

# Example of zombies: fact or fiction argumentative essay

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



Zombies have long been thought of as creatures of myth and lore. The fear of death is common in most all cultures and zombies play right into that fear making them a source for legends, movies, and popular culture. Despite Hollywood style zombies we now think of, zombies actually have a rich history stemming from religions such as Voodoo. By looking at the origins of zombie legends one can better understand their cultural meaning. I propose that there is scientific evidence supporting that it is possible for zombies to exist, just not in the traditional Hollywood means. By looking at both myth and science, I propose that one can find many instances where cultural customs and medical conditions could very well be the basis for the zombie myth. I will prove that zombies are possible but not in the context that myth's claim.

The word “ zombie” was first noted in the civilized world in 1810 when it was mentioned in a book (Donnelly & Diehl). The word didn't describe the zombies we think of today, but instead described a West African deity (Donnelly & Diehl). The term didn't become associated with undead humans until later. This West African influence brought to the ‘ new world” became part of voodoo ritual in the area. The slave trade spread this influences to other areas of the world (Bailey).

The term “ zombie” that was most commonly use today typically means an empty shell of a human, usually someone who is not in control of their own body or someone who has risen from the dead(Donnelly & Diehl). Usually without a soul or sense of self. The traditional idea of zombies that of a human brought back from the dead started by believers of Voodoo. Bokurs or hougans, where the names given to those that can raise the dead.

Usually these people were greatly respected and even fear, for followers felt that they held vast power. Zombification was considered a punishment, revenge for deeds of the past. One article states, " In Haiti a zombi is someone who has annoyed his or her family and community to the degree that they can no longer stand to live with this person." (Nanton) They respond by hiring a Bokor, a vodoun priest who practices black magic and sorcery, to turn them into a zombi," Often Bokurs would work in conjunction with the Tonton Macoute, an occult police force within Haiti. The Tonton Macoute kept order by threatening zombification on any that broke the local laws (Nanton).

Haiti was the area that held the greatest fear and belief in zombies. One commonly held belief was that zombies were used for slave labors on the many plantations that thrived within the Caribbean. The link between zombies and slaves is a strong one. Some areas such as Mexico and Central America often embraced the idea of witchcraft. In these areas of the world the ability to produce magic was a trait that was highly revered. A witch might make a good living by selling spells, charms, and cures. Zombies are most commonly believed in voodoo and witchcraft.

While most feel that zombies are creatures of myth and lore, there have been a few whom set out to prove that zombification can exist. One such person was esteemed scientist, Wade Davis. While Davis didn't believe the traditional means of zombification through Voodoo and magic, he did propose that a zombie like state might be achievable with the correct drugs. His studies revolved around the neurotoxin like substance, Tetrodotoxin (Metraux). This compound is one commonly found in venomous animals,

such as Puffer Fish (Metraux). Davis implied that he had tested powders from those that claimed to be bokurs, having it chemical analyzed to determine its components (Metraux). Even though Davis' theory is difficult to prove, mainly since the bokur's powders were all different and difficult to properly does, Davis maintained his belief that zombification was possible through the use of these tetrodotoxins, saying that individuals dosed with these toxins could appear dead and revived after burial (Metraux).

Zombies also exist within the animal kingdom. Scientist have documented insects like ants that were killed and then forced to move in a zombie like state by a fungus that grew within their habitat (Cannon). Scientist also have documented that a virus can infect caterpillars causing them to crawl up and down trees all day before liquefying and infecting more caterpillars (Cannon). Both grim fates that makes one wonder if funguses or viruses could have a similar effect on humans.

Brain disorders such as Mad Cow Disease also have symptoms similar to what we typically describe as zombie like actions. Humans can contract the disease from infected cattle. In humans it is called Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. The symptoms include staggering gait, hallucinations, low coordination, twitching of seizures, delirium or dementia. Sounds a bit like a zombie right? Overtime several Haitian individuals have come forward claiming to be victims of bokurs. Perhaps one of the most convincing cases was that of Clarivius Narcisse. In 1962, Narcisse was declared dead by two separate doctors and had a documented burial (Aaronovitch). However nearly twenty years later, Nacisse reappeared in his home town. Narcisse's claimed to be enslaved by voodoo masters and forced to work on a sugar plantation for

nearly two decades. No one could verify Narcisse's war bouts during this time. Whether Narcisse was as he claimed, a victim of chemical enslavement by voodoo masters, or simply a mentally ill man is open to debate, but his story is certainly an interesting addition into the zombie legend (Aronovitch).

The idea of zombies as flesh or brain eating creatures likely comes from the taboo cultural traditional. Cannibalism is widely believed to be practiced for consuming flesh individuals of the same kind. Archeological evidence indicates that there are practices of cannibalism in the past (cut marks, meat was taken off the bones and bone breakage). However anthropologists denied the moral issue and asked the question: why? Why do humans consume other humans? Anthropologists and archeologists adopt that there are different reasons that determine this behavior. Cannibalism is a ritual related to sacrifice and religious belief. Cannibalism experienced is ritual related to sacrificing and religious beliefs, included consuming and feasting the bodies of the dead in funereally rituals (Adams and Swanson)

. The idea that associates zombies with the " eating of brains" is probably more of a metaphor for mental illness or disease than for the ingestion of human organs. Still the fear associated with these taboos, likely tie into the fear of the undead.

Slavery and zombies have close ties. While many think that slaves are in fact zombies it is possible that people could possibly be drugged or injured to insure their servitude. The mentally ill might also be susceptible to being taken into slavery. The monotonous work associated with plantations is one that could when looked at by outsiders appear zombie like behavior.

Mental illness may also have been mistaken for zombification. The psychologist R. D. Laing studied this theory within his works on schizophrenia (Bailey). He notes the cultural influences can contribute to symptoms and may be partially responsible for the so called zombies of Haiti. Laing's study shows how social out casts such as the mentally ill could fall victim to untrue rumors of have their conditions exacerbated by cultural traditions (Bailey) . Live burial is thought to be one of the most common human fears, it may be jested at today, but before advanced medical care it was a real concern for citizens. Less developed areas of the world such as Haiti may also lack the medical knowledge to correctly diagnosis someone as deceased. It was not uncommon to open the coffins of the dead to find claw marks inside. This very real fear for third world countries likely contributed to the zombie story. In conclusion, there is a great need to re-examine the history of zombies if we are to truly understand their religious and cultural impact. By analyzing the systems and functions of death we can take all the clues revealed to build a theory on the societies' feeling about death, and zombies are no exception. As technology improves and people evolve, society changes all the time and so doe's zombie stories. However in contrast with all the emphasis put on preventing death, some traditions can be lost as society changes.

While it is impossible to prove that zombies, exist and most likely do not in the context of modern day zombie stories, there are some valid reasoning behind their story started and evolved. There are also some very real mental and physical concerns behind the symptoms of zombification. History points out how the myth was developed and how zombies hit into West African and

Caribbean societies and may very well be a metaphor for the loss of life and freedom as a result of slavery. From a religious stand point zombies are closely associated with the religion of voodoo. Practitioner's draw upon ancient knowledge and superstition to explain their own thoughts about life and death. The zombie myth might very well be a teaching tool to teach others about this subject in a culture that is highly superstitious and distrustful of more main stream religious beliefs. The term zombie may also help describe or prevent crime, in the instances of the Tonton Macoute, the fear of becoming a zombie was strong enough to prevent local crime making for a more peaceful society (Nanton). It also serves as a reminder that one should be kind to others or someone may be vengeful when you are trying to enjoy your after life! These social messages used fear to create a more peaceful environment.

Medically there are many possibilities that could explain the symptoms associated with zombification. The most common being the use of neurotoxins to incapacitate an individual and give the illusion of death only to resurrect them later. There are many naturally occurring neurotoxins that could account for these effects. Diseases such as mad cow disease and brain parasites can also induce similar symptoms (Bailey). Brain injuries or mental illness also being likely causes.

Zombies often represent cultural taboos and fears. The zombie myth plays into many common fears such as the fear of death, the fear of being buried alive, and the fear of not being in control of one's own body and mind. Ideas such as murder, cannibalism, and zombies as monsters or criminal elements, exploit fears and misunderstandings about cultural exploration.

While it cannot be proven that zombies exist or ever did, they certainly have had a big place in history and pop culture. Whether one finds the idea of zombies fascinating or horrifying there many cultural, medical, and psychological lessons we can learn from these myths.

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