zombie Film: From Derivation to Reinvention", in Steven Jay Schneider (ed.), *Fear without Frontiers: Horror Cinema across the Globe*, Godalming (England), FAB Press, 2003, p. 162.
57. Brad O'Brian, "Vita, Amore, e Morte – and Lots of Gore: The Italian Zombie Film" in S. McIntosh, M. Leverette (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 55-58. Fragasso directed *After Death: Oltre la morte* under the pseudonym Clyde Anderson. This movie was released in the United States under the title *Zombie 4: After Death* and in the United Kingdom as *Zombie Flesh Eaters 3*. It should be noticed that the Italian censorship laws were more permissive than the code of the MPAA in the United States, and allowed Italian horror directors to experiment more with the visual and realistic representation of brutality than their American colleagues.
58. A. Bruschini, A. Tentori, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-70.
59. In this sense, I disagree with Brad O'Brian, who claims, with little or no specific reference to specific excerpts, that the production of horror movies in this period was connected to the anxiety of political terrorism in Italy. See B. O'Brien, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-70.
60. Giorgio Rochat, *Il colonialismo italiano. Documenti*, Torino, Loescher, 1973.
61. Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale*, 4 vol., Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1976-1984.
62. Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2007, p. 445. TRANSL: [historiographic revolution].

CRITICA
CINEFILIA
E FESTIVAL
STUDIES

63. Miguel Mellino, "Italy and Postcolonial Studies: a Difficult Encounter", *Interventions*, vol. 8, n. 3, 2006, p. 465.
64. Antonio Morone, *L'ultima colonia: Come l'Italia è ritornata in Somalia 1950- 1960*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2011, p. xii.
65. Cfr. Daniele Comberiati, "La letteratura post-coloniale italiana: definizioni, problemi, mappatura", in Lucia Quaquarelli (ed.), *Certi confini. Sulla letteratura italiana dell'immigrazione*. Milano: Morellini, 2010, pp. 161-178. A significant exception to this trend in movies is Giorgio Moser's *Violenza Segreta* (1963), which is based on Enrico Emanuelli's novel *Settimana Nera* (1961) and set in Somalia after the Italian Trusteeship Administration of this African country (1950-1960). Although the movie stars famous Italian actors like Enrico Maria Salerno and Giorgio Albertazzi, it failed to gain critical or public recognition.
66. Frank Burke, "Dario Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*: Caging Women's Rage", in Annette Burfoot, Susan Lord (eds.), *Killing Women: the Visual Culture of Gender and Violence*, Waterloo, Ontario, Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2006, pp. 200-201.
67. Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema 1896-1996*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 37
68. Fabio Camilletti, "Il passo di Nerina. Memoria, storia e formule di pathos nelle *Ricordanze*", *Italianistica*, vol. 39, n. 2, 2010, p. 53. TRANSL: [The gothic (or, more precisely, fantasy) genre is, to some extent, one of the first ways through which the XIX century has made its uncanny relationship towards history explicit: it's in fantasy stories that the "ghost" becomes a clue to help interpret the survival of a past that has become "other"].
69. F. Moretti, *op. cit.*, p.130. TRANSL: [what has been repressed comes back, but as a monster. After changing form].
70. Russell King and Jacqueline Andall, "The Geography and Economic Sociology of Recent Immigration to Italy", in *Modern Italy*, vol.4, n. 2, pp. 136.
71. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Leonardo Quaresima (ed.), Princeton (NJ)-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2004 (1947), p. 79.
72. *Ibidem*, p. 107.
73. Karen Pinkus, "'Black' and 'Jew': Race and the Resistance to Psychoanalysis in Italy", in *Annali d'Italianistica*, n.16, 1998, p. 146.
74. Franz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, London, Pluto Press, 1993 (1952), p. 202.
75. F. Moretti, *op. cit.*, p. 105. TRANSL: [the monster [...] moves conflicts and horrors that are present *within* a society *outside* of it].