



ANTH3334 ZOMBIES: the anthropology of the undead

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Class time: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 9:10-10:05
Office hours: Monday and Wednesday 1:00 -3:00 and by appointment

Life is divided between the living and the dead, but for many cultures there are individuals who exist between the living and dead—the undead. In North America we call these individuals “zombies”. In this class, we explore how different groups in different times think about, deal with and classify the undead. The course begins with a discussion of anthropology, zombies and their current popularity. Looking at past societies, we note how the zombie has developed. We also explore the parallels and connections that link cannibalism, disease and witchcraft to the undead as well as social rules and rituals. Finally, we explore the place of zombies in contemporary life.

Goals:

After completing this class students will understand how and why anthropologists study the living, the dead and the undead; how culture and social organization help us to define the living, the dead and the undead and how we create social categories that organize our world and our place. They will be able to talk about research in anthropology and critically evaluate the role the undead play in world cultures and social organization.

Requirements:

The course includes three exams. Students will complete three home written exercises and short commentaries on films shown during the semester.

Exams: Exam format will be announced in class.

Assignments: The three assignments ask for short papers on themes central to readings and lectures.

#1: Anthropological study of Zombies and the undead.

#2: Zombies and the social and cultural systems of the past.

#3: Zombies and the undead in contemporary society.

Short commentaries: We will watch excerpts from several films during class time and students will complete response pieces that will link each film to class topics and readings.

READINGS: Reading materials are available on Carmen and listed on the syllabus; there are no required textbooks.

Readings on Carmen:

1. Katherine B. Dernbach, 2005, Spirits of the Hereafter: Death, Funerary Possession, and the Afterlife in Chuuk, Micronesia, *Ethnology*, vol. 44, no. 2, p. 99-123
2. H. Ackermann and J. Gauthier, 1991. The Ways and Nature of the Zombi. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 104 (4), 466-494.
3. Roland Littlewood, 2009. Functionalists and Zombis: Sorcery as Spandrel and Social Rescue. *Anthropology and Medicine*, 16(3):241-252

4. Culturing Science – biology as relevant to us earthly beings Zombie biology, parts 1 & 2
<http://culturingscience.wordpress.com/2011/05/16/zombie-biology-pt-1-richard-mathesons-bacterial-symbiosis/>
<http://culturingscience.wordpress.com/2011/05/17/zombie-biology-pt-2-zombie-neuroscience/>
5. Munz, Philip et. al., 2009. When Zombies Attack! Mathematical Modelling of an Outbreak of Zombie Infection. *Infectious Disease Modelling Research Progress*. JM Tchuente and C Chiyaka, eds. Nova Science Publishers: pp 133-150.
6. Lindenbaum, Shirley, 2008. Understanding Kuru: the Contribution of Anthropology and Medicine. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 363: 3715-3720.
7. Renee Friedman, Zombie Attack at Hierakonpolis
<http://www.archaeology.org/online/features/hierakonpolis/zombies.html>
8. Keyworth, G. David, 2006. Was the Vampire of the Eighteenth Century a Unique Type of Undead-corpse? *Folklore*, 117:241-260
9. J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, 2002, Alien-nation: zombies, immigrants, and millennial capitalism. *The South Atlantic quarterly*, 101(4): 779-805
10. A.R. Boelderl and D.F. Mayr, 1995. The Undead and the Living Dead: Images of Vampires and Zombies in Contemporary Culture. *The Journal of psychohistory*. 23, no. 1, 51-65

Academic honesty is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences that range from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, or collaboration, consult with the course instructor.

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact me to privately discuss your specific needs. At the appointment we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs and explore options for your accommodation. You should also contact the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Tentative Schedule:

	Week	Topic	Readings and films	Assignments
1	Jan 7, 9, 11	Anthropology the study of living, the dead and the undead	Littlewood, Functionalists and Zombis Dernbach, Spirits of the Hereafter	
2	Jan 14, 16, 18	What is a Zombie (anthropology and otherwise)	Ackermann and Gauthier, The ways and nature of the Zombi	Assignment #1, due end of week 2
	Jan 21	MLK day, no classes		
3	Jan 23, 24	Why Zombies? Science and biology of the undead	Zombie biology, part 1	Film: <i>night of the living dead</i>
4	Jan 28, 30 Feb. 1	Biology of the undead	Zombie biology, part 2	Exam 1 end of week 4
5	Feb 4, 6 8	Zombies and infectious diseases	Philip Munz, When Zombies attack	Film: <i>I am Legend</i>
6	Feb 11, 13 15	Disease		

7	Feb. 18, 20, 22	Zombies, archaeology and the past	Friedman, <i>Zombie Attack at Hierakonpolis</i>	Assignment #2, a plague of Zombies
8	Feb 25, 27, Mar 1	Vampires	Keyworth, Was the vampire of the eighteenth century a unique type of undead	Film: <i>Dracula</i>
9	Mar 4, 6, 8	Cannibalism and feast of the flesh (Anthropofage and Kuru)	Lindenbaum-Understanding Kuru	Exam #2, end of week 9
10	Mar 11, 13, 15	Spring Break		
11	Mar 18, 20, 22	Cannibalism		Film: <i>28 Days Later</i>
12	Mar 25, 27, 29	Zombies, Witchcraft and voodoo in ritual life and popular culture	Comaroff & Comaroff, Alienation	
13	Apr. 1, 3, 5	Popular culture	Boelderl & Mayr, <i>The Undead and the Living Dead</i>	Film: <i>Shaun of the dead</i>
14	Apr. 8, 10, 12	Popular culture		Assignment #3, Zombies in contemporary society
15	Apr. 15, 17, 19	Popular culture		
16	Apr. 22			Exam 3, Apr. 22

Master list of topics, readings and assignments:

Week 1 Anthropology the study of living, the dead and the undead

Readings: Littlewood, *Functionalists and Zombis*; Dernbach, *Spirits of the Hereafter*

Monday: A montage of images (zombie, undead, witches, sorcerers, etc) will play at the start of class. Students will be asked to comment on the images. After everyone settles in, I will introduce the class and goals and turn to why anthropologists are interested in the study of the undead.

Wednesday: Define anthropological models, focus on functional and symbolic models (highlight Littlewood article).

Friday: In anthropology and the social meaning of the undead (using Dernbach's discussion of the undead in Chuuk society, Micronesia).

Week 2 What is a Zombie (anthropology and otherwise)

Readings: Ackermann and Gauthier, The ways and nature of the Zombi.

Assignments: Assignment #1 Why study the undead? (Due in class on Friday, Jan. 18)

Monday: Define zombies and what makes them a unique social and cultural category.

Wednesday: Using structural anthropology, we explore how zombies and the undead help to define what are legitimate social categories and accepted cultural behaviors.

Friday: Continue our exploration of the relationship of extra-ordinary creatures and social categories, cultural beliefs and behaviors. First assignment due.

Week 3 The science and biology of the undead part 1

Readings: Culturing Science—biology as relevant to us earthly beings Zombie biology, part 1

Assignments: In-class response to film

Monday: MLK day, no class

Wednesday: Start the film, *Night of the living dead*

Friday: Film response and discussion.

Week 4 The science and biology of the undead part 2

Readings: Culturing Science—biology as relevant to us earthly beings Zombie biology, part 2

Monday: Zombies and other creatures (monsters, vampires, witches and so forth) are portrayed as not just living beings, but beings with special (often dangerous) powers. How do they gain their special powers? Some are born with them; others are cursed while still others suffer infection or attack. We look at the biology, culture and science of the undead.

Wednesday: We complete our discussion from Tuesday and explore what "cures" are available to bring the undead back to the living—or to help them enter the afterlife.

Friday: Exam #1 (in class)

Weeks 5 & 6 Zombies and infectious diseases

Reading: Munz, *When Zombies Attack!*

Assignments: In-class response to film.

Tuesday: Zombies attack and infect in a manner much like a disease. For this week, we explore infectious patterns as developed in the study of disease by anthropologists as well as epidemiologists.

Thursday: We apply epidemiological models to the discussion of zombies and the undead.

Tuesday: Zora Neale Hurston argues “*if science ever gets to the bottom of Voodoo in Haiti and Africa, it will be found that some important medical secrets, still unknown to medical science, give it its power, rather than gestures of ceremony.*” Is it possible that possession, zombies and the undead are explainable? Today we will try to find out.

Thursday: We will watch an excerpt from the film *I am Legend*.
In-class response to film.

Weeks 7 & 8 Zombies, vampires, archaeology and the past

Readings: Friedman, *Zombie Attack at Hierakonpolis*; Keyworth, *Was the Vampire of the Eighteenth Century a Unique type of Undead-corpse?*

Assignments: Assignment #2 *A plague of Zombies* and in-class response to film

Tuesday: We might think that zombies are new, but the undead have existed through time. We explore why social groups in the past believed in the undead and the role they played in past societies.

Thursday: Continuing our discussion we look at the work of Renee Friedman who argues that Hierakonpolis is the site of what might be the earliest known zombie attack. While the piece is not entirely serious, the data are presented in a scientific manner.
Assignment #2 *A plague of Zombies*

Tuesday: Our past is filled with creatures that are like contemporary zombies and the undead. How do beliefs and stories about vampires, werewolves and monsters reflect critical themes in society and culture through time?

Thursday: Film: *Dracula*
In-class response to film.

Weeks 9- 11 Cannibalism and feast of the flesh

Readings: Lindenbaum, *Understanding Kuru*

Assignments: In class response to film
Exam #2

Tuesday: The undead and zombies are often associated with cannibalism and anthropofage. More to the point, the undead often “feast on flesh.” Today we explore what cannibalism is, how it is portrayed and where it can be found in the anthropological record.

Thursday: Kuru is a disease (transmissible spongiform encephalopathy) that is found among the Fore of Papua New Guinea. It is associated with eating the brains of the dead. How do anthropologists explain this form of cannibalism and the disease that tends to follow it?

Tuesday: Mortuary practices sometimes include the ritualized consumption of the dead. Today we explore the ritualized consumption of the dead and the socio-cultural reasons humans engage in the practice.

Thursday: Film *28 Days Later*
In-class response to film.

Tuesday: The Anthropophage were a mythical race of cannibals who appear in *Othello*. The Anthropophage are also known as Blemmyes (headless monsters). Why do we need these monsters and what do they teach us about ourselves?

Thursday: Exam #2

Weeks 12–14 Zombies, Witchcraft and voodoo in ritual life and popular culture

Readings: Comaroff & Comaroff, Alien-nation; Boelderl & Mayr, The Undead and the Living Dead

Assignments: In class film response and Assignment #3 Zombies in contemporary society

Tuesday: Zombies and the undead are used by authors (like the Comaroffs, Boelderl & Mayr) to make critical statements about contemporary life, the living and the construction of power in contemporary society. Today, we investigate how the zombies and the undead are used in contemporary life.

Thursday: Film *Shaun of the Dead*
In-class response to film.

Tuesday: Does the zombie represent our alienation from the natural world around us? What theories in anthropology might help us pull together this idea?

Thursday: Globalization is typically celebrated as a force that unifies societies and cultures around the world. Globalization also homogenizes our world and we may be destined to become zombies (in name if not in form). Have we replaced zombies and the undead with members of ethnic communities we do not understand? Today we explore how it is possible to invent zombies and how anthropologists engage this theme.
Assignment #3 is due

Tuesday: Death is one of the only changes in life that will catch up with everyone. Death is also an event that specialists of all sorts (doctors, chefs, exercise gurus and the like) want to defeat. If we defeat death do we lose a need for zombies? Why or why not?

Thursday: Prepare for cumulative final exam

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Film Responses—for each film we watch, there are a series of questions I'd like you to think about. Read over the questions before we start the film, and write a brief response to at least one question. Turn your response in as you are leaving class.

Night of the Living Dead

Night of the Living Dead is often described as one of the first movies featuring zombies or “ghouls.” The film is more than a milestone—it holds cultural and social value as we think about its broader anthropological meaning.

1. Are the zombies or ghouls from the film a metaphor for lost consciousness? In other words, is the ghoul's lack of intellectual thought a comment that people have in general lost their own ability for conscious thought?
2. Does the process of zombification (which occurs when one is bitten by the undead) a challenge to our notion of ourselves as invincible and our souls as invulnerable?
3. Does the behavior of the zombies/ghouls/undead (a quest for food and an inability to communicate) in the film challenge our assumption that humans are unique and different from any other animal?

I am Legend

I am Legend is a post-apocalyptic science fiction film based on Richard Matheson's novel of the same name. A cancer drug turns out to initiate a zombie virus; Dr. Neville (played by Will Smith) fights to find a cure, but is also hostage to his own past and role he played in creating the drug.

1. How does the story of a miracle drug gone bad (creating zombies) reflect our own societal fears of science and medicine?
2. Do humans crave companionship over all other feelings? Do the zombies have a need for companionship?
3. Are the zombies in *I am Legend* more frightening because they maintain a modicum of advanced thinking?

Dracula

There are many versions of Dracula from Bram Stoker's novel to films, cartoons, and illustrated novels. There are humorous as well as serious takes on the story. I have selected the 1958 version of the film starring Christopher Lee.

1. Is Dracula a metaphor for all people? Does he show us the weakness of our resolve when confronted with our most tempting needs and wants?
2. Is the story of Dracula a story of our own fear of death as well as the urge to conquer death? And if we conquer death, is Dracula (a member of the living dead) a warning that the cost of immortality is our own humanity?

28 Days Later

28 Days Later documents what happens when the “rage” virus escapes from its testing lab and infects most of London. The film documents the struggle for survival and the challenge posed to the uninfected by those humans suffering from “rage.”

1. Are the rage virus and its mishandling and misuse a warning to humans not to tamper with nature?
2. Does the effect of the rage virus on humans and the transformation of humans into the infected (zombies) metaphorically communicate our doubt concerning medicine’s power to cure and protect us?
3. Are humans all on the edge, and just a small step away from rabid and crazed individuals much like the infected?

Shaun of the Dead

Shaun of the Dead documents one man (Shaun’s) struggle to deal with a job he hates, a girlfriend who dumps him and friend and family who are quite annoying while battling an infestation of zombies in London.

1. Early in the film zombies appear, but are they really zombies or simply people going about their lives? What does the fact that it is nearly impossible to tell the difference between normal everyday people and zombies tell us?
2. Where is individuality found? Does it only exist if we react against our “meaningless zombification”?

ANTH 3334, Anthropology of the Undead

Assignment 1: Why study the undead?

Though our class is only a week old, you have begun your investigation of the undead. In this assignment, you are asked to summarize a bit of what you have learned.

Part 1:

In a page tell me how anthropologists define the undead. What sets them apart from the living on one hand and the deceased on the other? Do you believe that most culture groups believe in the category of the undead?

Part 2:

In a second page, tell me why anthropologists are interested in the undead as a subject of study. Littlewood argues we often take a functionalist approach in our work. What does he mean? And what do we hope to learn from the study of the undead?

Part 3:

Finally, in page three, write a brief response to Dernbach's article. Dernbach argues that the recently deceased fill an important role for the living and the dead for the Chuuk of Micronesia. In about a page tell me if you agree. In your response reference Dernbach's work.

ANTH 3334, Anthropology of the Undead

Assignment 2: A plague of Zombies

We have spent the last few weeks exploring the biology of Zombies and a bit of history as well. In this assignment, you are asked to think about biology and history and write a brief essay on the role Zombies play in the anthropological imagination.

Part 1:

Zombies do not simply appear, they typically emerge due to specific processes (attacks, infections, etc). Thinking about the appearance of Zombies, what are two causes for their appearance?

Part 2:

In a second section of your essay refer to Keyworth's article and tell me if you agree that vampires fill the category of Zombies in the 18th century. Now, think about other creatures that are often found in writings concerning our past (werewolves, witches, etc). Identify at least two and tell me if you believe they also fill the category of zombies?

Part 3:

In a third section I want you to think about why we created a category called the undead or zombies. Why did we need the undead in the past? Thinking anthropologically, what might a vampire represent for people living in the 18th century? Would different groups of people (different social strata, ethnicities, genders, religions) think of the undead in the same way? Why or why not?

ANTH 3334, Anthropology of the Undead

Assignment 3: Zombies in contemporary society

Over the last few weeks we have explored cannibalism (whether it exists or not and how it is used as a category to define groups of people) and the role the undead, voodoo and witchcraft can play in contemporary society. In this paper, I ask you to comment on the role of the undead in contemporary society.

Part 1:

Zombies and the undead are often accused of cannibalism. We noted that anthropologists in their studies of the topic often look beyond the sensational to frame cannibalism as a part of cultural debates concerning identity and the value of different culture groups. In the first part of your essay, describe why anthropologists are interested in the cultural and social frameworks that characterize the accusations of cannibalism.

Part 2:

In the second section of your essay refer to Boelderl and Mayr's essay. Why is contemporary society obsessed with the undead? Do you agree that contemporary society is regressing and that the undead are one way to characterize that regression?

Part 3:

In the third section of your essay move beyond the personal and think about broader social issues. Comaroff and Comaroff argue that certain groups in contemporary society uses the label of Zombies, the undead and so forth to talk about what they perceive as "dangerous" changes. You may or may not agree that the changes they discuss are dangerous, but what do you think of their point that the undead and Zombies often fill categories that are dangerous and threatening to "traditional" cultural practices?