



México Interdisciplinario / Interdisciplinary Mexico

ISSN 2193-9756



XXIX. GRITOS Y SUSUROS GÓTICOS EN LA LITERATURA Y EL CINE MEXICANOS

2026/1, año 15, n° 29, 132 pp.

Editoras: **Nicolas Licata / Kristine Vanden Berghe**

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21454335

The Necro-poetics of Care: Necropolitics and the Gothic in Mexican Zombie Cinema

(pp. 96-113; DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21591811)

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Abstract

This essay studies Mexican zombie cinema as a critical site for theorizing what we call the necro-Gothic of care: an aesthetic formation in which necropolitical conditions reshape the meaning and practice of care. Drawing on Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, Judith Butler's theorization of grievability, feminist ethics of care, Rita Segato's notion of pedagogies of cruelty, and Cristina Rivera Garza's *necroescritura*, we argue that contemporary Mexican zombie films articulate a necro-poetics of care within a globalgothic perspective — an audiovisual practice that stages relationality with the socially dead without promising restoration or redemption. Through readings of *El Santo contra los zombies*, *Ladronas de almas*, *Savageland*, *Halley*, *MexZombies*, and *Párvulos: Children of the Apocalypse*, this essay traces a shift from restorative Gothic fantasies of rescue to necro-Gothic forms of care that emerge after grievability collapses and belonging becomes possible only beyond the limits of the human. We propose that Mexican Gothic, rather than a mere transplantation of European tropes, constitutes a situated affective grammar forged under conditions of disappearance, racialized violence, and social abandonment.

Keywords: Necro-Gothic, Mexican Zombies, Mexican Gothic, Necropolitics, *Necroescritura*



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Redacción iMex:

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Cinema

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Introduction: A Necro-poetics of a Mexican Gothic

Gabriel Eljaiek-Rodríguez describes the "tropicalization of the Gothic" as not only a transformation but also an inherent criticism of the European tradition. As America was framed by colonizers as a gothic space, a space of monstrosity for colonial imaginaries, the Latin American gothic is a commentary not only on the benighted past of Europe, but also on the violence of colonization, enslavement and genocide. Additionally, theories of the globalgothic have transformed our perceptions of how to understand the production of gothics worldwide. The term, coined in the edition by Glennis Byron, is a reaction to the late 20th century emergence of regional and national gothics, such as the one proposed by Eljaiek-Rodríguez. Byron and her contributors investigated these movements under globalization, crediting them to the growing effects of the global economy and the cultural flows and influences appearing across regions as transnational or cross-cultural gothic. Byron asserts that globalization "becomes a gothic manifestation, a material and psychic invasion, a force of contamination and dominance" (Byron 2013: 5). For Byron, this manifestation exists beyond nationalities, even as they incorporate traditional monstrous figures from other cultures worldwide into the ranks of the traditional Western gothic tropes such as vampires, ghosts, and zombies.

Rebecca Duncan, however, writing in a post-covid world, asserts that the effects of covid and climate crisis complicate the notion of a gothic understood through globalization with interconnected flows of influence and exchange. She observes that "though the financialisation of the market may be a globally obtaining development, the underlying unevenness of these regional conditions also means that the speculative economy is experienced differently across different locations in the world-system" (Duncan 2023: 5). Poverty, often racialized and gendered, unequal access to the centers of power, and systems of oppression still exist, and are regional. Therefore, while still eschewing gothic nationalisms, she finds that regionalisms are central to understanding globalgothic, the purpose of which is to chart "transregional dynamics and connections that give rise to the moments of social and environmental destabilisation to which gothic responds" (Duncan 2023: 13). For example, Enrique Ajuria Ibarra illustrates how

natural (geographic) and economic distinctions create a space of gothic violence and dread around borders (Ajuria Ibarra 2023: 377), and Ordiz and Casanova-Vizcaíno explain how the commoditization of female bodies across Latin America highlights a system of violence against them that is structural and systemic, rooted in regionality and consequence (Ordiz / Casanova-Vizcaíno 2023: 391).

How then to speak of a Mexican Gothic? The US/Mexico border is more than a delineation of national territories, it is a division between worlds of experience. In the films we have selected we identify a tendency of an attitude toward care that is a reaction to the regional realities of existing in a part of the global south that is so close to the center of power and economic oppression. The monstrous effects of the global financial system in a world suffering precarity under neoliberalism is met with a reaction that leans toward survival and care within small and protected groups (personal, familial, societal, communal) as a coping mechanism. As opposed to a form care that "cures" or "saves", this necro-care simply attends to those who are already ailing, or lost, those who have suffered the social death of the zombie.

We propose the Mexican Gothic as an affective grammar: not simply a relocated aesthetic, but a historically situated way of organizing fear, intimacy and attachment under necropolitical conditions. This shift allows us to move beyond where and how the Gothic is staged and which aesthetic elements arise to express it. In this way, we can identify how it structures relations of care, abandonment, and social disappearance. In Mexican zombie cinema, the Gothic does not merely become tropical; it becomes necropolitical, formalizing care as a methodology for reacting to social death. For Virginia Held, the ethics of care would "enable us to evaluate and to criticize the current globalization that expands the market ever more insistently, at the expense of caring relations throughout the world" (Held 2006: 159). The act of caring becomes a response to the violence of globalization, and in Mexican zombie cinema, it is a response to the regional effects of neoliberalism and coloniality.

The films we have chosen to discuss here describe a quotidian experience of necropolitical abandonment, diffuse war, social death, and porous domestic spaces, in which the living and the dead do what is necessary to contain the physical and affective remnants of violent experience that has been folded into routine. The Mexican Gothic we propose, therefore, does not reflect the affective elements of shock, fear, and repulsion when confronted with death, but rather an affective relation that enfolds the dead into a structure of care. We will show how within this affective grammar, terms are negotiated for ungrieved deaths and necro-restoration. The Mexican zombie mainstreams extremes of affect as a technology of care when confronted by death. Sayak Valencia, in *Gore Capitalism*, has illustrated the ways that in border spaces

where extreme wealth encounters zones of extreme poverty spectacularized violence and death become capital in a commodification of the corpse. Gore capitalism is a perfect example of the ways globalized systems produce regionalized results. Here, she explains the first seed of inspiration for this work, after seeing a partial corpse, the torso of a man, fall off the back of a truck while driving in daytime Tijuana traffic.

That dead man shook me out of my spectralized and comfortable idea of death, ripped me out of the mediatized logic that tells us that bad things always happen to Others. The body makes me realize that I am the Others... That dead man tells me that I am also responsible for his dismemberment... that I have to do something with this, because if I don't, it'll do something with me. (Valencia 2018: 299–300)

Valencia removes the alterity of the dead and instead recognizes herself in it. The nameless dead man inspires action that is not only self-protective, but a form of communal care that must include the living in the dead, and the dead in the living. This affinity with the dead, and call to action in the face of it, is what we will call the *necropolitics of care*. Building upon Mónica Velásquez Guzmán's notion of a poetics of care, a poetics which requires us to "pensar eso común que todavía posibilite un lazo, una alianza, un amor" (Velásquez Guzmán 2018: 48), we will understand the Mexican Gothic as a *necro-poetics* that will serve to illuminate this affective grammar born of necropolitical violence. We will explore the extent to which this necro-poetic can encompass and transmit the experience of such an intimacy with death.

The Zombie Gothic

Why, then, do we propose a Mexican Gothic through the figure of the zombie? The zombie, born in a particularly American context of brutal slavery, then co-opted and sensationalized by Hollywood, is an internationally recognized creature. The zombie is a perfect example of a globalized figure, having rampaged across continents to be repackaged, altered, and repurposed through the cultural output in every corner of the earth. Kerstin Oloff, who notes that capitalism is an ecological regime that relies on exploitation and extractivism to funnel capital to the center, contends that "the zombie is a figure that narrates a relations-in-motion and therefore cannot be defined as a stable transhistorical figure" (Oloff 2023: 17). Oloff sees the zombie as a figure that spans the distinctions capitalism makes to divide society from nature, which includes the dehumanization of populations whose labor and bodies are used to accumulate capital. We assert that the adaptable zombie in Mexico is used to elucidate care as a survival mechanism, one that ameliorates the dehumanization of the zombie, re-humanizing them even as they remain zombies.

But in examining the films we will discuss here, we can see the way that Mexican cinema presents the zombie narrative from a perspective of an intimacy with death, resulting in an affective grammar shaped by the necropolitical reality of disappearance, femicide, militarization, narcotrafficking, and border violence. We propose *necropolitics of care* in order to analyze Mexican and transnational zombie horror cinema filmed in and about Mexico. Considering Mbembe's necropolitics, we understand the figure of the zombie as the product of regimes of structural violence, militarization and abandonment of the State, in which the body of the zombie is thrown into a state of social death. These films, however, not only perform the administration of death, they also show techniques of care that are intimate, familiar, communal or institutional that suspend the logic of death and are administered with affects. From the perspective of the ethics of care (Tronto; Mol; Puig de la Bellacasa), care appears as a political work that is precarious, and destined to hold broken or contaminated bodies. To care for a zombie, therefore, does not mean its integration to normative life, but to contain the collapse, exposing an affective economy of abandonment.

Taking into account Mónica Velásquez Guzmán's critical rereading of Heidegger's concept of *Fürsorge* (solicitude) as a contemporary mandate rather than a purely ethical disposition, this article proposes that zombie cinema exposes the necropolitical deformation of care itself (Velásquez Guzmán 2023: 35). While Heidegger distinguishes between a "leaping in" mode of solicitude that substitutes for the other and a "leaping ahead" mode that enables the other to recover their possibilities of being, the figure of the zombie marks the collapse of this second horizon, foregoing resolution for a constant of trauma. In these films, care no longer operates as an enabling relation oriented toward the restoration of agency or futurity. Instead, it functions almost exclusively as a substitutive and managerial practice: a way of containing, administering, and regulating bodies that have already been lost to social death. Understanding Velásquez Guzmán's notion of care as mandate (due to violent structures and widespread precarity), such practices reveal care not as a redemptive ethic, but as a necropolitical technology for making abandonment, decay, and death temporarily, if indefinitely, sustainable.

Necropolitics of care can also be demonstrated following Judith Butler's understanding of grievability and precarity, as well as contemporary feminist ethics of care. For Butler, grievability is not simply an ontological condition but a politically distributed one: certain lives are rendered grievable and worthy of protection, while others are framed as disposable and ungrievable (Butler 2010: 9). These frames of recognition do not merely determine who is mourned after death; they organize in advance whose lives are understood as livable and whose exposure to violence and abandonment is accepted as normalized. Feminist ethics of care

complicates this account by foregrounding care as a situated, unevenly distributed form of labor rather than a universal moral value. As theorized by Joan Tronto, care is a political practice structured by relations of power that determine who is expected to care and whose needs are recognized as deserving of care (Tronto 2013: 17-22). Annemarie Mol further emphasizes that care operates under conditions of failure and chronic vulnerability: it does not restore bodies to normative functioning, but manages ongoing breakdowns (Mol 2008: 7-13). María Puig de la Bellacasa extends this framework by insisting that care often involves engagement with damaged, contaminated, or more-than-human forms of life (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011: 85-106). Together, these approaches allow care to be understood not as an ethical remedy to violence, but as a practice that unfolds within the constraints of structural harm. Combined with Butler's concept of grievability, care emerges as a practice that is already shaped by necropolitical frames of recognition. Under conditions of necropolitical governance, care does not undo the distribution of livable and unlivable lives; rather, it becomes a technology for managing precarity and abandonment. This necropolitics of care does not restore value to ungrievable lives, but regulates the conditions under which social death becomes temporarily livable. In contemporary zombie cinema, care thus appears less as an ethics of repair than as a mode of administering bodies that have already been rendered disposable.

Rita Segato's concept of the "pedagogies of cruelty" further illuminates how care operates under necropolitical conditions. Segato argues that contemporary regimes of violence function not only through direct harm but through affective training: societies are taught to tolerate cruelty, to normalize exposure to violence, and to accept the expendability of certain bodies as part of everyday life (Segato 2025: 34). In contexts marked by diffuse war and permanent danger, care is reshaped by this pedagogy of cruelty. Protective practices become tactical and defensive, oriented toward survival rather than toward the restoration of social bonds or ethical repair. Read alongside Butler's account of grievability, Segato's framework helps explain how care adapts to the normalization of ungrievable lives: care becomes a habituated practice of managing harm within conditions of endless violence. In zombie cinema, this training in cruelty materializes as forms of care that no longer contest necropolitical abandonment, but teach subjects how to exist within it.

We approach the Gothic not merely as a genre or iconographic tradition, but as an affective mode for staging intimacy with death, decay, and social disappearance. In Mexican zombie cinema, Gothic aesthetics—ruined domestic spaces, claustrophobic interiors, nocturnal geographies, contagious bodies, and melancholic attachments to the undead—mediate how care is felt and practiced. Placed within a globalized necropolitical framework, the Gothic emerges

as a formal grammar that renders practices of care legible within regimes of abandonment: it organizes fear, attachment, and obligation around bodies that have already been rendered ungrievable. The Mexican Gothic thus operates as an affective infrastructure of the necropolitics of care, shaping how subjects learn to inhabit social death as an intimate condition rather than as an exceptional catastrophe. It becomes a way of dwelling with decay, haunting and contagion. Care becomes claustrophobic, domestic, excessive, and obsessive. In other words, the Gothic is not a mere representation of necropolitics; it teaches subjects how to feel care within necropolitical conditions.

Necrovoice and the Collapse of Testimony

Cristina Rivera Garza's notion of *necroescritura* further sharpens this framework by foregrounding the aesthetic and ethical stakes of writing under conditions of mass death and disappearance. In *Los muertos indóciles*, Rivera Garza describes *necroescritura* as a practice of writing with the dead rather than about them—an insistence on relationality through fragments, traces, and unresolved remains that refuse narrative closure or juridical resolution. Necroescritura does not redeem death; it sustains co-presence with those rendered socially or politically disposable. Read alongside Butler's account of grievability and feminist ethics of care, *necroescritura* allows us to think of aesthetic practice itself as a mode of care under necropolitical conditions. Rivera Garza describes necroescritura as an ethical co-presence with the dead—writing not about them as closed objects, but with them, through traces and fragments that resist closure. Moreover, Rivera Garza emphasizes that during times of extreme violence, writing has become a textual corpse:

No es exagerado, pues, concluir que en tiempo de un neoliberalismo exacerbado, en los que la ley de la ganancia a toda costa ha creado condiciones de horrorismo extremo, el cuerpo textual se ha vuelto, como tantos otros organismos que alguna vez tuvieron vida, un cadáver textual (Rivera Garza 2013: 30)

We extend this insight into what we call a *necro-poetics of care*: an aesthetic formation in which various cultural texts (including film) stage ethical relations to social death without promising restoration. Mexican zombie cinema, as we will show, performs such necro-poetics audiovisually, transforming images of the undead into sites of relationality, trace, and contested memory. Throughout this article, we distinguish between necropolitics and necro-poetics. Necropolitics names the structural regime that governs exposure to death and distributes grievability unevenly. Necro-poetics refers to the aesthetic strategies through which cinema renders that regime perceptible, affective, and inhabitable. While necropolitics produces social

death, necro-poetics shapes how subjects relate to it—through archive, repetition, intimacy, and care. The Gothic operates as the affective grammar that binds these dimensions together.

Rita Segato argues that contemporary forms of diffuse war generate a crisis of communicability: violence is inscribed on bodies, yet victims are deprived of effective speech within juridical and political structures:

El increíble fenómeno de la inaudibilidad del grito indica que nos sumergimos, sin percibirlo, en la incomunicabilidad propia de toda atmósfera totalitaria, con su estado de sitio mediático, con su lengua eufemística, con el encapsulamiento de los sujetos. (Segato 2009)

The body becomes battlefield and message, but not interlocutor. Under necropolitical regimes, testimony does not disappear; it is neutralized, absorbed into institutional deafness. Violence speaks, but it does not enter dialogue. The zombie literalizes this collapse of communication. Stripped of language and reduced to groans, shouts, and repetitive noises, the zombie embodies a form of presence without recognized discourse. Its necrovoice does not articulate narrative; it emits sound. In this sense, the zombie's scream marks the reduction of suffering to noise under necropolitical conditions. It is not silent, but it cannot be heard as speech. Combined with Rivera Garza's *necroescritura*, this sonic excess may be understood as a form of necrowriting: an insistence of the socially dead that does not stabilize into legible testimony yet refuses erasure. Mexican Gothic zombie cinema thus stages not only social death, but the impossibility of communication that accompanies extreme violence. The Gothic, with its whispers, echoes, and inarticulate cries, becomes the affective grammar through which this breakdown of speech is rendered audible.

The moment the Gothic was 'tropicalized' and brought to the Americas, it became embedded in layers of coloniality. As Anibal Quijano's theories so well describe, modernity was only achieved through the exploitation of the American continent or the Abya-Yala (Quijano 2000: 533). The new world power that resulted from the colonization of European explorers was based on the invention of race, (created in part to dehumanize the indigenous populace and enforce the distribution of labor according to the color of the skin), and the expropriation and global circulation of natural resources (e.g. silver, gold, spices) that helped the establishment of a capitalist system.

Taking into account the Gothic as an expression of not only colonial violence in the American context, but also the punishing and apocalyptic violence that continues to devalue humanity worldwide, we instead look into the figure of the zombie as an essential gothic figure, and propose to study its particular iteration in Mexican horror cinema. We have argued that the zombie is a necropolitical subject, reduced to its decaying body as abandoned human ruin,

hollowed out by capitalist exploitation, racist dehumanization, heterocentric and ableist norms, and violent state oppression (Saldarriaga / Manini 2022: 126). As such, the zombie is a response to the anthropocene dread we feel in apocalyptic times. As Jeffrey Weinstock argues, the Gothic "has always been about how human beings relate to the nonhuman world, what happens when objects assume a kind of mysterious animacy, or potency, and what happens when human beings are reduced to the status of things among other things" (Weinstock 2023: vii), as the soulless vampire, the reanimated Frankenstein monster, or the living dead. He asserts that twenty-first century anthropocene anxiety expresses itself in Gothic terms as humanity's response to "being reduced to the status of a thing" (Weinstock 2023: 172). What is a zombie but the body as thing, either a slave to be manipulated by destructive forces or a mindless flesh-eating machine? As such, the zombie is also a fitting avatar of ungrieveable loss and normalized dehumanization.

The zombie represents a stripping away of the individuality of consciousness from the matter which previously housed it. As zombies have a long history of representing stolen or enslaved labor, racialized identities, and bodies brutalized by gore capitalism, we examine the Mexican Zombie as a Gothic monster, not only through the lens of diffuse societal and military violence, but also the ways in which religion supports the ongoing politics of exploitation, and how Catholicism, in conjunction with the state, interacts with the syncretic beliefs in which zombie legend is rooted as well as precolombian approaches to death. The cinematic Mexican zombie as a necropolitical subject of history, as well as a subject of imperialist border violence in the present, exists alongside the living in an intimate relation that requires active involvement and management of the dead in order to make catastrophe bearable and contain its consequences.

A Proposed Genealogy: Development of an Aesthetic

Although the figure of the zombie comes from African spirituality, and was brought to the Americas with slavery, the first mention of the zombie to an American audience was through the popular travelog *The Magic Island*, written by William Seabrook (1884–1945) in 1929 during the American Occupation of Haiti (1915–1934). He describes a *zombie* as: "a body without a soul" (Seabrook 1929: 93). This colonial rhetoric coincides with the debate between Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de las Casas that took place in Valladolid between 1550 and 1551. While Sepúlveda's goal was to justify the conquest and naturalize the alleged inferiority of American natives, de las Casas tried to defend them. In the Bull *Sublimis Deus* from 1537, Pope Pablo III concludes that "indians" should not be considered beasts, that they should be given liberty and the right to retain their properties, even if they are not Christians. He added that the goal was to spread the Christian faith through peaceful means.

Hollywood produced its first zombie film *White Zombie* (Dir. Victor Halperin), only three years after the publication of Seabrook's book, in 1932. In this film, zombified Black Haitians were predominantly used as slaves to work in the sugar cane industry, in recognition of the fact that zombie myths sprang from the all-too-real experience of enslaved peoples, expressed through Haitian spiritual practice. From the very beginning, non-Christian religion has been demonized within the zombie genre. *I Walked with a Zombie* (Dir. Jacques Tourneur, 1943) uses the term witchcraft to refer to Haitian spirituality, thus justifying the need for salvation and the occupation of Haiti. The film perpetuated the colonial gaze in regard to Black Haitians, and incorporated *voudou* rituals and other spiritualities which, when combined, zombified White women and demonized Haitian beliefs.

When tropicalized outside the Caribbean, and brought to Mexico, zombies gained another layer of coloniality linked to the expropriation of silver. *El santo contra los zombis* (Dir. Benito Alazraki, 1961) brings a Christian protagonist (El santo/ The Holy One), a ring fighter and a popular hero who protects the nation from criminals and evildoers. Although the display of masculinity in the *El Santo* series is excessive, this take on zombies is worth considering. Zombies are resuscitated White men who are here to continue their delinquent activities even after death. In this particular case, zombies are 'created' inside a silver mine by the brother of a kidnapped scientist who is interested in Haitian zombies. One could say that these dehumanized beings are the modern necropolitical subjects who are controlled by the newest technology and are destined to perpetuate a necropolitical economy in which they perform as slaves. The same way Haitian Black zombies worked in the sugar fields to enrich Europeans (in early 20th century films), these Mexican zombies will bring silver (stolen from jewelers) back to the already empty mines. The process is reversed, but with limitations: mines are now spaces that serve as allegories of the Mexican nation, laboratories for the creation of zombies, whose purpose is not to reverse colonization by returning the silver to the mines, but to enrich greedy men from the upper class.

The female zombie marks an instability of care: once managed through patriarchal protection, later exposed to necropolitical abandonment. The recurring zombification of women across the history of the genre reveals shifting regimes of care rather than a simple allegory of feminist "waves". In early films such as *White Zombie* and *I Walked with a Zombie*, female zombification stages patriarchal care as control: women's bodies are immobilized, managed, and protected and used through forms of paternalistic domination. This tendency in zombie cinema aligns with core gothic themes. Persephone Braham, following Cari Winter, asserts that the central theme of the gothic is violence against women and emphasizes the vulnerability of

women within patriarchal societies (Braham 2015: 156). In *El Santo contra los zombies* (1962), the threatened female body remains recoverable, sustained by a restorative horizon of rescue. There is an attempt to zombify the scientist's daughter, who would become the "first female zombie" in Mexico. However, this attempt fails precisely because of El Santo's intervention. Ironically, it is the religious narrative and a male figure that prevents women from being enslaved and zombified, but it is the patriarchal system that oppresses them and benefits more from their work and bodies as living subjects than as the living dead. Contemporary Mexican zombie cinema, however, emerges under necropolitical conditions in which restoration is no longer guaranteed, as further films studied here will demonstrate. Here, zombification signals not dependence but disposability, and care no longer promises rescue. The Gothic thus registers not only the vulnerability of women's bodies, but the transformation of care itself—from patriarchal protection to necropolitical abandonment.

The religious language mobilized in *El Santo contra los zombies* reinforces the film's restorative fantasy of care. Religion allows care to operate as faith in return: even the zombie body can be contained in the name of a future restoration of the human subject. When the scientist's daughter is told to "have faith" in her father's well-being even after his zombification, care operates as a suspension of social death. Faith authorizes a mode of solicitude oriented toward future restoration rather than toward the management of irreversible loss. In Heideggerian terms, this scene sustains the horizon of the "leaping ahead" version of solicitude: care anticipates the other's return to human subjectivity, despite the visible transformation of the body. The undead body may be disposable and technologically manipulated, but religious discourse preserves the fiction of a recoverable subject beneath zombification—a fiction that later zombie cinema will decisively foreclose. Zombie cinema subverts religious narratives in core ways, including the fact that zombies resurrect without God's permission, upending the narrative of Judgment Day, and providing a secularization of history while destroying the guaranteed economy of salvation (Saldarriaga / Manini 2022: 15).

The 2015 film *Ladronas de almas* (Dir. Juan Antonio de la Riva) also imports Haitian syncretic beliefs to the Mexican context in order to explore themes of national identity and the monstrification of the other. In this case, a servant of Haitian descent whose *bokor* grandfather passed zombie knowledge to him aids the wealthy family for whom he works when they are attacked by the royalist forces of the Viceroy. In this case, the foreign, non-Christian beliefs – here termed "dark" magic– have been used to aid the rich in making slaves of dead bodies to work in the mines. When the Cordero family is attacked by royalists, Indalesio, the Haitian servant, helps María turn her attackers into zombies. These zombies represent a middle stage

between the enchanted but salvageable zombies described in Seabrook and represented in *El santo contra los zombis* and the modern undead flesh-eaters. Though the zombies in *Ladronas de almas* are indeed the walking dead who will never again be "cured", they are still used as slaves, and can be made to perform labor. In this case, they are trained by the Cordero daughters to guard their house and the gold they have taken from the royalists. The Corderos take the responsibility of care of their creatures upon themselves installing them within their home and feeding and managing them. This sets up an exchange of services with the dead in which the zombies are taken into the domestic space in order to help secure it, and in turn are tended to, even spoken to, in order to keep more violent chaos at bay. This film underscores the way that the work of care and management of domestic spaces and physical well-being during crisis has traditionally been relegated to women but this particular relation to care also imbues the women with power: without their management of the dead both the living and the dead would only be subject to further exploitation and violence. The bodies of the Cordero sisters are considered by royalists and insurgents alike to be territorial sites of combat to be won, taken, pillaged, raped and murdered under pedagogies of cruelty, a social pedagogy in which violent acts are committed in order to communicate and demonstrate power to other men using the bodies of women. Through creating a security force of zombies by killing and resurrecting their tormentors, they have internalized the lessons of patriarchy and turned them to their advantage. In so doing, they have committed "a problematic imperial act" (Dalton / Potter 2018: 1), by appropriating knowledge as landed gentry extracted by one of their Haitian servants in order to hoard imperial gold.

The land, the house, and especially the daughters are referred to repeatedly as *malditas*, emphasizing the way in which the voodoo rites they perform are perceived as witchcraft and the daughters as witches. But within the culture of the family, the Haitian rites have supplanted the old Catholic beliefs of the landowning *criolla* family. The family has a chapel with a crypt below it. As the ineffectual and paralysed father reads aloud the Bible in Latin above, embodying patriarchal rule that is enforced by the Church, his intrepid daughters have installed a voodoo altar beneath him, keeping their zombified creatures in the burial crypt below the Catholic space. Just as the Church came to be built upon the indigenous sites of religious importance, now Haitian rituals subvert from within, protecting the girls and punishing colonial rapists and thieves. In *Ladronas de almas* the best that can be hoped for is the maintenance of the status quo. Neither the living nor the dead can hope for eventual restoration.

Halley (Dir. Sebastián Hoffman, 2012) similarly does not provide any horizon of restoration. In this film, the dead body itself is conceived as a necrotic structure in which Gothic elements

are superimposed with images of self-care as necropolitical self-management. If *Ladronas* maintains a corps of the dead to ensure domestic security, *Halley* internalizes the work of maintenance within the body itself. The protagonist's decaying flesh —marked by flies, maggots, oozing wounds, and persistent odor— transforms the body into a crypt. Gothic architecture collapses inward: there are no decaying castles or catacombs, only epidermal ruin. These material signs of decomposition function as micro-archives of social death, an index of traces that resist spectacle while refusing erasure. Read through the lens of Rivera Garza's notion of *necroescritura*, the body becomes a site of inscription, writing decay through infestation and repetition of domestic and hygienic routines. Necro-poetics here are not applied to visual excess but material persistence. Care emerges as the management of this archive: cleaning, hiding, maintaining, delaying exposure. The protagonist aspires not to life, but to the legibility of his own disappearance. Under Segato's notion of diffuse war, Beto's routines can be read as survival practices within a social field that has normalized bodily abandonment.

Necro-Gothic care is marked by contradiction: to care for others risks exposure, while self-care risks disappearance. *Halley* exposes a tension between care and self-care that runs through necropolitical conditions more broadly. The protagonist's disciplined routines —cleaning, showering, maintaining appearance— suggest forms of self-care, yet these practices function less as preservation than as containment. His decaying body cannot be restored; it can only be managed. Not even the church can offer this dead man any form of salvation. His preacher reminds his congregants that sin makes the body vulnerable to illness, and that the suffering caused by bodily damage pales when compared to suffering caused by being far from the Lord. Religious practice is but a salve, as ineffective as the medical tape the protagonist uses to try to close his gaping wounds. There is no holy intervention by a *Santo*. The living dead man is abandoned by God as he is by most of society. At the same time, his attachment to others—particularly his quiet intimacy with his employer—renders relationality itself a risk. To care for others would mean exposing them to contamination; to protect them requires withdrawal. Care thus becomes paradoxical: self-care entails isolation, and love demands self-erasure. He turns his attention to care meticulously for *things*. Objects (teacups, furniture, silver) in his care are attended to lovingly, polished and wrapped in plastic. As he transforms from person to thing, he spends most of his time maintaining himself as just another object in his care. In this necro-Gothic framework, dependency and affection are inseparable from vulnerability and disappearance. The film stages care not as mutual sustenance but as a fragile negotiation between attachment and survival within irreversible decay.

If *El Santo contra los zombies* imagines care as rescue within the human community, *Savageland* relocates care and restoration beyond it, into a necro-collective that emerges only after death. In this film (Dir. Phil Guidry, Simon Herbert, David Whelan, 2015), a small Texas town called Sangre de Cristo (Christ's Blood) is attacked by a number of zombie-like creatures. Most of the victims are racially selected, as Sangre de Cristo is a town where migrant laborers live. We never see the zombies themselves, but only photographs of them: "These images are used as allegories that refer to racialized and phantasmagoric spectres that return within the imagination of a nation, especially in a border controlled through necropolitics" (Saldarriaga / Manini 2022: 27). *Savageland* builds a Gothic archive of images: e.g. ruins of abandoned buildings, nocturnal landscapes, photographs of missing girls, spectral photography, images of dead animals, abandoned bones (of Mexican immigrants) in the desert, rotting food. All these images produce a necro-Gothic of racialized disposability of the body. The photographic structure of *Savageland* can be read through *necroescritura*: it is also an archival practice that emerges under conditions of mass death and disappearance and refuses to aestheticize or domesticate loss. This echoes Sayak Valencia's notion of collapsing the distance between the spectralized dead and the observer, setting up an affinity and recognition of community with and responsibility for the dead. *Savageland* performs this *necroescritura* (through photographs of zombies, photographs of the desaparecidos, blood) audiovisually. The photographs do not restore the victims to grievable life, nor do they resolve the narrative juridically; instead, they insist on the persistence of racialized death as trace. *Savageland's* subgenre, a "found-footage" style of faux documentary, lends an aesthetic immediacy to the evidence of disappearance it presents. The film thus transforms photography into a necro-poetic practice of care: a way of remaining with social disappearance when the state has already withdrawn recognition. Salazar's remove behind the camera keeps him safe as long as he records events. When he abandons this method of *necroescritura* to care for another, his fate is sealed, demonstrating the contradictions of care.

In *Savageland*, the Gothic does not promise a return to life; it stages restoration as necro-restoration, a community of care that can only emerge among the ungrievable dead. The film stages two distinct registers of care that unfold across the threshold of death. Within human society, care appears as an exposed and punished practice: Salazar protects the pastor's daughter during the attack, even suffering physical harm through contact, yet this care does not secure recognition, protection, or survival for either of them. Salazar's wounding upon contact literalizes Butler's claim that grievability is unevenly distributed: care for ungrievable lives entails embodied risk without institutional protection. While the White Anglo child of the pastor

is considered a tragic loss, lamented by the public, Salazar's eventual death is seen as just and even deserved. Understood as a pedagogy of cruelty, this scene shows how subjects are trained to accept the expendability of racialized bodies even in moments of ethical proximity; care is expressed, but it does not interrupt the normalization of abandonment. Care here unfolds within necropolitical frames that render Latinx lives disposable and ungrievable.

The unseen zombies that cross the Texan border from the south to attack a town full of Latinx migrants seemingly create a contradiction in a film that deals explicitly with racism faced by Latinx in white society. However, when considering the zombie horde as a necro-collective, we see that the "chosen" racialized dead reappear as an organized community, a kind of war machine structured around mutual recognition after social death. Additionally, in a post-credits scene, we see how Salazar is rescued as a symbol of resistance and identification. Now that he is risen as a zombie, he performs the function of community and purpose that previously was fulfilled by the Church. Restoration thus does not occur as a return to human society, but as a necro-restoration: a form of care and belonging that becomes possible only after subjects have been expelled from the category of the human. The film does not redeem necropolitics; it reveals how care is forced to migrate beyond the limits of human polity in order to survive at all.

Párvulos: Hijos del Apocalipsis (Dir. Isaac Ezban, 2024) can be understood as a culmination of the development of the necropolitics of care that we propose and the nature of its temporary/indefinite quality. After an apocalyptic plague has destroyed society, a family of young boys struggle to survive while caring for their parents, who have been zombified by an experimental vaccine. As they wait for a possible cure for their undead parents, they have created a routine of hunting, butchering, and feeding themselves and the zombies in their care, looking after hygiene and eventually attempting to incorporate them into their family recreational activities and celebrations. The constant danger in which they find themselves is attributable to the state of diffuse war in which they exist. Rita Segato asserts that we live in a time of the informalization of war, in which multiple forces (comprising paramilitary, organized crime, militarized police, and private security) necropolitically manage the population not through care but through violence. This diffuse and unending violence results in no possibility of armistice or peace, since the combatants are not subject to any legal, temporal, or spatial boundary. Segato also clarifies that there are no limits to who can be considered a combatant in these informalized states of war (Segato 2025: 92). Non-warriors, women and children, are targeted with equal fervor. In *Párvulos*, the surviving children are in danger from other

survivors, a foreign military that flies over them, and a religious cult called the Trompetas that fanatically seek to trigger the apocalyptic return of Christ. It is this violent cult that, in a syncretic melding of biblical doctrine and pre-Colombian sacrifice ritual, ultimately destroys the familial idyll. In *Párvulos*, the children eventually participate in killing when they find that human meat seems to make their parents stronger. Thus, maintenance of domestic balance becomes another form of violence that the children deem necessary for the survival of their community, and themselves.

As they are subject to the diffuse and informal wars that mark contemporary life, part of their practice of necropolitical care involves participating in violence. The children plan and execute murders in order to feed their parents. This is very similar to the way in which a group of adolescents in *MexZombies* (Dir. Chava Cartas, 2022) appeals to their local narco-trafficker for military-grade weapons to protect their parents during a zombie invasion. In this film, kids must align themselves with the very organized criminals that caused the event. Criminals are presented as heroes as the heroes must become criminals in this teen romance/horror comedy which presents survival of modern Mexican life as inextricable from perpetrating violence as part of care. This also echoes the war machine/zombie horde marching north in *Savageland*. This contradictory element of care also subjects these children to even graver danger in these films, just as it subjected Salazar to physical harm and (un)death as he tried to protect a child. There is no escape from societal violence, intimacy with death often carries along with it a complacency to causing more of it.

In *Párvulos*, the children's ease with violence and consuming the products of it are the maintenance routine of the world they live in. The aesthetic expression of this practice of caring is expressed in this film through a focus on the homely (if gruesome) details of the children's lives: the bloodstained kitchen, their worm-and-honey smoothies, their handmade limb prostheses and detailed drawings of their filthy, skeletal parents bound in cages and chains. The camera lingers on these domestic objects, in a desaturated color palette. Only a family photo from before the catastrophe is shown in saturated color and when the children attempt to recreate the photo with their undead family, it brings them a sense of stability and containment that can reach beyond death. However, this sense of security is flawed, there is community with death because death and life walk a blurred line. One can die, and be carefully embraced, the infected can be cured, but the healthy are struck down. Both *Párvulos* and *Ladronas de almas* incorporate the drawings of children to relate their stories, both in the films and then highlighted in the end credits. This wordless communication recalls the *grito inaudible* in times of war as suggested by Rita Segato. She explains that Evil can not be represented in language, "Lo que

digamos no conseguirá capturar el horror de los sucesos, porque los sucesos son tan ininteligibles como el propio abismo de la muerte" (Segato 2009). Segato explains that language is insufficient to contain the horrors of war and, as a result, there is a limit to the communicability of the weight of barbarism. Thus the necro-poetics of the Mexican zombie exists beyond representation and can only be hinted at through image, sound, and affect.

The question remains: can we limit necropoetics of care to Mexican zombie cinema or can we identify a global aesthetic of zombie cinema (e.g. *Handling the Undead*, *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple*)? The difficulties and contradictions at the site of care reflect a global state of affairs. For Virginia Held, the ethics of care function as an alternative to moral theory. Ethics of care, which considers persons as relational and interdependent, is beginning to influence the way we understand global politics and global relations (Held 2006: 155). Additionally, Hamington and Flower affirm that given the widespread of neoliberal precarity, "it is time for another international social movement infused with empathy and compassion that reconnects people separated by identity-based discrimination, disparate resources, and oppressive violence" (Hamington / Flower 2021: 9). In other words, these critics all call for a global movement of care ethics that responds to precarity that is the result of neoliberalism globalization. How is zombie cinema, be it Mexican or international, responding to precarity through care ethics? Under necropolitical conditions, care no longer guarantees reciprocity or futurity; it becomes structurally contradictory. To care for others entails exposure without protection, while self-care becomes a practice of containment that risks social disappearance. The necro-poetics of care thus describes a condition in which attachment and erasure become inseparable, and the Gothic renders this instability affectively inhabitable. This Mexican Gothic, as necropolitical care defined necro-poetically, makes these contradictions explicit as result of proximity to racialized, femicidal violence and disappearance. The necro-Gothic names not the promise of restoration but the persistence of attachment within conditions that make attachment unsustainable. It is only temporary, yet it has no end.

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