

# 'World War Z' and Hollywood's Zionist Embrace

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Global Research, June 26, 2013

[Mondoweiss](#) 25 June 2013

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

I went to the Drive-In in Atlanta Friday night, to celebrate a friend's birthday, a beautiful night under an almost full moon. We watched *This is The End* and *Fast and Furious 6*, and two of us stayed for the 2:00 am screening of *World War Z*.

I'm not a zombie fanatic, so other than watching the *Walking Dead*, I had few expectations beyond the trailers that have been on TV since the Super Bowl. So I was surprised, jarred out of the movie really, when right in the middle of the narrative, Brad Pitt's character, Gerry Lane, travels to Israel and spends more than 10 minutes in a full-on pro-Israel propaganda piece that was as corny as it was crazy.

The *Times of Israel* may be only slightly exaggerating when it calls this "[the greatest piece of cinematic propaganda for Israel since Otto Preminger's "Exodus."](#) Not only is Israel's fanatical Wall Building proven to be justified, against the hordes of undead invaders, and not only are Jewish victimizations paraded to justify the aggrandizement of Israeli military prowess, but it's Israel's supposed humanism, and multicultural inclusiveness, which in the end weakens the fragile post-apocalyptic state and allows the zombies to overrun everything. Its pretty heady stuff.

The film

*Spoiler Alert:* In order to deconstruct this bizarre interlude into politics at the movies, I will need to reveal most of the plot points, so read on at your own risk. Apparently, WWZ is based on the book of the same name, by Max Brooks, Mel's son. It took many years to produce, cost about 200 million to make, and has a respectable 67% rating on Rotten Tomatoes, which ensures a wide audience and broad cultural impact for this summer blockbuster. The story centers on an unexplained global zombie pandemic that starts suddenly and engulfs the world rapidly with an onslaught of sprint-inclined zombies that rush toward their prey in huge mindless swarms. What people seem to like about the book is that it engages the global geo-politics of the zombie fall out, but it quickly reverts to neo-conservative assumptions that are played out with far less scope in the film. While the film sticks with the super fast zombies, and the compelling immersion narrative technique, its international scope is greatly curtailed, with Israel the only country besides the US that is featured in any substantive way, beyond very brief forays into Korea, Wales, and at the very end, Canada.

Pitt plays Gerry Lane, a semi-retired UN worker who reluctantly is drawn back into the field to save his family and all of humanity. His zombie-readiness credentials are listed by his agency head as field experience in the conflict zones of Kosovo, Chechnya, and especially Liberia; and with this, the racialized naturalizing of interpersonal human violence begins. After zombies suddenly swarm through New Jersey, Gerry gets his family to the safety of

offshore naval vessels and then embarks on a search for patient zero, in hopes of finding a cure. In the book, this would be the outbreak of disease in China, but in the film this is South Korea, which we never really see, beyond a mostly white military unit on a US base besieged by walkers. Gerry immediately loses his South Asian medical investigator to a panic-induced, self-inflicted gunshot to the head, runs several harrowing zombie gauntlets, and picks up vital intel from a deranged CIA officer who suggests that answers lie in Israel, which has somehow managed to wall itself off from the plague, and also mysteriously seems to have known in advance that it was coming. Gerry says something about “they’ve been building wall for two millennia,” and then he’s off.

Before the viewer can process whether the film is about to go down some post-9/11 Jewish conspiracy path, Gerry is landing in the Holy Land fortress-state to the site of slowly fluttering Israeli flag close-ups, triumphant marshal music, and confident IDF soldiers speaking in Hebrew, rushing around, smiling in soft filtered light close-ups. It’s the first glimpse of order, military control, and calm since the disaster has started, and it’s so overtly pro-military that it’s reminiscent of the armed forces segments in *Transformers*, looking almost like a commercial shot by the media wing of the armed services. [1] Filmed in Malta, the aerial and long distance wide shots do a passable job of conveying Jerusalem to an unfamiliar audience, and Gerry is soon talking to the Mossad chief, Jurgen Warmbrunn, played by a somewhat Tevya [2]-like caricature that really is redolent of *Exodus*.

Gerry’s already informed the audience that wall building is natural to Israel, so the reinforcement of ancient and Separation Walls is plausible, and comes as not at all veiled justification of Israel’s current and widely condemned Apartheid Wall. He questions the Mossad chief on how he knew the threat was coming, and gets a lesson in revisionist Zionist history, starting with the legitimate failure to take the threat in 30s Germany seriously, and then the same failure from similar or greater threat in 1973, when “we were almost washed into the sea,” and at the 1978 Olympics, both of which “we did not see coming.” It’s the classic, and academically disproven myth that Israel was always on the defense in its wars, and also the conflation of Palestinians and Arabs with Nazis, as ever-present existential threats to peace-loving Jews. Then we are treated to a quasi-mystical “10th Man” theorem, in which any time there is too much consensus, a 10th man in the hierarchy must consider the impossible, as a form of protection from this repeated failure to see the inevitable next assault on the Jewish people. This throw-away theory is never returned to in the film, but briefly justifies Israel’s aggressive military posture, and suggests that others in the world must follow suit to survive the coming Armageddon.

In the book, unlike the film, Cuba is portrayed as ascendant during the disaster, due to its supposedly fascist state military control of the society. Worse, South Africa rehabilitates apartheid era tactics and leaders, at the request of Nelson Mandela himself, in an effort to stave off the zombies. It creates survivalist Bantustans for the privileged, and fake safe zones where lesser humans are fed to biters/zombies to buy time for the others to regroup. So the defense-of-apartheid trope is neither accidental nor limited to Israel. While the fate of North Korea is a mystery in the book, in the film we are told it survived by the largest feat of social engineering ever: it knocked the teeth of all 13 million inhabitants out in one day, thereby preventing zombies from biting and spreading their virus after they’ve shifted. Viva totalitarianism.

In Israel, Gerry’s Mossad tour continues, showing a society safely protected by its paranoia and militarism from the outside threat, the only known safe haven as the world crumbles. At a clearing in front of the large barrier wall, near a refugee processing military checkpoint, is

a spectacle of pure multicultural fantasy, in which Hassidic and secular Jews, and Palestinians sing and dance in praise of the savior state. I think I caught a Palestinian woman singing a patriotic song in Hebrew, after she grabs the mike in the celebratory frenzy. It's a very brazen rewrite of the violence and exclusion of Israel's hundreds of checkpoints, which are turned completely on their head in the film. Talking over the din of this utopian spectacle, Jurgen explains that they are letting in every human being, in a kind of equalized Right of Return for all, because every living human is one less undead to deal with later. This is the high point of the Zionist propaganda, after which things quickly fall apart. But by now Israel's aggression and militarism have been fully justified, and it is the only safe harbor in the apocalypse. Its apartheid walls are what save it, and others wishing to survive must copy their example (as the US is doing on its southern border in real life). And we have received heavy-handed doses of Israel's democratic, multicultural, inclusive nature, all in defiance of any basic facts, human rights reports, or even middle of the road media coverage.

Then it comes unglued. Israel's supposed openness and multiculturalism are what does it in! Jews and Palestinians singing together in a circle get too loud, and the zombies create zombie pyramids to overrun the walls and invade the sanctuary-state. Chaos ensues and Gerry, with his IDF escort, makes his way to the airport to try to escape alive. It's such a straight shot at the weakness of inclusion and a (fantasy) post-racial Jewish state, that the *Times of Israel*, again, says: "Basically, if it weren't for those damn peaceniks, Israel would have survived. Hey, who the hell wrote this movie, Meir Kahane?"<sup>5</sup> And below an accompanying photo of the zombie pile breaching the Security Wall, their caption: "World War Z's zombie pyramid. Damn peace camp." Message received.



Zombies rush the wall in World War Z

But as the *Times* also states, "Okay, so Israel falls to the zombie plague, too. But... at least it lasted longer than everybody else. That has to stand for something, right?" And from here on out, Gerry has acquired an Israeli sidekick, young badass IDF soldier Segen, played by Daniella Kertesz, one of at least three credited Israeli actors in the film. As Jerusalem/Israel falls, Jewish soldiers fight valiantly with guns, grenades and hand-to-hand combat to stem the tide, and Gerry rushes to the airport. On the way, Segen is bitten and Gerry performs a quick amputation of her hand, saving her from becoming undead. They escape together, and travel to the film's 3rd act, in the WHO offices in Wales. Segen's now disabled body does not prevent her from continuing to fight on the way, but it is also used to symbolize her and the Israeli/Jewish state's lesser status in the ranks of humanity, coming in second to the fully humanized and whole body of Brad Pitt's Gerry Lane, whose full, passive, heteronormative family awaits him in Nova Scotia, and gives him a reason to keep on fighting to save us all.

The final sequences, in the WHO offices in Wales, are much less broad in scope, as Gerry uses his cunning and superior intelligence to figure out that zombies only feed on healthy humans, and avoid those who they sense are sick, weak, or terminal, apparently following a precedent found amongst predators in nature. "Mother" nature is literally called a ruthless bitch by the Harvard doctor earlier in the film, but luckily (super) man [3] will overcome her with reason, so not to worry. And while I suspect my biologist colleagues will tell me this is not a very accurate depiction of predators and nature, it is a zombie film after all, and the

pretense to realism and intellectual accuracy is just that, a pretense. But this analytic allows for a bizarre anti-environmentalism to cohabitate with the neo-conservative, macho geopolitics of the global narrative. [4]

So Gerry risks all to acquire the zombie-surrounded pathogen samples to test his hypothesis, purposely infects himself, and then powerfully is able to walk undetected through the undead, thus finding the cure to the global crisis. But remember, his fully able body is not actually sick, its just temporarily infected, before receiving the antidote to whatever typhus or dengue fever he selected for himself, and he will live on in full health after this mission.

#### World War Z's racial hierarchy

Gerry's method of survival is important because it confirms the total racial hierarchy of value established in the film's narrative structure. While Segen fights valiantly on the plane and in the Welsh research facility, she and the Israeli social body are clearly secondary, tools to achieve a final solution and goal, but little more. Mystical, paranoid Jews developed a survival instinct and a vicious apartheid separation system, which allowed Gerry a space to visit and make observations about the undead menace that only his superior intelligence could bestow on the world. It is the US military, working with the UN, in the body of the selfless white, Aryan, Christian male, Gerry Lane, which occupies the apex of human subjectivity. This narrative is a perfect metaphor for the reality of the Jewish/Christian Zionist political relationship that it is based on.

The *Times of Israel* misses this entirely, of course, as their celebration of the film's Zionism culminates in a critique of the sub-titling in Turkey, where apparently references to Israel and Jews are replaced with the generic phrase Middle East, much to their displeasure. But in the real world, Christian Zionists mainly in the US and also scattered throughout the settler-colonies of the West, contribute more than 10 times the funding to Israel than the much vaunted Jewish communal support machine does. And it does so in the service of Israel's Jewish defeat of unnamed Arab armies, to prepare the way for Christian rapture, during which Jews and other infidels will be converted or eliminated to create the (alarming mono-cultural or mono-theocratic) Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth, or in the sky somewhere.

In concluding, let's look at the racial hierarchy of *World War Z's* narrative. Gerry is the superman, for sure, who saves us all. Segen, minus her hand, is a worthy sidekick, useful like the Jews in general, in getting to the End of Times, or at least the end of the story. Almost all the others in the film are explicitly lesser in one way or another. Before being rescued by the UN helicopter after New Jersey is overrun, Gerry and his family are taken in by a kind Latino family, whose assimilated son translates their unexpected hospitality. But when Gerry tells them that he has experienced things like this before and learned that "movement is survival," their lesser racial/rational status prevents them from leaving their home and being saved with Gerry and his family. Only the son, who has converted to the "American" way, and learned English, survives, and gets unofficially adopted by the Lanes. This liberal act of compassion is compelling, but reinforces the necessity of assimilation to the dominant culture to ensure acceptance and survival. The unassimilated parents are left in the dust.

Thierry Umutoni, Gerry's presumptively African boss at the UN is competent, but unable to do more than recognize and deploy Gerry's greater intelligence and skills. He also can't

adequately protect Gerry's family, who are immediately shipped off to the Nova Scotia refugee camp when they think Gerry is dead. Gerry's wife and kids are important, and worth saving (given their apex whiteness), but still lesser due to gender and age — passive, needing protection, unable to fend for themselves, and in the case of the children, annoyingly and dangerously irrational in the face of the threat of death. It's a racial hierarchy that is explicitly gendered, with the patriarchal leader unequivocally at the head throughout the film, especially in the predictable Hollywood moment conclusion when the family is reunited.

Thierry assigns Gerry to guide Harvard educated Dr. Andrew Fassbach through the Korean hotzone, in search of patient zero. Fassbach, played by actor Elyes Gabel, is not white, has a British accent, and is presumptively of South Asian or Arab heritage. Gerry instructs him in what to do and expect, but on first sight of zombies as they deplane in the darkness and fog of Korea, he breaks ranks, panics, runs, maladroitly falls, and accidentally shoots himself dead. Potentially useful intelligence wasted on a lesser person, to be sure, who lacked the hetero-manly fortitude to face down the threat, thus confirming his lesser racial status, almost straight out of 19th century colonial tropes of the lesser manhood of colonized men. Korea itself is never seen, beyond the literal shadows at the edge of the US military base there. As to North Korea, all we hear is a deranged whisper of its ultra-fascist response.

In the end we are left with a prototypical kind of liberal multiculturalism that reinforces rather than challenges the hierarchies of modern white supremacy. The rational, Aryan, Christian male is at the very top, with his appended family next in line. Jews are provisionally white, therefore useful in Empire's need to fend off the hordes of undead walkers and others at the periphery. But ultimately even the mystical Jews are expendable, en route to the final salvation. All the other Others in the narrative are even further behind in the ranks of worthy survivors. While the film definitely provides a bizarrely crude Zionist redemption narrative, and even a Kahane-esque rebuke of liberal Zionist tendencies toward peace and coexistence, the ultimate Subject of value is the Christian Zionist of US Empire, so powerful that it goes unnamed, largely unseen, even though He is always, irrevocably at the center of the story.

Its fun to speculate about what motivates the heightened zombie vogue, what psychological and social angst it reveals. On the one hand, there is the fear of declining Empire, the fear of anarchy and chaos should the bottom fall any further out of our privileged economy. This makes perfect sense, and seems to have a lot of merit. On the other hand, the zombie meme may be less about looming Armageddon, and more about a nagging subconscious awareness that the extreme inequalities of our current world order are in fact already a kind of zombie-scape, in which almost 3 billion people live in such extreme poverty, largely removed from the view of Westerners, malnourished and off the grid, that they are real life living dead in a way, and they have lots of reason to come for us, looking to eat us, or at least consume our ill-gotten wealth. Maybe it's a little of both.

When WWZ (both the book and the film) strides into Israel, the slippage between zombie and racial-Other comes clearly into view. During an [interview about his book](#), Max Brooks is asked by a caller in Alexandria, VA if he "compare(s) the zombies to today's fundamentalist Islamists? i.e., unthinking, uncaring, irrational villains who kill for the sake of killing?" He replies:

"The lack of rational thought has always scared me when it came to zombies,



the idea that there is no middle ground, no room for negotiation. That has always terrified me. Of course that applies to terrorists, but it can also apply to a hurricane, or flu pandemic, or the potential earthquake that I grew up with living in L.A. Any kind of mindless extremism scares me, and we're living in some pretty extreme times."

Brooks seems moored in the state of our current world, and its (political or force of nature) "zombies," more than fear of any impending melt-down. While his work is noted for its breadth of global politics, it's also clear that it lacks structural analysis about the causes of violence and injustice, because the privileged prefer to construct those coming for them as mindless and irrational. Maybe what we need is a narrative from the perspective of the zombie, a subaltern zombie tale in which the myth of irrationality is finally rebuked.

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## Notes

[1] In this case, it's the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), and not the US army, marines, navy and airforce skilled for in Transformers. But at least one of the people behind WWZ was also on board for Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen, and that's Ben Seresin Director of Photography, and this may explain some of the similarity of sympathetic flag close-ups and reverential pro-military stylings.

[2] The main character in Fiddler on the Roof.

[3] I mean this more in the Nietzsche superman sense than in the comic book superman sense. Nietzsche's superman is Man with a capital M, the rational conqueror of nature, physics, and lesser humans that also features centrally, although inverted, in the critical theories of Sylvia Wynter.

[4] Apparently the book is more ambivalent on the environmental front, with this same meta-explanation more or less in place, but balanced to some extent by the despoliation of the Canadian arctic by uninfected humans amassing there due to zombies discomfort with the cold. Somehow readers seem to take this as an admonition that humans are too hard on their environment and need to rethink this.

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