

Article

Zombies and Refugees: Variations on the “Post-human” and the “Non-human” in Robin Campillo’s *Les Revenants* (2004) and Fabrice Gobert’s *Les Revenants* (2012–2015)

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Abstract: This article examines the use of the zombie (or the “returned,” the literal translation of the French term “revenant”) in Fabrice Gobert’s French series *Les Revenants* (2012–2015) as a narrative trope that evokes the recent wave of migration from Syria into Europe. In parallel, this article addresses Robin Campillo’s 2004 original feature *Les Revenants* as it served as an inspiration for Gobert’s work in 2012. Campillo’s work, like Gobert’s, is rooted in the treatment of refugees in France. Following the forceful closing of the Sangatte refugee camp in Calais in 2002, the Moroccan-born French filmmaker expressed his concern for the treatment of Others in France through the figure of the zombie, eventually initiating a new genre in French fiction that would serve to express and denounce the characterization of Others in France as “non-human.”

Keywords: zombie; refugees; postcolonial; post-human; non-human

1. Introduction

In Robin Campillo’s 2004 film *Les Revenants* [1], a large number of people inexplicably come back to life in a small French town. *Les Revenants* uses the figure of the returned to question the making of a group identity (in this case, the living) in light of the appearance of an outside element that garners both interest and scorn¹. Inspired by the 2002 human crisis of the Sangatte refugee camp near Calais in the North of France², Campillo wanted his film to act as an artistic “resonance” to the dire bureaucratic situation migrants find themselves in once they have arrived on French soil³. Campillo’s zombies⁴,

¹ In his article “Compassion and Repression: the Moral Economy of Immigration Policies in France,” Didier Fassin explains: “Hundreds of immigrants from Kosovo, Kurdistan, and Afghanistan were fleeing oppression to seek asylum in Britain...Waiting to make this passage, the “candidates for the British Eldorado” (*Nord Littoral* 1999d) [2] were camped in a park at the heart of Calais, where many inhabitants protested against the transformation of their city into the “funnel of misery” (*Nord Littoral* 1998) [3] of Western Europe” ([4], p. 362).

² “The Sangatte Center, an unused warehouse of 25,000 square meters (approx. 30,000 square yards) a few kilometers outside of Calais, opened on 14 August 1999. It soon became known as a transit camp because it was supposed to provide accommodation for only a short stay for immigrants on their way to Britain. As it happened, however, during the first two and a half years of its existence, it had accommodated up to 50,000 persons, only 350 of whom asked for asylum in France” ([4], p. 363).

³ “The film does not produce metaphors: it acts as a resonance to real elements, like Sangatte for example, but it doesn’t “speak” about Sangatte, it is not a fable of Sangatte. If I had wanted to make a film about Sangatte, I would have addressed that topic. In a way, the Red Cross center naturally finds its place in the film...welcoming people who should not be there, that nobody wants to see settle, but also that nobody wants to let travel to Great Britain. It is most likely in this paradox that the relationship between the Sangatte refugees and my “revenants” unfolds” ([5], my translation).

⁴ The figure of the “zombie” has always been linked to colonial concerns as it finds its origins in the transatlantic slave trade. In “The Sub-Subaltern Monster: Imperialist Hegemony and the Cinematic Voodoo Zombie,” Kyle Bishop explains:

in the way they are treated by the living upon their return, are used as narrative devices to denounce the anti-humanism with which migrants were victimized in Calais in the early 2000s⁵. After the 2002 closure of the camp, migrants continued to seek refuge in and around Calais, building temporary shantytowns that became known as “the Jungle”⁶.

Fabrice Gobert’s adaptation of Campillo’s narrative into a television series similarly echoes a highly mediatized migration event [9]: the displacement of a large part of the Syrian population into Europe following the violence of the Syrian civil war and the Islamic State’s perpetration of crimes in the region. This contemporary wave of migration into Europe provoked in 2014 the creation of a new shantytown inside Calais, nicknamed “Sangatte II” and the “New Jungle” by both Francophone and Anglophone media⁷. Gobert began producing the television series *Les Revenants* in 2012, as debates and newscasts regarding the Syrian migration began to garner increased interest from the general public. However, the series took a different turn from Campillo’s 2004 film production in associating the return of the dead in a small French town in the Alps with a multifaceted local ecological disaster, and a commentary on established religion in the protagonists’ reaction to the reappearance of the returned.

This article focuses on the evolution of Campillo’s original narrative from an accusation against bureaucratic practices as stemming from the resurgence of colonial stereotypes, to the development of a post-human narrative in Gobert’s adaptation. The term “post-human” lends itself to various interpretations: post-humanism as a condition happening *after* humanism (in the same manner as “post-colonialism” refers to the era following the colonial period), post-humanism as biological degradation (the destruction of the natural world as a habitable place for human beings)⁸, and post-humanism as anti-humanism (in the treatment of Others as non-humans, especially as a result of the eighteenth century definition of the “savage” as the antithesis of the Western “human”)⁹. I argue in this article that these three definitions of the post-human are expressed in the series *Les Revenants* in the figure of the returned and in their relationship both with nature and the living. This analysis of the returned is performed in the context of postcolonial and post-human thought, and seeks to define what makes someone “human” or “non-human” in today’s context of global migration and inevitable redefinition of One and Other, as expressed in both the film and the series *Les Revenants*. Finally, this article aims at unveiling Fabrice Gobert’s surreptitious humanist and ecocritical stance in his recasting of the classic zombie genre into a widely accessible yet political form of entertainment.

2. Refugee Camps and the Return of the Repressed

Campillo’s film *Les Revenants* opens on a vast crowd of elderly people slowly making their way from the cemetery to the downtown area of an unnamed French city. In the very next scene, officials

“...the zombie is a unique Hollywood monster inasmuch as it originated in the folkloric and ritual practices of the New World, specifically in the Republic of Haiti...In addition to potions, love charms, and voodoo dolls, the zombie—the “living dead”—came to be a source of both fear and fascination to white westerners, and the movies produced by Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s exploited this exoticism to draw crowds to the theater” ([6], p. 142).

⁵ “Some of the refugees claimed that they had been attacked by the police. Plainclothes police had arrived at the bunkers where they had sought refuge after the closing of the Sangatte refugee camp. Thinking they were volunteers from a charitable organization bringing food, the refugees went out to meet them, only to be brutally beaten by truncheons. Then, the attackers set fire to the bunkers, incinerating the few possessions the *sans-papiers* has stored there” ([7], p. 321).

⁶ “Squats and makeshift shelters were periodically erected and torn down again...In the intermittent media reports, the migrant shantytown became known as ‘the Jungle’” ([8], p. 517).

⁷ “The makeshift “New Jungle” camp in Calais is to be turned into an official migrant centre amid uncertainty about whether a plan to build £1.1 million ‘Sangatte’-style camp in Dunkirk will go ahead.” [10].

⁸ “Advanced capitalism and its bio-genetic technologies engender a perverse form of the posthuman. At its core, there is a radical disruption of the human-animal interaction, but all living species are caught in the spinning machine of the global economy...Globalization means the commercialization of Planet Earth in all its forms, through a series of inter-related modes of appropriation” ([11], p. 7).

⁹ “Numerous scholars, many of them historians, have noted that the New World’s indigenous people were variously perceived by eighteenth and nineteenth-century colonial commentators as subhuman or less than human...In being identified with nature, and often explicitly aligned with animals, so the argument goes, an offensive mode of exclusion was perpetrated” ([12], p. 11).

at a city hall meeting are pondering the viability of having the dead reintegrate society. The mayor explains that 70 million dead people have already come back to life around the world [1]; however, Campillo chose to focus on a small French town as a way of personalizing the return of the repressed, signaling to every French citizen's responsibility in the matter of refugee migrations and immigration.

Campillo's film is inspired from the events that took place at the Sangatte refugee camp in 2002, in particular the forceful closing and destroying of the camp by the French police following then-Minister of the Interior and future President of France Nicolas Sarkozy's orders. In his article "Haunted Europe: Virilio and Sangatte," Russell West-Pavlov recounts:

The closure was the result of an agreement brokered between David Blunkett and Nicolas Sarkozy, which traded the forcible closure of the camp on the French side for a drastic tightening-up of British asylum laws. After its closure, groups of refugees took refuge in the church of St. Pierre in Calais, until CRS [police] units cleared that sanctuary. Groups of refugees roamed the streets of Calais in January and February, camping in the open or even taking up residence in some of the abandoned [World War II] bunkers along the coast. Humanitarian organizations attempted to provide some sort of emergency service, and to prevent harassment and violence to refugees by the French police ([7], p. 333).

The sudden dismantling of the camp bore no traces of compassion or care for the human lives that had found refuge in Sangatte and, in this sense, suggests a post-human act. Rosi Braidotti explains in *The Posthuman*: "The posthuman predicament has more than its fair share of inhuman(e) moments. The brutality of new wars, in a globalized world run by the governance of fear, refers not only to the government of the living, but also to multiple practices of dying, especially in countries in transition" ([11], p. 9). The mistreatment of the Sangatte refugees is expressed in the 2004 film in the treatment of the dead upon their return to the unnamed fictional town. As the military is seen taking immediate control in managing the dead, rows of precarious beds are installed in the town's gymnasium, a temporary form of housing that serves as a reminder of the camps built in Sangatte by the authorities in order to control and displace the refugees who were living in a Calais park, unregistered¹⁰.

This makeshift form of lodging is also a powerful reminder of the camps that were opened at the end of the Algerian War to host the *harkis* (the Algerian soldiers who had fought with the French colonial army against their own countrymen and against Algeria's independence, as they were promised protection by the French colonial military) and the *pieds-noirs* (the descendants of French colonizers living in French Algeria during the colonial period). Both groups had to be repatriated after Algeria's independence was declared in 1962 as their lives were immediately threatened were they to stay in Algeria where they were considered traitors. In "Pied-Noir Memory, History, and the Algerian War," William B. Cohen explains: "Harkis and other French collaborators were dealt with harshly in independent Algeria; thousands were imprisoned, tortured and lynched" ([13], p. 134). In 1962, 41,000 *harkis* were repatriated to France. Half of them were placed in camps controlled by the army, and located outside of major French cities, sometimes in the woods¹¹.

The *pieds-noirs* were the other "undesirables" who were placed in makeshift camps in hospitals and gymnasiums when they arrived in France. They were thought to be "Other" by the native French population despite their French citizenship and ancestry, as they had spent extensive time,

¹⁰ "The camp was opened in 1999 by the French Red Cross at the behest of the French government in order to provide a viable solution to the provisional alternatives hitherto made available by the town of Calais." ([7], p. 333)

¹¹ "They arrived in France as 'repatriates'—a legal classification describing the relationship between the state and French citizens returning from all former colonies and protectorates—with the possibility of completing a pro forma procedure for French nationality. Approximately half of the *harkis* found housing on their own, through the aid of French soldiers who had fought in Algeria, benevolent associations, or familial and social networks. However, the French government relegated the half that relied on its assistance to former refugee and prisoner camps as well as forest hamlets (isolated prefabricated developments, which were microcosms of the larger camps). Most resided in these spaces for weeks or months, though some remained for over a decade [14]."

sometimes generations, living in Algeria. Gaston Deferre, a celebrated resistance fighter and mayor of Marseilles in 1962, stated that the *pieds-noirs* should try to “readapt” to Metropolitan life somewhere other than Marseilles, stating that his city had become overpopulated since the end of the Algerian War [15]. Both the *harkis* and the *pieds-noirs* resurface in Campillo’s film as the living-dead, thought to be untrustworthy and having irremediably changed from their extended stay in a foreign land. In Campillo’s film, this foreign land is evoked as the land of the dead, a symbol of the long-lost French Algeria.

Campillo therefore symbolically compares the situation of the Sangatte refugees in 2002 to the post-Algerian war mistreatment of the *harkis* and *pieds-noirs* in order to emphasize the very specific postcolonial mode of national identity building in France that consists in quarantining and managing migrant populations in hopes of annihilating their presence from the main French discourse and way of life. In his film, the dead are originally placed in a camp opened by the Red Cross and under continuous surveillance by the military. Eventually, a series of unexplained explosions in the town causes the military to accuse the returned of plotting against the living. The dead are hunted and shot with sleeping darts that put them in a long-term coma. In one of the film’s final scenes, the sleeping bodies of the dead are laid to rest on their individual tombstones, where they slowly disappear from the screen, a sign that the town’s group consciousness has effectively refused to address their past or take responsibility for their actions. The camps, both in the history of France (concerning the repatriation of the *harkis* and *pieds-noirs*) and in Campillo’s film, therefore emblemize the disassociation of the Other from the main discourse, and his eventual demonizing—or zombifying—by the group’s general consciousness.

The camps organized by the Red Cross also appear in Gobert’s series *Les Revenants* [9], in a flashback to thirty-five years prior to the main narrative, when a man-made barrage had broken and flooded the town resulting in the death of most of the villagers. However, a number of people were spared, their wealthy status having allowed them to build houses in the hills overlooking the town, away from the valley where the water pooled after the barrage broke. In the flashback opening the first season finale, two women who have survived the flood are seen talking outside the tents organized by the Red Cross and the military. Madame Costa, one of the women, comments on the presence of local officials: “Murderers...all of them” to which the other woman answers, “they couldn’t have known it would happen, or they’d have cleared the village.” Madame Costa continues: “They’ll get revenge one day...the dead” ([9], Season 1, Episode 8: “The Horde”). Madame Costa, the other woman, and the people who died in the flood in fact return from the dead during the first season of *Les Revenants* [9].

The camps as they are represented in Campillo’s film and in Gobert’s series point to the local officials’ responsibility in the displacement of populations and in their inhumane handling of the situation. These elements were very present in Robin Campillo’s film in 2004 as he stated in an interview that he wanted to show “a close-up into political power, with on occasion some aberrations, for example when important decisions are taken, decisions whose scope goes beyond the realm of authority of a small town” ([5], my translation). These temporary camps have become a reality again in France since the beginning of the Syrian migration in 2012. In “‘Forever Temporary’: Migrants in Calais, Then and Now,” Jessica Reisnich writes: “Migrants never stopped heading for Calais, even after Sangatte was closed and moved out of the spotlight...There are estimated to be 3000 migrants staying in a makeshift camp in the town of Calais” ([8], p. 515). In January 2016, it was announced that “[t]he French authorities will give 1500 migrants beds in shelters at the camp known as the New Jungle in Calais” and “[t]hose not allocated beds will be encouraged to seek asylum in France and will be offered free transport to centers elsewhere in the country [10]”. In order to control the refugee population, the government ordered the building of barracks in which the refugees would be made to stay and be forced to register in a database that could potentially send them back to their original

point of entry in Greece¹². Fearing a pending eviction to Greece, a high number of the refugees have fled the “Jungle” before its destruction.

3. Zombies, Refugees, and “Savages”

The various ways in which the Syrian refugee crisis has been handled throughout Europe since 2012 can certainly be said to be post-human if we assume the term to mean in this case “anti-human.” As Braidotti justly declares in her introduction to *The Posthuman*: “Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history” ([11], p. 1). However, to qualify the depiction of migrants in the media as “post-human” would signify that they are portrayed as having evolved from a “human” condition, when in fact their reality has been appropriated and repurposed as a series of signs characterizing them as *opposites* of the Western (believed to be “human”) populations¹³. Because the majority of migrants do not have proper identification or documentation (having most likely fled their country in a hurry), because they do not speak French, and, last but not least, because they do not occupy a sedentary space in the manner of established Western populations, they are portrayed in the media as perpetual nomads, the subjects of a Eurocentric discursive construct of the non-modern and, consequently, the non-human¹⁴.

As a matter of fact, the way this “new” population of migrants has been depicted in the media is not unlike the way the “old” migrant group occupying the first Calais camp between 1999 and 2002 was represented. Reinisch explains that the 2002 migrant crisis was caused by several political changes and challenges worldwide, conflicts in Eastern Europe and Kuwait causing the displacement of large populations looking for a safe haven in Europe¹⁵. These displaced populations represented a point of contention for both the British and French governments, and created tensions that eventually led to the closing of the camp¹⁶. Reinisch explains the discursive exploitation of the migrants’ living condition in the news media of the time: “In Britain, the frenzied press coverage...brought a number of more or less predictable responses: political scaremongering, complaints about transport disruption, more general accusations and blame, soul-searching and humanitarian concerns” ([8], p. 515). Whether he was represented as a source of conflict and fear or as a cause towards which all Western Europeans should turn, the migrant became a symbol of what the average Western European believed himself not to be: a savage, living in a “Jungle,” who had to be monitored.

The definition of humanism as opposed to an animalistic, “savage” nature dates back to the time of the European conquests and the Enlightenment. Hayden White in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* explains:

¹² “The French government says the removal of up to 1000 migrants intent on reaching Britain is a “humanitarian operation” and that they are being offered accommodation in containers recently installed nearby or in migrant centres elsewhere in the country. But many migrants, most of whom have fled war, poverty or persecution in the Middle East or Africa, are reluctant to move because to be allowed access to the containers they have to be fingerprinted.” [16].

¹³ “European governments have allowed widespread fears about migration and terrorism to erode their commitment to civil rights and liberal ideals, according to a new report by the advocacy group Human Rights Watch.” [17].

¹⁴ The stereotypes built around the figure of the migrant originate from colonial constructs, as Braidotti explains in terms of Eurocentrism: “Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behavior, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as ‘others’. These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies” ([11], p. 15).

¹⁵ “The themes of the decade were integration and union, but also the disappearance of old certainties, and instead greater heterogeneity, military conflict and civil war. One product of both trends was a growing number of migrants and refugees, particularly from eastern and south-eastern European countries, from parts of the Middle-East and Africa now affected by new conflicts and civil wars” ([8], p. 516).

¹⁶ “Riots broke out in 2001, as groups of migrants stormed fences and attempted to enter the Tunnel. Eurotunnel, the private operator, twice initiated legal proceedings to close the center; both were turned down. French and British local authorities also repeatedly called for the closing of Sangatte...In November 2002, the camp was closed to new arrivals, and it was formally closed by the end of the year” ([8], pp. 515–16).

To be sure, expressions such as “Wild Man” and “Noble Savage” are metaphors; and insofar as they were once taken literally, they can be regarded simply as errors, mistakes or fallacies. But the fact is that human culture cannot do without such metaphors, and when we have to identify things that resist conventional systems of classification, they are not functionally useful but necessary for the well-being of social groups. Metaphors are crucially necessary when a culture or social group encounters phenomena that either elude or run afoul of normal expectations or quotidian experiences ([18], p. 184).

The arrival of the returned in Gobert’s 2012 series *Les Revenants* represents an occasion for some of the protagonists to reaffirm their human nature insofar as the notion of humanity pertains to the realm of Christianity. In the series, a prayer group is quickly organized at a catholic non-profit named La Main Tendue (“The Helping Hand”) [9] in order for the living to cope with the return of the dead. Though they do not understand why the dead have returned, their leader Pierre in the first season is convinced that God has sent them as proof of his existence and of resurrection¹⁷. However, Pierre admits later that he truly believes the dead to be a symptom of the Apocalypse¹⁸. He thus opens La Main Tendue as a refuge for the town’s living and their returned relatives, stating: “I understand your concerns, but don’t be afraid...death is no longer an end. Our existence is not limited to our time on earth. Those who have returned are proof of that. The Main Tendue was chosen as their safe haven. Soon, a new world will begin” ([9], Season 1, Episode 7: “Adèle”).

In the dramatic first season finale entitled “The Horde,” the returned encircle La Main Tendue, demanding to be reunited with the dead who have remained in the building alongside their living family members. After a nerve-racking scene during which gunshots can be heard outside the closed shutters of the building, the dead leave town and they are quickly accused of kidnapping the policemen who were entrusted with protecting La Main Tendue. From that point on, Pierre is determined to eliminate the dead as he believes them to be a threat to the last group of living left in their very isolated town. The character of Pierre quickly goes from evangelist to prophet, and finally to cult leader, as his determination to rid his town of the dead leads him to kidnap and torture some of the returned in the second season.

With the character of Pierre, Gobert manages to represent the construction of the Other in the French discourse as a non-Christian “savage” effectively threatening the stability and authority (represented by the policemen) of a small French town. Pierre’s turn of faith in the series is symbolic of the evolution of the myth of the Wild Man during the eighteenth century, from the metaphor of the Noble Savage (White, [18]) to a dangerous, premodern entity, a construction meant to justify the uniqueness and humanity of Christians through their possessing qualities not found in the natural world. Kay Anderson explains:

The idea of human uniqueness—of exceptionality in relation to all the life forms that made up the non-human world—occupied a cherished position in ancient and biblical anthropology. Both such traditions addressed in different registers the question of people’s relationship to the natural world, the origins of the first humans, and the original state of humankind. In combination, the traditions emphasized the attributes of reason and soul as the defining measures of humanness. But during the period of the so-called Enlightenment...two loosely formulated notions became intricately through some quite specific writings. First was the idea that there existed a universal unity to the human. The second idea held that human potentiality was realized in a movement out of nature ([12], p. 35).

¹⁷ “What she [Camille, the first returned] is experiencing is terrifying but also amazing. We’ll be there for her” ([9], Episode 1: Camille).

¹⁸ “It’s all happening as it was written. They’re here to warn us that the end is near. And when it comes, it will be wonderful” ([9], Season 1, Episode 7: “Adèle”).

In Gobert's *Les Revenants*, Pierre acts as the authority that will determine who is human and who is not in his constant characterization of the undead as savage, non-human and therefore linked to nature. In his own "movement out of nature" and indoctrination of the masses, Pierre symbolizes the current mediatic characterization of Others as "savages" that serve the purpose of presenting the West as human, and migrants as non-human. While Gobert has not openly said that the series was a reflection of the Syrian migration, it can be inferred from the series' narrative arcs that the many similarities in script and scenario with Campillo's 2004 film do reflect the same sort of malaise concerning the treatment of migrant Others in contemporary French society. Furthermore, in positing the character of Pierre as the voice of a traditional, Christian society that purposely rejects Others, drives them out of their "civilized" town and into the woods, and characterizes them as the antithesis of humanity, Gobert is able to extend his criticism of the current situation in France into a more generic realm, one that is not a priori tainted by national politics but rather ecological politics: the realm of nature. In associating the zombie with the natural, "non-human" realm, Gobert produces an ecocritical discourse that surreptitiously reflects the current ethical debate regarding the human crisis in France.

4. The Zombie as "Non-human": Ecocriticism and Identity Politics

Several scholars have recently questioned the use of the zombie in postcolonial narratives as an expression of the post-human¹⁹. The term "post-human" indicates that such a condition would exist *after* the human condition, insinuating either the alteration or the disappearance of "humanity," and consequently of the original construct of the "human" as defined during the periods of Western imperialism and the Enlightenment. If we follow this definition of "post-human" and apply it to the trope of the zombie (who is technically post-living) in the historical and political contexts of Gobert and Campillo's work, the returned would then appear as a symptom of a world in which the social, ethnic, and national power balance of One and Other has shifted after the migrant Others arrived en masse on the main (European) territory. "Post-human" would therefore mean "post-Western," an era in which the historically imperial construct of the West would be jeopardized by the increased presence of the Other.

In addition to suggesting a post-human/post-Western stage in Europe, Gobert, in the 2012 series *Les Revenants*, uses the figure of the zombie as an expression of the non-human realm revealing (and denouncing) the current anti-human practices of the living, as the dead are eventually forced *out* of the town by Pierre and the police's continuous manhunt (or zombie-hunt) into the nearby woods. In *The Nonhuman Turn*, Richard Grusin explains that, unlike the post-human, the non-human does not reflect an evolution from the human stage. Rather, the non-human exists outside of the human, not as enmeshed, superposed or related entities, but as completely distinct constructions [20]²⁰. Grusin further describes the non-human as "animals, plants, organisms, climatic systems, technologies or ecosystems" ([20], p. x). Following Grusin's logic, I argue here that while the zombie in Gobert's narrative calls attention to the West's post-human condition, it is in itself presented as being ostracized *to* the non-human realm and, as such, reveals Gobert's adaptation of Campillo's narrative to have taken on a politically tainted ecocritical dimension.

¹⁹ In *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*, editors Sarah Juliet Lauro and Deborah Christie inquire: "With an eye toward the future (and perhaps a tongue in cheek), we question whether the zombie resembles our prehistoric past, acts as a mirror reflecting our present anxieties, or suggests whether the future will house a more evolved post-humanity or merely the graves of a failed civilization" ([19], pp. 1–2).

²⁰ "Unlike the posthuman turn with which it is often confused, the nonhuman turn does not make a claim about teleology or progress in which we begin with the human and see a transformation from the human to the posthuman, after or beyond the human. Although the best work on the posthuman seeks to avoid such teleology, even these works oscillate between seeing the posthuman as a new stage in human development and seeing it as calling attention to the inseparability of human and nonhuman...The nonhuman turn, on the other hand, insists (to paraphrase Latour) that "we have never been human" but that the human has always coevolved, coexisted, or collaborated with the nonhuman—and that the human is characterized precisely by this distinction from the nonhuman" ([20], pp. ix–x).

The return of the dead in the series *Les Revenants* coincides with the continuous decrease of the water level and the drowning of several elks and mountain goats from the nearby woods in the local lake. In the middle of the first season, the cause of the animals' death is revealed: they have fled the woods and run to their deaths in the lake, the same lake that formed after the flooding of the old town about thirty-five years prior to the dead's return ([9], Season 1, Episode 5: "Serge and Toni"). With the water level constantly dropping, the old church steeple begins to resurface, and so does the guilt of the living. Among the people who originally died in the flood was the engineer who designed the faulty barrage. Victor, the clairvoyant little boy who is believed by the dead to be their leader, had in fact warned the engineer that the barrage would give in to the water pressure thirty-five years prior, to no avail. The engineer's son, a governmental investigator named Berg, appears in the second season as trusting the dead and the living equally in his search of the truth concerning the recent events.

At the beginning of the second season, following the harrowing first season finale at La Main Tendue, the dead go into hiding deep into the woods following yet another flood, this time of the "new" town²¹. More animals are found dead, except now it is the returned who are to blame for their deaths. In a particularly symbolic opening scene of the second season, an elk is seen wandering the streets of the deserted downtown after the water from the flood has retreated: as the elk turns around to face the camera, a gaping wound is exposed on its flank. Later in the episode, the elk eventually stops to lie down and dies, surrounded by military men who cannot help save its life. The elk had descended from the woods to town to seek help from the living after being mortally attacked by the dead: however, after the flooding of the town, the living have either left or retreated to other neighborhoods, technically fleeing to save themselves, and leaving the army and police in control ([9], Season 2, Episode 1: "The Child").

The living's inability to make themselves available to tend to the natural disaster that just occurred and their leaving the current situation in the hands of the military are suggestive of past human disasters in France, namely, in the context of both the film and the series *Les Revenants*, the post-Algerian War treatment of *harkis* and *pieds-noirs* migrants, and the 2002 Sangatte crisis. Through this ecological narrative, Gobert creates a series of mirroring effects that effectively emblemize the current human crisis in Calais as a repercussion and a repetition of the 2002 events in Sangatte. Moreover, in mirroring Campillo's original narrative, Gobert calls attention to *historical precedence*, a theme that also appears in the mirrored image of the double flooding of the town, thirty-five years apart.

The dead's feeding on the elk is highly symbolic and prophetic of the living's slow descent into anti-humanism and their responsibility in the destruction of the natural world. Gobert artistically develops his narrative within a dual postcolonial and ecological framework, which enables him to create a critical discourse of the current situation of migrants in contemporary France. The fear of the Other is effectively materialized in the dead attacking the elk, suggesting that they might also be capable of attacking the living. Cannibalism as a colonial myth designed to dehumanize and stigmatize others is²², in Gobert's narrative, symbolic of the dehumanization tactics brought upon the migrant Other in the contemporary mediatic discourse: they should be feared, excluded, left aside as their proximity to the city-center (Calais) would put "humans" (French citizens) in danger.

The foreshadowing of the animals' brutal deaths at the hands of the dead as seen in their voluntary drowning in the first season is significant throughout the series of the gradual loss of connection between humans and the natural world, as the treatment of the returned by the local population

²¹ After spending some time roaming the woods, the dead decide to settle in a hamlet left empty after the recent flood and separated from the living by a large body of water. Eventually, as more of the dead come back to life and their housing situation becomes unmanageable, and as they begin to fear for their safety, the dead decide to go back into the woods at the end of the second season.

²² Huggan and Tiffin write in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*: "As numerous commentators have suggested, the routine assumption that the people westerners encountered in the 'new worlds' they conquered and occupied were cannibals demonstrated the fear of cannibalism rather than its actual practice—not that cannibalism did not exist as a reality, but its paramount significance was as a self-authorizing myth (Arens 1979; Hulme 1998)" ([21], p. 169).

progressively deteriorates. While the dead are first introduced as pacifist beings who resemble and act like their former selves, they are revealed as having the potential to become less human-like if no one in the living world is there to care for them, if they no longer exist in the discourse of the living ([9], Season 2, Episode 5: “Mrs. Costa”). For example, the character of Audrey who died in a bus accident four years prior to her return from the dead, is first presented as a human-like teenager, and continues to behave like one as long as her mother is alive and looking for her. However, once her mother has died next to her in the holding cell of La Main Tendue where Pierre has made them both prisoners, Audrey reverts to an animal-like state and eats her mother ([9], Season 2, Episode 8: “The Returned”). In this sense, the series surfaces as a commentary on the characterization of Others as non-human, as the dead in the series appear as oracles predicting the consequences of the living’s dismissal of their past and recent mismanaging of Others. These consequences are depicted in the living’s destruction of the natural world and their possible entrance into a cannibalistic era.

Gobert’s narrative eventually demonstrates that the living are the ones who are actually responsible for the killings perpetrated by the dead because of their original characterization or “zombification” of the dead as Others, and their exclusion from the town. In their introduction to the collection of essays *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human* [17], editors Deborah Christie and Sarah Juliet Lauro define the general characteristics of the zombie in Western literature and film as follows:

[Z]ombies do all share a common characteristic: the absence of some metaphysical quality of their essential selves. This may be the soul, the mind, the will, or, in some cases, the personality. But every zombie experiences a loss of something essential that previous to zombification defined it as a human...The original self has been altered in a way that guts its essence. The person is no longer a person in either an existential or metaphysical sense ([19], p. 7).

In traditional North-American zombie narratives (for example, *Night of the Living Dead* [22]), the zombie’s condition is usually unexplained; in contrast, in the recent *The Walking Dead* series [23], an explanation for the zombie’s condition is provided to the audience: a virus has propagated and made it so humans upon their deaths would come back to life, hungry for human flesh but having no remembrance of who they were prior to their passing. In his original narrative *Les Revenants* (2004) [1], Campillo displaces the blame for the returned’s “zombification” from an unexplained cause or a virus to the general consciousness of the town’s inhabitants: they are the ones effectively “zombifying” their loved ones, as their fear of the unknown Other drives them to distrust, and eventually annihilate the returned.

The dead in Campillo’s film appear to have been “zombified” by the very discourse of established Western values (the dead cannot come back to life): if it were not for the established values of Western society, they would not be perceived as having lost “something essential that previous to zombification defined [them] as human [19]”. In fact, in Gobert’s adaptation in 2012, when the first dead character Camille returns to her home, her mother Claire cannot see any significant changes in her daughter’s appearance or behavior²³. She initially believes her daughter’s return to be due to her constant praying, as advised by Pierre²⁴. At the end of the first season, Claire, however, chooses to follow her daughter and the rest of the returned as they go into hiding into the woods. Claire spends the second season caring for her daughter who longs to be reunited with the undead as remaining with her living mother is causing her emotional and physical distress.

Claire’s perception of her daughter is first guided by her own personal beliefs as emphasized by the leader of the Main Tendue, Pierre. Through the unfolding of this mother–daughter/ living–undead relationship, Gobert opposes the perception of the Other as it is grounded in Western values, with the

²³ “I agree, it’s not [possible]. But she is here.” ([9], Episode 1: Camille).

²⁴ “Camille’s come back. You told me my prayers would be heard.” ([9], Episode 1: Camille).

instinctive self-questioning process regarding the validity of those values that becomes necessary when faced with the improbable: the intrusion or return of the Other in our everyday life. The character of Claire in Gobert's series *Les Revenants* symbolizes the dual options with which host nations (symbolized in the fictional French town) are now faced [9]. Reinisch explains: "The debate between proponents of a humanitarian idea to help vulnerable people in need, and those who argue that perceived and actual harshness in their treatment can deter new arrivals, is as paralyzing as it has always been" ([8], p. 519). The contemporary ill treatment of refugees is incarnated in Gobert's *Les Revenants* both in how the returned are driven away and "zombified" by their loved ones' beliefs, and in the living's purposeful disregard for natural distress, as expressed in the breaking of the barrage and the death of the animals.

5. Conclusions

In constructing migrants as non-humans living in the "Jungle," Anglophone and Francophone media dwell on dated concepts of humanity that do not fit the reality of global migration. In Gobert's *Les Revenants* [9], the mishandling of the returned by the authorities is severely punished as the policemen who disappeared during the first season finale are found dead in the second season, attached to the trees delimiting the woods where the returned are hiding, their bodies visibly scathed. The policemen suffered the same treatment as the elk that eventually died while looking for help in the abandoned town. The deaths of both the elk and the policemen as they are constructed in Gobert's narrative appear as an omen, a prophecy of what is to happen if those who consider themselves humans do not halt their anti-human practices.

As the media continues to place the migrant Other in a geographic but also discursive "Jungle," outside of the Western "human" discourse and reality, Gobert artfully uses his *Revenants* to emblemize the extent of the human crisis that is affecting the beginning of the twenty-first century in France. In superimposing two discourses promoting the human (or humanitarian) treatment of Others and the preservation of nature (nature itself as opposed to the Western construction of nature as savage), Gobert expands tremendously on Campillo's original narrative on migration and repressed guilt in the treatment of Others. In fact, Gobert produces a post-human narrative that reflects on the relationship between the human and the non-human. The director's interest in nature preservation and analogy between the natural realm and the dead is significant of a recent increased interest in ecology as directly impacting the way we live socially and economically. In *Animal Pragmatism: Rethinking Human–Nonhuman Relationships* [24], editors Andrew Light and Erin McKenna insist: "...it is only recently that a critical mass of attention has focused on our possible ethical obligations to other animals...Indeed, it may represent the largest expansion of the domain of moral consideration in the West since the era of debates over slavery and women's suffrage. Its potential, if fully realized, could fundamentally change the terms of our day-to-day lives, as well as our social, political, and economic structures" ([24], p. 1).

In this sense, Fabrice Gobert has transformed the classic zombie genre into an artistic political platform that addresses contemporary postcolonial, post-human and environmental issues within an accessible framework, that of television entertainment. This new genre, as it was made available on Netflix streaming in North America in 2014, has the potential to reach a significantly large audience that might not, in its exposure to regular news media, be made privy to the intricate nationalistic discourse of contemporary France, particularly in the context of immigration and of global migration.

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