

Colloquium

COMPOSITE IDENTITIES

Percorsi tra cinema, teatro, letteratura,
musica, scienze sociali e politiche

A cura di Anna Maria Chierici e Fulvio Orsitto

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In copertina:

Marsha Steinberg, *Open Space* (olio su tela, cm 225 × 170), 1975.

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Sommario

Introduzione dei curatori <i>Anna Maria Chierici - Fulvio Orsitto</i>	9
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SEZIONE 1

Percorsi di cinema e teatro

'Riflessioni' identitarie in <i>Io, l'altro</i> di Mohsen Melliti <i>Fulvio Orsitto</i>	19
Storia, memoria e racconto: identità multiculturale in <i>Harem Suare</i> di Ferzan Ozpetek <i>Irene Lottini</i>	31
Cannibalized Identities: Marginalization in Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher's <i>La borde</i> and Luna Gualano's <i>Go Home! A casa loro</i> <i>Gloria Pastorino</i>	45
Delbert Mann's <i>Marty</i> : Notes on Italian American Identity <i>Antonio Iannotta</i>	59
Challenging Identities: Teatro delle Albe's Civic Engagement <i>Anna Maria Chierici</i>	71

SEZIONE 2

Percorsi di letteratura e musica

La questione del centauro: identità composite nell'opera di Primo Levi <i>Daniele Fioretti</i>	83
Reconstructing Identity at the End of the World in Gianni Miraglia's <i>Muori Milano, muori!</i> and Francesca Genti's <i>La febbre</i> <i>Nicholas Albanese</i>	95
Anatomical Identities: A Paradigm Shift in Global Crime Fiction <i>Barbara Martelli</i>	107
Gente che va, pensieri che tornano. Gente che arriva, parole che restano. L'identità italiana nelle canzoni di emigrati e nuovi cittadini <i>Andrea Pera</i>	119

SEZIONE 3

Percorsi di scienze sociali e politiche

The Meaning of Names: Why Can't You Pronounce My Name Right? <i>Claudia Peralta</i>	135
The Path towards Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Pursuit and Recognition of 'Identity' in the Process of Radicalisation <i>Maria Abruzzo</i>	143
European Islam and the 'Identity Challenge': Exploring the Nexus between Integration Policies and Radicalization <i>Ester Sigillò</i>	153
Bibliografia, discografia, filmografia	167
Autor*	183
Indice dei nomi	187

Cannibalized Identities: Marginalization in Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher's *La horde* and Luna Gualano's *Go Home! A casa loro*

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When George Romero changed horror forever by creating the modern zombie sub-genre in 1968 (modifying the previous Haitian model), he denounced social inequality in America and brutality against domestic and international enemies (Martin Luther King was shot a few months before *Night of the Living Dead* was released and Malcolm X was killed three years before – both while America was at war in Vietnam). In his films, Romero used zombies as stand-ins for social injustice or catalysts to expose what does not work in society at large. Aligned with Susan Sontag's ideas, Romero's films underscore our co-responsibility in bringing about the destruction of an America that appears incapable of defeating urgent threats effectively. Neither governmental agencies nor principled father figures manage to offer solutions or reassurance in his first three zombie films: very few people succeed in escaping, thus leaving the fate of the species in doubt. The America that in 1986 Jean Baudrillard sees as a «paradoxical» self-declared «achieved utopia» (Baudrillard 2010, p. 91) – a remarkable oxymoron – is sternly criticized by Romero, who demonstrates that one person's utopia is always someone else's dystopia. From his critique of the US involvement in the Vietnam war and of domestic politics that marginalize blacks and consider them expendable (*Night of the Living Dead*, 1968), to his skewering of a consumerism that literally consumes humans (*Dawn of the Dead*, 1978), to the obscenity of scientific experiments on human beings and the obtuseness of police states that offer no humane solutions (*Day of the Dead*, 1985), Romero's pre-millennium zombie films offer a sometime humorous, always grotesque, and rather hopeless portrayal of the socio-political realities of a country with which he identifies less and

less¹. Romero's subsequent three zombie films, made in the new millennium, are equally grim but in a different way: they leave a wider opportunity for survival but also less hope that the survival of such humans is auspicious. The critique of current politics is still present, although focused even more specifically on the impossibility of creating communities that are not self-destructive or do not enter into unsolvable conflict. Thus, the underlying significance of these last three films is more clearly whether it is worth saving a humanity ready to torture, annihilate, and sacrifice the living even when in the face of a destructive omnipresent threat from the undead. Be it an oligarchy concentrating all resources in their hands, to the detriment and shameless exploitation of the multitude (*Land of the Dead*, 2005), or a navel-gazing new generation believing that only what is filmed and photographed is real (*Diary of the Dead*, 2007), or remarkably similar communities that are unable to coexist peacefully because of philosophical or ideological differences (*Survival of the Dead*, 2009), the general feeling of these films is that humanity has problems of its own, bigger than even the threat posed by the destructive reanimated dead.

Romero's zombies are an inexorable, indiscriminating payback for all: the weak, the overbearing, and the arrogant, as well as the righteous. They are also a polysemic metaphor for all threats to 'the American' way of living (terrorists, Muslims, migrants, tsunamis, viruses, our own fears of losing status/ riches/things, etc.). Amidst the politics of fear enhanced post 9/11 especially in America but – to a degree – in Europe as well, two recent European films pay homage to Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* to expose the deep-seated injustice and manipulation of people's perception of threats in today's Europe. Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher's *La horde* (2009) and Luna Gualano's *Go Home! A casa loro* (2018) both deal with the impossible assimilation or even just peaceful co-existence of locals and migrants. Zombie outbreaks in both films exacerbate the conflicts, becoming part of the problem, rather than the problem itself. Neither film expresses the consolatory, *it's going to be ok* catch phrase present in every single American TV series episode and every other film post 9/11: it is quite clear that if people band together to fight zombies it is a temporary fix prompted by need rather than an understanding of differences, just as Romero did in *Night of the Living Dead*.

La horde takes place in a condemned HLM (Habitation à Loyer Modéré or Rent-Controlled Apartment) high-rise tower in the run-down *banlieu* of Paris, where four cops (Ouessem, Jimenez, Aurore, and Tony) go to seek revenge on some Nigerian drug lords who have killed their partner, Rivoallan. The moment violence escalates beyond the regular cop/criminal interactions and the youngest and most rash of the Nigerians (Bola) kills a prisoner, suspected

¹ In 2004 Romero moved to Canada, where he found more artistic leeway and creative freedom. He became a dual citizen in 2009. Not coincidentally his characters want to move north, to Canada, in hope of salvation.

of being a confidential informant, by riddling his body with bullets, inexplicable violence breeds more violence as the dead prisoner revives and attacks, apparently invincible. The claustrophobic, badly lit, abandoned building, in one night becomes the theater of a carnage that involves squatters and a horde of fast-moving zombies from the neighborhood. The setting is not just a homage to the isolated house in *Night of the Living Dead*, but also to John Guillermin's 1974 catastrophe-film *The Towering Inferno* and John McTier's 1988 good-cop vs. bad-guys *Die Hard*. In both of those tower-disaster films, destruction is brought about by human greed. In *La horde*, there is no catalyst virus, no contagion, no radiation, no government malfeasance, no explanation for the appearance of zombies out of nowhere except the unmotivated use of excessive violence. It is humankind at its worst that generates irreparable destruction that spreads immediately and ultraviolently.

The same thing happens in *Go Home! A casa loro*, when a zombie outbreak takes place during a neo-Fascist demonstration gone sour, outside a fictional first «Centro di accoglienza per migranti transitanti» in Rome («Oltreconfini», «Beyond Borders. Hospitality Center for Transient Migrants»), a rather dilapidated one-story warehouse at the outskirts of Rome. Neo-Fascists protest, through their leader, «the nth abuse of the government that, once again, favors the invasion of our territory and shows itself more sensitive to the needs of rapists, thieves, and assassins than those of Italians»² and propose to chase them away «kicking them in the ass and beating them with sticks»³. Such rhetoric sadly crosses Italian and European borders and is heard all too often in America as well: migrants are invading the Western world, compromising 'our' way of living in an attempt to share a pie that has not been offered. Ironically, some 'invaders' have historically been accepted and are not perceived as threats, at least in Italy: one of the neo-Fascists, Enrico, at the demonstration plans a date with a girl who suggests eating «at the Chinese», since she does not cook. Chinese immigrants, who arrived with or without papers, are perceived as providing services, while North and Central Africans or Bangladeshi are not (even though they usually do). Adé too, in *La horde*, unleashes his own frustration at the racial prejudice that has followed him around even among his collaborators, as he smashes the head of a zombified José (who was eating his brother Bola after pitting him against Adé) while repeatedly screaming «a fucking Nigerian!»⁴. The moment demonstrators in *Go Home!* attack and brutally kick to death a young man, part of a neighborhood counter-protest, all people involved in the fight get turned into zombies, who literally feed their rage by eating those who do not share their same views. Unlike the ones in

² «L'ennesima prepotenza del governo che ancora una volta appoggia un'invasione nel nostro territorio e si dimostra più sensibile verso i bisogni di stupratori, di ladri, di assassini che a quelli degli italiani».

³ «A calci in culo e bastonate».

⁴ «Un putain de Nigerien!».

La horde, these are slow-moving undead, more similar to Romero's, but their fury is just as inexorable.

When a zombie outbreak is activated by ultra-violence, in both films, unlikely alliances must occur: in *La horde*, in order to try to save themselves, the remaining, Ouessem (of Arab descent, as his name and hand of Fatima pendant on his necklace attest), Aurore (the pregnant lover of the dead colleague), and the bitten, hurt Tony need to make a pact with the Nigerian leader, Adé Markoudis, his brother Bola, and José (a naturalized French white man). This is already a culturally mixed group: the name of the first cop who dies is Jimenez and the drug-lord collaborators eaten by the undead C.I. are Czech. These are all people on the margins of a not-perfectly integrated French society, vying for a moral superiority that seems doubtful from the beginning of the film, when Jimenez declares, in front of the building, after having killed the gang's lookout: «Tonight we'll massacre them»⁵. As he barks orders and takes command over the other alpha (but reasonable and principled) male Ouessem, he also asserts «We're going to teach them the Marseillaise!»⁶. The French national anthem is an interesting choice in this context, not just because of its nationalist sentiments (after all, that seems to be the purpose of anthems), but because of its particularly ferocious imagery. Citizens are called to arms to protect against soldiers who would cut the throats of their children and women («ils viennent [...] égorger vos fils, vos compagnes») and are incited to march so that impure blood will water their furrows («Marchons! Qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons»). Vengeance is invoked as a virile effort to protect the Fatherland and be worthy of its ancestors. It seems ironic that such a motley crew would protect France's purity of blood and call into question who has the right of the land, but even the anthem provides a justification for the use of excessive force. As they run through the building to seek salvation (and lose Tony), they meet a fine example of outstanding French citizen, an elderly ex-Indochina combatant, who lives in the condemned building, calls zombies «Chinks», and kills with relish, using home-made bombs. As the ultimate defender of French blood, he is hardly a positive role model.

In *Go Home!*, Enrico, the only neo-Fascist survivor, is forced to seek shelter in the center he wanted to dismantle among the very individuals he sought to expel from the country. Just like Ouessem, he wears a necklace with a pendant that identifies his religion: the Sun-Cross adopted by white supremacists everywhere is a symbol of their own efforts to protect the 'purity' of their blood. To stay alive, Enrico must immediately hide his necklace and pretend to be one of the left-wing sympathizers, to interact with the guests of the Center, who saved him from being eaten. During the long night under siege, he shares a meal with migrants, plays soccer with a young boy (Ali), gets defended from zombie attacks several times by a tall and muscular African man (Ibrahim),

⁵ «Ce soir on fait un carnage».

⁶ «On va leur apprendre la Marseillaise!».

and stands watch to protect the only Italian volunteer at the Center, who acts as guide for him until he is bitten and falls ill. As events unfold, the forced proximity with migrants seems to penetrate Enrico's ignorance and prejudice, showing him that there can be peaceful interaction and even brief moments of fun, as when he plays with Ali-Pelé (as he nicknames him), to distract him from the nerve-wracking wait (see *Figs. 1* and *2*). The fact that most of the migrants are at least bilingual, while he can barely utter a few, ungrammatical and mispronounced words in English, while enhancing his alienation from the unfolding events, does not seem to prompt any kind of self-awareness, but the kindness he witnesses first-hand and the lessons he receives seem to make a mark, until his true colors show when it comes to saving his hide. As the director says through her quotation of Henry Ward Beecher at the beginning of the film, «Nothing dies hard or rallies so often as intolerance». In an unpublished interview⁷, the author admits that her intention was to get the audience to empathize with Enrico, no matter how misguided his point of view is in the beginning. He does seem to acquire some sort of understanding that migrants are not the threat they are made out to be by right-wing rhetoric, even though, in the end, his innate cowardness prevails.



Figure 1



Figure 2

⁷ With me.

In both films, zombies become the ultimate ‘teachers’ of lessons hard to swallow, by indiscriminately punishing all selfish humans, who nullify the efforts of those who selflessly sacrifice their lives to allow others to live, as Ouess and Ibrahim both do in *La horde* and *Go Home!*, respectively. The lack of an even tentative explanation for the zombie outbreak (aside from the unnecessary, excessive violence) is a point of departure from Romero’s model. Otherwise, just like in *Night of the Living Dead*, humans must defend themselves from the threat of being eaten alive by securing their position inside a building, trying to set aside their differences, albeit momentarily, and attempting to escape. Moreover, an unlikely ‘hero’, member of a marginal or marginalized category, leads others overnight in a claustrophobic siege that yields an unexpected ending in the morning. Just like in *Night*, one of the first scenes of *La horde* (after the establishing shot of a dead man and the hatred painted on the face of the friend who finds him, in a close-close-up alternation of shots and reverse shots), is set in a cemetery, where the angry friend, Jimenez, and Aurore stay behind to look at the tombstone and hatch a revenge plan, as the wife of the dead man begs Ouessessem to bring back ‘her family’ to her and not seek revenge. The titles of *Go Home!* still pay homage to the master by showing an aerial pan of a lonely girl on a bike through deserted streets, just as the camera (for a shorter time) follows Barbra and Johnny’s car around a windy country road in the titles of *Night*. The only real difference from Romero in *La horde* is that these zombies are fast (as many millennial zombies seem to be since, in the words of Romero, «it seems like they all joined health clubs» – Williams 2011, p. 174) and people do not necessarily need to be bitten to turn: violent death is enough to insure the transformation into death-seeking machines. As Lars Schmeink argues, these zombies’ behavior is more akin to a swarm than a herd:

Utilizing a collective intelligence, the swarm becomes a single entity and, not caring for its individual components, urges onwards towards its goal. Visually, most films enact this variant of zombie morphology in terms of fluidity, in which the metaphor of the ‘wall’ becomes the metaphor of the ‘wave’ singular drops are lost, arrested in their motion, but the wave itself is unstoppable, moving by replacing the front particles with new ones from the back. (Schmeink 2017, p. 216)

The swarm, to continue the biological reference, acts according to «a ‘taxis’ – an innate behavioral response causing an organism to move towards or away from some particular stimulus» (Derksen, Hick 2011, p. 14)⁸. The stimulus is eating human flesh, undeterred – which seems to be the perception of all third-millennium threats: the inherent aim for total destruction. Both Adé and Ouess in *La horde* and Enrico in *Go Home!* understand that setting aside dif-

⁸ Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry also talk about zombies as a posthuman «swarm organism» (Lauro, Embry 2008, p. 88).

ferent ideologies and banding against such a relentless enemy becomes imperative for survival, especially when the familiar turns monstrous in a matter of minutes. Thus, the easy rhetorical polarization of ‘us’ and ‘them’ provides the ethical justification of eliminating remorselessly whoever threatens our (way of) life, disregarding the enemy’s humanness.

These two films avoid the easy identification of migrants or criminals (terrorists) with zombies, by reversing the threat: migrants become unwitting ‘heroes’ who try to defend themselves and their turf from the societal threat their presence, and the violent actions surrounding them, have instigated. This different perspective pushes the audience to identify and root for the success and survival of migrants, who become the only hope for human survival. It is the ‘old blood’ of France and Italy that becomes too easily contaminated by its own consuming hatred and entrenched positions that seem as antiquated as the words of the Marseillaise in their call to arms against a nebulously uniform threat. In the past century, migrations to Europe from ex-colonies or from countries that offer few possibilities for living a decent life have proven profitable for the old continent, providing cheap labor and a tax-paying work force. Even undocumented migrants offer a boost to the economy and their demonization is an easy political move that plays on the fears of the local marginalized. That is why it is particularly astute to set *Go Home!* at the outskirts of a big city, among those Italians for whom travelling to the city center already feels like a voyage. Enrico may feel superior as a Roman in Rome, but, because of his profound ignorance and superficiality, his life is just as marginal and marginalized as the transient immigrants who live at the Center, on their way to finding a better life⁹. Identifying migrants as ‘clandestine’ (a word particularly dear to the Italian right-wing parties, as ‘illegal’ is to the American ones) goes beyond the more accurate definition of ‘undocumented’ and already implies guilt, crime, need to contain and reject. A similar ignorance is implicit also in seeing all black men as ‘Africans’: Ibrahim, when asked where he is from in the Center answers «Africa», showing the limits of global understanding in the absence of follow-up questions; when he finds Ali on a bench and asks the same question, the kid’s answer «Africa» becomes an inner joke, that makes adult and child bond over their common understanding of other people’s stereotyped perception of the world. Ouess and Adé may look like colonizer and colonized (white and black in racially charged France), but they are actually both victims of marginalization by the hegemonic discourse (Arab and Muslim, both colonized, at some point, by France, and united by an imposed language).

The homage paid to Romero in these two films is important because the American director first emphasized how selfish responses to a collective threat show the limitations of individuals unable to coalesce effectively against

⁹ One of them is shown sitting on a cot, trying to learn German phrases to look for work, clearly not in Italy: «Ich bin Koch», I am a cook.

a common enemy without showing endemic societal problems through their own prejudices and egocentrism. In both films, inner fights break out among the humans attempting to survive and fight the threat, showing that the need to fight a common enemy is not enough to get over deep-seated prejudices. Romero's assessment of the limitations of the melting pot of 1968 in his first film echoes the preoccupation expressed by several modern philosophers and sociologists about the nature of multiculturalism. In fact, as Zygmunt Bauman observes, multiculturalism «is apparently inspired by the postulate of liberal tolerance and of support for communities' rights to independence and to public acceptance of their [...] identities. In reality, however, it acts as a socially conservative force. Its achievement is the transformation of social inequality [...] into the guise of 'cultural diversity'» (Bauman 2011, p. 46). Diversity is a much more acceptable term that hides social injustice under difference.

In Romero's first film, the black protagonist Ben's long night's journey into day inside the farmhouse forces him to combat hysteria, selfishness, possible bigotry, warfare inexperience, and attempts at his own life along with the outside increasing external threat of hungry ghouls. The living dead are immediately established as an enemy who can (and needs to) be sacrificed without hesitation. The same happens in the films here examined, with the important difference that the protagonists are not killed, in the end, by outside 'rescuers' who take everything that moves (that is not them) as a threat to eliminate, but by someone from within the group of intended survivors, who thus signs his or her own death sentence. Romero's *Night* (and all subsequent films in the zombie genre) truly make the undead enemies 'other' and emphasize their inhumanity in the very way they mindlessly destroy living humans. The gruesomeness of zombie attacks justifies the brutal response in an endless cycle of violence, where the audience is not spared the details of what the impact of bullets does to a human body (particularly the head) or of what actual dismemberment and disembowelment looks like. However, the instant willingness to destroy enemies by riddling their bodies with bullets or smashing their heads with hammers reveals a deep-seated rage that in these two European films highlights the discomfort of multicomunitarianism. The constantly arguing guests of the center in Gualano's film come from several African and North-African countries: they have very little in common (language, culture, customs, skin color, etc.) except for the fact that they are all neatly (but not safely) tucked away in a peripheral center of transitory permanence where their existence could be forgotten (if not politically manipulated by people claiming a defense of local culture), their assimilation into mainstream culture impossible, their marginality sanctioned by the very walls that include and at the same time exclude them from Italian society. The same can be said for the protagonists of Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher's film: Arabs, Hispanics, Eastern Europeans, and Africans fight each other at the margins of society and are made aware of their marginality when they hear a brief, grainy TV

broadcast advertising an evacuation route to a military base from the city's center. «What about our emergency route?», exclaims José; «This reminds me of Abuja», muses Adé. Steven Shaviro argues that zombie «films literalize obscenity. In their insistence on cannibalism and on the dismemberment of the human body, their lurid display of extruded viscera, they deliberately and directly present to the eye something that should not be seen, that cannot be seen in actuality» (Shaviro 1993, p. 99). The obscenity of dismembered bodies matches the carnage taking place in Vietnam in Romero's film, or the violence of inner-city warfare in modern metropolis in Europe and Africa, and the long-term effects of colonialism and migration.

As Naomi Klein suggests, such marginalized people are needed in all countries with a strong economy: «if a continent is serious about being a fortress, it also has to invite one or two poor countries within its walls, because somebody has to do the dirty work and heavy lifting» (Klein 2003). In particular, she discusses how East and Central European countries were gingerly let into the European Union before closing the boundaries of what she calls «Fortress Europe», so that there would be built-in resources of cheap labor. Migrants and *sans papiers* are not outlaws, as some right-wing leaders would want us to believe, but outside law – *hors du nomos*, as Michel Agier puts it, in his study on refugees in the era of globalization (Agier 2002, pp. 55-56). The issue of migrations and co-habitation cannot be looked at in terms of 'invasion' and 'need' alone, i.e., using just right- or left-wing rhetoric: all sides of the issue should be considered: the migrants, that of the people left behind, and of the host countries, as Paul Collier argues in *Exodus: How Migration Is Changing Our World* (2013).

Stateless and ghost-like, migrants and political refugees are the inhabitants of the center in Luna Gualano's film and their disappearance is hardly felt. The walls that exclude them from Roman society are torn down by the equalizing zombie death that transforms them all into the same dehumanized mass. The film does not offer easy consolatory epiphanies aiming to prove that if people only got to know one another they would get along beyond racial, religious, and cultural differences. On the contrary, it highlights how infights, not listening to reason, and acting to favor oneself or one's family are an inevitable part of human behavior. Thus, Ali's mother pilfers the last cans of beans to feed her son, causing others to fight among each other and accuse everybody of theft. Her understandable (and selfless, since she does not partake) motherly instinct turns others into figurative cannibals first, and later as physical undead ones. Along the same lines, after being blamed by his brother Khaled for dragging them away from their country and into the current situation, Mohamed hides from the others that Khaled has been bitten and will soon suffer the same fate as the Italian man agonizing in the infirmary (when they both turn zombie, all hell breaks loose inside the Center as well).

A similar blame game takes place in *La horde*, where Bola Markoudi accuses his older brother Adé of always wanting to be in charge for selfish rea-

sons and leaves him to make his own way out of the building with a bitten José (choice that turns Bola into a meal). Ouess, in turn, accuses Aurore of being the cause of Rivoallan's death, since her pregnancy revelation caused him to get distracted and killed. Aurore, not nearly as sunny as her name implies, is similar to Warrant Officer Ripley in *Alien* in her relentless determination to kill her own enemy aliens and avenge her lover's death. Therefore, this film goes a step farther, showing how even inside a tight-knit group – a chosen 'family' of cops all working together or an actual family within a group of criminals – disagreements cause friction that leads to death. Bauman defines the reluctance to share common spaces and work as a society as «mixophobia», «a highly predictable and widespread reaction to the mind-boggling, spine-chilling and nerve-breaking variety of human types and lifestyles that meet and rub elbows and shoulders in the streets of contemporary cities» (Bauman 2007, p. 86). He offers segregation as a solution that actually exacerbates mixophobic paranoia; these films offer annihilation by zombie, since the idea of living in a culturally homogeneous society seems preposterous in current times.

What is clear in both films is that self-centeredness leads to self-destruction. When someone is at the door in *Go Home!* and a black man from the inside tells him he cannot let him in, the outsider gets eaten. As the gruesome sounds of someone being eaten alive are heard inside the center, the men who denied entry cries desperately, aware of his responsibility in another person's death. Fahran, a friend, tells him he could not have behaved any differently, espousing the utilitarian view that the interest of the majority must prevail. However, when Enrico joins in telling him he did well, the man yells: «You say I did well? You would have died if I hadn't let you in!», demonstrating the limits of utilitarianism when human lives are at stake. Enrico later convinces Ali's mother not to let Fahran into her room as zombies are storming the hallways, which leads to Fahran's death. As all hell breaks loose, Enrico manages to run around the warehouse in search of a way out with Ali, protected by a mallet-swinging Ibrahim (reminiscent of the gigantic good-natured black inmate of *The Green Mile*), who, steps from the exit, offers himself as bait to the horde of incoming zombies so that the other two can save themselves. As Enrico has troubles removing a dead man obstructing the door and the horde is getting nearer, he throws Ali at them, to buy time and get out. Once safely on the other side of the door, he runs a gamut of emotions in a matter of seconds: desperation for what just passed, urgency to get out, and happiness at seeing the empty courtyard where he can continue his narrow escape from death. The camera closes up on his face, where the smile that forms is short lived, since his skull is split from behind by the mallet of the half-eaten Ibrahim. Viewers see Enrico's facial expression change as a perfectly centered streak of blood runs down his forehead. Ibrahim, as unlikely a hero as Ben is in *Night*, acts as moral compass of the film, even on his way to zombification. In the film, he saves Enrico three times, until the latter proves

utterly unsalvageable, since he has not understood what life – not mere survival – means.

Migrants are not just in a state of transitory permanence, but they also embody the reverse oxymoronic concept that Bauman discusses: the «permanence of transitoriness» (Bauman 2007, p. 47). Migrants are here to stay – not the same people perhaps, but they will keep on coming; denying them shelter and humanitarian aid can only destroy our humanity and turn us into zombies. The question of identity of ‘first world’ countries is permanently changed by the encounter with migrants (new and older, as in *La horde*), whose participation in the life of the host country is, for the most part, a necessity, not a hindrance. Bauman argues in favor of a new kind of human right: the right to difference, since coexistence can be mutually beneficial. Therefore, territorially determined rights are supplanted by rights of belonging, which call for «mutual tolerance» if not «mutual solidarity» (Bauman 2011, p. 37).

La horde explores class and racial conflict without making any excuses for the way these characters are: poverty, crime, and marginalization do not justify overkill. The cops are just as bad as the drug dealers and have a hard time settling their differences aside to join forces and collaborate for survival, as a horde of zombies storms the city and the building. The homage to Romero’s films underscores the self-destructiveness of human beings, who even facing the prospect of death by dismemberment, cannot focus on understanding what is the value of human life. Especially those who cease to see the undead as once human lose their own humanity. René, a crass epitome of a self-serving loner, when he recognizes the now zombified pretty teacher from the second floor, instead of shooting her in the head, taunts her, along with Bola and José, and tries to force her to «kiss» the severed head of a dead man. Killing a threatening enemy for survival turns into a perverse pleasure for people who seem to start enjoying the carnage, just as brute beasts would get excited by the smell of blood. Adé puts an end to the bullying and misogynistic scene by reproaching his brother («You think you’re a badass?»¹⁰), once again showing that keeping an ethical and level-headed demeanor is the only way to, possibly, save oneself. The lesson is not learnt, and one by one they all die, including the closest thing to a ‘hero cop’ this film has to offer, Ouessem, who sacrifices himself to give the remaining three some time to run away. Half savior, half Grim Reaper, he goes from ambidextrous gunman to machete wielding mower of zombies, turning himself into a destructive parody of Christ and zombies into suppliants (see *Figs. 3 and 4*). That salvation may come from a man who has proven himself principled has a certain logic; in trying to save Aurore, he also keeps the promise made to Rivoallan’s widow at the beginning of the film. The irony is that to do it he must turn into a bizarre ‘angel of death’.

¹⁰ «Tu te prends pour un dur?».



Figure 3



Figure 4

Aurore, whom Ouess entrusts to Adé in his parting, final words, kills Adé Markudis execution style, pointing a gun to the back of his skull while he kneels at her feet. They are the only two who have miraculously escaped the horde and are finally out of the building, also thanks to René's final sacrifice of getting himself blown up with zombies once his machine-gun runs out of rounds. When hatred is stronger than common sense, humanity truly does not have a prayer. The film ends with the cries of the horde, reawakened by the sound of the gunshot that marks the new display of useless violence. Quite rightfully, they are coming to get the pregnant cop, unable to understand that violence engenders violence and that the priority should always be protecting life – any life, even the one of an enemy who just saved her. The cycle of violence becomes endless when we attack and destroy other humans, no matter their crime. Lars Schmeink observes that

Biopolitics is thus the practice of excising unhealthy, bad, or wrong specimens from the governed social body, by deciding which life is worth living and which is expendable. It is this excised body that Giorgio Agamben describes with his concept of *homo sacer*, 'who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*' – the 'bare life' of man that is outside of law and the social body, defined within only by exclusion from it. In (liquid) modern times, groups of expendable lives are declared

homo sacer by a biopolitical sovereign in order to assure their lawful exclusion, and even extermination, from the social body. (Schmeink 2017, p. 225)

Killing zombies is the only way to save the living, but not understanding that in extreme situations killing the living as well leads to the destruction of humanity is obtuse. These films turn into cautionary tales about not espousing an ideology based on indiscriminating hatred, because if we do not understand the value of solidarity we, as a society, are lost.