

**LIMINALITY IN A POST-APOCALYPTIC WORLD: A STUDY OF SELECTED  
VOLUMES OF *THE WALKING DEAD***

**P.C. LALRINMUANI**

**SUPERVISOR**

**Dr. K.C. LALTHLAMUANI**

**Department of English**

**Mizoram University**

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## **DECLARATION**

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

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I, P.C. LALRINMUANI, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to Mizoram University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

**P.C. LALRINMUANI**

(Candidate)

**Prof. MARGARET L. PACHUAU**

(Head)

**Dr. K.C. LALTHLAMUANI**

(Supervisor)



MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that “**Liminality in a Post-Apocalyptic World: A Study of Selected Volumes of *The Walking Dead***” written by **P.C. Lalrinmuani** has been written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down within the M.Phil. regulations of Mizoram University. The dissertation is the result of her own investigation. Neither the dissertation as a whole or any part of it was ever submitted by any other University for any research degree.

**(Dr. K.C. LALTHLAMUANI)**

Supervisor/ Associate Professor

Department of English

Mizoram University

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**NAME OF CANDIDATE** : P.C. LALRINMUANI

**DEGREE** : M.Phil.

**DEPARTMENT: English**

**TITLE OF DISSERTATION** : Liminality in a Post-Apocalyptic World: A Study of Selected Volumes of *The Walking Dead*

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**SEMESTER/DISSERTATION**

### APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL-

1. B.O.S : 26.04.2017
2. SCHOOL BOARD : 26.05.2017
3. REGISTRATION NO. & DATE : MZU/M.Phil/366 of dt. 26.05.2017
4. EXTENSION IF ANY : January 2018 – July 2018

**HEAD**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

## BIO-DATA

**Name :** P.C.Lalrinmuani

**Father's Name :** Vanlalliana (L)

**Address :** D 21, Mission Veng, Aizawl – 796001, Mizoram.

**Phone No. :** 7674055428

### **Educational Qualification:**

Class	Board/University	Year of Passing	Division/Grade	Percentage
X	MBSE	2009	I	65%
XII	MBSE	2011	I	67.4%
B.A.	Mizoram University	2014	I	68.67%
M.A.	University of Hyderabad	2016	I	68.90%
M.Phil. (Course Work)	Mizoram University	2017	I 'A' Grade awarded. 10 pt. scale grading system, 'A' corresponds to 6-6.99 pts.	Corresponds to 68.3% in terms of percentage conversion.

**M.Phil. Regn, No. & Date :** MZU/M.Phil/366 of dt.26.5.2017

**Other Relevant Information:**

- i) Currently working on M.Phil. dissertation entitled “Liminality in a Post-Apocalyptic World: A Study of Selected Volumes of *The Walking Dead*” under the supervision of Dr. K.C. Lalthlamuani, Department of English, Mizoram University.
- ii) Attended and participated in international seminar entitled “The Politics of Difference: (Re)Locating Subalternity/Marginality” organized by the Department of History, Assam University on 22-23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2017.
- iii) Attended and participated in international seminar entitled “Why Ecocriticism?” organized by the Department of History, Sikkim Government College in collaboration with Foundation for the Study of Literature and Environment, New Delhi on 21-23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2017.
- iv) Visited the following libraries for the purpose of research:
  - a. Central Library, Mizoram University.
  - b. Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, New Delhi.
  - c. North Eastern Hills University (NEHU) University Library, Shillong.
- v) Awarded the UGC-MZU Fellowship for the tenure of eighteen months from the date of admission on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2016.
- vi) Awarded the UGC-NET for eligibility for Assistant Professor on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 2018.



## **CHAPTER I**

# **ZOMBIES IN POPULAR CULTURE**

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## 1. Zombies in Popular Culture

Zombies have influenced and dominated so many aspects of popular culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They scare people by triggering their primal fear of being eaten alive, their instinctive horror of corpses, their unconscious fear of the civilizational collapse and make them contemplate about life during a large scale life threatening crisis. They have appeared in countless films, television shows, animation and video games. They are stock characters in comic books and graphic novels. They crop up in genres ranging from pop to death metal and in music videos, such as Michael Jackson's 1983 music video for "Thriller". There are banks called "zombie banks" whose debts are greater than their assets, and "zombie walks" in the cities of the United States where ordinary people from all walks of life dress up like zombies and lumber the parks and streets.

Zombies are fictional undead monsters that prey on the living and are encountered in horror and fantasy themed fiction and entertainment. A zombie can be defined as a person or reanimated corpse that has been turned into a creature capable of movement but not of rational thought, which feeds on human flesh. Another definition of a zombie is a corpse said to be revived by witchcraft, especially in certain African and Caribbean religions. A zombie is the one stock horror character that does not have a genealogy in European tradition or much presence in Gothic fiction, as do the ghost, vampire, werewolf and Frankenstein. It came into being in the plantation society of colonial Saint Domingue (modern day Haiti) and is a direct product of Vodou (Voodoo), Haiti's most essential belief system. Though multiple concepts of the undead can be traced back to thousands of years in different cultures and mythologies, the modern zombie that has permeated and influenced popular culture has its roots deeply embedded in the superstitious beliefs and traditions of the Haitian slaves. It is also from these African roots of

Haitian peasantry's folk beliefs, practices and superstitions that the fear of zombies and of being turned into one originated.

The concept of the flesh-hungry undead can be traced back to folklore and mythology from prehistory. These cannibalistic undead – mostly evil or frightening by nature and appearance and often in the form of ghouls and vampires – have been a common fixture of world mythology. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the goddess Ishtar vows in rage:

‘I shall *smash* [*the gates of the Netherworld, right down*] to its dwelling,  
to the world below I shall *grant* [*manumission*,]  
I shall bring up the dead to consume the living,  
I shall make the dead outnumber the living.’ (97-100)

Similarly, in Norse mythology, “draugar” or “haugar” are animated corpses of the dead who live on in the burrows in which they are enclosed. They are generally mischievous and are greatly to be feared. In Japanese Buddhism, a Jikininki (spelled ‘shokujinki’ in modern Japanese, meaning human-eating ghost), told through the tale of a travelling monk Muso Kokushi, is a person cursed to return to life after death as a scavenger and devourer of human corpses at night due to his greediness and selfish impiety while he was living.

“Zonbi”, a Haitian Creole word for zombie, appears in writing as the slaves’ belief in a returned soul, a *revenant* as far back as colonial Saint Domingue by a travel writer Moreau de Saint Mery in 1797. Prior to this, an early reference to zombies in Western literature can be found in the 1697 French novel “Le Zombi du grand Pérou” (The Zombie of the Great Peru) by Pierre-Cornielle Blessebois, set in colonial Gaudeloupe. The use of the English word “zombie”

was first recorded in a history of Brazil by the poet Robert Southey, in the form of "zombi" in 1819.

*Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, published in 1818, prefigures many 20<sup>th</sup> century ideas about zombies as the resurrection of the dead is portrayed as a scientific process rather than a mystical one, and the resurrected corpse is more violent and degraded than when he was living. Though later 19<sup>th</sup> century stories about the avenging undead such as Ambrose Bierce's short story "The Death of Halpin Frayser" and various Gothic Romanticism tales by Edgar Allan Poe, such as "Berenice", "Morella", "M. Valdermar", "Spirits of the Dead", cannot be properly categorized as zombie stories as they contain no usage of the word "zombie", they do serve as a major influence for later undead-themed writers that came after them. In the 1920s and early 1930s, H.P. Lovecraft authored several stories dealing with the undead theme, among which *Herbert West- Reanimator* (1921), the story of a mad scientist who revives human corpses, is the most definitive zombie story in all of his works.

However, it was during the United States occupation of Haiti during the early twentieth century that zombies first attracted widespread international attention. Haiti underwent many attempts by the French, English and Spanish to claim the land as their colony, with the French finally colonizing it from 1660 onwards. The descendants of different African ethnic groups who were enslaved and brought to Haiti by the French in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, known then as Saint Domingue, forged a syncretic religion called Vodou. It is "a danced religion which allows communication with the loas (spirits) and their African ancestors" (Laguerre 42). The slaves reconstituted in Saint Domingue a religion which grew out of and served their needs. Vodou was a unifying factor which allowed them to be aware of their enslaved condition. It can be



considered as the main factor responsible for bringing about the Haitian Revolution from 1791 to 1803 and the resulting liberation.

However, the Revolution of the enslaved population of Haiti and the resulting independence from France in 1804 “in a world dominated by European powers in the early nineteenth century” were considered unacceptable and these were communicated discursively through travellers visiting Haiti shortly after its independence who wrote about “cannibalism, superstitiousness, and the lasciviousness of its people whose childlike nature made them incapable of governing themselves” (Pressley-Sanon: 120, 121). Haiti fell under the occupation of the United States once again from 1914 to 1934. The U.S used the rhetoric of Christian duty as a justification for its military mission to save Haiti from itself and Vodou that interpreted it as an evidence of barbarism from which the people of Haiti must be delivered.

According to Afro-Haitian belief, there are two types of zombies- *zonbi astral* and *zonbi ko kadav*. *Zonbi astral* is a charmed bottle that contains not a human soul or spirit but rather a fragment of it. It is believed that “part of the spirit goes immediately to God after death while another part lingers near the grave for a time. It is this portion of the spirit that can be captured and made to work” (McAlister 462). *Zonbi astral* stands as evidence for refusal to adhere to Western distinction between people and things, between life and death, as the charm itself is a hybrid of human and spirit, living and dead, individual and generic. This spirit can “inhabit both natural and human-made things” and this force can be “manipulated and used often for healing and protection, sometimes for aggression and attack” (464).

*Zonbi kò kadav* is walking corpse, a reverse of the *astral zonbi*, whereby “his spirit is extracted from his body and his body is sold into modern-day slavery to cut cane on a sugar

plantation” (McAlister 469). An extreme and rare form of punishment some societies in Haiti hand down to an accused criminal is to be made into a zonbi kò kadav. Becoming a zonbi kò kadav involves a scientific process where the would-be zonbi is secretly given tetrodotoxin from a puffer fish to lower his metabolism to the point where he appears dead. After being buried by his family, the society's sorcerer opens the tomb and gives the victim datura plant, a hallucinogen, and mystically separates out parts of the spirit from the body.

In this scenario, mystical technology much like that applied to the zonbi astral separates the spirit from the body, except that the separation takes place before rather than after the body's death. In the final phase of punishment, this body – a religious and social corpse – is said to be trafficked to a labor camp cum sugar plantation, with the secret society collecting a procurement fee. It is this returned body and not a returned soul- a person bodily raised from the grave and turned into a slave worker – that came to be commonly known as a zombie. The Haitian zombie is a victim and not a predator – being without essence that is “lobotomized, depersonalized, and reduced through malevolent magic to a state of impotence” (Glover 107).

The creature is a corpse that has been maintained in that misty zone which divides life from death and exploited without mercy by his master. It exists only in its present state of exploitation, without any recollection of its past or hope for the future. It symbolizes the ultimate horror of a population who descended from slaves, whose hope of respite from slavery in a heavenly paradise after death is threatened by the idea of being raised from the dead and forced to serve a bokor (sorcerer or witch) endlessly. It is not at all the cannibalistic monster raised from the dead by some compulsion to hunt down humans and feast on their brains or flesh. “Such a conception of the zombie – drooling, stiff legged, arms outstretched – is strictly a Hollywood invention” (Glover 107).

Capitalist production creates value for some through appropriating and consuming the energies and labours of others. The slave trade and colonial slavery that cast living humans as commodities are quite literally encoded and reenacted in zombification of people or their spirits. Just as slavery depended on capturing, containing and forcing the labor of thousands of people, this form of mystical work reenact the same process in local terms. The Haitian spirit workers performed some of the actions famously used against the African slaves – tricking, capturing, binding, and shackling – but this time, the ritual actors were the present-day descendants of slaves, enacting the commodification and trafficking of humans through the ritual vocabulary most salient to their history.

Elizabeth McAlister, in her paper “Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies”, argued that the process of capturing slaves and leading them, bound and whipped, to be sold for labor is represented in religious terms. The moment of punishment by zombification throughout Haitian history “replicates and reproduces the crucial transformative moment in the lives of West and Central Africans and the slaves in the colonies, where Africans were seized, kidnapped, bound, whipped, sold, and forced to labor”(470). The very people who experienced the master-slave relationship, the Haitian peasantry, mimetically performed and repeated it, even though this time it was between a bokor and the spirits of the dead. The production of spiritual and bodily/physical zombies shows how groups remember history and enact its consequences in embodied rituals and arts.

Sugar was one of the main resources of Haiti. The plantation owners “fed and inaugurated the modern system of capitalism through dehumanization, starvation, and torture” (McAlister 464). This aspect of capitalism is what Haitian spirit-workers redescribed in their religious ritual. The zombie was born in colonial plantation and is therefore inextricable from the

culture of terror inherent in the plantation. Zombie-making is “an example of a non-western form of thought that diagnoses, theorizes, and responds mimetically to the long history of violently consumptive and dehumanizing capitalism in the Americas from the colonial period until the present” (468). Zombies can be understood as a religious, philosophical, and artistic response to the cannibalistic dynamics within capitalism, and a harnessing of these principles through rituals. Zombies represent, respond to, and mystify fear of slavery along with their collusion with it and rebellion against it.

The horror of the Haitian zombie, for the Americans, was the image of the disfigured body with no soul, will, agency and hence its interiority and humanity. These religious differences were terrifying when set against Christian beliefs that placed theological priority on the soul. It can be said that the zombie myth authorized military intervention. The zombie, along with the cannibal practices that were imputed to be part of Haitian culture, becomes “the image of the Other through which barbarism comes to be the sign for the Haitian” (McAlister 472). Americans became fascinated with zombie mythology and reproduced it in writings on Haiti during the Marine Occupation between 1915 and 1934, usually overlooking its obvious articulations with slavery, capitalism, and political control. Early Hollywood placed the walking dead zombie in the monstrous pantheon alongside old monster figures such as the vampire, werewolf, and ghost. From the 1930s until the 1960s, zombie was synonymous with a kind of barbaric, racial blackness.

The nature and meaning of zombies have changed drastically with time. Many scholars have argued that the frequently changing portrayals of zombies reflect changes in societal concerns and anxieties. Zombies are more than just an aesthetic horror. They are a medium for social and political commentary. Zombies and zombie apocalypse have been used by writers and

filmmakers intentionally or unintentionally as a metaphor for articulating much deeper fears and anxieties such as racial subjugation, mass contagion, nuclear war, foreign invasion etc. This is evident when the evolution of zombies in mainstream culture is taken into account.

William Seabrooke's travelogue *The Magic Island* (1929) introduced zombies – of Haitian and particularly Voodoo origin and revived by witchcraft – to the American public. While researching Voodoo in Port-au-Prince, Seabrooke was introduced to “zombies” in a Haitian American Sugar Company. Ignorant to the possibility that these zombies were slaves employed by the company who lived in squalid conditions and worked for long hours without rest, he sensationalized the account in his book *The Magic Island*:

My first impression of the three supposed zombies, who continued dumbly at work, was that there was something about them unnatural and strange. They were plodding like brutes, like automatons . . . The eyes were the worst . . . They were in truth like the eyes of a dead man, not blind, but staring, unfocused, unseeing. The whole face . . . It was vacant, as if there was nothing behind it. It seemed not only expressionless, but incapable of expression. (101)

Influenced by the travel writers' accounts of black West Indian superstition, films such as *White Zombie* (1932) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) feature corpses transformed into undead, zombified servants by an evil magician through magic spells. They were folkloric zombies mostly associated with the foreign, the exotic and with a colonial context. They did not necessarily signal an apocalypse, unlike the zombie literature and cinema that came after them.

In the film *White Zombie* (1932), a white couple visits and plans to get married in Haiti but trouble arises as the plantation owner, who falls in love with the woman, transforms her into

a zombie with the help of a Voodoo master. Despite several zombifications by evil Haitians, the white couple is unharmed in the end while the Voodoo master is pushed off a cliff. It was a manifestation of America's worst fears of Voodooism which inverted the spiritual belief system into a horror motif. Haiti is depicted as primitive, orderless and infested with witchcraft, black magic and zombies. *I Walked With A Zombie* (1943) which features a white nurse who goes to the Caribbean and has hallucinations about zombies is a psychological exploration of the fear of Voodoo. By casting black sorcerers plotting for conquest and control over white women, these films highlight the misunderstood and distorted elements in early Hollywood films regarding Voodoo and zombies as blackness was perceived to be unmistakably linked to primitive menace, superstition and the diabolical.

Zombies were largely a reflection of fears of Voodooism and blackness till the 1940s, but soon acquired a new symbolism with the changing social and political landscape of America. By the 1940s, zombies had transitioned from being a Haitian folklore to a widespread cultural phenomenon in America. It was the time of great fear where World War II was emerging and with it, mass genocide, atomic warfare and the threat of communist dictatorships. The Cold War that followed reinvigorated anxieties over Soviet communism and scientific advancements, such as the space race. Zombies became an integral part of how Americans grappled with these fears. Zombie films are imbued with espionage themes, as seen in *Revenge of the Zombies* (1943) where an evil doctor creates an army of Nazi zombies to ensure a German victory.

With the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 and the first Soviet atomic bomb test in 1949, zombies became a manifestation of fears of nuclear radiation and communism. An example of this is the comic strip *Corpses: Coast to Coast*, published in a 1954 issue of *Voodoo*, where a Soviet communist sends unburied corpses to an indoctrination

tank where they mutate into zombies, thereby forming United World Zombies (U.W.Z.) that takes over the White House, America, Europe and the world. The zombie uprising is ultimately quelled by an atomic bomb whose radiation damages zombie tissues. Hollywood also used similar plots in films produced during this era.

With the Soviet Union winning the space race, as it launched the world's first satellite named Sputnik in 1957 and sent the first human to space in 1961, zombies were used for expressing America's fear of losing ground in the space frontier and the fear of space itself. These fears were depicted in Hollywood films such as *Zombies of the Stratosphere* (1952) depicts an evil alien force that steals atomic bomb plans from the Soviets to use its force to change orbital positions with Earth. In *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959), benevolent aliens resurrect a human zombie force to stop a destructive bomb from developing.

Richard Matheson's seminal 1954 novel *I Am Legend* depicts the story of future Los Angeles that is overrun by undead, bloodsucking vampires. Its portrayal of infection as the cause for a worldwide apocalypse along with the conception of vampirism as a disease is notably influential for the zombie genre. The novel was adapted into films in 1964, 1971 and in 2007. Though considered the first modern vampire novel, the novel and the 1964 film adaptation heavily influenced and impacted George A. Romero, who would later redefine and reshape the way zombies are conceived.

By the mid to late 1960s, the modern zombie was born as a result of new turmoil that emerged in America. Zombie images took a different and fascinating direction as a very different kind of zombie, a "ghoul" who walks around trying to eat people, began to populate American film and television. George Romero's independent trilogy of films *Night of the Living Dead*

(1968), followed by *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and *Day of the Dead* (1985) set the terms for the American zombie horror genre and most pop-culture zombie images since. In *Night of the Living Dead*, he stripped zombies off their foreign, exotic and colonial origin and placed them on American soil, associating them with science and technology instead of witchcraft or necromancy. He also made cannibalism intrinsic to their nature. Although Romero reportedly did not think of his creatures as zombies, from *Night of the Living Dead* onwards, critics and the public pronounced the label.

*Night of the Living Dead* proved to be more influential on the concept of zombies than any other cinematic or literary works before it. Zombies in movies and literature after Romero are therefore altered into corpses reanimated by virus, infection or contamination. There is no reference to an otherworldly or a superhuman force intervening in the process of zombification. This modern concept of zombies owes itself almost entirely to him. The reason for the shift from superstition and voodoo to science and technology can be attributed to the widespread popularity of the Science Fiction genre from the 1950s onwards.

The 1960s saw the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, assassinations and counterculture rebellion. George Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead* came along that entirely changed the zombie film as we know it. The film begins with Barbara running into a zombie in a cemetery and taking refuge in a farmhouse where she encounters Ben and other survivors. As the story progresses and zombies attack the farmhouse, Ben emerges as the sole survivor, only to be shot and killed in the end by a white police officer. Released just five months after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the film is filled with political undertones that expose the country's turbulent race relations.



Racially charged interactions are woven throughout the film mainly between Ben, a young black man, and Harry, a white authoritarian. The film's closing credits are a series of still images in which a mob of white Southerners puncture Ben's lifeless body with hooks and pose for photos. The film was often considered to be a direct response to cultural events. It was also revolutionary as it was the first prominent film to feature hordes of zombies, instead of an isolated few, which were used as a symbol of an impending apocalypse. Romero's reinvention of zombies is notable because he used zombies not just to incite horror, but as a tool to criticize real modern day issues such as government ineptitude, bioengineering, slavery, greed and exploitation while indulging the audiences' post-apocalyptic fantasies.

Romero's follow-up film *Dawn of the Dead* in 1978 reconstituted the genre as a form of social commentary, shifting his target to American capitalism and consumerism. In the film, a zombie apocalypse rakes the United States and a group of survivors take refuge in a shopping mall where they enjoy a "hedonistic lifestyle". A gang of bikers breaking in to loot the mall let in thousands of zombies who eventually overrun the mall. The zombies represent fears of capitalism and mindless consumption that racked the late 1970s. They are consumers, aimlessly and mindlessly roaming through shops as the mall was "an important place in their lives", as commented by one of the survivors. The survivors are no different as it is evident from the exchange between the protagonists Roger and Peter who shop in the mall amidst the zombies outside struggling to get in. "Having been essentially brainwashed by capitalist ideology, the survivors cannot see the shattered world round them in any terms other than those of possession and consumption," writes Kyle William Bishop, "and this misplaced drive ultimately proves strong enough to put all their lives in jeopardy" (Bishop 130).

*Night of the Zombies* (1981) was the first film to use a mutagenic gas as a source of zombie infestation, later echoed also in the 1985 film *The Return of the Living Dead*, which undertook a more comedic approach and featured zombies craving particularly for brains instead of flesh, thereby becoming the source for brain-devouring zombies. It was also during the 1980s that zombies were introduced into Chinese and other Asian films. Often martial arts or horror genre, films like *Kung Fu Zombie* (1981), *Zombie vs Ninja* (1989) among others featured zombies animated by magic mainly for the purpose of a battle.

The folkloric, Voodoo zombies that first hailed from Haiti made its resurgence in Wade Davis' travelogue "The Serpent and the Rainbow" (1985). Wes Craven's film adaptation of the same name in 1988 also attempted to reconnect zombies with the Haitian Voodoo roots that inspired it. The film displays supernatural and scientific possibilities for zombification which involve using the poison "tetrodotoxin" and other aspects of Vodou, though the scientific explanations have been dismissed by the scientific community. It can also be considered the only Voodoo-themed zombie film of recent times.

Fear of global contagion consumed the minds of people over the next few decades as Ebola was detected in Sudan in 1976, AIDS was discovered in the 1980s, the Avian flu broke out in China in the mid- 90s and SARS in 2003. Zombies became an embodiment of these contagion fears. Contagion soon joined the ranks of voodoo and radiation as an explanation for the reanimation of zombies. In the widely popular video game *Resident Evil* (1996), a major pharmaceutical company called the Umbrella Corporation secretly experiments with bio-organic weaponry and develops a mutagenic virus called the T-virus that reanimates corpses back to life. This zombie themed video game can be said to have sparked the zombie renaissance in low-

budget Asian cinema with films like *Bio Zombie* (1998), *Wild Zero* (1999), and *Stacy* (2001) among a handful of others.

The 2002 film and box office hit *28 Days Later* follows a similar contagion plot where zombification is caused by virus-infected apes that have escaped from a medical research lab, thereby spreading their viral infection throughout the globe. The zombie subgenre in the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century experienced a resurgence with other box office successes such as the *Resident Evil* films in 2002, 2004, and 2007, the *Dawn of the Dead* remake in 2004, *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *28 Weeks Later* (2007). The slow, lumbering and mindless zombies first popularized by Romero were replaced in the films created within the 2000s with zombies that are more agile, vicious, intelligent and stronger than the traditional zombie. The depiction of zombies as biologically infected people has also become a prominent feature of modern zombies.

Zombies and their scientifically and medically induced origins have been appropriated in recent years. Steven Schlozman, a Harvard neurobiologist, released *The Zombie Autopsies: Secret Notebooks From the Apocalypse* in 2011 which presented a realistic zombie scenario based farcically on scientific evidence. He even coined a term for the zombie contagion called Ataxic Neurodegenerative Satiety Deficiency syndrome (A.N.S.D.). In the same year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a national public health institute in the United States, released a guide which gained widespread popularity called “Preparedness 101: Zombie Apocalypse” – a guide on how to prepare for a widespread epidemic outbreak.

In the literary field, zombie fiction as a distinct literary subgenre under apocalypse and post-apocalyptic fiction is said to have emerged in the 1990s. The idea that mass contagion could start a zombie apocalypse was soon appropriated by mainstream media, especially the zombie

genre, whereby a new survivalism fantasy set in a zombie apocalyptic world requires ample amount of weaponry, rugged individualism and fear of other survivors. This is clearly presented in Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead*, an ongoing black and white comic book series first published in 2003, which contributes greatly to the recent popularity of zombies in popular culture.

*The Walking Dead* deals with the central character, police officer Rick Grimes, who wakes up from a coma to post zombie apocalypse and his journey across America in search of his wife and son and the other survivors he meets along the way. Besides being adapted into the highly rated television series with the same name, it has also been adapted into video games, a companion television series called *Fear the Walking Dead*, a webisode series and various additional publications. The comic book series has also broken barriers and records in the print media industry with its 100th issue by being the largest selling single comic of this decade as well as the second highest ordered comic of the 21st century. There are 29 volumes, consisting of 176 issues, of *The Walking Dead* that have been published so far, out of which the first twenty one volumes will be dealt with in this dissertation.

The comic series presents a post-apocalyptic world where zombies or "walkers" are the least of the survivors' problems. The protagonists are constantly attacked by other survivor groups, each with a deeply conservative value of defending their own. The post-apocalyptic survivors are interested only in their own self-preservation while all other life is considered disposable. Walls are prominently featured in *The Walking Dead* as a way to keep out both zombies and other humans. In early zombie films, small groups of survivors banded together to increase their chances of survival. In the post-apocalyptic genre, all survivors are insistent on living, but only on their own terms.

*The Walking Dead* conveys a detailed development of the characters by shifting its focus away from the zombie monsters and onto the besieged human survivors. It addresses the struggles, losses, emotional and psychological traumas experienced by the human protagonists and emphasizes on their humanity. Instead of being metaphors for social satires, the zombies here are victims of tragedy as they themselves were once humans. More than zombies, the real threat and danger are the remaining human factions who battle over limited resources and render each other into enemies.

Recent notable zombie fiction includes, among many others, Stephen King's *Cell* (2006) where a possible zombie outbreak is caused by an electromagnetic phenomenon that turns cellular phone users into zombie-like maniacs. It has its film adaptation of the same name in 2016. Max Brooks authored *World War Z* (2006) in which the story of a global zombie apocalypse is written as a series of interviews with survivors who recount the event. The zombies here move at fast speeds with a sense of urgency. With its film adaptation in 2013, *World War Z* is one of the most well-known in the genre of recent zombie fiction.

*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) is a parody of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* by Seth Grahame-Smith. With elements of modern zombie fiction, the story takes place in early 19<sup>th</sup> century England where a zombie plague sweeps over the country. An alternate take on the zombie is *Warm Bodies* (2010) by Isaac Marion where the zombie has consciousness and some intelligence. Both novels have been adapted into films with the same name in 2016 and 2013 respectively. The South Korean zombie apocalypse thriller film *Train to Busan* (2016), which takes place in a train going to Busan as zombie apocalypse spreads across the country and inside the train as well is another recent zombie film with immense success and popularity.

Within the span of a few decades, the catatonic zombie of Haitian voodoo tradition is transformed into a bloodied, vicious creature intent on devouring everything in its wake. Zombies are a fascinating study of mankind's historical fears but also a window into how foreign ideas adopt new meaning when stripped of their original context over time. They scare people by purging their darkest deeds and in doing so make them question what it means to be human. They challenge the perception and understanding of the relationship between the body and the mind. The adaptability and permeability of zombies in order to match with the changing world and different time periods answer for their relentless resilience and undeniable relevance in popular culture since the twentieth century.

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## 2. Liminality and the Post-Apocalyptic Space of *The Walking Dead*

Derived from the Latin word *limen* meaning threshold, liminality is used to define the interstitial or in-between location of two existing states or structures where an individual, culture or nation is placed. Liminal existence, also referred to as threshold or border existence, has proved itself to be crucial and relevant for understanding multiple cultures and identities that have emerged from the margins and interstices of a culture or a nation. In literary, post-colonial and cultural studies, the concept of liminality has been adopted to define a being on the border or threshold, dividing distinct spheres, identities or discourses and the interstitial environment in which cultural transformation takes place.

Initially used by Arnold van Gennep in *Rites of Passage* (1909) to define the tripartite structure – separation, transition and incorporation – of the rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage in the field of anthropology, liminality refers to the middle state or stage of transition or an in-between zone. In Gennep's first rite of separation, an individual or group detaches from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or cultural conditions after which, the ritual subject passes through a liminal or transitional stage where he/she is rendered ambiguous. In the third phase, the ritual subject is incorporated into a stable social structure once more.

The transitional phase is the period in which an individual is in the 'in-between', as he/she passes through a realm that has none of the attributes of the past and future state or social position. To illustrate this phase, Gennep refers to territorial transitions in early human history when countries did not border directly on each other but were divided by a neutral zone. In this zone, travellers "wavered between two worlds" (Gennep 18) as they found themselves in a special situation where neither laws of the adjoining countries applied. Such an indefinable state,



that also includes non-territorial transitions, is considered by Genep to be potentially dangerous as routines of life are disrupted and the person going through it lacks familiar guidelines or rules to hold on to.

Victor Turner, intrigued by Genep's formulation, expanded the middle rite of transition and popularized its usage in other fields besides anthropology. He uses liminality to define the ambivalent and transformative nature and character of rituals. He examines the rituals or rites of passage practiced by the Ndembu people of Central Africa as revolving around liminality. In the liminal stage, a ritual subject undergoes a period of disorientation as he/she slips in and out of structurally and culturally defined states and statuses. For Turner, liminality is an interstructural state or situation in which an individual is a structurally invisible and indefinable transitional being who is "betwixt and between" fixed points of structural classification since he/she is "neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or may even be nowhere" (Turner, *The Forest* 236).

Turner attributes ambiguity and paradox to liminal beings as they confuse customary categories and classifications. The attributes of liminality or ritual subjects experiencing liminal or threshold existence are necessarily ambiguous since in this condition, meanings, identifications or the personalities of the liminal subjects are "no longer classified and yet not classified" (*The Forest* 236). They slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in a cultural space and evade any form of fixity and certainty placed upon them through cultural authority or hegemony. Besides providing a detailed study of the liminal nature and experience of ritual processes, Turner provides a detailed and in-depth analysis of liminality by distinguishing it into three forms: ritual liminality, outsiderhood and marginality.

Ritual liminality forms the central element in transitional processes and in any kind of initiation ceremony. It always implies the re-incorporation of the liminal subject into social structure since the transition is just temporary. Unlike ritual liminality, Turner claims that outsiderhood and marginality are semi-permanent or permanent forms of liminal existence. Outsiderhood is a condition in which the individual is either permanently or temporarily "set outside the structural arrangements of a given social system" or he or she voluntarily retreats and set himself apart from "the behaviour of status-occupying, role-playing members of that system" (Turner, *Dramas* 233), usually with no intention or ability to re-integrate. According to Turner, monks, shamans, prophets, hippies and gypsies count as outsiders, because they live life at the boundaries of or opposed to the prevailing social structure permanently.

Marginals, on the other hand, are defined by Turner as simultaneous members of "two or more social groups whose social definitions and cultural norms are distinct from, and often even opposed to, one another" (Turner, *Dramas* 233). The marginal man is a personality type that lives in two worlds at the same time where he assumes the role of a native and a stranger. Though marginals are betwixt and between clearly defined social states like those in ritual liminality, they have no prospect of resolving and stabilizing their ambiguity as "they will never be fully integrated into the one side or the other" (233). For the marginals who live in the edge of both worlds, liminality is not a temporary but a permanent state of existence. It is this aspect of marginal liminality that gains widespread usage in postcolonial studies for understanding the marginal and minoritarian experience of people caught in the in-between or straddling with them two cultures or nations.

Robert Park defines a marginal man in his essay "Human Migration and the Marginal Man" as an outsider who exists on the margin of two cultures and two societies which never completely interpenetrated and fused. He lives and shares intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples. He is never quite willing to break with his past and his traditions but he is not fully accepted in the new society either and hence never ceases to experience feelings of alienation, exile and exclusion from the mainstream culture and orphaned by the process of migration and displacement. He is a mixed blood who lives in "two worlds, in neither of which he ever quite belonged" (892). It is in the mind of the marginal man that "the conflict of "the divided self", the old self and the new" (892) and "the moral turmoil which new cultural contacts occasion" (893) manifest themselves most clearly. An individual experiences inner turmoil and intense self-consciousness in the liminal period because old structures and habits are discarded and new ones are not yet formed.

Unlike Genep for whom the liminal phase is dangerous, Turner attributes a positive trait to the characteristics of liminality. He claims that the middle passage opens up a "realm of pure possibility" (Turner, *The Forest* 236) where ideas and relations are generated and "a stage of reflection" (240) where knowledge is acquired and there is a "change in being" (239) for the individual. Similar to Turner, Robert Park also attributes a positive trait to the marginal as he claims that with the breakdown of traditional society, "energies that were formerly controlled by custom and tradition are released" and the individual is "free for new adventures", even though he or she is "without direction and control" (887). As those in the liminal experience a release from the restraints and constraints to which they have been subjected to, there is an "aggressive self-assertion" and the "overexpression of individuality" (887). They are in a position to

reconsider and investigate civilization or the norms that prevail within the social structure from which they are excluded.

The liminal has its own advantages and autonomy as it ushers in a free, ambivalent space where the perceptions of the world are reshaped and made anew. This aspect of the liminal as a site for innovation and invention will also be later taken up by Homi Bhabha in his arguments about liminality. Liminality represents a phase in the life of an individual, a community, or a nation where any attempts at a settled and fixed assumption of meaning and identity is made impossible because of the contradictions and instabilities inherent in the liminal subject. Turner also attributes to the liminal subjects undergoing a ritual process equality as he perceives their lack of ownership or possessions – “no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows” (Turner, *The Forest* 237) as a factor that renders them equal.

Turner views the middle, transitional passage as crucial for elaborating the nature and importance of various forms of space identifiable in human cultural experience. He arrogates significance to liminality as it is the transformative nature of rituals that makes possible the emergence of border spaces that do away with the idea of structure, giving liminality an arbitrariness that defies classification and fixity. The middle passage is where inbetweenness dominates persistently, during which the ritual subjects experience disorientation and slip in and out of determinate and fixed identity. As they respond and adapt themselves to the changes in their internal as well as external environment, they inhabit an indefinable identity and generally display ambiguous and even oppositional attributes such as ambiguity, individuality, alienation, and confusion.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha theorizes liminality within the context of post-colonialism. He draws on Victor Turner's idea of liminality from the domain of ritual ceremonies in both tribal and industrial societies, appropriating and establishing it as crucial for understanding post-colonial identity and culture formations by adapting it to postcolonial theory and contextualizing the ambivalent and indeterminate nature of the liminal space as a postcolonial condition. Following Turner's assumption about the shifting and ambiguous nature of meaning, Bhabha contends that meanings and identities are always constructed through a negotiation of difference in liminal spaces and are therefore always shifting and changing. Liminality is significant for shedding light on the issues experienced in the gaps or in-between spaces that have become evident across societies and cultures.

Bhabha develops Turner's idea of liminality to explain the dynamic and transformative spaces of change where the nature of culture and identity is shifted and made ambivalent in the modern, largely post-colonial world. Though there is no mention of Turner in *The Location of Culture*, the latter's influence on him can be seen reflected in his discourse on liminality. The betwixt and between where things cease to signify other things for Victor Turner becomes for Bhabha, the third space or the realm of the beyond. The beyond is a transitory, in-between state or space where there is a disruption of time, space and identity. The present is no longer synchronic and cannot be envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and the future. Experience and existence are characterized by indeterminacy, ambivalence, hybridity, potential for subversion and change as "there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction in the 'beyond'" (Bhabha 2). It is "neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past" but "the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (1).

For elaborating his point, Bhabha cites an example of a stairwell as a liminal space, placed in between designations of identity, which becomes the place of symbolic interaction and the connective tissue that constructs the difference between one identity and the other. The temporal movement and passage that the stairwell allows prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. The liminal becomes a space of displacement and disruption, resulting from “the slippage of signification” which becomes the precondition for what Bhabha calls the “articulation of difference” (Bhabha 235). It is this slippage of signification, the interstitial passage between fixed identifications, which “opens up the possibilities of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5). There are always conflictual and ambivalent positions constituting a subject in the third space as the presence of slippage calls into question fixed differentiations and classifications.

According to Bhabha, the beyond is the marginal space of “occult instability” (52) where the “unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty” (214) is encountered because the subject is liberated from being defined in terms of fixity and purity of origins and the claim to a pure and uncontaminated, homogeneous culture is disavowed by the exhibition of its inherent hybridity and heterogeneity.. The logic of binarism through which identities are often constructed – Self/Other, Black/White, Civilized/Savage, Colonizer/Colonized – suffers displacement and dislocation. The binary structure of meaning and signification is destabilized as the third space opens up “a space of interpretation and misappropriation” (135), thereby enabling meanings and symbols of culture the freedom to reject primordial unity or fixity. The third space exposes hierarchical claims and beliefs of the inherent originality or purity of cultures and identities for

their hybridity and lack of homogeneity. It is this engagement with binaries that allows liminal, in-between spaces moments of disruption, resistance, confusion and paradox.

The idea of splitting or doubling, as emphasized by Bhabha, forms an integral part of the theory of liminality. The space of splitting or doubling is “the phantasmic space of possession” (Bhabha 63) that cannot be fixedly occupied by a single subject, and therefore permits the inversion of the space’s inhabitants. It disavows usual process of identifications by presenting to man his alienated image – “not Self and Other but the otherness of the Self” (63) – that is inscribed in his very being. The consequence of the splitting of the Self and the Other unto themselves is such that the doubling, dissembling beings produced are partial – “almost the same, but not quite” (122) – as they are neither sufficient unto themselves and since they exist in two places at once, they are “neither the self nor the other but the disturbing distance in-between” (64).

Man’s image of his own self is tethered to the other as he recognizes his own shadow in the other and an otherness in himself which leads to a splitting of his presence, distortion of his outline, breaching of his boundaries, repetition of his action at a distance, disturbance and division of his being. The site of the liminal is where splitting and doubling occurs because it conjures into existence “something that is absent” and represents a time that is “always elsewhere, a repetition” (Bhabha 73). The space of splitting and doubling incorporates anxiety as part and parcel to the condition of experience in the liminal. This is due to the fact that anxiety is “the affective address of a world” (306) that reveals itself as split or doubled up as it gets caught up in the space in-between two states of existence or culture. The excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry produces an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a partial presence.

A liminal life lead outside a habitual, structured order and hence “nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal” (Said 186) may have its trauma, anxieties and confusion as certainty and familiarity are transformed and replaced with their opposite states. Whether it is forced or voluntary migration, when one leaves one’s own country and settles in a foreign land, a sense of displacement and rootlessness usually follows. The liminal space is where dual concepts like homeliness and unhomeliness and the familiar and unfamiliar coexist and overlap each other. But at the same time, just as Victor Turner and Robert Park’s contentions, Bhabha also attributes a positive trait to the idea of liminality. The liminal beyond is space where the destabilization of fixity and significations makes it possible for the same signs to be “appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhabha 135). While it may entail a moment of restlessness and confusion, it also has its advantage as an “expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment” (Bhabha 6). It is a space of intervention which opens up possibilities for invention and innovation constitutive of newness and creativity.

While confusion and paradox stir in the ambiguous third space, it also gives way to freedom and openness for new forms of existence which comes about when assumed hierarchies, impositions and contradictions become disrupted and ambivalent. It acts as the ground for “elaborating strategies of selfhood which initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (Bhabha 2). In the moments of historical and cultural transformation and from the intersections and interstices of cultural traditions emerge liminal and hybrid life forms who have no prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language. This is expressive of a moment when structures and hegemonies are rejected, heterogeneous spaces are occupied where differences are negotiated, and hybrid and liminal forms of meanings and identities are inhabited and embraced.



The migrant experience can be best explained as the scattering of people and the consequential “gathering of exiles and émigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of ‘foreign’ cultures; gathering at the frontiers. . . . Gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present” (Bhabha 199). The third space emerges from a fusion and intermingling of two disparate cultures and traditions. It is a zone of cultural contact, interaction and exchange representative of the relatedness and interconnectedness of identities existing particularly in-between the margins or interstices as a result of the clash of cultures. It is where engagements and negotiations of cultural difference take place which may be consensual or conflictual, confound the definitions of tradition and modernity, disturbs the customary boundaries between the private and the public and challenge normative notions regarding development and progress.

Such views of liminality and the liminal from the perspective of Victor Turner and Homi Bhabha are relevant to *The Walking Dead* comic series, whose human protagonists and zombies, along with the post-apocalyptic earth itself, are fraught with themes of in-betweenness, collapse of certainty, identity crisis and emergence of hybrid and liminal forms of life. The concept of liminality forms the basic theoretical framework for this dissertation. It serves as theoretical scaffolding for reading *The Walking Dead* and as such, is applied in the comic series to identify the liminal nature of the post-apocalyptic world and situate its post-apocalyptic space, culture and identity as ambivalent, shifting and always in flux. The texts are read in terms of the shifting nature of realities and the evasive, unstable meanings and identities they uncover in the changing new world characterized by its ambivalence and uncertainty.

The world has been confronted with multiple global disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, wars and terrorist attacks. In these fearful and chaotic moments of disasters, what is rendered most visibly is the temporary breakdown of law and order or the

slower than usual response and actions taken by the government. However, this does not imply their complete demolition as they are still there nonetheless. In such cases, survival is often only a matter of waiting until someone official organizes a rescue, predicated on the belief that things will eventually revert back to normal as they always have. But a situation where all institutions and law and order have been eradicated with no hope of retaining normalcy, though often imagined and explored in fictional works and entertainment, is an issue human beings as a species in general are yet to be faced with.

Kirkman portrays the collapse of modern, civilized America, the center of Western civilization and progress, due to an outbreak of a lethal virus that reanimates the dead and transforms them into zombies. He explores a morbid state of existence through an apocalyptic event where the human survivors are bereft of any hope of rescue or help. There is a passage from a structured to an unstructured world as the civilized world is shattered into fragments. A glimpse of America before the apocalypse is provided by Kirkman in the beginning of the first volume "Days Gone Bye", where police officer Rick Grimes and his partner Shane are on duty chasing an escaped prisoner. This pre-apocalyptic scene is representative of the presence and dominance of systems and structures, where human beings are governed by law and order and their lives are rich with resources, clothing, different forms of transportation, medicine, readily available food sources and other necessities and access to unlimited information through mobile phones and the internet. Various levels of protection and security are made available to the public through the police and the military forces. There is a belief in the effectiveness and permanence of the system, and its unfailing ability to reset itself even when it fails.

This is made evident in the early stages of the apocalypse when a group of survivors bands together for safety purposes and awaits rescue from the government. As Rick reunites with

his wife and son and joins the Atlanta survivor group in “Days Gone Bye”, he learns that the group has been camping near the city so that the rescue team will quickly find them “when the government sorts all this mess out”. When Rick suggests that they move their camp some place safer, Shane quickly opposes because he believes their location is “the best place to be for the rescue”. However, as the story progresses, the tiny fraction of human population left have to come to grips with the harsh truth that the system has failed and cannot rest itself. The world they are familiar with is gone and since they are bereft of any help or rescue in the present or future, they protect and fend for themselves.

The post-apocalyptic condition of existence in *The Walking Dead* is reflected in Robert Park’s “Human Migration and the Marginal Man”:

A chaos in which an old civilization is shattered into fragments, its laws set at naught. . . .  
There were no laws because there was no one to administer them or even to remember them. Household and family life had disappeared and all its innumerable ties with it.  
(889)

The human survivors are marooned on a wasteland-like earth overrun by zombies where survival now requires an intense struggle. The zombie outbreak has turned more than half the population of America into zombies. There is a complete breakdown of government, society, infrastructure, law and order, technology and civilization. The ties to their old lives have now been severed; societal bonds, customs and traditions disappear and there is a radical break and disruption from the past ways of living. With the resulting breakdown of household, family and society, the human population left – lost, scared and devastated with loss and so much death surrounding

them – are now marginalized, dispersed in different parts of the country in the pursuit of survival and hunted at every turn by the flesh-hungry undead roaming the earth.

Kirkman's settings or landscapes in *The Walking Dead* are worthy of attention because they possess traits of the "betwixt and between". The post-apocalyptic landscapes are liminal since they resemble "working ecosystems but show telltale signs of decomposition and toxicity" (Rozelle 88). The earth is still the earth despite the damage done to it by the apocalypse. Human survivors are still able to live in it, despite the struggle, and may even thrive in the future. The rivers, lands, forests, roads, buildings and cities (though abandoned) continue to remain. The landscapes mimic lively, healthy functioning landscapes that hold the potential for mankind to rebuild civilization. However, the post-apocalyptic landscapes also betray and distort this mimicry as the other façade that the landscapes constitute is of barrenness, stagnancy and death.

The post-apocalyptic settings in *The Walking Dead* possess no sign of regeneration, growth or newness. The landscapes transform into zombiescapes, where zombies infest and spread their lethal infection with their zombie bites, and phantom lands whose functions have atrophied, where natural resources and diverse species are endangered, if not already eliminated and "only the lowest level of functionality remains" (Rozelle 88). There is a shift from a complex and resource-rich world to a desolate one that lacks the kind of resources and information the survivors require to get their bearings in life. Life is stripped down to its barest, rawest and most minimal form as there is a return to nature and no scientific technologies to render life complex. The days of the human survivors are filled with struggles, toil and yearning as they have to work with remnants of a world that has experienced a catastrophe while running, at the same time, from the zombie predators haunting their every move.

The survivors have to rummage through abandoned houses, shopping complexes and cars for food and other supplies, hunt animals in the woods if necessary and even grow and cultivate their own food, since they are running short of basic necessities required for sustaining life. Farming becomes one of the prerequisites for survival. Any resources left – food, clean water, clothes, basic necessities for survival and even shelters – are limited and therefore fiercely coveted by the survivors who divide themselves into different groups. The post-apocalyptic landscapes therefore embody the dual nature of liminality – “neither one thing nor another; or may be both” and “neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another” (Turner, *The Forest* 236) – since the potential they represent for reconstructing life is disturbed and distorted by the actual struggles and hardships the lands necessitate for survival.

Before the apocalypse, the main protagonists were normal citizens with lives of their own. Rick Grimes was a police officer with a wife and son, Glenn was a pizza delivery boy, Andrea was a clerk in a law firm, Michonne was a lawyer, Tyreese was a professional football player and so on – each with family, friends, properties, job and status of their own with which they identify themselves. However, the apocalypse takes away everything they possess and hold dear. They have to rebuild life from scratch with no status and belongings in their name. In the words of Turner, this renders them equal as they have nothing – “no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows” (Turner, *The Forest* 237). They are stripped of their identities and rendered into mere survivors – no longer differentiated, “hopelessly bereft and half-made” (Bhabha xii) – without home or familial ties.

The post-apocalyptic world is where, in the words of Bhabha, “occult instability” (52) and the “unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty” (214) are experienced. The human survivors are thrown into an ambiguous state of existence because there is a disruption of time. The linear progression of time as moving from the past into the present and towards future is interrupted as there is a complete break from the past while certainty for the future is inverted. Since civilization has collapsed, the human survivors are uncertain and bereft of the means to know the date, time or month they are living in. Though Andrea keeps track of the dates and months, as Rick tells Douglas upon reaching Alexandria in “Life Among Them”, their calendar is highly inaccurate and unreliable.

The past and its ways of living are no longer applicable or practicable in the new world because the dead no longer stay dead but reanimate as mindless, flesh-hungry predators that hunt the living. It is maintained in the story that a zombie bite, though lethal for humans and speeds up the process of transition, does not cause the zombification itself. While Rick’s group settles in a prison in “Safety Behind Bars”, Tyreese’s daughter comes back as a zombie after committing suicide. To prove his suspicions right, Rick ventures back to where they had previously set up camp near Atlanta and digs up Shane’s grave, out of which crawls Shane as a decomposing zombie. They are all infected and fated to reawaken as zombies after death and the only way of escaping this fate is to destroy the brain after death either by a bullet or a sharp object.

As Rick realizes in “The Heart’s Desire”, while being surrounded by death and the undead, they themselves have become “the walking dead” who are living on “borrowed time”. In a panel towards the very end of the same volume, Rick exclaims: “Every minute of our life is a

minute we steal from them!” For the human protagonists, the present is no longer a point in time that moves towards an unknown future with new chances and possibilities. They are stuck in the present, in a state of confusion and curiosity, which will give way to a future that has nothing new in store for them but an exact replica of the present. This is because the future is ordained in such a way that even without being bitten by a zombie, it is just a matter of time before they themselves turn into the zombies they are fleeing from since they have all been infected with the zombie virus.

The post-apocalyptic world opens up a liminal space of existence between the past and future states where living in the present becomes entirely about the unceasing, monotonous labour of survival and escaping death for the survivors. It creates the possibility for the emergence of these complex and transgressive figures of liminality that defy definitive and classificatory systems by embodying both life and death, past and present and human and non-human attributes. It acts as the ground for “elaborating strategies of selfhood which initiate new signs of identity” (Bhabha 2) without an assumed hierarchy or imposed authority. This is expressive of a moment when structures and hegemonies are rejected, heterogeneous spaces are occupied where differences are negotiated, and liminal forms of meanings and identities are inhabited and embraced.

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### 3. Migration, Detachment and Validity of Violence

*The Walking Dead* is a testimony of dislocation, displacement of time and people, and defilement of culture and territorial boundaries in a zombie plagued world. As liminal spaces are produced during the process of cultural, political and social transformations, the post-apocalyptic space is fraught with two contrasting states – the homely and the unhomely, the strange and the familiar. The concept of home as a permanent place of dwelling is problematized and re-conceptualized as a contested, provisional construct. The apocalypse violates home, its sanctity and all that it embodies – private life, family, familial interactions, belongingness, security and comfort from the outside world. Homes in the post-apocalyptic world become strange and unhomely because the old and familiar homeliness they constitute transitions into unhomeliness. The survivors are not homeless but ‘unhomed’ as the unhomeliness that stirs in the homely domestic space makes it incapable of sustaining life.

To be unhomed is “not to be homeless” (Bhabha<sup>13</sup>) but to dwell in a state of incredulous terror as the recesses of the domestic space turn into sites for invasions. Homes either run out of food and other necessities required for survival. They become a site of invasion for zombies who senselessly wander around being stirred by even the slightest sounds and movements as well as for human survivors who always search the houses they come across for food and other supplies they need after fleeing their own homes and communities. In the post-apocalyptic world, the traditional home becomes a public space that strangers pass through and walk in and out of without ever settling in. It is no longer a permanent place of abode for a family or household as the remaining survivors are on the run after having lost their family members to the zombies. It is still a home, but one that lacks homeliness since it no longer assures safety, privacy and comfort

to the survivors when “the borders between home and the world become confused” and “the private and the public become part of each other” (13).

As the concept of home and the homely is disrupted and deconstructed by unhomeliness, migration and displacement become established as one of the most crucial and prominent features in the lives of the protagonists. The post-apocalyptic condition makes migrating and leaving for other places indispensable to the path towards survival. The survivors constantly move from one temporary shelter to another, always on the verge of leaving for somewhere else or on the lookout for a safe dwelling place. They are forced to flee their homes in search of another place and opportunity for a new life as well as to escape poverty and threats of danger and violence that have come to be associated with traditional homes and the homely. They have to fight for the space and place they occupy in this world because they are treading on lands that deny them home, security or certainty – the conditions deemed essential for their existence.

Migration creates a situation where an individual finds himself living in between two diverse cultures – the parent culture and the new culture of the place he migrates to. This in turn transforms him into an “unstable character” or a “personality type” whose behavior is that of a marginal man (Park 893). This becomes evident when the migratory life and experiences of the displaced protagonists are traced. In “Days Gone Bye”, Rick moves from his hometown Kentucky to Atlanta in search of his family. He joins the Atlanta survivor group where he reunites with Lori and Carl. The group consisting of Glenn, Dale, Carol and her daughter Sophia, Andrea, and others camps near the city but leaves due to lack of safety. This move is significant because it marks henceforth the commencement of a wandering, migratory life the group is subjected to lead henceforth for survival.

In the next volume “Miles Behind Us”, after being joined on the road by Tyreese, Julie and Chris, the group finds a gated community with big houses and lawns called Wiltshire Estates where they spend a night. The next place they take shelter in is a farm owned by Hershel, father of Glenn’s future love interest Maggie. After being forced to leave again, they come across a prison in “Safety Behind Bars”, which they rid of its zombie inhabitants and share with some prison inmates as their home. Another community of survivors in Woodbury headed by a man called the “Governor” attacks the prison at the end of “The Calm Before” and in “Made To Suffer”. This results in destruction of the prison and the survivors having to leave their shelter once again. In “Here We Remain”, the survivors that remain go back to Hershel’s farm and after meeting new comers Abraham, Eugene and Rosita, who are on their way to Washington DC, decide to leave with them.

They temporarily take shelter in a church belonging to Father Gabriel, a man they meet on the road in “Fear The Hunters”, but lack of food and resources forces them to continue their journey on the road. They are soon met by Aaron, a recruiter who takes them to a community called Alexandria in “Life Among Them”. Even though Alexandria becomes home for Rick’s group till the end of “All Out War – Part Two”, their security is often contested by attacks from other groups who desire the place for their own. This necessitates a temporary migration from Alexandria to other communities, as seen in “All Out War – Part One”, when the Alexandrian survivors migrate temporarily to another community called the Hilltop to avoid the wrath of a tyrannical group called the Savivors.

It can be derived from these repetitive migrations and movements that there is a continuous attempt to reconnect and relocate the earth as “home” in a hostile and hypercompetitive environment. This highlights the interdependent relationship between human

and nonhuman nature and how place and identity are inextricably bound to one another. When Rick's group discovers Wiltshire Estates in "Miles Behind Us", Lori exclaims to Rick: "This place is perfect. We could start a new life here". In "Safety Behind Bars", as they find the prison Rick exclaims: "Look at all the land inside the fence... Safe, secure. We could make a life here. . . . We can make this work. . . . We're home". As those who survive the Governor's attack on the prison go back to Hershel's farm in "Here We Remain", the same hope is echoed by Dale when he tells Rick that they can work to make the farm their abiding place.

The desire for home in the midst of displacement is evident in the statements uttered by some of the protagonists. In all the journeys they undertake, they are driven by the hope of finding a new home since it is a guarantee of temporary security from the challenging outside world. Migration for them can therefore be interpreted as a confrontation with loss and unbelongingness as well as a continuous search for and approximation of an abiding place or a home. The act of relocating the earth as home requires endless negotiation and compromise on the part of the survivors. The notion of home undergoes deconstruction and reconstruction in the new world they are thrown into. This is evidenced by the varying forms of shelters and sanctuaries that have passed off as a proxy or reincarnated home for them. They are able to create a temporary home base – however transient and provisional – which momentarily provides them some level of comfort and security.

Before finding the prison, the R.V. truck that Dale owns serves as a shelter for Rick's group with which they move around the desolate American land looking for a safe place to dwell. The prison stands as the most outstanding example of home as even the protagonists themselves are surprised by their own settlement in it. Tyreese's statement in "The Best

Defense” is crucial for understanding how the concept of home is redefined in the post-apocalyptic space. He tells a fellow survivor:

Imagine how weird it must be to us to live in a prison... and call it home. We're sleeping in rooms with bars on one wall. All we see all day is fences and bars and we're happier than we've been since this whole thing started.

In “Fear The Hunters”, Rick's group is ecstatic to get off the road for a while and take shelter in a church run by Father Gabriel on their way to Washington D.C. In the survivors' desperate attempt and yearning for the reestablishment of home and belongingness, the concept of home is redefined and given volatility, accentuated by their dismissal of what shapes or sizes home comes in or the material and aesthetic appearances it lacks. As long as it provides a dwelling to the survivors and momentarily shields them from the madness lurking outside, it counts as home.

Migration “involves not a mere movement, but “a change of residence and the breaking of home ties” (Park 886). As the old world and its civilization break down, so do the ties and bonds the survivors have to the land and belongingness. The severing of their roots and ties to the land is maintained from early on in the comic series. Rick Grimes venturing homewards after waking up from a coma in a hospital in “Days Gone Bye” to look for his wife and son can be interpreted as a metaphorical attempt to return to his roots. He finds upon reaching his house that his family is no longer there and that the house itself, like the other houses he has come across, looks abandoned and uninhabited for a long time. His decision to leave it all behind in the hope of finding his family and to escape the zombie predators is representative of the severing of his

roots and ties to the place because from that moment on, he journeys toward strange, unfamiliar lands as a mere, wandering stranger with no ties and affiliations.

The consequence of the survivors' almost unending search for and failure to find homes where they can permanently live is such that displacement and nomadic and migratory periods are normalized and as the story progresses, become a permanent state where the characters dwell in. "The stranger stays, but he is not settled. He is a potential wanderer. That means that he is not bound as others are by the local properties and conventions" (Park 888). It can be seen throughout their journey of survival that Rick's group are strangers to the land they are treading on. The road to survival is reflective of not just the geological but psychological state of unhomeliness and unbelongingness the survivors are perpetually subjected to as a consequence of their ceaseless movements and departures from one place to another. This is displayed most conspicuously through the behavior of Rick's group in Alexandria.

Alexandria Safe Zone is a safe community with gated fences and walls that gives the place a secure and impenetrable appearance. There are two streets of houses with lawns and running water, and since the area runs on an isolated solar power grid, there is access to hot water and electricity. There is also an infirmary where three doctors tend to the sick and needy, an armory slash storehouse where ample amount of food and other supplies are stored along with arms and ammunitions, a meeting house and a school for children. The inhabitants are given work based on their abilities and talents, thereby contributing their share to the community. Within the boundaries of the walls, the original inhabitants have been able to return to the life they remember from the pre-apocalyptic times. However, for Rick's group, life in Alexandria is where they fully exhibit the trait of "a mixed blood. . . . who lives in two worlds, in both of

which he is more or less a stranger” (Park 893) as they continue to struggle with belongingness to the people and their surroundings.

Marked from the rest by their experiences, Rick and his people are unable to bring themselves to behave like normal Alexandrian members with normal, day-to-day preoccupations or even relate to them. The continuous destruction of the shelters they find which forces them to repeatedly migrate and survive in the harsh wilderness in the midst of zombies and other self-centered groups seeking their downfall and coveting all the resources and supplies for themselves have changed Rick’s group. They are unequipped for trivial, everyday matters or thinking about long-term goals and visions for themselves because what they have been doing all this time is not living, but surviving. In a panel midway through “Life Among Them”, as Rick assures Carl that they no longer have to live like before, Carl answers: “What about when we leave here? I don’t want to get used to this – it’ll make us weak. I don’t want to die”.

The sight of perfectly normal people walking about doing their daily work or happy children laughing and playing around makes Alexandria seem like, in Rick’s words, “a different dimension”. Carl has the hardest time adjusting to a seemingly peaceful and secure life. He finds it weird and difficult to sleep on a comfortable bed in an actual house. Bothered by the celebration of Halloween, he tells his dad in a panel towards the end of “Life Among Them”: “The costumes, the candy – everyone walking around, acting like nothing’s happening around them.... I hate this place, Dad. It doesn’t feel real. It feels like everyone is playing pretend”. A few pages later, Andrea also voices the same opinion when she tells Rick: “Everything seems fake. This won’t last... It never does. Enjoy it while you can – and pray it doesn’t make us too soft to survive when it’s over”.

Rick's group have been accustomed to living in the moment quite literally, for they exist alongside and so much closer to death and danger, with no certainty or guarantee for tomorrow. They continue to remain in Alexandria as displaced migrants and outsiders whose main concern cannot move past survival and the act of surviving. Physically and geographically Rick's group may no longer migrate after reaching Alexandria, but their psychological and emotional state continues to resemble that of marginal beings who can never settle as they exist in the liminal in-between. This is evidenced by their incessant readiness to fight for their lives or depart the place at the first sight of danger. Even after settling and adjusting themselves to the new place, since they have been exposed to the true nature of man in the face of danger and the value of food, resources and secure locations, they are mindful of the possibilities of an organized group attacking Alexandria or a herd of zombies tearing through its walls.

They remain cautious, suspicious and untrusting of even the Alexandrian people. On their first night in Alexandria, they secretly sneak out of the houses allotted to them and stay together in one house just in case the original inhabitants turn out to be like the other murderous groups they have been acquainted with in their journeys before reaching Alexandria. Glenn steals guns from the armory which Rick secretly distributes amongst some people within his group so that they can be armed and protected at all times. Rick has already conjured up a secret plan if there ever comes a time when the Alexandrian community forces them to leave. He tells Andrea in a panel towards the end of "Life Among Them": "If they ever try to make us leave we'll take this place from them and make it ours". Their behavior is reflective of a person who cannot settle but is condemned "to live in two worlds, in neither of which he ever quite belonged" (Park 892).

Rick's group has stayed together as a community since the early days of the apocalypse. They live together, look out for each other, survive and fight their way out of death that comes in



the form of zombies and dangerous human beings together. However, what is portrayed most visibly by Kirkman of his human protagonists is the fact that they are strangers to each other. Even though they live together and see each other most of the time, they lack real knowledge about each other because there is no time to figure out their grounds of commonality. They are a group of people who are forced to survive together in a post-apocalyptic environment. They relate to each other because they have a shared experience of trauma and loss. The only thing binding them together as a group is nothing other than their will to survive. Their detached view of life can be comprehended from Lori's statement as she tells Carol in a panel midway through "The Best Defense":

We relate to each other – because we have a shared trauma. We've watched the world we knew crumble around us – together. When we talk – we don't talk about us, we talk about our situation. Just because we like each other and we relate to each other doesn't mean we love each other.

The detached nature of the human survivors is further elaborated through their readiness and the ease with which they are willing to leave other people behind for their own safety. After the Governor and his men launch their first attack on the prison and Rick's group awaits another attack from them, Dale, Andrea, Glenn and Maggie decide to take the kids – Ben, Billy and Sophia – and abandon the prison in order to save their own lives, leaving their fellow group mates to defend themselves. Dale explains to Andrea the necessity of leaving in a panel midway through "Made To Suffer": "It is about our lives and the lives of the children. We can't put everything on the line to protect this place". Similarly Glenn decides to leave Alexandria and take his family – Sophia and his pregnant wife Maggie- to the Hilltop. As Alexandria falls under the tyranny of Negan and his group the Saviors, Glenn exclaims in a panel midway through

“Something To Fear”: “I’m saying we should leave here before they come back. The Hilltop is bigger, it has more people... It’s so much safer. . . . Saviors. . . . They don’t attack there. We’d all be safe”.

The main protagonist Rick acts as an outstanding embodiment of “the detachment of a stranger” (Park 888). While his group awaits another attack on the prison from the Governor and his men from Woodbury in “Made To Suffer”, without anyone’s knowledge except for Carl, Rick secretly hides canned food and supplies only for his family in a backpack just in case they have to escape from the prison in a hurry during the attack. In a panel towards the end of “This Sorrowful Life”, he explains to Lori his realization after committing murder:

It made me realize how detached I’ve become. I’d kill every single one of the people here if I thought it’d keep you safe. I know these people – I care for these people – but I know I’m capable of making that sacrifice. I find myself ranking them, sometimes – looking at them and thinking – who do I like the most – who do I need the most – just in case something happened and I had to choose. I’ve seen so many die already – I have almost no attachment to these people at all anymore... And I could kill any one of them at any moment for the right reasons.

His detachment is further shown when the group settles in Alexandria. As hordes of zombies breach the walls and swarm inside the streets of Alexandria, Rick tries to lead Carl, Jessie, with whom he is romantically involved, and her son out of Alexandria through the zombie masses. When Jessie tells him other families and children cannot be left behind, Rick states in a panel towards the end of “No Way Out”,: “The thing to keep in mind about other people’s children... They’re not our children”. Though he does not mean to be insensitive, he explains

that given the chance, he will always choose his child over someone else's child. Jessie and her son Ron are attacked by the zombies while walking their way out through the streets cluttered with zombies and since Jessie would not let go of Carl's arm while the zombies devour her, Rick, after apologizing to her, hacks off her hand with an axe and immediately grabs Carl to run for an escape.

The detachment of the protagonists is reflective of the trait of a migrant being whose state of existence is permanently situated in the margins between belonging and unbelonging and who "learns to look upon the world in which he was born and bred with something of the detachment of a stranger" (Park 888). The detached and psychological state experienced internally by the characters is manifested through their external actions. Being detached not just from their surroundings and the land itself but from their fellow human beings as well becomes one of the most dominant characteristics of the survivors. It can be interpreted as a defense mechanism to help them cope with their new station in life where danger, death, and loss is all around, along with the incessant need to pack up and leave places and people behind in the pursuit of survival.

Death has always been a part of life since the beginning of time. However, in modern societies today, death is far removed from the average person's life. The industrial revolution urbanized the Western landscape in the nineteenth century and removed most of its workers from the everyday encounters with death experienced in farms and villages. For instance, meat becomes a product far removed from the slaying and butchering of animals that the consumers seldom relate it to the killing process. Burials no longer take place on family property like it did in pre-modern times but in isolated areas, usually away from the residential areas. Even though the realness and impact of death remains unchanged and acknowledged, medicine, scientific

advancements and funeral procedures adopted today make death seem distant as a large part of it is concealed from the modern public.

Even before the apocalypse, death has always been present in the lives of the characters since it is part of the natural order. In the pre-apocalyptic world, the characters were typical modern Westerners living in a developed American society. They must have experienced death of family and friends at some point in their lives, but they were not accustomed to it like they are now in the post-apocalyptic zombie infested world. Andrea states in panel midway through “Miles Behind Us”: “We’re surrounded by death. It’s taken over our lives”. Death is now living and thriving alongside them in such a proximate distance that it can actually be visualized in the form of zombies. It endlessly haunts them at every turn, so much so that they become accustomed to it. This is made evident by Rick’s statement after the death of Morgan in panel towards the end of “Fear The Hunters”: “Here we are again, the never ending cycle of death continues uninterrupted”. It is in this close relationship with death and their treatment and reaction to it that the characters’ detached view of life manifests itself distinctly.

Towards the beginning of the story in “Days Gone Bye”, Rick encounters a rotting corpse for the first time as it falls out from an opening elevator in the hospital and the expression of horror and fear on his face shows how much he is not inured to death. He sheds a tear when he kills a zombie for the first time. In the early days of the apocalypse, panic and fear strike the human survivors whenever they encounter death – be it a literal death or the kind that comes in the form of zombies. When Rick’s group set up camp near Atlanta, Lori, Donna and Carol are attacked by a zombie while they wash clothes in a nearby river. They panic, tremble with fear and are unable to defend themselves. Shortly after this incident, the group is attacked again by

some zombies who wander inside the camping area, leading to Jim and Amy being bitten and the group abandoning the place out of fear and lack of safety.

However, the realization of the necessity to adapt to the new world they are living in prompts the survivors to acknowledge and accept death as part of their lives. Soon after staying in Hershel's farm in "Miles Behind Us", learning how to handle guns for defense becomes mandatory in Rick's group. Similarly, in the prison as well as in Alexandria, they teach each other how to aim and shoot with a gun since the idea is to train everyone to be able to defend themselves during an attack. As the story progresses, due to the defensive skills they acquire, the protagonists are able to face the zombie threat head on throughout their journey instead of cowering in fear at just the sight of zombies. As seen in "No Way Out", the people of Alexandria unite to defend their sanctuary and kill all the zombies that have breached through the walls and terrorize their community.

The act of defending themselves from zombies serves as a metaphor for fighting and warding off death. It is only when the survivors accept the omnipresent force of death instead of running from it that they are finally able to do something about the conditions of life present to them. It becomes a regular chore for the survivors to take turns in clearing their surrounding areas from wandering zombies who get too close to their settlement, as seen in the prison and in Alexandria. In addition to this, other communities such as the Hilltop, the Kingdom and the Saviors' home base keep guards posted at the perimeter to watch over the area and keep track of who goes in and out of their sanctuaries.

Adapting to the new, post-apocalyptic world requires the survivors to become accustomed to death at some point in their lives and hence, as Andrea states at the end of "We

Find Ourselves”, “death doesn’t affect people quite like it used to”. After losing his wife Donna, Allen tells his sons in a panel midway through “Safety Behind Bars”:

Death is a part of your lives now. Your mother died. . . . We’re all going to die. We have to get used that. We have to be okay with that -- We have to expect it, welcome it. Because if we don’t -- It will hurt us a lot.

Death and its effects become normalized and neutralized. If their efforts to ward off death with all their might fail and someone from their group – be it a loved one or a friend – loses his or her life, the ones still alive make it a habit to quickly move on with their life. Living in a fast-paced world where a few seconds of carelessness can turn them into meals for zombies, they detach themselves from death because they believe that dwelling in a morbid state of grief and longing will only slow them down.

The characters’ detachment from death, grief and loss is depicted through various incidents in *The Walking Dead*. Death is a sad but normal incident in their lives. They honour their departed loved ones by remembering and missing them but the ability to quickly move on from grief is considered necessary for survival. This can be seen most notably in “Made To Suffer” when Rick and his family runs for escape during the Governor’s attack of the prison. Lori and their newborn baby Judith are shot dead on the ground but instead of stopping or looking back, Rick tells Carl in a panel towards the end of the story arc: “Just keep your head down and whatever you do – don’t stop running”.

The detachment and alienation of an individual from the world and even his own self, imposed upon him by the post-apocalyptic space and condition of life, exhibits itself in Rick’s son Carl who, from such a young age, has experienced so much horror and loss. In a panel

towards the beginning of “Fear The Hunters”, as the death of his adopted sons Ben and Billy devastated Dale, Carl interprets his grief as a weakness and exclaims to his dad: “All he does is make things harder for us. We’d be better off without him”. Rick’s worry about him is made obvious when he tells Andrea in a panel towards the end of “We Find Ourselves”:

He knows his mother is dead... and he doesn't miss her. He's moved on. It's like he's too strong to grieve. . . . He's been changed so much. It's not his fault, that's what I keep telling myself. He's had to do this... adapt. That's the only way he survives. When we got here, I thought being here, behind the walls... safe... would bring him back to... how he used to be.

Douglas, the leader of Alexandria upon the arrival of Rick’s group, opposes holding a funeral service for a deceased community member. He claims in a panel midway through “Too Far Gone”: “A funeral is an ordeal – we don’t need to be drawing attention...They’ll know Scott’s gone, we’ll all remember him. No need to rub their noses in it. We continue as we always have”. Similarly, the people at the Hilltop refuse to have funerals and graves and instead cremate the departed. Brianna tells Maggie in the beginning of “March To War”: “It was decided a long time ago that we don’t bury our dead. Don’t need the reminder, got that all around us”.

Andrea and Dale’s discussion of death after having lost both their loved ones is a clear portrayal of their detachment. Andrea confesses that she has trouble taking death seriously after her sister Amy died. She tells Dale in a panel midway through “Safety Behind Bars”: “Another one of us is gone, or two, or three... But it’s just death”. Dale explains his feelings: “I’m sad for them. . . . But it doesn’t affect me at all. . . . It’s like I have no emotion left... I’ve used it all up”. In his discussion with Andrea about Glenn’s gruesome death in the hands of Negan, Rick

exclaims in a panel towards the end of “Something To Fear”: “It’s just so sad. Glenn was my friend, and now... and now he’s gone... and we’re not. Same old story, right?”

The nature of death in the post-apocalyptic world is such that it is no longer just an ending of life and the beginning of an afterlife, for those who believe in the existence of the soul and heaven and hell. Death now comes in a different variety where after the end of human life begins another, but in the form of a zombie. The characters go through a period of confusion and disruption of the preconceived notions and beliefs about death or the afterlife they have familiarized themselves with. Hershel is the only character who remains unperturbed since he claims that his faith is stronger than ever because of the apocalypse. In a panel towards the end of “What We Become”, Maggie exclaims after a suicide attempt: “There’s nothing waiting for us on the other side. My father was wrong. There’s no light, no voices... Nothing but darkness. Knowing that this is all we get... No matter how hard it is, I don’t want to end it”.

The uncertainty of what comes next after death and the realization that where they are now is all they have that is certain force them to selfishly value their individual lives. This leads to the characters’ aggressive attempt to separate themselves from death – both dying and the one that comes in the form of zombies. Walls, fences and boundaries are featured prominently in *The Walking Dead*. Throughout the story, the human characters place themselves behind walls, bars and fences of their shelters and in vehicles. The most distinctive depiction of separation and distance is the prison, carefully separated from the world outside with iron bars and three layers of fences, which Rick’s group finds in “Safety Behind Bars”. The protagonists constantly repair and rebuild their fences while in the prison, and after settling in Alexandria, they keep constructing and repairing the walls which isolate and secure the place from the outside world.



They separate and distance themselves either by a physical barrier or space from zombies and later on from antagonistic survivors which is expressive of their attempt to escape death. When they are not on the run from zombies or other survivors, much of their life revolves around establishing, reconstructing and securing the walls and fences of their settlements and marking their boundaries. The desperate need to distance themselves from death leads to the willingness to do whatever it takes to survive and escape death, including criminal and brutal acts of violence. Violence becomes inscribed to the very condition of life and survival in the post-apocalyptic zombie world. This can be seen when the behavior of the human survivors and zombies are taken into account.

Zombies, those undead corpses roaming around in search of living bodies to devour, serve as the most apparent figures of violence. As a viral pandemic spreads across America and possibly the entire globe, the dead are reanimated and transformed into zombies, making existence in-between two states – of life and death, of human and not wholly human – possible. Zombies are an embodiment of horror that trigger mankind's primal fear of corpses and of being eaten alive. Since they have died and come back to life, the beings reanimated are neither fully human nor non-human, but something in between or even both. They are mindless, driven by nothing but their violent, cannibalistic appetite and their insatiable hunger for human flesh.

As discussed in first chapter, mankind's age old fears of the undead coming back to life to haunt the living can be traced back to ancient mythologies and beliefs. However, the dawning of modernity, wider knowledge and religious beliefs comfort mankind with the impossibility of their realness and cause these fears to subside. However, the post-apocalyptic space in *The Walking Dead* creates conditions for these primitive fears which were laid to rest to be reawakened. Zombies parade around in their eerie, repulsive anatomies, trying to gnaw on every

living thing they come across. They are a literal rendition of “everything that ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light” (Bhabha 14) as their insides and interior body parts are exposed through their bodily decay and degradation; instead of remaining dead and buried, they are now walking and haunting the living.

The validity of violence in the post-apocalyptic scenario of *The Walking Dead* is provided by zombies. The human survivors have to resort to violence and kill them in order to protect their own lives. However, zombies themselves are the bearers of violence. Once living and whole individuals, they are now shambling and decaying corpses whose body parts are either missing or falling apart. They are transformed into a faceless, character-less, collective Other whose one and only attribute is their insatiable hunger for human flesh. Theirs is a marked body—torn, rotten and amputated – a perfect inscription of violence. As they seek to take bites out of living survivors, they function as an engine for violence that will further make those human bodies mutilated, undead and marked with violence.

The initial four volumes of *The Walking Dead* emphasize these shambling, marked and mutilated zombies as the main antagonists, the real threat and danger that the human survivors have to contest with in order to stay alive. Except for the character Shane, Rick’s best friend who tries to murder Rick and gets killed in the process in “Days Gone Bye”, the rest of the danger along with death among Rick and his group is caused by the cannibalistic undead. The surviving humans are inscribed with violence as a result of their struggle to survive against the zombies. They start out with whole and unmarked bodies in the story, but over the course of the series, they become fragmented and marked through various impairments and amputations. Many of the survivors have brutally marked bodies that miss a hand, arm, leg, ear, or eye. Their impairment is given an unprecedented visibility in the story.

Those that have been bitten by zombies are marked with amputated bodies. Amputations are performed in order to save their lives. By severing the limb or the arm, they attempt to stop the infection caused by zombie bites from spreading throughout the bloodstream. The first character to be amputated is Allen who gets bitten on the ankle. Though Rick chops off his leg just below the knee cap, he does not survive the surgery and dies in “The Heart's Desire”. Later in “No Way Out”, Morgan's arm is quickly cut off by Michonne when he gets bitten, but even he fails to survive. Despite these two failures, Dale does survive the amputation of his leg in “The Calm Before”. Dale lives and moves about with the help of crutches, he becomes impaired as he is not able to perform physical tasks like the other survivors. Heath is another character who survives an amputation. Due to a bomb explosion in “All Out War – Part One”, his leg has to be cut off in order to stop the zombie infection and his body becomes marked with impairment like the other characters.

*The Walking Dead* starts to change its threat by shifting its antagonists from the story arc “The Best Defense” with the introduction of the Governor of Woodbury. The main threat shifts from the undead zombies to, as Negan states in a panel midway through “March To War”, “the much more dangerous, but slightly less prevalent, living. The thinkers”, that is, the human survivors. At first, the human survivors struggle only against the hordes of flesh-eating zombies, but they soon become most fearful of each other. Zombies do not cease to be a threat, but by comparison to human beings, they become less dangerous as the survivors realize ways to deal and manage them. The surviving humans, who divide themselves into different groups, turn on each other, contest for the remaining resources, provisions, supplies and security and render each other into enemies. While zombies are mindless and their behaviors predictable, human beings are clever, unpredictable and capable of strategy and this knowledge makes them fear each other

all the more. This is evidenced by Rick's statement in a panel towards the beginning of "Miles Behind Us": "I just don't know what anyone's thinking. To me, that's scarier than any half-rotten ghoul trying to eat my flesh".

Besides the violence inflicted by zombies, some of the human survivors begin to bear signs of human-on-human violence which comes to be prominent with the progression of the story. Their bodies are represented as marked, impaired or mutilated, often to the point of being appallingly grotesque and gruesome. They are bearers of the signs of violence that has come to be validated in the zombie infested world they are living in. The main protagonist Rick becomes an outstanding example of a marked body. The Governor, a psychopathic leader of another survivor group, wants Rick to disclose information regarding his group's settlement and location. Angered by Rick refusing to do so and fighting against his tyranny, the Governor chops off his hand. Thus the main protagonist is left one-handed for the rest of the story, placing him at a disadvantage in the struggle to survive against dangerous zombies and humans.

As the Governor cuts off Rick's hand, Michonne jumps on the Governor's back and bites off a large part of his ear. After her having been tortured and raped by the Governor multiple times, Michonne gets her just revenge by brutally mutilating the Governor. Though he lives because of an immediate medical help, he is permanently marked as he misses an ear, one arm, and one eye in addition to other physical trauma he goes through. He bears the signs of violence inflicted upon him as a result of his violence towards others. Though Michonne herself is not physically marked, she associates herself with marked entities by surrounding herself with maimed and mutilated zombies when she appears in front of Rick's group in "The Heart's Desire". When she arrives at the prison where the protagonists stay, along with her she drags two zombies whose arms and jaws have been removed to render them harmless and unable to attack.

Carl suffers the most gruesome impairment among all the other characters in the entire comic series. In an incident where Alexandria is overrun and swarmed with zombies in “No Way Out”, Carl accidentally gets shot on the right side of his eye which leaves him one-sighted and permanently impaired. His impairment does not affect his ability to shoot a gun or fight zombies. However, in “What Comes After”, Carl is saved by Michonne when he almost gets killed by a zombie on his right side that he fails to see because of his blind spot. Andrea is another character who bears a mark of violence on her face. A survivor of an attempted murder from Thomas, she has a scar from a deep cut running across her face and has lost the lobe of one of her ears. Though her disfigurement is much less severe than that of her male counterparts, the fact that she is marked highlights the trend of marked bodies that bear signs of violence in *The Walking Dead*.

In “Fear the Hunters”, Rick’s group encounters a group of cannibalistic human beings. These cannibals kidnap Dale, mutilate and eat his remaining leg, as he already lost one in an amputation to save his life. Rick and his friends do not immediately kill this group as is the case with other people who endanger their lives. Instead, in a twisted act of revenge and punishment, they torture and mutilate them one by one while making the others watch and make their death as slow and painful as possible. Even the protagonists are shocked by their own monstrosity and inhumanity that Rick later recounts with horrification at what they did towards the end of the story arc: “I see every bloody bit. Every broken bone. Every bashed in skull. They did what they did, but we mutilated those people.”

Another incident occurs later “No Way Out” where Carl’s hand is being held by Jessie, Rick’s lover and a later addition to the survivors’ group, as the zombies eat her up while trying to escape the hungry hordes of zombies inside Alexandria. Rick chops off Jessie’s hand to free Carl

from her clutches and escape from the zombies. He later confesses what he did to Jessie in a panel towards the beginning of “We Find Ourselves”:

She was slowing us down, was going to get all of us killed. . . . She was scared, she couldn't let go ... they had her. But she was holding us back. I hacked off her hand. There was no other choice.

The introduction of the character Negan in “Something to Fear” provides a further evidence for the validity of violence in *The Walking Dead*. Negan is a tyrant preying on all the groups of remaining survivors and brutally killing anyone who opposes his demands. When Rick and his group oppose his demands and even murder some of his men, he kills Glenn by smashing his skull into pieces. He creates an atrocious punishment for his multiple wives when they cheat on him by burning half of their partners' faces off with a hot iron, leaving them disfigured and marked. After melting half of Mark's face in a panel midway through “What Comes After”, Negan states: “Mark will forever bear the shame of his actions on his face, all will know what he's done”.

In these instances, it is not the zombies who are disfiguring and mutilating, but the human survivors themselves who mark bodies with signs of violence. In the cases of those who get bitten by zombies, the root cause may be attributed to zombies whereas for the rest, the cause is purely due to the remaining humans' act of rendering each other into life endangering antagonists. The radical transition of the human beings in the post-apocalyptic scenario from being the bearer of violence to the engine of violence is symbolic of the parallel between the human characters and the zombies. Just as the undead monsters, who were people before they died, start off from being victims of violence to its perpetrators, the surviving humans as well

begins their survival journey in a world overrun by zombies as powerless victims and preys who then evolve into ruthless and vicious agency of violence for not just zombies, but other survivors who threatens their life and security.

The very nature of the post-apocalyptic space that brims with violence serve as the catalyst for the transformation of the human characters into a similar state with the zombies – marked and no longer normal. *The Walking Dead* depicts the difficulty that the characters experience with their marked, impaired bodies in their journey of survival. For instance, Rick almost gets killed several times because of his impairment – a missing hand – that hampers with his ability to fight the zombies. Carl, who starts his journey as fully abled but later becomes one-eyed and impaired, is unable to fight zombies in close quarters. However, the characters' marked bodies do not fully disable them, but only impair or limit them to a certain extent. They can still fight and perform tasks like everyone else but with a struggle. They are depicted as characters that adjust, take action and defend their own in spite of their impairment.

The same thing can be said about zombies. Even when their bodies are severely dismembered and mutilated, zombies continue to be a threat as they stagger or even crawl with whatever is left of them and resume their attempt to eat the living. As long as the brain is still intact, zombie heads still try to bite people after they have been severed from the rest of the body, and these bites are enough to kill. Just as the zombies continue wreaking havoc and horrifying the living with their maimed, incapacitated bodies that miss different body parts, the human characters as well are made to go through life fiercely and fearlessly with their torn, wounded, mutilated bodies that forever mark them off from whole and normal bodies.

It is this perseverance and relentlessness, despite impairment and the lack it creates, between the human characters and the zombies they battle that give them an uncanny likeness. The surviving humans' unrelenting aim to stay alive is parallel to the monstrous zombies' unending attempt to consume because despite their marked bodies and the struggles that come with it, both continually move on towards their goal and the only force strong enough to stop them is death. In the midst of countless differences and diverse nature between zombies and humans, it is this parallel factor that makes them transcend the limitations of being just zombies or humans and renders them simply into a collective body as maimed and disfigured survivors on whose bodies are inscribed the signs of violence.



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#### 4. Self and Otherness: Liminal Identity in *The Walking Dead*

*The Walking Dead* tackles the complicated nature of personhood and identity by using the zombie apocalypse as a backdrop. The surviving humans' attempt to establish their concept of the self and the other is not only contested endlessly but redefined through their life-changing experiences in a zombie infested world. Questions about what constitutes a person, to what extent an individual keeps being a person and when he/she stops becoming one are addressed through the characters' behavioral as well as psychological changes and adaptations. The ambivalent nature of the post-apocalyptic world disavows simple, black-and-white definitions and judgments and transplants them with complex and transgressive ones. The shifting nature of personhood and identity in *The Walking Dead* is disruptive for the characters as their perception and understanding of their own selves is continually put under crisis.

Throughout the story, the human characters deploy dehumanizing strategies on zombies in an attempt to differentiate themselves from them and establish their identity as people. Relentlessly claiming that zombies are no longer people, the identity of zombies is pitted against their own. In order to maintain the demarcating line between human and zombie, they articulate and reiterate their differences through the "us versus them" mentality, fixing the zombies as their polar opposite – an epitome of all that is not human. Zombies are cannibals, with no will or consciousness, and most importantly, they are dead. Human beings on the other hand are not savages who consume their own flesh; they have minds and consciousness of their own and lastly, they are very much alive. It is through this construction of differences that the human survivors derive their sense of self and at the same time contain zombies in a fixed definition as the strange, non-human, dangerous "Other".

Zombies are referred to as monsters, savages and things but never as people. The survivors discuss them only in terms of practicalities such as how to kill them, how to avoid them, how their senses work and how to use them for defense purposes. That zombies are no longer the people they were when they were alive is asserted and made abundantly clear from early on in the story through the characters' perspective and treatment of zombies. Rick and Hershel nearly come to blows when it is brought to light that Hershel refuses to kill his zombified neighbors and family and keeps them in a barn. Rick's statement in a panel midway through "Miles Behind Us" is expressive of the common stance taken by the survivors:

We're putting them out of their misery, and keeping them from killing us! Those things aren't human. They're undead monsters. . . . That thing in your barn is . . . it's not your son. They're dead. Before they get back up – before they try to eat you – they die. You said you saw your son die. He's dead. Those things are rotting corpses with pieces missing . . . They're not sick people . . . They're dead.

The events that follow this heated argument bear out Rick's contention that zombies are not people as the zombies in Hershel's farm escape and kill his son and daughter, prompting him to accept the necessity of killing them. Even in "The Heart's Desire", the zombies left alive in the unused parts of the prison once again prove to be a threat and danger as they escape and attack the humans. However, the characters' claim that zombies are not people, along with the fixity placed on their differences, is betrayed by their own actions towards them. There is a blurring of distinctive lines maintained between zombies and people as the human characters, despite the uncompromising attitude they pretend to have towards the zombies, empathetically recognize that zombies as partial people who might be suffering, cursed to walk the earth mindlessly and hungrily.

Incidents such as Rick's first killing of a zombie in the beginning of "Days Gone Bye" where he sheds a tear, or when he shouts "What the hell is wrong with you?!" at the zombies who brutally devour his horse in the heart of Atlanta city and Hershel's refusal to kill zombies in "Miles Behind Us" because he believes in the possibility that "these things could wake up tomorrow, heal up and be completely normal again" show how zombies are still considered as possessing human traits. Rick's use of the phrase "put them out of their misery" – the killing of zombies in order to liberate them from unsolicited misery – bears resemblance to mercy killing. This contests the survivors' notion of zombies as just unfeeling monsters since in a subtle and twisted way, the survivors still express sympathy towards the zombies they kill.

After discovering that they are all infected even without a zombie bite, Rick journeys back to Shane's grave at their first camping site and digs him up. He goes out of his way to kill zombified Shane because he cannot bear the thought of him being alive in his grave. Before shooting him in the head in a panel midway through "Safety Behind Bars", he states:

When I realized you might be at the bottom of that hole, alive – or whatever – I couldn't stop thinking about it. I couldn't sleep – knowing you were down there. . . . You were a good man, Shane. I don't know why you did what you did...but you were a good man. . . . I had to set things right.

His actions and rhetoric further undermines the outspoken claim that zombies are no longer people since the urge to mercifully release Shane from his miserable condition implies recognition of the partial humanness of the zombified Shane on Rick's part.

Among the surviving humans, there are some who harbor a more nuanced perspective regarding zombies; they move past the monstrosity of zombies to draw out remnants of their

human attributes. This is evident when Jesus asks Rick in a panel towards the end of “All Out War – Part Two”: “You think they’re laughing at us?” He wonders if they are the butt of a joke to the zombies because in the midst of being hunted by zombies who are always there, lurking around every corner and waiting to kill them, they kill and massacre each other thereby making it easier for the zombies to kill them.

A parallel attitude from the characters that humanizes zombies can be seen in Carl and Sophia. As they watch the zombies lurking outside the prison fence midway through “The Heart’s Desire”, Sophia declares that she is not scared of them anymore and instead feels sorry for them because “they look so sad”, to which Carl also agrees. A couple of pages later, when Axel and Hershel plow the prison yard for farming, Axel muses about the zombies:

I think about them all the time. Who they were – what they did before they died. . . . I think about what jobs they had or if they had any family, and if so, where they went or what happened to them. Are any of them family members who have stuck together? Any of them out there know each other before they died? I mean, those things all used to be people. Every single one of them had lives. . . . I bet most of them were good people, like you or me. . . . I wonder what it felt like when they died. I wonder what it was like to start turning into one of them – to come back. I wonder if its hurts. I bet it hurts real bad. That’s why they moan so much.

*The Walking Dead* depicts some characters for whom the distinction between zombies and humans has completely broken down. The Governor of Woodbury has a zombie daughter whom he keeps chained up and regularly feeds with human flesh. Combing her hair, talking to her, disciplining her and his response, “I’m sorry, honey. What’s got you so upset? You haven’t

tried to attack me in months. . . . I raised you better than this”, when she attacks him in a panel towards the end of “The Best Defense” indicate that he treats her as he would a human daughter. A similar reaction to the zombification of a loved one is seen in the character Morgan. It comes to light that he refuses to kill his zombified son Duane and explains to Rick why he has been feeding him human flesh in a panel midway through “What We Become”: “He’d look at me differently after – like he did before – like he knew me. I just wanted that. I’m his father... I wanted him to act like he knew who I was”.

The main protagonists discover towards the beginning of “Safety Behind Bars” that they are all bound to reanimate as zombies even without a zombie bite when Julie, Tyreese’s daughter, comes back as a zombie after committing suicide. Tyreese, refusing to accept her death and devastated and overwhelmed with loss, begs Rick not to shoot his “baby girl” and pleads:

She’s okay! Let me talk with her. We’ve never tried that! We’ve never even tried to reason with them. Maybe – if I talk to her long enough, she’ll begin to understand again.

If she starts to understand then she – then my baby girl won’t be dead anymore.

Even though they acknowledge the death of their loved ones and their zombification, blinded by grief and the clarity of their conscience clouded, these characters cannot accept their zombified children as soulless monsters with no identity or history; they continue to see them as the humans they once were, thereby deconstructing completely the line that divides what is human and what no longer is.

These instances, along with the earlier ones provided, are evidence to the fact that zombies are continued to be perceived, as least partially, as the people they used to be despite claims to the contrary. While their bestial and monstrous side are emphasized and repeatedly

portrayed throughout the story, this very portrayal is disrupted by rare but lucid moments where any semblance of human elements left in the zombies is drawn out. In such moments, the human characters defy and contest their own claim to a total lack of “human” aspect in zombies, thereby perceiving them not just as monsters but sympathetically and empathetically as unfortunate victims upon whom tragedy has befallen. The horror yet pitiable condition of zombies lie in the fact that they used to be people, just like the survivors.

*The Walking Dead* provides an even more insightful depiction regarding the shifting nature of distinction between zombies and humans through its human characters such as Jim, Allen, Dale, Morgan, Denise and Doctor Stevens who go through a process of zombification. As these characters do not die immediately from a zombie bite, they helplessly suffer the slow and painful advance of the zombie infection. After being bitten, they grow pale and weak with an extremely high fever and lose either their sanity or consciousness by the time they reach their death. Except for Jim and Dr. Stevens, the other characters are shot in the head as they die since they choose literal death over coming back as zombies.

As the characters undergo the process of transition, they are still humans with a sane mind of their own. However, “human” is no longer a classification fully representative of who or what they truly are. They are no longer just humans since two forms of life inharmoniously coexist in their bodies, where one is bound to eventually take over the other. The transitioning process is where a person embodies both classifications of a human and a zombie as he is “neither this nor that, and yet is both” (Turner, *The Forest* 237) and is placed in the margins between life and death.



The character Jim prefers the zombie life and asks the group towards the end of “Days Gone Bye” to leave him in the woods after being bitten, saying, “When I come back . . . maybe I’ll find – find my family . . . Maybe they c-came back too. Maybe we can be together again”. Doctor Stevens also makes a similar choice to become a zombie after being bitten towards the beginning of “This Sorrowful Life” as he says, “I’m not dying . . . Think of it scientifically . . . I’m just . . . evolving . . . into a different . . . worse life-form. I’ll still exist . . . in some way”. Jim and Doctor Stevens’ take on zombie life contradicts the surviving humans’ notion about zombie life as a life of dreadful mindlessness and an unfeeling, unending hunger for flesh that makes not coming back at all a more preferable choice. Jim hopes to be reunited with his family and for Doctor Stevens, becoming a zombie will not erase the fact that he still exists. Their decision to spend their afterlife as zombies harbors hope, or semblance of it, since they perceive zombie life as not the end but the beginning for a new kind of existence.

In “Days Gone Bye”, Rick discovers while trying to obtain more guns that the living can blend in with the zombies and move undetected among them by covering themselves with zombie blood and body parts. This plan nearly proves lethal when the rain washes their disguising scent away. Rick later reuses the same disguise method when he tries to escape with Carl and two other members of the community as zombies swarm inside Alexandria. Their disguise works until the two new members panic and reveal their identity to the zombies. The survivors realize that to survive among the zombies who have infested every nook and corner of their world, they themselves must become like one. In order to move freely among the undead zombies, they must momentarily transform themselves into one by mimicking and blending in with them.

The same disguise is employed by the character Michonne. Before arriving at the prison, she travels with two zombies whose lower jaws she has removed to stop them from biting. Keeping them in chains and dragging them along behind her through a sea of zombies, she uses them as a camouflage that covers up her human scent and keeps other zombies at bay while she travels. However, Michonne goes further by even taming the zombies she travels with, as she says in a panel towards the beginning of “The Heart’s Desire”, “These two stopped trying to attack me a long time ago. My boyfriend and his best friend”. Some information about zombie psychology is provided by the Governor in “The Best Defense” as he reveals that well-fed zombies are happier and less likely to attack. These developments complicate the notion that zombies are empty shells operating on the hunger instinct alone as Michonne and the Governor prove that they can be tamed and disciplined.

The analogy between zombies and humans is drawn out most obviously by the Governor in a panel midway through “The Best Defense”. Upon watching zombies feeding on human flesh, he exclaims:

They just don’t stop – they’re resilient. They eat until it’s gone and then they’re content. . . . They’re just us – they’re no different. They want what they want, they take what they want and after they get what they want – they’re only content for the briefest span of time. Then they want more.

He notices the parallel between zombies’ unrelenting and insatiable hunger for flesh and the remaining humans’ never ending greed and selfishness for the things they desire. This analogy blurs the demarcating line established between zombies and humans by highlighting their

similarities instead and presenting anomalies that urge questioning of the assured claims made by Rick's group regarding their differences.

To establish the identity of the self is to "be called into being in relation to an otherness"; it is always related to the place of the other as it demands reaching "outward to an external object" (Bhabha 63). One of the most interesting issues that *The Walking Dead* explores is the act of 'othering' – the human characters' rendering of themselves into an "other" – in order to establish their own identity. The recurring attempts of the survivors to define themselves while differentiating each other echo throughout the story. This is carried out in ways that maintain their humanity, usually at the cost of dehumanization of others. The survivors contrast their humanity with the savagery and inhumanity of everybody else, thereby fixing them at the polar opposite as the fearful, untrustworthy "other" with whom they can never co-exist or reconcile. This is especially manifested through the main protagonists and their encounter with "other" kinds of people in their journey for survival.

In the early days of the zombie apocalypse, the survivors reflect a 'safety in numbers' mindset as those who happen to stay together or run into each other band together to form survivor groups for mutual aid and protection. The main protagonist Rick and his group are introduced to few, isolated and usually harmless survivors. Constantly wondering if there are other survivors out there or not, they are initially open and welcoming to the strangers they stumble upon in their journey. In "Days Gone Bye", Rick is warmly welcomed into his current group by the members, Hershel is generous and welcoming to Rick's group when they first reach his farm in "Miles Behind Us" and when Rick, Glenn and Michonne spot a helicopter crashing in a nearby forest during their settlement in the prison in "The Best Defense", they direct themselves towards the trail of smoke in the woods hoping to find more survivors.

With the progression of the story, Rick's group becomes acquainted with other survivor groups and communities with diverse personalities and conflictual values and interests. As the remaining humans realize the permanence of their living conditions, with danger ceaselessly mounting in the form of zombies, food and other resources slowly diminishing and the knowledge that production of new ones is nothing but a pipe dream, the dark side of human nature such as selfishness, greed and immorality takes over human beings and alters their behavior completely. With the absence of a totalizing force of authority in the post-apocalyptic scenario, the survivors are liberated from the grasp of law and order. Survival is therefore based more upon needs as defined and appropriated by different people and unbounded by pre-existing laws and norms of the past.

The consequence of this is that in the process of living in their own terms and enacting their own version of laws, violence comes to be validated and deeply inscribed to the conditions of life. It is made intrinsic to the very nature of the characters by necessitating and normalizing it as significant part of the survival process. Zombies are vehicles for repetitive enactment of violence on the living body; their existence and being is inscribed with and built around infliction of violence. Survival for humans requires killing them and hence the necessitation of violence. No hesitation is shown in killing them as they are seen only in terms of the horrors and death they embody. The zombie threat becomes more or less normalized as the survivors realize their capability to deal with the zombies who will seemingly be there always as a dangerous threat.

The surviving humans become self-centered savages with only their interests and values in mind. As they turn on each other and make each other enemies, human-on-human violence comes to be largely accepted and appropriated as part of the post-apocalyptic conditions for life

as well. There is a total disregard for others as they naturally place their needs and survival above the rest. They are willing to resort to whatever means necessary to get what they want, as Morgan states in a panel towards the end of “What We Become”: “People come around here – they’re looking for supplies – and they’ll kill you to get it. Whatever you have, they want it”. The longer they survive, the more they become fearful of each other because they have become not just the victim but also the engine of death. This is testified by Lori statement in a panel towards the beginning of “The Heart’s Desire”: “The monsters outside are one thing but any of the people in here with us could cause us just as much harm any time”.

The survivors’ fear of each other is justifiable when instances such as the attacks on Rick’s group from other communities are taken into consideration. The Governor of Woodbury leads his people into attacking the prison where Rick’s group settles because he desires to possess everything they have – guns, food, bullets, vehicles, tools, other weapons and the security that the prison gates and walls offer. Similarly, Rick’s group is introduced to a group of survivors called the Saviors in the beginning panels of “Something To Fear”, whose leader, a ruthless tyrant named Negan, uses violence and murder to force other communities to pay half of their resources and supplies as tribute to him. With death constantly looming on the horizon and man’s basic necessities running out, the surviving humans expose to each other their real nature and capabilities in the face of danger.

After being forced out of the prison by the Governor’s attack, Rick’s group is made aware of how much the post-apocalyptic conditions of life have changed human beings. The initial curiosity Rick’s group harbors about other survivors and the joy in finding them become transplanted with fear and suspicion of unknown strangers and a wish for their existence and shelters to go unnoticed. This is made abundantly clear by instances where they meet new

survivors while being on the road looking for a safe dwelling place. In “Here We Remain”, when Abraham, Rosita and Eugene approach the farm where Rick’s group take shelter looking for supplies, Andrea immediately points a gun at them and warns them not move any closer. She orders Glenn to get the strangers’ weapons and states, “We’re not taking any chances”.

As Father Gabriel Stokes’ introduction to the main protagonists in the beginning of “Fear The Hunters” coincides with the disappearance of Dale and Andrea’s realization that they are being watched, he is perceived as untrusting and suspicious, with even an accusation from Andrea who exclaims: “You! This is all connected! You show up, I start seeing people watching us – Dale disappears!” Their suspicion and distrust for others is shown even more elaborately when Jesus, a member of the Hilltop community who aims to establish trade relations with Rick’s group, shows up towards the beginning of “A Larger World”. His innocent disclosure that the Hilltop community has about two hundred people is misinterpreted by Rick as a threat for an attack. After knocking him out and tying him up, Rick awaits an attack on Alexandria by Jesus’ people. He goes so far as even checking the surrounding areas of Alexandria with Abraham and Michonne for traces of people.

The protagonists’ fear for strangers and the extremity of violence and crimes they are capable of committing leads them to draw a distinctive line between them and the strangers they encounter, thereby rendering the latter as the oppositional others. The others are “overdetermined from without” (Bhabha 61) by Rick’s group. This is made evident when Aaron, worrying if Rick is being too harsh and suspicious with Jesus and the Hilltop in “A Larger World”, warns him not to “make them enemies, turn into what you’re scared they already are”. While they claim to be humane, ethical and civilized, the others are assumed as selfish, inhumane and savage people. It is from this that their sense of selfhood is constantly derived and renewed. Unlike these

monstrous humans, they convince themselves that humanity and moral conscience is still not lacking in them.

This is made evident in “Safety Behind Bars” when Rick is perplexed by what to do with Patricia who had previously tried to free the serial killer Thomas from being locked up. He states at the end of the story arc: “It’s not like we can beat her or just lock her up – we’re not animals.” Similarly, towards the end of “The Heart’s Desire”, some characters voice their oppositional opinions regarding the ironical “You kill, you die” rule – murder those who murder people – Rick establishes in the prison. Tyreese tells Rick: “We’ve got to retain our humanity. . . . We are trying to re-establish life – as it was. That’s our goal. We don’t want to be savages”. However, the protagonists’ claim of being different from the others goes through a period of crisis and disruption as their humanity and humanness – the very base from which they derive their differences – is too often contested and put on trial by their circumstances.

The surviving humans’ fear and othering of each other becomes most evident when Rick’s group becomes acquainted with the Woodbury group. After Rick, Glenn and Michonne escape the Governor’s imprisonment and discover that Martinez intends to lead the Woodbury group into the prison where they settle, Rick runs Martinez down with an RV truck. As he lies on the ground, Martinez claims that his people “deserve to be safe, too” and that he will bring only the good people to the prison and exclude the Governor. However, Rick, seeing them as enemies, exclaims towards the end of “This Sorrowful Life”: “You people are a poison – a plague worse than the dead. . . . You’re animals!” As he strangles him to death, he ironically shouts, “Don’t you know what people are capable of?!” to which Martinez responds with a struggle, “I think I’m getting – the idea”.

The Governor is psychopathic tyrant of a neighboring community of survivors called Woodbury. His villainous and sadistic side, as is evidently seen in his feeding of zombies with the flesh of strangers and the violent tortures he inflicts upon Rick and his friends, is hidden from most of the people in Woodbury. In order to convince the people to attack the prison and that their fight is for a just cause, he paints Rick's group as vicious, cold-blooded killers seeking to destroy Woodbury. In a similar rhetoric used previously by Rick, he calls Rick's group "ruthless, inhuman savages", pins the death of Doctor Stevens on them and even shows the people Martinez's severed head as he says in the beginning of "Made To Suffer", "I just want to make you all completely aware of the kind of people we're dealing with . . . Monsters!"

The parallel language between Rick and the Governor when they describe each other's group highlights the ease with which humans in the story render themselves as the diabolical other through dehumanization, as seen in their metaphorical use of animals and monsters to describe their fellow human beings. They turn each other into enemies and massacre each other amidst the zombies surrounding them. The attempt to adapt themselves to the new world teeming with violence and danger leads to justification and normalization of the acts of violence and murder they so easily resort to as self-defense. This is made abundantly clear when Rick explains the necessity of killing as the only way to stay alive in a panel midway through "What We Become":

We're doing whatever it takes to survive and to help those around us survive. . . . Those who weren't able to go from law abiding citizens to stone-cold killers . . . Those are the ones shambling around out there trying to eat us.



However, the “necessary” violence the human survivors inflict upon zombies and each other is disruptive to their self-perception and constantly calls into question their identity. In *The Walking Dead*, the space for defining the self or the other is a “space of possession that no one subject can singly or fixedly occupy”, and therefore it permits an “inversion of roles” (Bhabha 63). The carefully constructed claim made by Rick’s group of being people with humanity and morality is disavowed as their subversive acts contrary to their claim suggest the lack of difference between them and the others. The violence and atrocity they inflict on their enemies to protect the group makes them resemble the very people they contest with and thereby making “the inversion of roles” a reality in the post-apocalyptic scenario. This is made evident by Rick’s statement in a panel towards the end of “The Heart’s Desire”:

We already are savages. . . . The second we put a bullet in the head of one of these undead monsters – the moment one of us drove a hammer into one of their faces – or cut a head off. We became what we are.

By addressing how the act of killing, be it a zombie or human, is corrosive for the characters’ humanity and identity, *The Walking Dead* portrays the narrow line that divides humanity from inhumanity and civility from savagery, with its characters ceaselessly shifting back and forth between the two. The distinctive line is too often blurred by the characters’ own contradiction of the values and humanity they adhere to in an attempt to stay alive. The question of what becomes of the human characters when they do inhumane things is explored throughout the story. Since their criminal and inhuman actions destabilize the fixity of differences they attribute to themselves contrary to the rest, there is reiteration and rearticulation that they are still

good people despite their actions in order to convince themselves that they are still human. This is evident in the beginning panel of “Life Among Them” when Rick tells Carl:

I do things . . . a lot of bad things, to help you and all the other people in our group. . . . That’s the world we live in now. . . When we do these things and we’re good people . . . they’re still bad things. You can never lose sight of that. If these things start becoming easy, that’s when it’s all over. That’s when we become bad people.

A similar statement is uttered in “Too Far Gone” when a group of armed survivors gathers at the gated entrance to Alexandria and prepares to attack the community. The leader of the group states in a panel towards the end of the story arc, “We’re good people, we are, but we’re desperate and we’ll do whatever it takes to make you let us in”, while another person warns the Alexandrian community to open the gates before they have to kill them. Negan, one of the worst and atrocious villains introduced in the comic series, claims that the Savivors are “really nice people” and that he can be “reasonable”. He slaughters a man who tries to rape Holly midway through “All Out War – Part One” as he prohibits rape and makes a contradictory statement right after by saying, “I really want you to understand... we’re not monsters”. In a panel midway through “What Comes After”, he tells Rick: “I don’t want to do the bad things I do. I only do them to set boundaries, to make people aware of the consequences of their actions. I take no joy in those deeds”.

The human characters justify their criminal acts as a necessity imposed on them by the post-apocalyptic world. However, the very nature of their justification is fraught with contradiction because their claim to being good people is juxtaposed and undermined by their actions. For maintaining their humanity or what is left of it, they attempt to distance themselves

from their criminal acts and even go as far as blaming the victims for instigating their actions. For instance, Carl kills Ben because he poses a threat to the group's safety. Confessing to Rick in the beginning of "Life Among Them", he says, "I didn't want to kill Ben. I had to". Carl considers Ben as a friend, but his dangerousness forces him to murder him even though he does not want to.

The act of victim blaming is made especially clear in the character Negan. In a panel towards the end of "All Out War – Part Two", Negan blames Rick for the murders he has committed as he exclaims, "I don't really enjoy killing. You made me do it. Don't make me do it again". He even ventures further than the rest and blames Lucille, an inanimate baseball bat wrapped in barbed wires, for all his violent crimes and murders. He claims that Lucille is a lady always thirsty for blood, violence and revenge while he himself does not enjoy doing any of them. Similarly, Rick justifies his hacking off of Jessie's hand that clutches Carl when zombies attack her as an act that she necessitates and put the blame on her instead. He later recounts in the beginning of "We Find Ourselves": "I did what I had to do. What she made me have to do..."

*The Walking Dead* brims not only with danger and violence, but also with madness and insanity. The human characters, whose minds and actions are fundamentally changed in the wake of the zombie apocalypse, drift back and forth between clarity and insanity. Dale's explanation of Rick as someone who "bounces back and forth between sickeningly optimistic and completely enraged" in a panel towards the end of "Safety behind Bars" serves as a perfect example. The consequence of the traumatic events and losses that remain primary in their consciousness is depicted through instances that scatter throughout the comic series. Instances such as Rick's trauma because of the murder of Lori and baby Judith which leads to his psychotic telephone

conversations with his dead wife, Michonne's recurring conversations with her dead boyfriend, and Andrea speaking to Dale's hat after he has departed provide a glimpse of their inner turmoil and the cracks in their sanity despite the seemingly normal appearance they exhibit.

In the post-apocalyptic scenario, as stated by Douglas in a panel midway through "Life Among Them", "People who were keeping themselves in check, living by society's rules... they no longer had any checks and balances. The crazy, free to roam, unchecked – a world gone mad". The serial killer Thomas, a prison inmate who resides with Rick's group in the prison, murders Hershel's two daughters by cutting their head off for no apparent reason and later attempts to kill Andrea. Horrified by the total lack of humanity in his actions, Rick proposes capital punishment by hanging him. He ironically states in a panel towards the end of "Safety Behind Bars": "If we're going to keep him from killing anyone else, we're going to have to kill him".

Similarly, in "Fear The Hunters", Rick's group grapples with one of their very own – Ben, the boy who killed his brother for no reason. Though Ben initially seems relatively normal, with the progression of the story, a glimpse of Ben's emerging madness is portrayed when he vivisects a cat in the end of "What We Become". His statement to Andrea after murdering Billy, "Don't worry, he's going to come back. I didn't hurt his brains", shows that he has no grasp on the difference between right and wrong and as Michonne puts it, "He's a boy who doesn't understand murder". The threat that Ben poses to the safety of the group changes him fundamentally in their eyes. As claimed by Abraham, Ben is "simply a burden – a liability" since they are not therapists and therefore cannot help him.

Like the situation with Thomas, they believe killing him to stop him from killing others is the only solution, but they are torn by their affection for Ben and hesitates as he is only a child. Therefore Carl, another child who has grown up over the course of the story, understands what needs to be done and kills Ben in secret. When Rick asks his reason for killing Ben later in the beginning of “Life Among Them”, Carl answers: “Because it needed to be done. And no one else would”. In the early part of the story, Carl had also killed Shane, a man who tries to kill his father, by fatally shooting him. He justifies his murder later on in “Safety Behind Bars” to his mother, saying, “I killed Shane before he killed anybody”, and Lori agrees that he did the right thing.

Other mad and sadistic characters whose horrifyingly inhumane behaviors make them seem mentally ill or unstable are acquainted with the main protagonists. The Governor of Woodbury is the perfect example for this. In “The Best Defense”, it is brought to light that the Governor provides an entertainment to his people by staging fights where contestants battle each other in the presence of chained up zombies. He feeds the zombies with the flesh of strangers he has killed and even feeds his zombie daughter Rick’s hand which he has cut off. He keeps the head of everyone he has killed in a glass container and pretends it is a television, as there is a scene at the end of the story arc where he sits in front of it and says to himself, “Fifty-seven channels and nothing on...” His very own people kill and leave him to be devoured by zombies towards the end of “Made To Suffer”.

Another character that illustrates the inhumanity and madness of human beings in *The Walking Dead* is Negan. He is a violent, inhumane, self-proclaimed leader of the Saviors and the new world who kills those who do not abide by his “new world order”. After Rick’s group

slaughters some of his men who try to forcefully take their resources and supplies, Negan as a punishment kills Glenn by bashing his skull with a baseball bat. He burns people's faces with hot iron as punishment for their crimes. When Spencer tries to convince him that Rick is incapable of being the leader of Alexandria midway through "March To War", he tells Spencer that he has no guts and brutally slashes his stomach open. As Spencer's insides fall out, he exclaims with no remorse or sympathy, "Oh, how embarrassing! There they are! They were inside you this whole time. You did have guts".

Rick's group joins forces with other survivor communities in an effort to remove Negan from their lives. The united communities of Alexandria, the Hilltop and the Kingdom wage a relentless war against Negan and the Savivors. The same attitude that Rick's group has harbored towards murderous madmen in earlier instances resurfaces again as the survivors plan to kill Negan. This is made abundantly clear when Eugene tells Rick in a panel towards the beginning of "All Out War – Part One", "We should save lives, not take them. But now I realize this is the only way to do that... to preserve life. The bad ones have to die". The ironic and contradictory nature of the characters' claim to humanity is constantly highlighted through these instances where their response to murder subverts the very reason why they oppose it in the first place.

The protagonists' aggressive efforts to distinguish themselves as non-killers and people with humanity disrupt and erase the distinctive line that divides them from the killers. Rick states in a panel midway through "A Larger World", "After everything... I feel like we'd have a hard time finding anyone more dangerous than we are". In killing those who are dangerous and murderous, they themselves turn into the very people they abhor – killers. Their crimes and murders, though justified as a mandatory and defensive act on their part, erode their humanity, as

they suggest a lack of it thereof, and their identity as good, civilized people, since they resemble lawless, uncivilized savages.

The “conflict of “the divided self”, the old self and the new” (Park 892) is manifested in the main protagonists because the “bad but necessary” things they do put them in a permanent state of moral and mental turmoil where they constantly question if they are still human or not. They are now confronted by “the idea of man as his alienated image; not self and other but the otherness of the self” (Bhabha 3) which disturbs and sometimes even terrifies them. The first glimpse of this issue is seen at the end of “Days Gone Bye” when Carl sobs after shooting Shane, saying, “It’s not the same as killing the dead ones, Daddy”. He confesses that he gets sad whenever he thinks about what he did to Shane out of a claimed necessity. After killing Ben, he cries every night out of missing him and also guilt as he is aware that his dangerousness does not erase the fact that it is wrong to kill him. The mental and emotional toil that his crimes have on him is clearly revealed in a panel midway through “What We Become” when he tells Rick: “I’m scared if you knew the thoughts I had sometimes that you’d hate me...”

The storyline of Father Gabriel, whom Rick’s group meets in “Fear The Hunters”, highlights another kind of mental turmoil brought forth by inhumanity or moral lapse. He recounts that he had locked the doors to his church and left his congregation outside to die when the apocalypse happened. His action highlights how inaction and the failure to show humanity and sympathy can make a person monstrous and inhuman. He is not a killer in a direct sense like Rick and his friends since he never commit the act, but he is a killer nonetheless as he leads his congregation to death. The mental turmoil and guilt he experiences because of his selfishness and failure to protect his own people torments him, as reflected when he tells Rick in a panel

midway through the same story arc: “I know what I did. I know what I deserve. Kill me. Please. I’ve suffered enough – I want you to do it”.

Throughout the comic series, the main protagonist Rick often laments that he has drifted too far away from the man he had believed himself to be. Killing Martinez makes him worry if he has lost his humanity and morality. He tells Lori in a panel towards the end of “This Sorrowful Life”:

I used to be a trained police officer – my job was to uphold the law. Now I feel more like a lawless savage – an animal. I killed a man today and I don’t even care.... Does that make me evil?

The law maker and upholder can no longer see the law. The desensitizing effect of killing his fellow human beings disturbs Rick’s ideas about who he is. The violence and inhumanity he shows towards others, despite his own claim that his actions are correct, suggests how much he has changed as he violates the code he had sworn to uphold when he became a police officer.

Rick’s definition of bad people as those who easily kill without remorse in contrary to good people like them who kills only out of necessity and with guilt, as seen when he tells Carl in the beginning of “Life Among Them”, “If these things start becoming easy, that’s when it’s all over. That’s when we become bad people”, becomes expressive of Rick and his group’s behavior. After encountering dangerous, inhumane people, they resemble the very ones they contest with since committing murder and other vicious crimes begin to come off as easy and natural for them. This is made evident when Rick recounts his minor argument with Nicholas in Alexandria in a panel towards the end of “We Find Ourselves”:



I wanted to kill him – I even thought, when I was talking to him, how much easier it'd be if I just killed him, right then and there. . . . I've done it so many times, it's... it's something I casually think about when someone comes into conflict with me.

Similarly, before joining Rick's group, Tyreese killed an old man who tries to rape his daughter Julie and confesses to Rick midway through "Miles Behind Us": "I'm not beating myself up because I did it... I'm beating myself up because I don't feel bad about doing it". He also kills Chris, whom he blames for Julie's death from a suicide pact they both made in the prison. He admits to Rick that he enjoys killing him in a panel towards the end of "The Heart's Desire": "After all these months and the hell we've been through – it's almost the only thing I've enjoyed! I turned into an animal on him – I mutilated him over and over... I'm not ashamed". Abraham has also murdered six men who raped his wife and daughter while making his son watch by pulling them apart with his bare hand. He tells Rick in "What We Become": "I did what I wanted to do... I can't get over how easy it was. How much it didn't upset me".

According to Rick, the people of Woodbury – the dangerous others – are "animals". Meanwhile, his actions make him feel no better than "a lawless savage – an animal". Tyreese too compares himself to an animal when he kills Chris. As Rick explains the necessity of changing along with the changing world, he again makes an animal reference in a panel towards the end of "The Heart's Desire": "You can sit around trying to follow every retarded little rule we ever invented to make us feel like we weren't animals – and you can die!" The analogy drawn between human beings and animals highlights the displacement and overlapping of definite meanings and distinctions in the post-apocalyptic world so that human beings can no longer be defined as constituting just human attributes alone. They are beings whose behaviors are never

steady or fixed but endlessly shifting back and forth between human and bestial or monstrous, based on the circumstances presented to them.

The animalistic side of the human survivors is further illustrated in “Fear The Hunters”, when Rick’s group encounters a group of hunters who prey on human beings and has resorted to cannibalism. They capture Dale and consume his left leg. When Rick and the others confront them, they explain that since food and animals to hunt are scarce, they decide “to hunt easier game”. They have been feeding on loners on the road and even their own children. The leader tells Rick: “When we started out, we had a few kids with us... So as you can imagine... most everything got a little bit easier after dealing with that”. He uses as a reference a bear that eats its own cub after running out of food in order to survive to justify their cannibalism. They feel no remorse because they consider their actions as a requirement in order to keep themselves alive.

Rick, Abraham, Michonne and Andrea overpower the cannibals, torture and murder them in ways that horrify even them, the perpetrators. Abraham tells the others towards the end of “Fear The Hunters”: “We had to do this. . . . They didn’t give us a choice”. The same method of victim blaming that the surviving humans have often used to justify their violent actions in order to cover up their lack of humanity can again be seen at work here. However, in torturing the hunters, they further undermined their own hold on civilization and humanity by killing not for self-defense but for punishment as well. Rick continued to be haunted by the actions he and others have taken to survive as he describes at the very end of the same story arc:

I can’t stop thinking about what we did to the hunters. I know it’s justifiable . . . but I see them when I close my eyes. . . Doing what we did, to living people . . . it haunts me. I see every bloody bit. Every broken bone. Every bashed in skull, they did what they did, but

we mutilated those people. Made the others watch as we went through them . . . one by one.

The things the survivors are willing to do to protect themselves from danger gets more vicious and unbounded. They will be killers and criminals if the need arises; and savage actions are acceptable for protecting the group as long as savagery is tempered by necessity. It does not matter if they can live with themselves and their wrongdoings as long as they live. At the same time, they are also fully aware of the immorality and inhumanity of their actions as they stretch beyond the ethical framework they have clung to so far. Rick and Abraham's conversation in "What We Become" is a testimonial for this.

Abraham: You don't just come back from something like that . . . You don't rip a man apart – hold his insides in your hand – you can't go back to being dear old dad after that. You're never the same. Not after what you did.

Rick: You can fake it. Feel like I already have been. Fact is, I've done things – this isn't the first thing to chip away at my soul until I wonder if I'm still human. Probably won't be the last. My son is all I have... I don't know what I wouldn't do to protect him. Sometimes that scares me... but it doesn't make it any less true.

After their settlement in Alexandria, the safety and comfort they are able to afford compared to the harsh world outside the walls of Alexandria make them rethink their values and approach towards justice. Despite the horrendous crimes they have committed, they try to rebuild civilization and humanity inside the walls. Their old lives bear such a strong hold on them that they find it difficult to shake loose their eagerness to resort to violence and murder. This is made obvious through Rick's character. Though he tries to act civilized and humane, he is often

confronted by the feeling that he is just an empty shell of a human. He states in a panel towards the end of “We Find Ourselves”:

I’ve been trying to change things, how people act. . . . to build a better life for all of us. It’s a life I don’t even think I’m capable of living anymore... I just don’t fit into a safe world. . . . There’s nothing left in me, not anymore. I feel like I died a long time ago.

The human characters as well as the zombies that emerge in the post-apocalyptic space of *The Walking Dead* cannot be contained in the self/other, civilized/savage, good/evil and human/zombie binary oppositions. The survivors are made aware of their own image which constitutes a split and discontinuity because they are confronted with “a difference within” (Bhabha 19) – an otherness not of the other but the self. This is representative of the moment when “the shadow of the other falls upon the self” (85), when distinctions between self and the other become blurred, when the image of the protagonists comes to replicate the inhumane killers they have distinguished themselves from. Constructed meanings, identity and otherness show signs of instability, discontinuity and are subjected to negotiation and change in *The Walking Dead* as they move from one fixed point to a shifting and mutating one. The post-apocalyptic identity is portrayed as shaped and shifted by mobility and migration and not something based entirely on geography and race. To that end, Bhabha and Victor Turner’s theory is a useful perspective for informing the liminal nature of selfhood and identity in *The Walking Dead*.

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Conclusion

## 5. Conclusion

The relevance of *The Walking Dead* in popular culture is evidenced by its depiction of issues which find resonance in today's world, such as migration, displacement, alienation, defense and security, war and our fear of the other or each other, through the human protagonists living in a world overturned and infested by zombies. It is a fictional rendition of life in a ruined earth under conditions of societal and civilizational collapse. Unlike so many serial narratives where the heroes are fixed characters, unaffected by their experiences and environment, *The Walking Dead* features protagonists who are most definitely swayed and altered by their experiences in the world around them. Zombies are largely relegated to the background so that the story revolves more on the survivors, their behavioral changes and adaptations and their attempt to reestablish life in the post-apocalyptic world.

In *The Walking Dead*, multiple aspects of the post-apocalyptic world are stressed upon and considered as reflective of the comics' inclination to the idea of liminality. The moments or spaces of liminality are produced as a response to the apocalypse. The zombie apocalypse, the causes of which are never addressed in the comic series, is considered in this dissertation as the causal factor that brings about the condition of liminality. America, the center of Western civilization and progress, has crumbled due to an outbreak of a lethal virus that reanimates the dead and transforms them into zombies. With the zombie apocalypse, there is a passage from a structured to an unstructured world as the civilized world shatters into fragments. There is a collapse of government, society, authority, infrastructure, technology, law and order and the small fraction of human population left have to fend for themselves.

*The Walking Dead* is an exploration of the “transnational histories of migrants. . . . those border and frontier conditions” (Bhabha17), exhibiting the scattering and the consequential gathering of migrants and exiles on “the edge of ‘foreign’ cultures” and at “the frontiers” (199). It exposes the nature of the post-apocalyptic land that has been transformed into zombiescapes and phantom lands that usher in a state of dwelling where the survivors are able to exist between two worlds – of the civilized and the wild, of order and of chaos – but unable to find a permanent home in either.

The very nature of the post-apocalyptic land is a liminal space “where double lives are lead... with its journeys of migration and its dwelling of the diasporic” (Bhabha 306). It necessitates complex conditions of life for the protagonists whose road to survival is fraught with migration, displacement and marginalization. Notions such as home and belongingness are problematized as there is an estrangement of the survivors from their own homes and land which renders them into strangers, outsiders and exiles in their own country. The reversal and disappearance of home and the homely provide revelations and reinscriptions of the unhomely moment experienced in moments of liminality.

The human characters experience Turner’s concept of marginal liminality as an actual, permanent condition through migration, exile and unbelongingness. The protagonists provide an account of the world as seen and lived from the margins and borderlines, bringing their liminal experiences and identities to the forefront and displaying creative inventions and newness that exert themselves into existence in the post-apocalyptic liminal space. The characters’ displacement and detachment, resulting from their constant move from one place to another in the pursuit of survival, allow them to begin seeing the world as a foreign land – a state which



necessitates an adoption of new perceptions of themselves and the world. It is these factors which make this study located in the context of Turner and Bhabha's framework of liminality.

The post-apocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead* is perceived as caught in the "betwixt and between" (Turner, *The Forest* 236) of two states of existence which are contradictory and sometimes even conflictual to each other, resulting in the ambivalence and uncertainty of previously conceived notions of meanings, cultures and identities. Liminality and its application in *The Walking Dead* challenge the rootedness and homogeneity of these notions by contesting their fixity and binarism which privilege one above the other. It is proposed through careful analysis of the texts that these are not a given but rather a product of lived realities and experiences and are therefore, a social construct that is always in the process of changing and evolving. Emphasis is laid on the existence of not a single but multiple nature of reality which establishes the multiplicity of meanings, especially those relating to identity and culture, as its by-product.

One of the major concerns of this dissertation is the notion of identity as located on the borderlands between civility and barbarism, morality and immorality and between selfhood and otherness that the characters inhabit in *The Walking Dead*. An openness about identity is raised that is redemptive, powerful and subversive, resisting any foregrounding of its purity and homogeneity. The identities of the characters are established as innovative, ambivalent and therefore liminal, as presented in Bhabha's schema of the third space. It incarnates a kind of liminality that Turner and Bhabha conceptualize in their works. As the liminal nature of the post-apocalyptic world in *The Walking Dead* enables a new conception of meaning, the binary logic with which people have accustomed themselves to is deconstructed and transcended. *The Walking Dead* provides a view of identity as something that subverts and transcends binaries – a

product of negotiation of differences – by portraying the problematic and paradoxical interaction of the self and the other in both a positive and negative light.

In the liminal space of contradiction and uncertainty in *The Walking Dead*, the fixity of binary concepts such as human and non-human, civilized and savage, self and others, which were formerly perceived as notions for pure difference, are destabilized and rendered fluid. Forming itself in the gap between these shifting boundaries and identifications, the post-apocalyptic identity becomes “a subject that inhabits the rim of an “in-between’ reality” or a “borderline existence” (Bhabha 19). The texts are therefore representative of the liminal identity attendant on the human survivors as well as the zombies who are no longer just one thing or the other but a fusion of both, drawing attention to its evolving and ever-changing constructedness. The events in the texts and the characters portrayed make nonsense of all notions that privilege falling back on a primordial and fixed meanings or binaries.

Similar to Bhabha’s conception of the third space, the post-apocalyptic space brims with spaces waiting to be transformed, reinterpreted and filled with new meanings and identities. The characters become figures of liminality by not only destabilizing binary oppositions, thereby leading to dissolution of boundaries, but also filling in those spaces especially in their refusal to remain fixed or certain. In their refusal to allow singularity and exclusiveness to identity and culture in the post-apocalyptic world, the texts situate the liminal and intercultural aspects of the human experience, space and identity as a shifting and mutating category. It is this resistance to the idea of fixed, static identities and the emergence of new ones that defy previously conceived notions of selfhood and identity in *The Walking Dead*.

The post-apocalyptic space of *The Walking Dead* is the site of a “doubling, dividing and interchanging” (Bhabha 234) of the self since its nature and representation is always in a state of “splitting, doubling, turning into its opposite” (137). There is an interruption and disruption of the idea of a reformed, recognizable other, where the other is appropriated as a subject of difference, since it is constructed around an ambivalence. The human survivors’ perception of themselves is disturbed as their own shadow is reflected in the other while in themselves, they recognize an “otherness” they had previously attributed to the other and from which they had derived their sense of identity and difference.

The characters’ double or split selves return uncannily as neither the one nor the other, but the imposter of both that mock, mimic and lose “the sense of the masterful self and its social sovereignty” (Bhabha 195). They are split and double personalities “estranged unto themselves” (4). They emerge from the edge of meaning and being and from the shifting boundary of otherness within identity. They grapple with their own liminality and transcultural nature by straddling with them a partiality where they are neither one thing nor the other but a subject inhabiting the space in between the two. These split personalities produced in *The Walking Dead*’s moments of liminality serve an insightful narrative that sheds light on the production of cross-cultural identities.

*The Walking Dead* articulates a moment of undecidability and the forging of new and liberated spaces of meaning and being, represented through the post-apocalyptic land and the different types of characters – both zombies and human survivors – who emerge from it. The post-apocalyptic being aligns himself with selfhood and identity that completely differs from and contests to biological essentialism. He glides easily or uneasily between one form of being to another, at times subscribing to or juggling with him multiple affiliations and identities. For

instance, zombies are a literal rendition of the classic undead monsters whose corporeal bodies are a manifestation of both the human and non-human. The human protagonists are also a figuration of otherness and of liminality, as they are split selves whose shadow becomes inscribed on the other's being.

The human and zombie characters in *The Walking Dead* endlessly shift between the boundaries of two states of existence and identity. Zombies confound definitions and distinctions as they are an embodiment of both life and death. They are both monsters who kill and also the victims; their appearance is that of a human with an animalistic behavior. For the human survivors as well, their characteristics and actions can no longer be contained under the homogeneous definition of human behavior. What was once considered 'human' comes to coexist alongside the inhuman in the post-apocalyptic scenario. Both zombies and humans are representative of Bhabha's split subjects that display "ambivalent and divided forms of identification" (Bhabha 43) because they waver between two states of being. They are liminal beings that inhabit the rim of an 'in-between' reality where they are neither the one nor the other, but the imposter that constitutes a "partial presence" (123) and mocks and mimics "the masterful self and its social sovereignty" (195).

Thus, the nature of the post-apocalyptic world in *The Walking Dead* is uncertain and open-ended as it attests to the non-existence of absolute meanings, the dismantling of rigid oppositions and the inherent ambiguity and paradox of fixity. It entails that meanings are liberated from their traditional or pre-conceived, limited notions to be fashioned anew. To look at *The Walking Dead* as a mere work of popular culture purely for entertainment is to miss the relevant issues regarding identity, place and culture it informs. It portrays human survivors as being situated permanently in that liminal space "betwixt and between" two worlds where new

forms of life emerge that are “neither one thing nor another; or may be both” (Turner, *The Forest* 236), and where meanings and beliefs are liberated and made ambivalent, resulting from a slippage from their fixity and distinctive classifications made possible by the liminal post-apocalyptic world.

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