

Bad Juju: The Translation of the African Zombi to Nigerian and Western Screens

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Abstract : Within the past few decades, zombie cinema has evolved from a niche outgrowth of the horror genre into one of the most widely-discussed and thoroughly-analyzed subgenres of film. Rising to international popularity during the 1970s and 1980s following the release of George Romero's landmark classic, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and its much-imitated sequel, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), the zombie genre returned to global screens in full force at the turn of the century following earth-shattering events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, America's subsequent war in the Middle East, environmental pandemics, and the emergence of a divided and disconnected global populace in the age of social media. Indeed, the presence of the zombie in all manner of art and entertainment—movies, literature, television, video games, comic books, and more—has become nothing short of pervasive, engendering a plethora of scholarly writings, books, opinion pieces, and video essays from all manner of academics, cultural commentators, critics, and casual fans, with each espousing their own theories regarding the zombie's allegorical and symbolic value within global fiction. Consequently, the walking dead of recent years have been variously positioned as fictive manifestations of human fears of societal collapse, environmental contagion, sexually-transmitted disease, primal regression, dwindling population rates, global terrorism, and the foreign "Other". Less commonly analyzed within film scholarship, however, is the connection between the zombie's folkloric roots and native African/Haitian spiritual practice; specifically, how this connection impacts the zombie's presentation in African films by native storytellers versus in similar narratives told from a western perspective. This work will examine the unlikely connections and contrasts inherent the portrayal of the traditional African/Haitian zombie (or zombi, in Haitian French) in the Nollywood film *Witchdoctor of the Livingdead* (1985, Charles Abi Enonchong) versus its depiction in the early Hollywood films *White Zombie* (1932, Victor Halperin) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943, Jacques Tourneur), through analysis of each cinemas' use of the zombie as a visual metaphor for subjugation/slavery, as well as differences in their representation of the the spiritual folklore from which the figure of the zombie originates. Select films from the post-*Night of the Living Dead* zombie cinema landscape will also warrant brief discussion in relation to *Witchdoctor of the Livingdead*.

Keywords : Nollywood, Zombie cinema, Horror cinema, Classical Hollywood

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