

Zombie Biopolitics

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The zombie is first and foremost an expression of Haitianness. . . . the zombie exists, by definition, in a state that as closely resembles the movement of life as it does the immobility of death.

—Kaïama Glover, *Haiti Unbound*

The plantation thesis uncovers the interlocking workings of modernity and blackness, which culminate in long-standing, uneven racial geographies while also centralizing that the idea of the plantation is migratory. . . . With this, differential modes of survival emerge—creolization, the blues, maroonage, revolution, and more—revealing that the plantation, in both slave and postslave context, must be understood alongside complex negotiations of time, space, and terror.

—Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation Futures”

Barbadosed

In the late 1640s Colonel Walrond, a plantation owner in the colony of Barbados, decapitated the body of an enslaved African man who had committed suicide rather than labor for Walrond in the Caribbean. Walrond placed the man’s head on a twelve-foot pole and, according to the British writer Richard Ligon, “caused all his *Negroes* to come forth, and march around this head, and bid them look on it” in order to make the case that the enslaved Africans “were in a main error, in thinking they went into their own Countries, after they were dead; for this mans head was here, as they all were witness of; and how was it possible, the body could go without a head.”¹ Killing oneself, Walrond sought to demonstrate, was not a way to escape the living death of Caribbean enslavement—not a way to effect natal repatriation in body or spirit.

According to some accounts, the Haitian origins of the zombie relate directly to the display of the decapitated head on a pole—and specifically to the message that Colonel Walrond, as well as plantation owners in colonial St. Domingue, sought to convey with the horrific (and horrifyingly conventional) staging of the tortured black body as the sign of plantation power. Amy Wilentz notes that historically, Haitian slaves who committed suicide were understood to

be condemned to remain in the colony as zombies, unable to return to Africa upon death: "The only escape from the sugar plantations was death, which was seen as a return to Africa. . . . Suicide was the slave's only way to take control over his or her own body. And yet, the fear of becoming a zombie might stop them from doing so."² The zombie known today in vodou practices originates as the material presence of the living death of slavery. As Kaiama Glover indicates, in Haitian vodou practice, the zombie is a being "without essence": "Without any recollection of its past or hope for the future, the zombie exists only in the present of its exploitation. It represents the lowest being on the social scale: a thingified no-person reduced to its productive capacity."³ The zombie is thus a material figure of what I identify as *bare labor*—namely, the reduction of the human, in the words of Sylvia Wynter, to "so many units of labour power."⁴ In the dismembered body of the slave that Colonel Walrond displays on a pole, we see the body that can be killed without juridical cost or consequence, the body of what Giorgio Agamben would call "bare life": I suggest, however, that the enslaved African is better described as "bare labor" given that the conscription of Africans into capitalist modernity functions by way of stripping sociality from the labor force through technologies of social death: the dehumanized body of the enslaved African is *forced* to live in order to work without respite.

In Walrond's theatrical reanimation of the dead and mutilated body of the African man as perpetually enslaved, we thus see a negative image of the living death of enslavement—a body alive yet dead, a body dead yet alive—and therewith the creation of what Anthony Bogues has called the "living corpse" of the enslaved African.⁵ The living corpse—whose cultural avatar we can recognize as the zombie—is relegated to a zone of nonbeing in the primal scene of colonial modernity and racial capitalism: namely, the plantation. Significantly, Bogues argues, this is also the scene of the emergence of the "human" in Western thought. The zone of nonbeing to which enslaved Africans as well as (in different fashion) indigenous Americans were conscribed also marked out the presence, being, and mastery of the resourced, white, genealogically reproductive, legally substantiated, Enlightenment man.⁶ But as Bogues also contends, there is a vital history of thought—an archive of freedom practices—that emerges from the living corpse, from the terrorized body barred from sociality, kinship, and the status of the human: "On these bodies, practices of violence were conducted that made them not sites of exception but rather sites in which regularized performances of violence as power were enacted. Yet from these bodies, seemingly corpses, there emerged a set of practices that generated thought."⁷ In pointing to a history of expression, thought, and culture that

emerged from the “seeming corpses” of the enslaved and dispossessed, Bogue is implicitly (if not explicitly) contesting the claims of both Agamben and Gayatri Spivak: the living corpse, he indicates, is not exceptional but constitutive with respect to (colonial) modernity and Enlightenment knowledge; further, the living corpse speaks.⁸

In this essay I propose an account of zombie biopolitics—one that turns to the figure of the zombie to track the colonial origins of biopolitics on the Caribbean plantation. For Michel Foucault, biopower aims at the production and protection of specific forms of life rather than the threat of death: in Foucault’s succinct formulation, biopolitics has the power to make live and let die, whereas the power of the sovereign is that of making die and letting live. But in the case of the enslaved African in the Americas, these categories are less than clear: the enslaved African is, one might argue, made to live as socially dead. Race slavery aims to produce and protect the living *after* it has killed them—race slavery creates the living dead. I turn, then, to the Caribbean plantation as the “aperture” of a capitalist *geography* of modernity—one that relies on a regime of racialization, terror, and the creation of bare labor that might best be described as “zombie biopolitics.”⁹

A few key propositions structure the argument that follows. First, the (attempted) production of the living corpse / bare labor must be seen as central to a biopolitics of racial capital. Second, however, zombie biopolitics does not solely name the necropolitics of the plantation, to use Achille Mbembe’s word. Rather, it points, as well, to “plantation futures” (in the words of Katherine McKittrick)—that is, to the specific form of the aliveness of the zombie as much as its deadness.¹⁰ The zombie appears with tremendous vitality in a long history of Haitian voodoo practice and Caribbean culture. Elizabeth McAlister, for instance, notes the creative and transformative nature of the zombie as a cultural form that transmutes a history of death and terror under slavery into religious life: “Zonbi-making is an example of a nonwestern form of thought that diagnoses, theorizes, and responds mimetically to the long history of violently consumptive and dehumanizing capitalism in the Americas from the colonial period until the present.”¹¹ The zombie inhabits a line of flight, then, marking an instance of cultural creativity—of sociality and reassemblage—produced from within the shadow of technologies of social death.¹² And yet, third, and perhaps most pointedly, this line of flight is the scene of continued capitalist extraction and reappropriation: the very sociality that the zombie embodies is itself extracted by capitalism for the reproduction of whiteness as futurity and value. The zombie today is nothing if not a profit-making machine on large and small screens, proliferating across a massive and still-growing corpus

of US-produced films, books, television shows, and scholarly works.¹³ The zombie, then, is a key figure that speaks to long histories and current crises of human and inhuman assemblages, to forms of life and capitalist contestation articulated at a biopolitical level.

Biopolitical Geographies

The plantation does not appear in Foucault's account of the birth of biopolitics: his account is elaborated from the grounds of the European nation-state, with scant attention paid to the role of colonialism in founding and sustaining such a state.¹⁴ Zombie biopolitics, by way of contrast, elaborates an account of the origin of biopolitics from the grounds of the plantation. At the core of this account are three aspects of biopolitics that require reconsideration when reframed from a colonial perspective: geography, capital, and race.

The specific geography of colonialism and capitalist modernity (absent from Foucault's biopolitics) is worth foregrounding here: a key feature of the plantation-centric geography of Americanness is the *distinct geographic separation between the site of production and that of social reproduction*. Colonial modernity as embodied in the plantation complex constructs the colony as a site of production alone—one in which social reproduction is unresourced if not actively eradicated. In this formulation (as throughout this essay), I refer in particular to what Antonio Benítez-Rojo identifies as the "Plantation" thesis—a specific formation of extractive agricultural production linked to the Caribbean origins of racial capital—rather than the colonial "plantation" in its diverse histories. Early sugar plantations on Hispaniola, owned by the Spanish crown, as Benítez-Rojo notes, were more closely related to an economy that emphasized settlement than exploitation/extraction. The subsequent reorganization of the plantation toward extraction correlates with the shift from plantation to Plantation, a shift that arrived at different historical moments on different Caribbean islands: first in Barbados and Jamaica, later in St. Domingue and, following the Haitian Revolution, in Cuba.¹⁵

While the colony is the site of production alone (ideologically speaking), social reproduction, in turn, becomes the prerogative of the metropole. For this reason, not only enslaved Africans but also free blacks and white creoles from colonies such as Barbados and St. Domingue were largely viewed as debauched, degraded, and less than civilized: an education in the metropole and/or marriage to a metropolitan European (a physical return to the land of legitimate social reproduction) was required for even white creoles to gain an aura of civility and social legitimacy. The technology of social death, developed

in the colony, thus works to effect a central aspect of the market economy as described by Karl Marx, namely, the separation of production and consumption. The geographic distinction between sites of production and consumption—and the attendant technologies of social death and social reproduction written into this geography—is visible in the core commodity of Barbados and the West Indies, namely, sugar. Sugar is produced in the colony but consumed in the metropole: further, sugar production in the colony is the scene of social death if not physical death on the plantation (fig. 1); sugar consumption in the metropole is the site of exuberant and developing sociality. Consider, for instance, the wedding cake or the elaborate sugar statuary (“subtleties”) (fig. 2) of the European banquet table in all their saccharine glory as extravagant sites of social reproduction.¹⁶

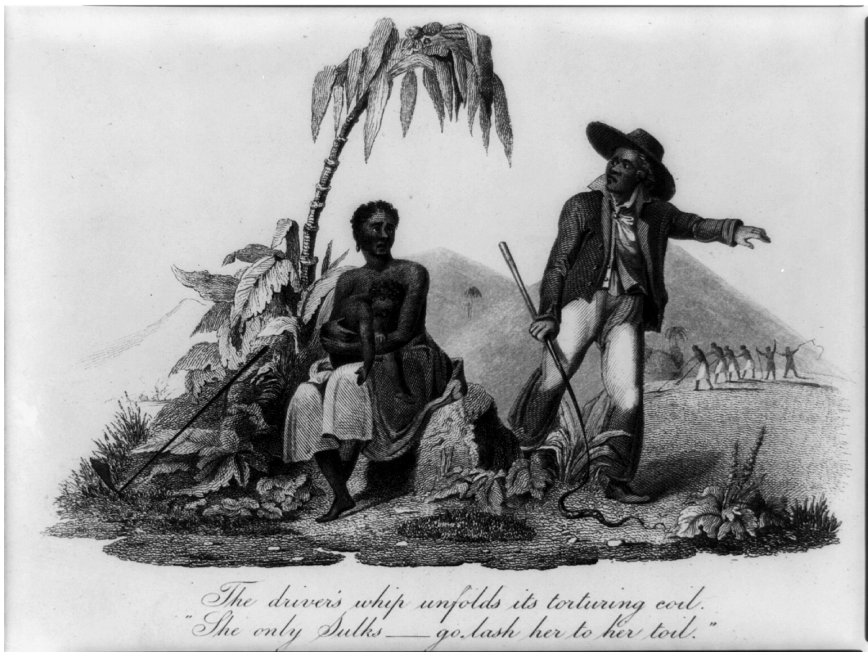


Figure 1.

Sugar and social death: abolitionist image of an overseer forcing a mother to leave her child. Drawing originally published by the Female Society, for Birmingham, West-Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and Their Respective Neighbourhoods, for the Relief of British Negro Slaves (1828). Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.



The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. ID no.: gri_festivals_86_b22668_pl7. For higher resolution images visit: http://hdl.handle.net/10020/repro_perm.

Figure 2.

Sugar and social reproduction: table with sugar figures for the marriage of Johann Wilhelm, Duke of Jülich. Frans Hogenberg (1587). Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Foucault does not attend to this wider geography of production and the centrality of the colony to metropolitan social reproduction, mostly because his analysis begins from the nation state and not capitalism.

However, the plantation complex emerged not as a state-driven enterprise but as a commercial one. The English colonization of Barbados, for instance, begins in the hands of joint venture companies that are later supported by the state. Mistaking the temporal formation of the colony as secondary to the nation-state (rather than co-constitutive) leads to claims such as the nineteenth-century chestnut that English imperialism took place in a “fit of absence of mind”—a claim that remains a subject of discussion in studies of English imperialism today but that is possible only when you associate awareness with the state, not with capital.¹⁷ A state-centered genealogy of biopolitics, such as Foucault’s, then, misses the foundational nature of colonialism and the plantation complex with respect to the differentiated geography of capitalist modernity.

Foucault's account of race is also framed in relation to the politics of the European state and nationalism, resulting in a resolute blindness with respect to biopolitics and racial capitalism. In his lectures of 1975–76, *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault directly takes up the question of biopolitics and race. He begins by proposing that politics are a form of war and, specifically, at base, a form of race war between Normans and Anglo-Saxons, Franks and Gauls. Accordingly, it seems accurate to say that Foucault's notion of biopower has race at its core, yet the concept of race that Foucault turns to is manifestly Eurocentric, or metropolitan-centric, and, as such, fails to address race as it informs the biopolitics of the colonial plantation. Further, because Foucault's concept of race concerns the history of Normans, Anglo-Saxons, Franks, and Gauls, his account of race relations is that of a war to death—of genocide. For this reason, Foucault's account of state racism can be summarized in Nazi genocidal ideology. In the Atlantic world from the seventeenth century on, power was certainly biopolitical: it was exercised at the level of life, race, and population. Significantly, however, the production of bare labor is not oriented toward genocide: race is the key term of a biopolitics that does not aim at a war of destruction but at a system of production.

The Plantation Complex and the Technology of Social Death

Placing the archive of freedom practices and thought that emerge from the “seeming” corpses described by Bogues next to the instance of Walrond's cruel stagecraft in Barbados makes visible the performative force of terror as a *technology* of social death. Technology, in this instance, is an “art, skill, cunning of hand” aimed at the production of social death—a “science” designed to strip the natality, language, kinship, and social being from a person.¹⁸ Rather than view social death as a state of being or an identity, then, I suggest it might be understood as a technology—one that colonialism (and neocolonialism) deploys, albeit one that does not ever precisely succeed in its contradictory aims of eradicating social life while sustaining bare labor.¹⁹ Placing Walrond's *techne* next to Bogues's account of the living corpse that speaks, we see that while there is a technology of social death, *there is also no such thing as social death*. Nonetheless, the effort to forcibly manage the distribution of life through the technology of social death constitutes an originary biopolitics that took shape in the “laboratory” of the plantation.²⁰

In a sweeping account of the global reach of the plantation complex, Kris Manjappa delineates key elements that create the admixture of the plantation form, arising from a Caribbean origin:

The plantation complex was honed and streamlined in the Caribbean from the 1500s to the 1700s. It mixed together ecological extraction, racism, colonialism, financial and mercantile capitalism, militarism, and agricultural science into a destructive, cellular form that metastasized from the Caribbean across the Global South after abolition, creating . . . a global “plantation arc.”²¹

The colony of Barbados, where Walrond performed his horror show in the 1640s, was the earliest and most decisive laboratory for the development of the plantation technology that produced racial capitalism. “Claimed” by the British in 1625 in the name of King James I, by 1665 the island of Barbados had the “premier export economy of the Atlantic,” exporting over one hundred million pounds of sugar per year produced through the labor of twenty-five thousand enslaved Africans on increasingly large and mechanized plantations. With stolen land and labor, Barbados became the richest colony in the West Indies and the first to pioneer the model of large-scale enslaved African labor and extractive plantation agriculture in the modern world.²² Put another way, Barbados evolved, from 1627 to 1665, into one of the first islands that was unable to feed itself because it was almost singularly producing sugar for a European market—a story that exemplifies the new shape of “Americanity” in a global system of capitalist production.²³

Notable in this history of developing and honing the plantation technologies of settler colonialism and social death in Barbados are key inflection points that proved axiomatic to the organization of the plantation and its subsequent migratory capacity. The island of Barbados was inhabited by the Taino and Kalinago prior to the sixteenth century, when raids by Spanish conquistadores captured indigenous people for enslavement and decimated the island, leaving it “empty” when the English arrived in the seventeenth century. Agricultural success by settler colonials was premised on both the elimination of indigenous relations to the land and appropriation of indigenous knowledge about the land: during the first year of the English colony’s founding, Henry Powell—the uncle of the first English governor of Barbados—visited Portuguese-held Guiana in 1627 and acquired not only native seeds and roots (tobacco, corn, cassava, sweet potatoes, plantains, bananas, melons, and citrus fruits) but also kidnapped thirty Arawak Indians who were brought to Barbados to teach the English how to cultivate these plants.²⁴ As Scott Morgensen notes, “We can read extermination [of Indigenous peoples] as a biopolitics originary to the settler colonial situations that conditioned enslavement on settled land.”²⁵

Importantly, the English colonization of Barbados, from its inception, was in the hands of a corporate entity—the Courteen Company—whose sole aim

was maximum return on investment. The Courteen Company was led by two brothers who embodied the “new breed of businessman in London—the transnational merchant prince with connections across the globe.”²⁶ After cultivating first tobacco, then cotton, and then indigo without producing significant profit in London markets, English plantation owners in Barbados turned to sugar in the 1640s with astounding success—success that made Barbadian planters the richest men in the English Empire. The profits from sugar were so immense, writes one contemporary observer, that planters became “so intent upon planting sugar that they had rather buy food at very dear rates than produce it by labor, so infinite is the profit of sugar works after once accomplished.”²⁷ Once the sugar revolution took hold, food was no longer grown in Barbados; rather, provisions were imported from New England—thus inaugurating on Barbados an extractive agricultural monoculture that was necessarily embedded in a geographically extensive world system of commodity exchange.

Coupled with the shift to the capital- and labor-intensive crop of sugar and the consolidation of small landholdings into large plantations, Barbadian plantation owners shifted from employing the labor of indentured white servants to that of enslaved Africans. In 1640 there were roughly thirty indentured white servants to every enslaved African in Barbados—in fact, so many British prisoners and Irishmen were impressed into indentured servitude in Barbados that the verb *barbadosed* was coined as a synonym for kidnapped—yet by 1680 there were seventeen enslaved Africans to every white indentured servant, and enslaved Africans constituted 95 percent of the workforce.²⁸ Funded by global capital—the Dutch helped finance both sugar cultivation in Barbados and the importation of African slaves—Barbados was the first colony to employ African slave labor on a large scale; this model was subsequently widely exported to other colonies in the Americas.²⁹ Following the shift to enslaved/racialized labor, Barbados enacted a comprehensive slave code in 1661 that defined Africans as “an heathenish brutish and an uncertain dangerous pride of people” who were not entitled to English liberty or the legal status of fully human subjects; this slave code enumerated a set of draconian terms crafted to enforce and sustain the racialized technology of social death and subsequently served as the basis and authority for slave laws later enacted in other colonies including South Carolina and Jamaica.

Barbados is thus a key site where the plantation was developed and refined into what Sidney Mintz has described as the first factory of the modern world.³⁰ Further, the technology of the Barbadian sugar plantation model (and here I do not refer simply to the machinery used to press the juice out of cane), once

perfected, was exported elsewhere—to North American colonies and to other islands of the Caribbean, in all its aspects enumerated above, including the ongoing warfare aimed at eliminating indigenous peoples and the production of the living death of enslaved Africans. Indeed, plantation owners themselves described Barbados as “a nursery for planting in Jamaica, Surinam, and other places.”³¹ This broader definition of the technology of the plantation makes it clear that it was a nursery for biopolitics as well—a school for developing and refining the management of bodies and populations, as well as biota, in the service of capital.

The Plantationocene and the Biopolitics of Disentanglement

“With the discovery of the New World and its vast exploitable lands,” writes Sylvia Wynter, “that process which has been termed the ‘reduction of Man to Labour and of Nature to Land’ had its large scale beginning.” Wynter here names the plantation as the origin of capitalist modernity—a modernity associated with the effort to make land a resource from which to extract crops, and (some) humans into resources for the labor of production and extraction. This transformation revises the relation between earth and humans from one of food cultivation for sustenance to one of crop cultivation for exchange on the market—a transformation that also works to eradicate the web of sociality and meaning (the deep social/material/cultural/spiritual connections) linking food, land, and people. Wynter writes, “The Caribbean area is the classic plantation area since many of its units were ‘planted’ with people, not in order to form societies, but to carry on plantations whose aim was to produce single crops for the market. That is to say, the plantation-societies of the Caribbean came into being as adjuncts to the market system; their peoples came into being as adjuncts to the product, to the single crop commodity—the sugar cane—which they produced.”³² The plantation works to eradicate sociality in the name of production and market relations alone, and does so in a way that fundamentally reshapes the relation of the human to earth and nourishment.

In related terms, Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing have recently proposed the term *Plantationocene*, together with *Capitalocene*, as alternatives or supplements to the more familiar *Anthropocene*. Haraway and Tsing foreground two dimensions of the advent of the plantation that speak to its historically world-changing effects—namely, its reliance on a vast geography (entailing the transportation of people, plants, animals, and genomes across enormous distances) and its work of disentanglement or alienation in the name of extraction (work that aims at separating out plants, people, animals, and places from their entangled lifeworlds). Haraway explains:

The Plantationocene makes one pay attention to the historical relocations of the substances of living and dying around the Earth as a necessary prerequisite to their extraction. . . . It is no accident that labor is brought in from elsewhere, even if, in principle, there is local labor available. Because it is more efficient in the logic of the plantation system to exterminate the local labor and bring in labor from elsewhere. The plantation system depends on the relocation of the generative units: plants, animals, microbes, people.³³

Haraway's formulations resonate with Wynter's account—not only in centering the plantation as the site of a world-changing logic of capitalist relations but also in specifying the concept of disentanglement or alienation as key to the plantation system that we have seen at work in Barbados. The plantation invention/institutionalization of agricultural monoculture exemplifies an effort to disentangle a plant—in this case, sugar—from all other plants and from its native lifeworld.³⁴ As indicated above, the Barbadian plantation refined the work of producing a single crop for transportation to metropolitan markets, such that the sustenance of those living on the island had to be largely imported from elsewhere. Further, the alienation of indigenous people from their land and lifeworlds together with the trafficking across oceans of enslaved Africans both involve herculean work of alienation and disentanglement. Disentangling people from their social worlds and biota from their environmental worlds—and obfuscating as well the deep and rich cross-species entanglement of human sociality and culture as imbricated with food, biota, and land—exemplifies the workings of biopower. Biopower aims to operate less on individual subjects than on life itself at both a supra-individual level (in a concern with populations rather than people) and a subindividual level (in a concern with, say, calories/units of energy, seeds/units of genetic material, or soil composition/units of mineral vs. water).

However, the plantation system's aim of disentanglement is a fraught one; just as the technology of social death cannot *not* produce new forms of social life in the shadow of social death, so too does the technology of disentanglement engender new forms of entanglement on the grounds of alienation. Importantly, in her account of the plantation, Wynter also notes that the food eaten by enslaved people was often grown on provision grounds—the small plots of land, typically in the mountains and on plantation margins, where enslaved people were permitted to grow food for sustenance and local exchange, in part so that plantation owners did not need to feed them.³⁵ “From early,” writes Wynter, “the planters gave the slaves plots of land on which to grow food to feed themselves in order to maximize profits. . . . this plot system, was . . . the focus of resistance to the market system and market values.” What emerges from the plot, following Wynter's analysis, is what we might call the reentanglement

of life within the shadow of the work of biopolitical management aimed at disentanglement. On the provision ground, writes Wynter, “the land remained the Earth—and the Earth was a goddess; man used the land to feed himself; and to offer first fruits to the Earth; his funeral was the mystical reunion with the earth. . . . Around the growing of yam, of food for survival, he created on the plot a folk culture—the basis of a social order.”³⁶ The provision ground thus grows not just yams but enables an assemblage of relations—of earth, of yam, of human nourishment, of the sacred, of life and death, and thus of sociality and relation itself.

If the plantation forces the socially dead subject to live on as bare labor, it is nonetheless impossible for life to be bare, to not accrue to it relations, connections, meaning, and value. Further, the technology of social death—aimed at the production of bare labor—may strengthen both the need and capacity to creatively elaborate new relations, to build kinship networks and aesthetic and material assemblages. Wynter speaks, for instance, of the profound necessity of creativity for the uprooted, enslaved African in the Caribbean: “Of all the people that came to the New World, the Negro as a group, has been the most creative culturally. He has been because he has had to be. It is the rhythm of the Negro—not of the African, not of the European—that informs the popular music of the New World.”³⁷ The analytic ground opened in the plantation-plot points to this profound creativity—a creativity of which the Haitian-born zombie is a part (as I show below). However, at the moment that this analytic ground becomes visible, it also reveals a new scene of theft, namely, a form of primitive accumulation that operates not by way of violently appropriating land or labor, but by way of extracting relationality itself—entanglement, intimacy, sociality—in the service of racial capital and white reproductive futurity.

The Sociality of the Zombie

The Plantation, then, is a lifeworld, albeit one in which the technology of social death plays a determining role. As Vincent Brown demonstrates in his study of colonial Jamaica, the omnipresence of death in the colony was itself the source of rich cultural creativity, shaping key aspects of social and political life for both whites and blacks in the colony.³⁸ In related terms, we can view the zombie not just as a figure of death but also as a figure of social life born in the shadow of the colonial technology of social death. In 1791 the wealthy plantation owner and leader of the so-called Planters Party in the early days of the Haitian revolution, Jean-Baptiste de Caradeux, reportedly executed more than fifty slaves who rebelled against the plantation regime and placed their

bloody heads on poles surrounding his property. As another planter boasted, “If anyone has qualms about cutting off heads, we will call in citizen General Caradeux; he made fifty or so [heads] fly during the time he was tenant of the Aubry estate and, so that everyone knew, stuck them on stakes like palm trees around his plantation.”³⁹ Caradeux is memorialized in Victor Hugo’s novel of the Haitian Revolution, *Bug-Jargal*, as “Citizen C”—a man who not only “had fifty black heads planted on either side of [his] avenue as if they were palm trees,” but also “wanted to slit the throats of . . . five hundred shackled negroes after the revolt, and to encircle the city of Cape with a cordon of slaves’ heads.”⁴⁰ Caradeux and Hugo thus multiply the head placed by Walrond on a pole in Barbados into a nameless and looming horde—a population—of the decapitated-yet-forever-enslaved dead whose heads demarcate the ownership of land by white settler colonials. Notably, Caradeux-the-cruel, as he remains known in Haiti today, was also renowned for his innovations in the technology of sugar production and refinement as well as for throwing his enslaved boilers into cauldrons if they did not produce the quality of sugar he sought. A plantation biopolitician par excellence, Caradeux at once sought to shape life itself at the subindividual level (the molecular makeup of sugar within the food chain) and at the supra-individual (the black body as laboring population rather than person).



Figure 3. Abolitionist cartoon linking sugar production to cannibalism: “Barbarities in the West Indies” by James Gilray (London, 1791). Courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

A second account of the early Haitian roots of the zombie refers to a counterpart of Caradeux's—a reverse image, as it were—found in the historical figure of Jean Zombi, a mulatto who was “renowned for his cruelty” according to Thomas Madiou, a nineteenth-century French historian. During the final days of the revolution in which Jean-Jacques Dessalines assumed control as the new leader of an independent Haiti, Zombi is said to have sought to prove his mettle by grabbing “un blanc,” dragging him to the steps of the government palace, and stabbing him in the chest with a knife to execute him.⁴¹ Zombi later became revered as a lwa or god within the pantheon of lwas in Haitian vodou. Colin Dayan concludes that “the undead zombi, recalled in the name of Jean Zombi, thus became a terrible composite power: slave turned rebel ancestor turned lwa, an incongruous, demonic spirit recognized through dreams, divination, or possession.”⁴² Significant in Dayan's account is her description of the zombie as a form of cultural *life* within a regime of terror and death. The zombie, as both captive undead spirit and revolutionary antislavery force in Haitian culture, is itself a creative cultural response to plantation biopolitics—one that tells the story of the insistence of life and sociality under the regime of social death.

The powerful sociality of the zombie endures today in Caribbean religious practices. In contemporary Haitian vodou practice, as Elizabeth McAlister reports, the zombie is still very much alive, although the resemblance to Hollywood screen zombies is minimal: “In Afro-Haitian religious thought, part of the spirit goes immediately to God after death, while another part lingers near the grave for a time. It is this portion of the spirit that can be captured and made to work; let's say, a form of ‘raw spirit life.’”⁴³ A sorcerer or bokor can capture this spirit in a bottle and put it to work. McAlister notes, as well, that the zombie is the only horror figure in US culture that is of a non-European origin. In both its Haitian history and its enduring presence, the zombie is both an instance of and a figure for social reproduction on the plantation—for the weaving together of sustaining narratives, bodies, and relations into a lifeworld. While there is a technology of social death that operates as an aspect of the geography of racial capital, it bears repeating that there is no such thing as social death.

Social Reproduction on the Plantation

It is not only black sociality that emerges in new forms on the plantation but white sociality (and its interdependence with and dependence on blacks) as well. The specific geography of coloniality aimed to relegate production to the

colony and arrogate social reproduction to the metropole, but the very real intimacies of bodies on colonial grounds made for white creole social worlds as well as interracial ones. An effect of this entanglement, I suggest, is the creation of colonial strategies of erasure and appropriation—strategies that insistently appropriate black, creole, and interracial sociality to produce whiteness as a form of futurity and reproduction.

Lady Maria Nugent, the wife of the British-appointed governor of Jamaica, General George Nugent, attended church in Kingston on the morning of June 26, 1803. Her travel to the church was marred, however, by the necessity of passing by the severed head of a decapitated slave that had been placed on a pole along her carriage route to the church. She was thus forced to encounter the dismembered head of one of two slaves, Dundo and Goodluck, who were, according to a newspaper report, convicted of “forming a rebellious Conspiracy” and “sentenced to be hanged by the neck on the Parade of Kingston, their heads severed from their bodies and placed on poles—one on the Slipe Pen Road, the other on that adjoining that City, leading to Windward.”⁴⁴ In her diary, Lady Nugent reports that she was “obliged to pass close by the pole, on which was stuck the head of the black man who was executed a few days ago,” a scene she would have avoided had not the minister been promised that she and her husband would appear in the Kingston church that Sunday.⁴⁵

Once past the pole and the head impaled on it, her thoughts rapidly turn to other scenes, namely, that of the church service where she and her husband, the governor, are on display; that of the military barracks where the British troops are on display; and that of a dinner party where her young son is on display. She writes:

After the [church] service, we had to run the gauntlet quite, for a lane was formed from our pew to the carriage door, and all were standing still till we passed; not a very comfortable exhibition to me at present, with my round-about [pregnant] figure, in a high wind. After church, General N. went to inspect the messing of the regiment, in the King's barrack. The Admiral and the ladies returned with me to the Penn [plantation]. At 5, a large dinner party. — Little George made his appearance both before and after dinner, and was the admiration of every one.⁴⁶

Each scene described here presents a certain choreography of power: most obviously, when the British troops are on display, they perform their force and fitness for occupying the island; but in addition, we see the presentation of Lady Nugent's procreative body, accompanying her husband in the very public occupation of a pew at church in Kingston on Sunday morning; and later the same day, displaying the body of her son in the dining hall of her

estate before a gathering of the colonial elite. These scenes stage the geopolitics of colonialism and the spatial differentiation between the labor of production and the labor of social reproduction.

With respect to Lady Nugent in Jamaica, then, we can see that her body—allied with that of her husband—stands as the figure of white reproductive power, a figure of the metropole and thus a figure of fertility and futurity; the decapitated black heads of Dundo and Goodluck, in contrast, appear as icons of powerlessness, death without redemption, preterition. As the first lady of the British imperial government in Jamaica, Nugent had a ceremonial role to play; however, that role was, to some extent, a heightened version of the part assigned to all white women within the racial economy of the colony, one that might be described in terms of the “reproduction of freedom.” Cecily Forde-Jones notes that white women in the West Indies were “reproducers of the human state of freedom” given that the condition of the child followed that of the mother with respect to legal status as enslaved or free.⁴⁷ More broadly, we might see plantation biopolitics as working to consolidate whiteness as a form of capital associated with futurity and social reproductivity. The pregnant body of Lady Nugent here stands as a “forward-looking, regenerative bod[y]” in its performance of whiteness.⁴⁸

But the reproduction of whiteness, particularly in the space of the colony, was no easy matter for Lady Nugent: the work of social reproduction requires of her an insistent labor of disassociation/disentanglement despite the realities of entanglement. To stage her liberty and futurity, she must erase her dependence on a larger social and economic structure founded on racialized violence and terror and the social being of enslaved and nonwhite people. Two contrasting scenes of social reproduction (one white, one black) appear in Lady Nugent’s journal, demonstrating the complexity of this labor of appropriation and erasure. The first scene involves the christening of Lady Nugent’s first-born child, George Edmund Nugent or “Georgy,” and the second involves her encounter with an unnamed mixed-race child whose father is the richest plantation owner on the island, Simon Taylor. Of the christening party held for her son Nugent writes:

My dear baby looked beautiful in his christening dress, and was wrapped, by way of mantle, in a beautiful muslin handkerchief, embroidered in gold sent me by Madame Le Clerc. I am much flattered by the pleasure all the Members of the Assembly, &c. expressed, on the birth of our little boy. He is, it seems, the first child that has been born in this situation; for none of the former Governors have had children. . . . Old Mr. Simon Taylor and Mr. Mitchell could never say enough upon the subject, and they seemed to think that he should now be so attached to the island, and should become quite one of themselves.⁴⁹

The social relations assembled in this performance enact social reproduction across an array of religious, economic, political, and social fields. Yet while Nugent notes that she is flattered by the pleasure taken in Georgy's birth by the colonial elite, she later takes exception to the imputation by Taylor and Mitchell that Georgy is "one of themselves"—that is, a creole. Nugent notes that she "cannot carry [her] gratitude so far" as to endorse these views, and she instead wraps Georgy in what is apparently a mantle of metropolitan identity—specifically, a gold-embroidered mantle supplied by the dazzling figure of metropolitan aristocracy, Pauline LeClerc, the sister of Napoleon and the wife of General Charles LeClerc, then governor of the French colony of St. Domingue. Ironically, however, the muslin handkerchief is itself an aesthetic object whose value derives from the technology of social death: enslaved and mixed-race women were enjoined to wear head scarves in the colonies to mask their attractiveness, a regulation that engendered the creative response of women wearing elaborately colored and woven headscarves often made from muslin handkerchiefs, and these headscarves in turn became objects of attraction that white women, such as Pauline LeClerc and Lady Nugent, appropriated. In this christening scene, Nugent thus relies on the muslin handkerchief—an object intended to impart social death (the erasure of gender) to enslaved Africans, but in an instance of plantation social reproduction, imbued with social life by enslaved women. In her use of the muslin handkerchief to signal her aristocratic, metropolitan position and the whiteness of her son, Nugent extracts precisely this sociality as a form of value to secure her son's nomination as a white Englishman.⁵⁰

In a contrasting scene of (erased and appropriated) social reproduction, we see a related stripping of nomination from the mixed-race child of Simon Taylor. In March 1802 Nugent recounts visiting several of Taylor's plantations: she notes that "Mr. Taylor is an old bachelor, and detests the society of women," but later in the same journal entry she betrays (without any sign of self-contradiction) that Taylor is quite interested in the company of women, albeit not that of white women. Specifically, Nugent describes an encounter at Taylor's plantation: "A little mulatto girl was sent into the drawing-room to amuse me. She was a sickly and delicate child, with straight light-brown hair, and very black eyes. Mr. T. appeared very anxious for me to dismiss her, and in the evening, the housekeeper told me she was his own daughter, and that he had a numerous family, some almost on every one of his estates."⁵¹ The "sickly and delicate child" who is Taylor's daughter has no name in this passage, unlike the elaborately christened George Edmund Nugent. Further, the girl's relation to Taylor is both known and unknown: Nugent learns through con-

versation with another enslaved woman that the child is Taylor's daughter and that Taylor has many enslaved children whom he does not publicly or legally acknowledge. Nugent reports, however, that Taylor does have relations that he seeks to make visible: "Mr. Taylor is the richest man in the island and piques himself upon making his nephew, Sir Simon Taylor, who is now in Germany, the richest Commoner in England, which he says he shall be, at *his* death."⁵²

The conversation with the "housekeeper"—an enslaved woman who may also be one of Taylor's (forced) sexual partners/concubines—reveals the forms of sociality that sustain the plantation on the ground of Jamaica. This backroom, second scene of knowledge and conversation—a scene of unofficial, domestic intimacy (of white men and black women *and* of white women and black women) that is coded as nonconversation, nonknowledge—names the relations that sustain the production of Georgy Nugent's whiteness and the wealth and whiteness of Simon Taylor's nephew, together with the denomination of Taylor's daughter. Nugent's diary demonstrates her immersion in the intimate world of the plantation-plot as well as her effort to erase her intimacy while relying on its value—not just the value of sugar but that of the sociality of enslaved, mulatto, and creole peoples—all of whom assist her in the production of her fictive whiteness. In this sense, it is not simply labor or land that is extracted at the site of the plantation: enslaved sociality itself becomes the raw material appropriated for the use of whiteness as capital.

Haiti, Hollywood, and Zombie Extraction

The centrality of white women to the reproduction of whiteness as a form of futurity and value endures in the colonial structures of racial capital that shape our current cultural moment and remains linked, as well, to zombie biopolitics and the Plantationocene. In its appropriation of the zombie as an indigenous Hollywood creation, the US culture industry had largely erased explicit links between Haiti, the plantation complex, and the zombie. Nonetheless, the Hollywood zombie—read through the lens of a plantation past, present, and future—betrays the structural haunting of the culture industry of the global North by the undercommons of the plantation complex.⁵³ As Kaiama Glover indicates, a genealogy of racial capital remains vital to the US zombie: "The zombie is an inherently racialized assemblage that functions generatively vis-à-vis the phenomenon of Afro-alterity and, in particular, twentieth- and twenty-first-century refugeeism." The zombie horde of contemporary Hollywood, Glover argues, is linked to "contemporary brown migrants, refugees, and camp dwellers who assert their status as human beings. The category of

the human is jealously guarded and politically bound—and race is, of course, the social fiction most critical to maintaining this boundary.⁵⁴ Staged as the distinction between the living and the living dead—between the human and the not-quite/no-longer-fully-human—the zombie demarcates racial and geographic boundaries *and* threatens the eradication of these boundaries as well, performing a hauntology of the geography of capitalist modernity in which black and brown people are located in zones of violence, social death, and primitive accumulation and whiteness is geographically associated with zones in which social reproduction normatively takes place (i.e., the global North).

Interestingly, the first US zombie movie, *White Zombie* (1932), directed by Victor Halperin, does indeed speak directly to the Haitian roots of the genre. The film is set in Haiti during the US occupation of the country (1915–34). It tells the story of a white US couple—Neil and Madeline—who voyage to Haiti to get married. On a cruise ship headed for Haiti, Madeline meets a plantation owner named Beaumont who falls in love with her: he invites her and her husband-to-be to get married on his plantation. But he secretly contacts a zombie master, “Murder” Legendre—played by Bella Lugosi—to turn Madeline into a zombie so that he can have her for himself. In the film, writes Jennifer Fay, the sugar mill is the “primal scene of the occupation economy” in which Legendre’s zombified black workers toil without complaint, consciousness, or cessation.⁵⁵ While the zombified black workers in the sugar mill make visible the colonial terrain on which the film takes place, the narrative of *White Zombie* has little overtly to do with the sugar mill; rather, the plot concerns the violation of the geography of social reproduction that occurs when the white woman’s body is conscripted for a form of labor that is coded as socially dead—one that is thus antithetical to the reproduction of freedom. Once Madeline is zombified by Legendre, her would-be-suitor, Beaumont, is immediately struck with regret and asks Legendre to reverse his spell. The nature of Beaumont’s regret has to do with the fact that Madeline, as a zombie, is a lifeless and emotionless figure: most painfully for Beaumont, she is incapable of showing excitement or pleasure when he presents her with a glittering diamond necklace. Her capacity for consumption—pleasure in the extraction and consumption of colonial goods as signifiers of luxury and futurity—has utterly disappeared and, with it, so has her desirability as a partner for Beaumont. The zombification of Madeline thus represents a violation the geography of racial capitalism and biopolitics: in a neocolonial formation, social reproduction should occur in the global North (consecrated with a sugar-frosted wedding cake), and bare labor/social death/zombification should occur in the global South.

The Haitian roots of the zombie, so evident in films such as *White Zombie* from the mid-twentieth century, disappear from view with the advent of the “modern” zombie in the films of George Romero, beginning with *Night of the Living Dead* (1962). Nonetheless, a focus on biopolitics suggests the sustained connection with Haiti and the plantation-plot in post-Romero zombie culture of the US—a connection that appears in the biopolitics of life itself, in the shape of both the subindividual (sugar/food chain/molecule/virus/cell) and that of the supra-individual (race/population/horde). Romero’s decisive and enduring innovations in the zombie genre include the conception of zombies as a horde (population) of nonindividuals; the representation of zombiehood as contagious—conveyed through biting; and the singularly cannibalistic (brain-eating) hunger of the zombie. In *Night of the Living Dead*, we see not just a dehumanization of individuals who are infected with zombiehood but the transformation of individuals into a population. The movie thus concerns the destruction of individuality and stages the threatened implosion of the white, socially reproductive nuclear family. During the zombie attack in the film, the angry, vociferous, and impotent white father in the movie, Harry Cooper, retreats to the basement with his wife, Helen, and his daughter, Karen, in an effort to protect himself and his family from the horde, only to ultimately be eaten alive by his daughter when she reanimates as a zombie. Yet if white social reproduction is under threat in the Cooper family, its ultimate force is maintained in distinctly racial terms by the close of the movie.

A second plotline, played out in counterpoint to Harry’s impotence, concerns white women’s futurity and reproduction and centers on the couple of Barbra, a hysterical white woman, and Ben, the African American man who takes charge of the house under siege by zombies at the center of the film. At the outset of the film, Barbra and her brother, Johnny, are visiting their father’s grave—mourning, albeit in quite ambivalent terms, the death of the white father—when they are attacked by a zombie. Barbra escapes the attack and finds refuge in a farmhouse where Ben has also sought shelter (and where the Cooper family will later be discovered hiding in the basement). A great deal of critical attention has focused on the casting of Duane Jones, an African American actor, in the lead role as Ben, particularly given that the film appeared six months after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Throughout the film, Ben leads the embattled group of survivors in a rational, capable, and knowledgeable fashion, in contrast to the histrionics of both Harry and Barbra. Nonetheless, the implicit coupling of Ben and Barbra—setting up house together—enacts a code violation of sorts, one that will eventuate in the murder



Figure 4.
Zombies as population in *Night of the Living Dead*,
George Romero (1968).

of Ben by a sheriff's bullet at the close of the film. Diegetically, the pairing of Barbra and Ben does not occur—there is no pretext of love interest—but physically and visually it occurs throughout the film, and in a similar visual (but nondiegetic) register, the sheriff's posse that seeks to subdue the zombie horde appears, as numerous critics have noted, in the form of a lynch mob, shooting down Ben and burning his body at the close of the film.⁵⁶ If Barbra does not survive the zombie attack, her sterile futurity is nonetheless protected from blackness by white men with guns.

While Ben remains upstairs during the film, taking on the leadership and management of the house under siege, at the close of the film, the bullet through his head takes direct aim at his intelligence and leadership capacity. Further, the horde of zombies walking inexorably toward the farmhouse, while white, nonetheless raises questions of the breaching of racial and geographic boundaries in its evocation of civil rights marchers who refused to be gunned down crossing the bridge in Selma. As Glover suggests, the zombie horde, at this historical moment, bears resemblance to an insurgent colonized population.⁵⁷ This colonial insurgency registers in an additional inversion of capitalist geography, namely, the zombie's single-commodity diet of human flesh (especially brains)—one that mirrors the plantation disentanglement of the food chain and the monocrop production of sugar.

The zombie genre is vast, and here I only gesture toward key aspects of the Hollywood transformation of the genre, but I mean to suggest that the geography of capitalism and plantation biopolitics remain central to even the most recent iterations of the zombie, whether in the form of threat or containment. Dual forms of dehumanization—the disarticulation of the body and molecularization of life, and the aggregation of life into impersonalized populations—mark the zombie genre in its most recent contagion narratives. In Max Brooks's novel *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006), for instance, a hidden starting point of the apocalypse-inducing zombie virus lies in the traffic in organs between China and the wealthy Westerners who buy body parts—no questions asked, no legal borders respected—to extend their own lives. The harvesting of bodies and body parts as consumer goods is also the subject of Jordan Peele's recent horror film *Get Out* (2017), a film not congruent with Romero-zombie idiom but one that stands in clear dialogue with Romero's vein of horror.⁵⁸ The force of zombification, in *Get Out*, is explicitly wielded by wealthy, white liberals against black men in the service of white reproduction and futurity.

As in *World War Z*, the aim of the hidden plot within *Get Out* is to harvest body parts, or whole bodies, to prolong the lives of rich white men and women with failing or suboptimal capacities for sprinting, golfing, breathing, seeing, and/or having sex. As in *Night of the Living Dead*, the film centers on an interracial couple—Chris Washington, an African American photographer, and Rose Armitage, his white girlfriend. When Chris and Rose visit Rose's wealthy, liberal parents, we learn that Rose's mother, Missy, is a psychiatrist and hypnotist. Under the guise of (forcefully) assisting Ben in quitting smoking, Missy hypnotizes Chris in a scene haunted by colonial geographies. Missy's hypnotism is performed by stirring a spoon in a porcelain tea cup imprinted with a blue and white Asian pattern. The rhythmic tinkling of the spoon in the cup serves as the hypnotic sound that compels Chris toward susceptibility to Missy's control; on the back of the spoon one can discern granules of sugar that Missy, in her ritual invocation of tea time, stirs into the cup in her hands. Tea, sugar, tobacco: Missy wields the intoxicating drugs of colonialism while asking Chris to recall his experience, as a child, of his mother's death. Invoking this devastating loss of relation, Missy accrues Chris's (lost) kinship tie with his mother as a form of power that allows her to take possession of his will, pushing him into the "sunken place"—a state of hypnosis that will be literalized when he is imprisoned in the basement of the family home so that Rose's father can transplant a white art dealer's brain into his body to take possession of Chris's keen vision.



Figure 5. Storyboard of hypnosis scene, staging the relation between the stirring of tea (and sugar) and Chris's (appropriated) sight. *Get Out*, Jordan Peele (2017). Courtesy of Eric Yamamoto/Universal Pictures.

Chris's sight in "Get Out" has market value not just as a body part but as an *aesthetic*—Chris's capacity to see, as a photographer, is precisely what makes him desirable as a commodity to the art dealer who "purchases" his body at auction. Zombie biopolitics here operates by extracting sociality itself—the socially grounded position of Chris that enables his sight—as a form of capital. Further, Missy's vicious appropriation of the emotional force of Chris's tie to his mother serves, again, to suggest that it is not just labor or material objects that neocolonialism harvests but relationality itself—the social reproduction that takes place under the sign of social death becomes, itself, a commodity. Indeed, we might say that this is the irony of zombie biopolitics: zombie culture, produced in relation to social death, has also been extracted from Haiti by Hollywood, in the service of erasing coloniality and sustaining ongoing capitalist geographies. In the penultimate scenes of *Get Out*, we see Rose, in her room, secure in the belief that Chris has been permanently relegated to the undergirding substructure of her world—literally, the basement—where the wealth of her family is produced and hidden. Sitting on her bed, with framed photos of past conquests on the wall behind her, Rose listens to "(I've Had) the Time of My Life" while eating Fruit Loops, drinking milk, and perusing the bodies of "Top NCAA Prospects" in the soft glow of her laptop.

It is fitting that Rose performs her conquest and futurity through consuming sugar and black male bodies at the same time. While Fruit Loops announce their fruity flavor in their bright tropical colors, the differently colored pieces of cereal in fact all share only one flavor: sugared. The consumption of sugar, since the late eighteenth century, has been overtly associated with cannibalism by antislavery activists. During the “blood sugar” campaign, English abolitionists equated the consumption of sugar with the consumption of enslaved human flesh. The contemporary zombie film continues to meditate on this enduring relationship—the relation between nourishment, human flesh, reproduction, and colonial commodities. These relations are given to us by the biopolitics of the plantation complex and remain the entangled ground we inhabit today. Despite Plantationocene fantasies of disentanglement, these entanglements proliferate. At the supra-individual level, the zombie cultural assault wields horror through the threat that whiteness itself is subject to the deadening contagion wrought by global capital. At the subindividual level, new medical studies indicate that sugar leaves certain forms of tangled webs in the bodies of its consumers’ brains, forms of plaque that correlate with cognitive decline, indicating a link between sugar and brain destruction.⁵⁹ The eerie nature of this final finding points to a link between sugar as an object of consumption and human brains as objects of consumption—a link that connects zombie biopolitics and zombie horror flicks in ways that suggest a deep and ongoing colonial history that operates on a cellular as well as a cultural register.

Plantationocene is a term that names geologic time and gestures to the causality of epochal transformation—here that cause is defined as the plantation system of commodity production and the complex geography of race and social life and death developed and refined in the early Caribbean. To the extent that we are able to see the current epoch of climate disaster and its apocalyptic effects as the Plantationocene, we are also reckoning with being “barbadosed”—that is, with being forced to inhabit the world of the plantation and the enduring system of racial capitalism enacted in scenes staged by men such as Colonel Walrond and the many who followed him. The deathworld of the plantation and of zombification is also a lifeworld—one in which the extraction of capital for the production of both sugar and white futurity is manifestly entangled with horror *and* is productive of new assemblages. Zombie biopolitics names this death, this life.

Notes

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1. Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2011), 102.
 2. Amy Wilentz, "A Zombie Is a Slave Forever," *New York Times*, October 30, 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/10/31/opinion/a-zombie-is-a-slave-forever.html.
 3. Kaia Glover, *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 59.
 4. Sylvia Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Towards the Interpretation of Folk Dance as a Cultural Process," *Jamaica Journal* 4.2 (1970): 36. On "bare labor," see also Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649–1849* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 26–27, 266–67.
 5. Bagues adopts the term from a poem by Nicolás Guillén; he is far from alone in articulating a living death status for the enslaved. See, among others, Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 11–40; and Dennis Childs, *Slaves of the State: Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
 6. Bagues writes, "The creation of the figure of the human in Western thought occurred at the historical moment of colonial conquest and the emergence of the European colonial project. . . . the human, as a figure with special meaning, is already assumed by those who dominate and enact violence, while the supposed nonhuman nature of the living corpse becomes the foundation on which violence is enacted" ("And What about the Human? Freedom, Human Emancipation, and the Radical Imagination," *boundary 2* 39.3 [2012]: 35–36).
 7. Bagues, "And What about the Human?," 34.
 8. In this vein, see powerful related formulations by Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe* 17.3 (2013): 1–15; Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 65–68; and Alexander Weheliye, *Habes Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
 9. The account of the Caribbean as the "aperture" of a global and enduring plantation complex derives from the superb work of Kris Manjapra, "Plantation Disposessions: The Global Travel of Agricultural Racial Capitalism," in *American Capitalism: New Histories*, ed. Sven Beckert and Christine Desan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 361–87.
 10. Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe* 17.3 (2013): 1–15.
 11. Elizabeth McAlister, "Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies," *Anthropological Quarterly* 85.2 (2012): 468–69.
 12. I invoke here Weheliye's citation of the Deleuzian concept of flight. In his turn to the concept of flesh (viscus) to explore race and biopolitics, Weheliye aims to "reclaim the atrocity of the flesh as a pivotal arena for the politics emanating from different traditions of the oppressed. The flesh, rather than displacing bare life or civil death, excavates the social (after)life of these categories: it represents racializing assemblages of subjection that can never annihilate the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and possibilities of other worlds" (*Habes Viscus*, 2).
 13. Of the vast scholarship on zombies, two recent volumes, both with valuable introductions, have informed my thinking in this essay: *Zombie Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sarah Juliet Lauro (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); and *Race, Oppression, and the Zombie: Essays on Cross-Cultural Appropriations of the Caribbean Tradition*, ed. Christopher M. Moreman and Cory James Rushton (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011).
 14. Theorists including Ann Laura Stoler (*Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995]), Mbembe, and Weheliye (among others) have decisively demonstrated the lacuna in Foucault's theory of biopolitics with respect to colonialism. Weheliye, in particular, speaks to the urgency of addressing this lacuna: "The concepts of bare life and biopolitics . . . are in dire need of recalibration if we want to understand the workings of and abolish our extremely uneven global power structures defined by the intersections of neoliberal capitalism, racism, settler colonialism, immigration, and imperialism" (*Habes Viscus*, 1).

15. See Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd ed., trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 33–81. The field of plantation studies and particularly the “Plantation thesis,” articulated primarily by Caribbean scholars, focuses on the distinctive economic dimensions of the plantation and the effects of this economy in historical and contemporary terms. See George Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); and Lloyd Best, “Outlines of a Model of the Pure Plantation Economy,” *Social and Economic Studies* 17.3 (1968): 283–323. On the Caribbean origins of the plantation complex and its historical and global spread through the twentieth century, as well as its contemporary presence, see Manjappa, “Plantation Disposessions”; and Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).
16. On the sociality of sugar, see Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1985); on social reproduction, see Cindi Katz, “Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction,” *Antipode* 33.4 (2001): 709–28.
17. For a relatively recent entry into this debate, see Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) as well as, more generally, historians of the “New Imperialism” who argue persuasively against this oft-repeated claim (famously coined by John Seeley in his essay “The Expansion of England” in 1883).
18. On social death, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Vincent Brown, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” *American Historical Review* 5.1 (2009): 1231–49; Jared Sexton, “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism,” *In Tensions* 5 (2011): 1–47; and Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).
19. I use the term *technology* in the sense that the theorist la pa person defines settler colonialism as a technology. See la pa person, *A Third University Is Possible* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 5.
20. On the plantation as a laboratory, see Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”; Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*; Daniel B. Rood, *The Reinvention of Atlantic Slavery: Technology, Labor, Race, and Capitalism in the Greater Caribbean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); and James Duncan, *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race and Biopower in Nineteenth-Century Ceylon* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007).
21. Manjappa, “Plantation Disposessions,” 363.
22. David Eltis, “The Total Product of Barbados, 1664–1701,” *Journal of Economic History* 55.2 (1995): 324, 327.
23. Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, “Americanness as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System,” *International Social Science Journal* 44.4 (1992): 549–59.
24. Matthew Parker, *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies* (New York: Walker, 2012), 16–17.
25. Scott Lauria Morgensen, “The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 1.1 (2011): 58. Importantly, Morgensen emphasizes that settler colonialism is an ongoing component of biopolitical power, not a single event that precedes the establishment of the plantation/biopower: “Late modern colonial occupation acts precisely and continuously as settler colonial, with its global projections being the activity of a settler colonial power that does not cease” (59).
26. Parker, *Sugar Barons*, 14.
27. Quoted in Kupperman, “Introduction,” *History of Barbados*, 16.
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29. On the Dutch funding of the Barbadian sugar industry, see Hilary McD. Beckles, *A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Caribbean Single Market*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27–30. On the transition from white indentured servitude to enslaved African labor, see Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627–1715* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989). On the shift to sugar cultivation, see John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, “The

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30. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 48; "An act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes" (1661), reprinted in *Slavery*, ed. Stanley L. Engerman, Seymour Drescher, and Robert L. Paquette (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 105.
 31. "Petition of the Planters of Barbados," *Calendar of State Papers: Colonial Series, America and the West Indies* (London, 1880–1889), vols. 7, 8, pp. 46–47, quoted in Eltis, "Total Product of Barbados," 333.
 32. Sylvia Wynter, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," *Savacou* 5 (1971): 99.
 33. Comments by Haraway in the dialogue among D. Haraway, N. Ishikawa, Scott F. Gilbert, K. Olwig, A. L. Tsing, and N. Bubandt, "Anthropologists Are Talking—About the Anthropocene," *Ethnos*, 2015, works.swarthmore.edu/fac-biology/451.
 34. On the pre-Caribbean history of sugar cultivation, see Schwartz, *Tropical Babels*.
 35. On provision grounds, see Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 239–43; and Sonya Posmentier, "The Provision Ground in New York: Claude McKay and the Form of Memory," *American Literature* 84.2 (2012): 273–300.
 36. Wynter, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," 99.
 37. Wynter, "Lady Nugent's Journal," *Jamaica Journal* 1.1 (1967): 34.
 38. Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
 39. Guitton to Billard, July 18, 1791, quoted in David P. Geggus, "The Caradeux and Colonial Memory," in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. David P. Geggus (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 238.
 40. Victor Hugo, *Bug-Jargal*, trans. and ed. Chris Bongie (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2004), 140.
 41. Thomas Madiou, *Histoire de Haïti*, vol. 3 (Port-au-Prince: J. H. Cortois, 1848), 133.
 42. Colin Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 37. On Jean Zombi and the valences of the zombie as an antislavery revolutionary associated with the Haitian Revolution, see also Sarah J. Lauro, *The Transatlantic Zombie: Slavery, Rebellion, and Living Death* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 59–62.
 43. McAlister, "Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies," 468–69.
 44. *St. Jago de la Vega Gazette*, June 18–25, 1803.
 45. Maria Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805*, ed. Philip Wright (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2002), 155.
 46. Nugent, 155.
 47. Cecily Forde-Jones, "Mapping Racial Boundaries: Gender, Race, and Poor Relief in Barbadian Plantation Society," *Journal of Women's History* 10.3 (1998): 9–31.
 48. Jasbir Puar notes that the "ascendancy of whiteness in the modern world" involves precisely such an element of reproductive futurity: "the terms of whiteness . . . extend out to the capacity for capacity: that is, the capacity to give life, sustain life, promote life" (*Terrorists Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007], 200).
 49. Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 126.
 50. For further discussion of this scene, see Dillon, *New World Drama*, 187–88.
 51. Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 68.
 52. Nugent, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 88.
 53. On the undercommons, see Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe, UK: Minor Compositions, 2013); on the emergence of the undercommons in relation to the plantation complex, see Manjapra, "Plantation Disposessions," 382.
 54. Kaiama Glover, "'Flesh like One's Own': Benign Denials of Legitimate Complaint," *Public Culture* 29.2 (2017): 253–54.
 55. Jennifer Fay, "Dead Subjectivity: White Zombie, Black Baghdad," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 8.1 (2008): 81–101.
 56. On race in *Night of the Living Dead*, see Robert Lightning, "Interracial Tensions in Night of the Living Dead," *CineAction* 53: 22–29; and Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29.4 (1988): 44–64.

57. Glover notes that in 1962, it is “the beginning of the end of colonialism and the emergence of the Third World that must be foregrounded in thinking the zombie horde” (“Flesh like One’s Own,” 254).
58. Peele himself comments: “‘Get Out’ takes on the task of exploring race in America, something that hasn’t really been done within the [horror] genre since ‘Night of the Living Dead’ 47 years ago. It’s long overdue” (“‘Key & Peele’ Star Jordan Peele to Write, Direct Blumhouse and QC Horror Film ‘Get Out,’” *Variety*, September 21, 2015, variety.com/2015/film/news/jordan-peele-blumhouse-horror-thriller-get-out-1201598927/).
59. See, for instance, *World War Z*, directed by Marc Forster (2013), as well as Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, “Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism,” in *Zombie Theory* on the relation of the zombie to neoliberalism and the “problematic status of production in the age of global capital” (140); Olga Khazan, “The Startling Link Between Sugar and Alzheimer’s,” *Atlantic*, January 26, 2018, www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/01/the-startling-link-between-sugar-and-alzheimers/551528/.