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The Living Dead *Tirailleurs*: Crushing Limitations of Labor in David Diop's *Frère d'Âme*

Abstract

The living dead is a powerful figure. In general it is associated with horror and a mindless mass bent on feeding off the living. However, the figure of the living dead may be adapted to many different contexts. Tobias Warner has shown that the living dead readily lends itself to the study of the socio-economic situation in post-colonial Africa. By extending the historical context to colonial Senegal before and during World War One, I demonstrate that the theme of the living dead permeates an earlier period. In order to situate the context and examples, I use the work of David Diop *Frère d'Âme*. This article offers a pivot away from current scholarship analysing the trauma of WWI by focusing on socio-economic concerns present in Diop's work. The welding together of these sources creates a larger picture of what the living dead represent for the limitations of economic self-realization in Africa.

Keywords: World War One, living dead, *tirailleur*, colonialism, *arachidité*

In 1924 two monuments were simultaneously erected in Reims, France and Bamako, Mali. The monuments were both entitled *Monument aux héros de l'armée noire*, they represent the appreciation and remembrance of the pivotal role that African soldiers played in the defense of Reims in 1918. The monuments are made of bronze, a metal alloy composed of copper and tin both extracted from veins found in the earth. And while it makes perfect sense to use this common alloy for a statue, the circumstances and the composition of these monuments contain a rich metaphor hidden below their facades. The metaphor I am alluding to is borrowed from historian and political theorist Achille Mbembe, who likens the African slave trade to the extraction of ore and its metaphorical relationship to Europe and capitalism in his work *Critique de la raison nègre*:

Si sous l'esclavage l'Afrique est le lieu privilégié d'extraction de ce minerai, la plantation dans le Nouveau Monde, par contre, est le lieu de sa fonte, et l'Europe le lieu de sa conversion fiduciaire. Ce passage de l'*homme-minerai* est une dimension structurante du premier capitalisme. L'extraction est d'abord arrachement ou séparation d'êtres humains singuliers des origines où ils tirent leur naissance. Elle est, ensuite, ablation ou extirpation

- condition pour que le pressage (sans lequel il n'est point d'extraction aboutie) puisse effectivement avoir lieu. En faisant passer l'esclave par le laminoir et en le pressurant de manière à en extraire le maximum de profit, on ne convertit pas simplement un être humain en objet.

If under slavery Africa is the privileged site for the extraction of this ore, the plantation in the New World, on the other hand, is the site of its smelting, and Europe the site of its fiduciary conversion. This passage of the human-as-ore is a structuring dimension of early capitalism. Extraction is first a tearing away or separation of singular human beings from the origins from which they draw their birth. It is then an ablation or extirpation—necessary conditions for pressing (without which no complete extraction can occur) to actually take place. By passing the slave through the rolling mill and pressing them to extract the maximum profit, one does not merely convert a human being into an object. (Mbembe 67-68)

In Mbembe's metaphor, Africans are ore-men, extracted and taken away from their home and exploited for maximum profit. Mbembe's work is clearly within the context of the Atlantic slave trade, but this metaphor is incredibly relevant at the moment when African soldiers were conscripted to fight in World War One on behalf of France. Within the context of the Great War, we have evidence to support the metaphor that Africans were still being turned into so-called "Ore-men" in a literal sense in Reims, and as well as in a metaphorical sense on the continent. This article seeks to illuminate instances that are particular to World War One that echo Mbembe's metaphor and connect these instances to previous scholarship on the subject. By building primarily off of the work of Tobias Warner I link the representation of what is labeled 'living dead labor' to David Diop's novel *Frère d'Âme*.

In the introduction of his article 'Labor of the Living Dead,' Warner draws the reader's attention to the film *Atlantique* which he uses to highlight the concept of the labor of the living dead. One key component of Warner's analysis centers on the semantic malleability of the Wolof word *liggéey* which can be interpreted multiple ways: "any kind of labor in a conventional

sense,” “occult labor,” or “the work of the mother” (Warner 386-387). Warner applies these various interpretations of *liggée* to the film *Atlantique* directed by Mati Diop in 2019, in which young Senegalese women are possessed by the spirits of dead young men who are owed money by their employers. The spirits of the dead men demand a proper burial and their rightful compensation through the young women. This representation of occult labor couched within the context of exploitation causes Warner to question the meaning of the labor of the living dead, “Against the backdrop of exploitation, economic desperation and gendered dreams of migration, multiple senses of work are colliding, creating a palimpsest around the term *liggée*. The semiotic subsidence around what it means to work clusters around the labor of ghostly subjects who are no longer alive, but not quite dead either. So, the question is: What is this work of the living dead?” (Warner 388). Similarly, I would like to analyze different forms of labor exploitation that coalesce into an occult context, blurring the lines between the living and the dead and the stakes of their labor.

If we circle back to Mbembe’s metaphor, we can begin to inquire what type of labor these statues are performing. They are commemorating the dead, bringing them back into the memory of the living, in order to remember them for their labor of war. Professor of modern literature Santanu Das, opens up important questions about how to commemorate the war dead without valorizing war itself “...why do we commemorate the war dead? Or indeed, can we commemorate the war dead without endorsing war itself and instead open up a space for reflection and critique as we strive towards perpetual peace?” (Das 135). Much like the statues, David Diop set out to write his award-winning novel in order to commemorate the dead soldiers. In an interview by *La Grande Librairie* he directly expresses his desire to do this, when asked if he found any shocking letters from West African soldiers to inspire his work, “ Non, on les

trouve pas parce que les tirailleurs sénégalais qui venaient de toute l'Afrique de l'ouest, il y avait le Niger, le Sénégal, le Mali, eh bien, en effet, viennent d'une civilisation où l'orale supplante l'écrit... / No, we do not find them because the Senegalese riflemen, who came from all of West Africa, there was Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, in fact come from a civilization where the oral supplants writing..." (2:17-2:32). Due to this lacuna in the archive Diop felt compelled to write for these soldiers, to give them back the voice they were missing in official records. Filling in this gap does not tackle the monumental task of perpetual peace as put forth by Das, but, rather, it appears to try and gain some compensation for these laboring soldiers from beyond the grave.

While the works of the scholars I use to support my argument are entrenched in very different time periods and contexts, I contend that this theme can be adapted to different time periods in African history. Specifically, I argue that *Frère d'Âme* by French/Senegalese author David Diop forms a critique of labor through the *tirailleur* in the context of World War One. Additionally, I find that this dimension of analysis adds to the richness of the work by Branach-Kallas which is centered on the trauma suffered by the *tirailleurs*. There are three different aspects that I bring to light that demonstrate how Alfa, the main character of Diop's novel *Frère d'Âme*, brings these unfair labor structures to the surface through the portrayal of the laboring living dead. What is needed for clarification is a working definition of the labor of the living dead. Unfortunately, there are no definitions that are unique to World War One, so it is necessary to borrow from other contexts, such as what we find in the work of Warner, who defines the labor of the living dead as such:

First the labor of the living dead speaks to a pervasive and potentially fatal mismatch between discourses of entrepreneurial self-realization and the crushing limitations and dangers imposed on many by their present circumstances. Undead labor animates a sense

of powerlessness circulating on the surface of everyday experience, a feeling that ordinary life can feel like an impasse. But this is beyond “cruel optimism” - the trope of undead work evokes the ways in which imperatives toward self-improvement can devour and finally outlive the selves they were meant to improve. In these nightmarish yet also realistic and even banal visions of undead labor appearing in Senegal, a person is often consumed by their drive to improve upon themselves - all that remains is often consumed - all that remains is their labor. (Warner 389)

The labor of the living dead is therefore a type of labor that positions economic self-realization as a distinct possibility but ultimately reveals itself to be impossible. The illusion is strong enough to keep the laborer stuck in an unending cycle of trying to improve themselves without results.

My argument relies on three aspects of the novel to make this argument, starting from the general going down to the particular. The first case to make is that the living dead is an implicit category in the Great War. Through letters of French soldiers on the front, I will show how the metaphor of the living dead fits within the context of World War One and how it is also apparent in Diop’s work. Thereafter, I will discuss the labor performed by the characters in the novel and from which space these dead (re)enter the world of the living. After discussing the context and labor, I use historical evidence to demonstrate how economic concerns in the nineteenth-century Senegambia region are represented by Diop, and how these three elements work together to create a theme of living dead labor in *Frère d’Âme*. David Diop’s *Frère d’Âme* is a powerful story because it explores the trauma of soldiers and shows how the inhuman demands placed on soldiers can lead to quite unusual occurrences. As we shall see, detailed studies of trauma in the novel have already been undertaken and they add to our understanding,

but by analyzing the role of the soldier as a laborer, we can offer critique of economic disparity that traverses centuries.

The trope of the living dead in WWI

The First World War is imbued with tropes of death. If anything is common knowledge about this war, it is that it was fought in the trenches. The average depth of a trench was about six feet, which ironically corresponds to the conventional wisdom that a grave is six feet deep. The trenches were a means of defense to stop and counter enemy advances, but they were also more than that: they were where the soldiers slept, ate, and everything in between. For all intents and purposes, the men lived in the trenches, seemingly already buried alive in a grave. We can glimpse primary source evidence of what life under such conditions was like for European soldiers from works such as *Paroles de poilus : lettres et carnets du front (1914-1918)*, a curated selection of letters and journals from the war front, compiled under the direction of Historian Jean-Pierre Guéno. For instance, we see that the intensity of the shell bombardments turned the idea of a grave on its head, as French soldier Lucien Jourdan attests, “Je mets la tête hors du boyau pour essayer de reconnaître les morts qui sont étendus là. Seul, car tout le monde est terré, je suis épouvanté devant ce gigantesque charnier et suffoqué par l'odeur qui s'en dégage. A perte de vue, la terre est recouverte de cadavres : tout est changé : les vivants sont sous terre et les morts sur la terre / I stick my head out of the trench to try and recognize the dead lying there. Alone, because everyone is hiding, I am horrified in front of this gigantic mass grave and suffocated by the odor coming from it. As far as the eye can see, the ground is covered with cadavers: everything has changed: the living are underground and the dead are on the earth” (Guéno 340). The literal term for the connective trails between trenches is *boyau*; this is what Jourdan peaks his head out of to catch a glimpse of the corpse-filled landscape. Even this term

used to describe the structure of trenches makes a slight reference to the trope of death. That is because *boyau* means a small narrow trail, but it also can mean intestine; a grotesque reference to an organ that is responsible for the transformation of matter into waste, taken metaphorically as a transformation from life into death. Along with this, we see his realization that this war has changed everything; the dead are above ground and the living are underground. The carnage of war fosters an environment for a profusion of the dreadful and unusual, making it a clear candidate to harbor stories of the living dead in works such as Diop's. These dreadful images of the dead taking the place of the living above ground, the living clinging to life underground, make it easy to see how accounts such as those could draw an author to include the living dead in their work on World War One.

So, taking into consideration the nightmare-scape of the trenches and the unabashedly racist tone of the French, for which possible reasons would West Africans be interested in fighting and producing for France? The answer to this question pushes us further into the grave where we can begin to dig up the meaning of the labor of the living dead for the *tirailleurs*. The link between the War and Africa is deeply entrenched in the colonial history between France and West Africa. In relation to World War One, general Charles Mangin is a prominent figure with regard to the conscription of West African soldiers. Mangin, in his work *La Force noire* articulates the fear of a demographic imbalance between France and Germany, finding that Germany has more manpower than France, and concluding that France should call on her colonies in order to compete effectively on the field of battle with her neighbor. The work itself is a prime example of racist European discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it argues a case that depicts West Africans as an intellectually inferior yet strong warrior race.

France conscripted African soldiers from their colonies to fight on the front as their ranks dwindled as the fighting progressed. In the beginning of the war effort, there was resistance to the idea of Africans joining the French army, a novel idea at the time, however, the idea was adopted after massive casualties were suffered in the war effort. Historian Joseph Lunn in his article '*Les races guerrières : Racial preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War*' attests to the conscription patterns as well as the reasons for them, "Indeed, it was precisely because of the staggering dimensions of French losses during the first 22 months of the war – and the general recognition that these were likely to continue – that resistance to the massive recruitment of West Africans and their deployment on the Western Front was overcome"(Lunn 534). These soldiers became known as *tirailleurs sénégalais* or *tirailleurs* for short, their provenance is much more varied than hailing from only Senegal, so it is an umbrella term that encompasses most West African soldiers who fought for France.

As far as labor goes, for the *tirailleurs*, it could be understood on the surface that they worked as soldiers for France, but it becomes clear that it extended beyond this, as we shall see, and that this type of labor fits into the category of the living dead. It is worth briefly mentioning that there was a larger effort to recruit laborers in a more conventional sense for the war effort, as Pascal Blanchard points to in his work *La France Noire*, "Outre les combattants au front,...des travailleurs "mobilisés" dans les colonies ou bien encore celle des supplétifs militaires, recrutés pour l'effort de guerre en métropole. Cette main-d'œuvre coloniale indispensable à l'économie de guerre (pour un combattant en première ligne, plus de trois sont nécessaires à l'arrière)... / In addition to the soldiers on the front lines... there were also 'mobilized' workers from the colonies, as well as military auxiliaries recruited to support the war effort in mainland France. This colonial workforce was essential to the war economy (for every one soldier on the front

line, more than three were needed in the rear)...”(Blanchard 98). So, not only were Africans conscripted to fight on the front lines, but they were also worked in an industrial setting at a higher proportion in order to produce and maintain the machinery and technology of the war.

One important factor that cannot be overlooked is that France used the venture of joining the war effort as a means to gain French citizenship: although this was mostly a carrot on a stick there are examples of it happening. If we take, for example, the case of Lamine Senghor, we see that some West Africans were able to become citizens after they served in the army, which he appealed for after his demobilization in 1919, “A cette époque, il suffit que deux témoins jurent devant un juge que l'intéressé soit bien né dans une des quatre communes du Sénégal (Saint-Louis, Gorée, Rufisque, Dakar) pour que la citoyenneté soit accordée. Senghor trouve les témoins sans difficulté et, le 13 juillet 1920, un jugement supplétif du tribunal de Dakar lui attribue le statut de “citoyen”/ At that time, it was enough for two witnesses to swear before a judge that the person in question was indeed born in one of the four communes of Senegal (Saint-Louis, Gorée, Rufisque, Dakar) for citizenship to be granted. Senghor found the witnesses without difficulty, and on July 13, 1920, a supplementary judgment by the Dakar court granted him the status of 'citizen.’” (Murphy 21). However, it should be understood that these particular cases were exceptions, and it is simply not true at all to say that France offered all the *tirailleurs* who took part in the war citizenship. Moreover, it was not a reality for those who worked in factories in the metropolises of Paris. There were deliberate efforts to repatriate and to restrict the mobility of colonial workers and soldiers on the continent to describe the moment of victory, “La politique de rapatriement rapide de plus de quatre cent mille soldats et travailleurs indigènes qui se trouvent encore en Europe est le signe que la présence des Afro-Antillais n’est plus souhaitée à l’heure de la victoire. / The policy of quickly repatriating more than four hundred thousand

indigenous soldiers and workers still in Europe is a sign that the presence of Afro-Caribbeans is no longer desired at the moment of victory” (Blanchard 103). Therefore, while it was not true for the vast majority of *tirailleurs* or laborers who participated, David Diop nonetheless evokes this potential path to citizenship and economic self-realization for his characters as the impetus for joining the French war effort in his work *Frère d'Âme*.

David Diop's *Frère d'Âme*

Frère d'Âme is narrated from the first-person point of view and centered on a hypermasculine protagonist, Alfa, and his unimaginable feats during the First World War. His dearest friend Mademba, his *plus que frère* as he puts it, is killed before his eyes. He sits with him for an extended period of time as he begs for a death that Alfa will not deliver to him: “Ah ! Mademba Diop, mon plus que frère a mis trop temps à mourir. Ça a été très, très difficile, ça n'en finissait pas, du matin aux aurores, au soir, les tripes à l'aire, le dedans dehors, comme un mouton dépecé par le boucher rituel après son sacrifice / Ah! Mademba Diop, my more-than-brother, took too long to die. It was very, very difficult, it wouldn't end, from dawn into the evening, his guts in the air, his insides outside, like a sheep that has been ritually dismembered after the sacrifice” (Diop 4). The death of Mademba deeply troubles Alfa and leads him to alienating thoughts and an unhinged spree of mutilation of the enemy in his quest for revenge. The mutilation is ritualistic and happens every night after the death of Mademba: Alfa amputates the arm of a German soldier and takes it back to camp with him. Alfa's guilt-fueled warpath ultimately results in an obscure situation where Mademba is resurrected, but not in a typical sense of the word.

Mademba's soul comes to inhabit the body of Alfa. Hence, Mademba literally becomes the living dead through Alfa; he states so himself quite candidly. A translator character in the

novel explains this to his doctors after a lengthy description of how Mademba/Alfa embodies contradictions, he says he is night and day, but also life and death, “Lui a dit qu’il était en même temps la mort et la vie/He said that he is both death and life” (Diop 138). This simplifies his long explanation as Mademba is dead and inhabiting the body of Alfa, fully disclosed to the reader at the end of the novel “...par la vérité de Dieu, je sais, j’ai compris qu’Alfa m’a cédé une place dans son corps de lutteur par amitié, par compassion. Je sais, j’ai compris qu’Alfa a entendu la première supplication que je lui ai lancée du tréfonds de la terre à personne, le soir de ma mort/...God’s truth as my own, I know, I understand that Alfa left me a place in his wrestler’s body out of friendship, out of compassion. I know, I understand that Alfa heard the first supplication I uttered in the depths of no-man’s-land on the night of my death” (Diop 145). The soul swap is an internal conflict that is restricted to the reader and the narrator, outwardly, Alfa’s comrades cannot make sense of his transformation and this leads to obscure and seemingly irrational explanations as well as his ostracization from the group.

If we turn our attention to an interview with David Diop, we gain further evidence of how to situate Alfa into the role of the living dead. When asked by *La Grande Librairie* if he thinks that it is possible to reincarnate into the body of a loved one, Diop says yes, stating that we can incorporate lost loved ones through guilt. He says at least through literature this is possible, “par une forme de schizophrénie c’est tout à fait possible, on peut récupérer, incorporer peut-être, en effet, un disparu par souffrance, par un tel nostalgie de sa perte et tel sentiment de culpabilité, qu’on peut-être – en tout cas la littérature le permet, le réintégrer / through a form of schizophrenia it is possible, one may recover, perhaps incorporate, a lost person through suffering, through a nostalgia of their loss and such a feeling of guilt, that maybe – at least literature allows it – to reintegrate them” (11:56-12:20). I believe that this statement by Diop

directly addresses the situation of the Alfa and Mademba as one that should be understood as a dead soul co-habiting the body and soul of another individual. I see a direct parallel between Warner's analysis of *Atlantique* and Diop's answer during this interview: a soul may come to possess a living person and participate in living dead labor. Diop's work contains different levels of labor, some that are rooted in the war, but also a type of labor that is situated within colonial history.

Living dead labor

The novel opens with the death of Mademba and ends with his rise back to life in the body of his dear friend. There are at least two ways to interpret the labor of the living dead in the work: Mademba and Alfa laboring together towards a dead end and Alfa's labor towards getting Mademba back from the dead. First is Alfa and Mademba's labor to join the army, and second is Alfa's labor as a soldier on the front. Borrowing from Warner's definition of living dead labor: the fatal mismatch between entrepreneurial self-realization and crushing limitations, we see that this type of labor in *Frère d'Âme* is partly couched in Mademba's desire to become a French citizen. Despite the treachery of this promise, it was a major recruitment tool of the French half-way through the war as Mamadou Diouf explains: "The outbreak of the First World War and the need for African troops in the war effort afforded Deputy Blaise Diagne the opportunity to secure legal recognition of the *originaires*' citizenship through a series of laws known as the 'Blaise Diagne Laws'" (Diouf 693). Mademba was a gifted learner, and when he learned all that he could from his local priest, he went to be educated in a French school, "Une fois devenu plus savant que notre marabout, Mademba a souhaité aller à l'école des Blancs. Siré Diop, qui ne voulait pas que son fils reste paysan comme lui, a accepté à condition que je l'accompagne/Once he had become more knowledgeable than our marabout, Mademba wanted to go to the white

school. Siré Diop, who didn't want his son to remain a peasant like him, agreed on the condition that I go with him" (Diop 109). Here we get the impression that there is ambition in Mademba to surpass his father, and it appears this was his father's desire too. The best way to achieve this was to become educated by the colonizers. The mismatch occurs because of the pejorative views of the *tirailleur* held by French and Senegalese society as a whole. Mademba believed that his education and labor in the French army would grant him privileges that would generate financial success for him, which historically is partly true, as evidenced through historical sources such as Gregory Mann's *Native Sons*. The French uniform did carry with it a bit of prestige, "Across West Africa, ex-soldiers were reluctant to give up any aspect of their uniform. They valued the uniforms highly, and different pieces had different meanings" (Mann 94). The uniform represented the power of the colonizer, however, this power did not extend perhaps as far as Mademba thought: "Like former masters whose slaves had served as tirailleurs, chiefs found their positions challenged in the interwar period, but social hierarchies were by no means reversed. For them and for the *anciens tirailleurs*, the world did not turn upside down, but sideways. As one chief had replied to a French officer extolling the virtues of the social equality supposedly introduced under colonial rule, 'Yes, all that is well and good for the poor devils, the slaves and the idiots, but not for the rest of us!'" (Mann 92-93). Despite this, Mademba's ambition is laid out quite bluntly: "Mademba voulait devenir un grand quelqu'un à Saint-Louis, un citoyen français: 'Alfa, le monde est vaste, je veux le parcourir. La guerre est une chance de partir de Gandiol. Si Dieu le veut, nous reviendrons sains et saufs. Quand nous serons devenus des citoyens français, nous nous installerons à Saint-Louis. Nous ferons du commerce. Nous deviendrons des grossistes et nous fournirons en denrées alimentaires toutes les boutiques du nord du Sénégal, y compris celle de Gandiol!' ... /Mademba wanted to be a somebody in

Saint-Louis, a French citizen: ‘Alfa, the world is big, I want to see it. The war is a chance to leave Gandiol. God willing, we will return safe and sound. When we become French citizens, we’ll move to Saint-Louis. We’ll start a business. We’ll become wholesalers and we’ll distribute food to the shops in northern Senegal, including the ones in Gandiol! ...’” (Diop 109-110). Initially, this is a goal that both Alfa and Mademba work towards, although it remains clear that it is Mademba’s ambition. Mademba is rejected from the French army at first due to his small stature and frail constitution, however, Alfa is a ‘force of nature’ and helps train Mademba to put on weight and gain strength so that the army will accept him. The second try is successful and they are both accepted by the French military. This training represents the labor of the living dead and, while it seems to pay off through the admission of Mademba into the army, it is ultimately what leads to Mademba being disemboweled by a system that had little to no appreciation for him. Indeed, in the novel it seems that the life of soldiers was not valued very much at all. For example, Alfa is disgusted by his captain as he sends soldiers who do not blindly charge to a certain death at the sound of his whistle, they exclaim : “non, on ne veut plus obéir à votre sifflet de mort/No, we don’t want to obey your whistle of death” (Diop 70). As a result their hands are tied behind their backs and they are sent out on the front to die. The captain labels them as traitors, leaving no pension for their loved ones. Therefore, they die without economic gain, “Rien pour leur femme, rien pour leur famille! /Nothing for your wives, nothing for your families!” (Diop 71) declares the captain as the bound soldiers walk out to their slaughter.

There is yet again a mismatch between this attempted entrepreneurial self-realization and crushing limitations. The savagery of the captain is hypocritical, creating an impasse for Alfa, as he cannot engage in similar barbaric acts with impunity. The captain’s ability to commit these atrocities and retain his position accords itself with notions of necropolitics put forth by Achille

Mbembe. In his essay, Mbembe contends that the juridical power over life and death is not only central to a conception of biopolitics, but also to that of necropolitics, or a politics of death and killing. Alfa's necropolitical power is unquestionably a threat to the captain's sovereignty: how else would such hypocrisy be permissible? It is because the captain cannot outperform Alfa in this realm. Furthermore, Alfa's manner of wielding this power, through violent member severance, is portrayed as being merciful. This argument of Mbembe is rooted in the early part of the French revolution where decapitation was a strong symbol of political power over the elites, which gradually morphed into a more democratic and civilized method through the use of the guillotine. While Alfa is not in the business of decapitation, he does participate in amputation, and the power in amputation, according to Mbembe, is that it is a living reminder of the power of death, adding further to the notion of living dead: "The traces of this demiurgic surgery persist for a long time, in the form of human shapes that are alive, to be sure, but whose bodily integrity has been replaced by pieces, fragments, folds, even immense wounds that are difficult to close. Their function is to keep before the eyes of the victim—and of the people around him or her—the morbid spectacle of severing" (Mbembe 35). Yet, we know that Alfa civilizes this power since he shows mercy to the German soldiers he amputates, and he kills them. Unlike how he let his more-than-brother suffer for hours on end.

If the job of the soldier is to kill the enemy, then Alfa excels above all others, however, it is made clear that Alfa's job is not the same as the captain's. His job description is leveraged against him, putting him in a contradictory position with no room for advancement. It states he must be controllable and only used when the captain needs it. "Used" sounds a lot like "exploited," "La France du capitaine a besoin que nous fassions les sauvages quand ça l'arrange. Elle a besoin que nous soyons sauvages parce que les ennemis ont peur de nos coupe-coupe. Je

sais, j'ai compris, ce n'est pas plus compliqué que ça/The captain's France needs for us to play the savage when it suits them. They need for us to be savage because the enemy is afraid of our machetes. I know, I understand, it's no more complicated than that"(Diop 15). Therefore, in terms of job performance, Alfa must perform well, but not too well, or else he will frighten the higher-ups, which he inevitably does by dismembering enemy soldiers unencumbered. He is told that his means of warfare are too much by his superiors "Ta façon de faire la guerre est un peu trop sauvage. Je ne t'ai jamais donné l'ordre de couper des mains ennemies ! Ce n'est pas réglementaire. Mais je ferme les yeux parce que tu es croix de guerre/Your way of waging war is a little too savage. I never ordered you to cut off enemy hands! It isn't regulation. But I looked the other way because of your Croix de Guerre"(Diop 74). For any type of advancement, Alfa must be savage, even otherworldly to the enemy, brandishing his "coupe-coupe" to strike fear in the hearts of the Germans, however, he must be able to turn this off on command for his French compatriots. All soldiers have the responsibility to switch between these two states. However, in the novel, there is extra pressure on Alfa to appear as savage as possible, more so than his French counterparts. So, in turn, he has a more difficult task of suppressing the anger that he harbors after the murder of Mademba. Alfa continues as long as he can on the front, avenging his *plus-que-frère*, laboring for a dream that was never his own and one for which he no longer has a reason to work toward without Mademba. He is ultimately consumed by it, just as Warner states in his definition of the living dead labor. Nonetheless, he continues to work away at his dead end job: amputating Germans, until he is relieved of his duties. His behavior is too excessive for those at the front, even for those who would bind their own soldiers and send them to a purposeless death, leaving their families penniless to boot. Alfa is sent to a camp away from the

front. He brings the hands he amputated with him as his trophies, the sum of his labor, which is all he has left.

Aside from the mismatches present in the labor of both Mademba and Alfa, there is another aspect of Warner's conception of the labor of the living dead that aligns with *Frère d'Âme*. The other recurring theme that is present in Warner's analysis is the liminal spaces from which the living dead can re-enter this plane of existence: "Ocean, mirror, and grave are gateways to other existences but also dangerous portals out of which the living-dead may claw their way back out, going so far as to possess or replace those who summoned them" (Warner 396). The space present in *Frère d'Âme* is the grave. The association between the grave and the trench becomes very pronounced in Diop's novel shortly after the death of Mademba: "C'est la première chose inavouable que je me suis permis de penser. Avant la mort de Mademba, je n'aurais jamais osé imaginer une chose pareille, me dire à moi-même que je voyais la tranchée comme un sexe féminin demesuré qui allait nous accueillir, Mademba et moi/It was the first unmentionable thing I allowed myself to think. Before Mademba's death, I would never have dared to imagine such a thing, would never have thought of the trench as an outsized female organ ready to receive us, Mademba and me" (Diop 10). The combination of metaphors in Alfa's vision is rich with multiple aspects of generation that facilitate the living dead 'birth' of Mademba back into the world and into the body of Alfa. First, we can note that the ground, or soil, is generative in its own right, since there are minerals and moisture in the ground that are conducive to life such as plant growth, the ground is therefore generative. In addition, the trenches were corpse ridden, as the mass of bodies would be buried not far away from the trenches, making this soil very fertile in the future and therefore life-giving. By linking it to a human organ that plays a significant role in human reproduction, we are able to see how the

grave-trench has the potential to metaphorically act as a gateway for Mademba's return to this world, ultimately replacing Alfa. In this early passage, we see that both Mademba and Alfa are welcomed together into the generative space. The space of the trench creates a bond between the two of them playing off the title *Frère d'Âme*. We see that the trench makes them *frères d'armes* or brothers-in-arms; the metaphor is then bolstered by the ability of both spaces to create fraternal links. What really drives it home is that the ground plays a major role in the resurrection of Mademba. After being sent behind the front, Alfa buries his trophies under auspicious circumstances, which seem to coincide with the return of Mademba: "J'ai donc décidé un beau soir de les enterrer. Par la vérité de Dieu, j'ai attendu un soir de pleine lune pour le faire. Je sais, j'ai compris, je n'aurais pas dû les enterrer un soir de pleine lune. Je sais, j'ai compris qu'on avait pu me repérer de l'aile ouest de notre refuge en train de creuser le sol pour les enfouir / So one evening I decided to bury them. God's truth, I waited for the night of a full moon to do it. I know, I understand that I shouldn't have buried them on the night of a full moon. I know, I understand that they could have spotted me from the west wing of our sanctuary while I was digging in the dirt to bury them" (Diop 124). The fruit of Alfa's labor is not the sought after economic success of which Mademba dreamed, rather it is several amputated arms that serve as tokens of revenge against Mademba's assailants. This grave of amputated arms represents enough labor to bring Mademba back to life, although Alfa pays the ultimate price as he gives up a space in his body for Mademba to live and to continue his labor as the living-dead.

While the example of the soldier seems extreme, it does bear resemblance to what happens to those who go on laboring in a system that is rigged against them: a death from the inside, creating a vacancy in a living body for someone or something else to take over, someone perhaps coming from one of these liminal spaces, such as a grave. This is a theme that

continually crops up in pan-African portrayals of labor; the living dead are a strong metaphor for this type of work that takes the life out of laborers, as evidenced in the work of Jean and John Comaroff. By analyzing the concerning economic situation in various regions of the African continent, the Comaroffs reveal that the notion of the zombie, or living dead, is especially prevalent in representations. They assert there is a "...constantly reiterated suspicion, embodied in the zombie, that is it is only by magical means, by consuming others, that people may enrich themselves in these perplexing times" (Comaroff 792). The only way that Mademba was able to enrich himself is through a type of consumption of Alfa. The dream of economic success is ultimately what consumes both of them. However, both Warner and the Comaroffs situate their arguments in a post-colonial period that is radically different from the socio-economic context of the First World War. These differences must be acknowledged, especially in the Comaroffs' work, in which it is a question not only of a different historical context, but also a completely different geographical region of Africa. Therefore, different concerns are brought to the surface. We see in the work of the Comaroffs and Warner that immigration and unemployment are central issues that drive their analyses. Diop's novel being situated in the colonial period means that we have not yet encountered these central issues that engender representations of the living dead. Nonetheless, there are still some throughlines that link these time periods together: namely the connection to unstable economic conditions. In addition, Diop's work takes place in the colonial period, but he writes it from a post-colonial perspective. Bearing this in mind, we can see that Diop brings some of these post-colonial issues to the forefront in the novel, one of these issues being an economic issue grounded in the economic history of peanut monocultures in the Senegambia region.

Arachidité

While Alfa is sent away from the front, he reminisces on his life in Senegal, a good portion of this is dedicated to his family. He recounts a disagreement between his father and the chief of the village, Abdou Thiam. Alfa's father is against the monoculture of peanuts, while Thiam is in favor of adopting these new farming practices. As we shall see, the shortsighted Thiam does not anticipate the cycle of indebtedness that a monoculture would create. On the other hand, Alfa's father clearly understands the crushing economic limitations that a monoculture implies. Thiam, under the guise of what is best for the village, wants to adopt monoculture peanut farming in order to pay off taxes: "Inspiré par un envoyé du roi du Caynor et incité par un envoyé du gouverneur de Saint-Louis, Abdou Thiam a dit qu'il fallait suivre une nouvelle voie, qu'il fallait cultiver l'arachide plutôt que les oignons, l'arachide plutôt que les choux, l'arachide plutôt que les pastèques. L'arachide, c'était un surplus d'argent pour tous. L'arachide, c'était de l'argent pour payer les impôts/Inspired by a king's envoy from Cayor and incited by a governor's envoy from Saint-Louis, Abdou Thiam said that we needed to follow a new path, that we needed to cultivate peanuts instead of millet, peanuts instead of tomatoes, peanuts instead of onions, peanuts instead of cabbage, peanuts instead of watermelons. Peanuts meant more money for everyone. Peanuts meant more money for paying taxes" (Diop 117-118). However, Alfa's father senses that this will be problematic. This is because Alfa's father is not concerned with money, rather he is concerned with his ability to be a good host for travelers, "Mais si je ne cultivais que de l'arachide, qui nourrirait ma famille? Qui nourrirait tous les voyageurs de passage à qui je dois l'hospitalité ? L'argent de l'arachide ne peut pas tous les nourrir/But if I only grow peanuts, what will feed my family? Who will feed the passing travelers who deserve my hospitality? Money from peanuts can't feed them all" (Diop 119). Alfa's father is pointing out the obvious problem with the monoculture, which is that it quite

clearly puts all of the eggs in one basket, metaphorically speaking. If there is a bad harvest, then everyone will be in debt, since they will have to borrow money on credit in order to make it through to the next harvest. Conveniently, Abdou is the owner of a store who sells these items, so he would be able to lend people these food goods on credit, therefore making a large profit, a fact that Alfa's father is keen to: "Abdou Thiam, toi et moi nous sommes des égaux et je ne voudrais pas un jour devoir venir dans ta boutique te mendier du riz à crédit, de l'huile à crédit, du sucre à crédit pour les miens/Abdou Thiam, you and I are equals and I do not want, one day, to have to come to your store to beg for rice on credit, for oil on credit, for sugar on credit to feed my own." (Diop 119). But he is quick to remind Abdou that if he lends out all these goods on credit, then he will have nothing to repay his creditors, "Un boutiquier qui n'a que des clients débiteurs devient lui-même le débiteur de ses fournisseurs/A shopkeeper whose clients are all debtors becomes himself a debtor to his suppliers" (Diop 120). Alfa's recollection of this disagreement seems tangential to the horror and gore of the rest of the novel, but in reality it is grounded in a real historical moment in Senegal where there was economic pressure from Europeans to cultivate peanuts. Moreover, we should note that this indebtedness is not generated by the colonizer directly, but rather by the village chief. This is significant because the trope of the living dead shows us that it is often our neighbors or compatriots who turn into the living dead and come to consume us. If we recall the example Warner gives in *Atlantique* then we see that it is directly against the boss that the spirits seek reparations, not against the indirect foreign economic systems underlying the problem.

As the character of Alfa's father points out, the monoculture of peanuts created a cycle of indebtedness, just as historian George Brooks points out, "what can be learned about nineteenth-century antecedents of the phenomenon of *l'arachidité* in the Senegambia, the

overwhelming dependence on the peanut as the sole cash crop which engendered a life-cycle of indebtedness and penury relieved only by a reckless splurge of spending following the harvest” (Brooks 54). Perpetual indebtedness without a means for escape is eerily similar to the notion of living dead labor, where the application of life force to economic self-realization is systematically crushed. If this type of labor was a genre of literature, then it would be horror; it would constantly point to a miserable ending populated by creatures that suck the life and soul out of the worker.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that David Diop’s novel *Frère d’Âme* and its elements of the macabre offer a link to the prevalent contemporary theme of the living dead in Africa media that focuses on the socio-economic situation of colonial/post-colonial Africa. The macabre is an innate part of the First World War. The trope of death is inescapable in the context of World War One; equally unavoidable is the tension between life and death and the ways they intermingle. The example of the trench as both a life-giving force and a grave is prevalent in both Diop’s story and historical accounts of the war. Life in the trenches was bleak, to be sure, but it was a protective barrier where the living could hide underground from the enemy while the dead populated the ground above. It therefore carries symbolic notions of a womb that holds the living where the dead ought to be, a notion that Diop quite heavily insinuates by having Alfa imagine the opening in the earth as an enlarged female organ. Through the establishment of the environment as a conductor for the theme of the living dead, we see a direct connection to Tobias Warner’s work, especially given the overlap between the graves in *Atlantique* and the trenches of World War One. Moreover, not only is the metaphorical ground present to establish the living dead, but there are also the characters themselves that participate in a labor that directly lines up

with Warner's conception of the labor of the living dead. The academic labor of Mademba to learn French, Alfa training Mademba to increase his stature in order for him to be admitted into the French army, the exercise of necro-power through the grotesque spectacle of severed limbs, and the burying of the severed limbs as exchange of body and soul all amount to macabre and occult forms of labor in the work.

I would be remiss not to mention that this is a divergent interpretation of the work done on Diop's novel in regards to trauma, and how this interpretative lens offers some differing and complementary findings. Especially in regards to the swapping of bodies, my interpretation differs from current scholarship. It is through the use of a supernatural Wolof folk figure called a *dëmm* that Alfa is constantly suspected of being a close ally of death, or as an embodiment of death itself. While these points are indispensable to a wider understanding of the postcolonial critique of the role of the *tirailleur* in World War One, they do not so easily direct themselves to a socio-economic critique of the labor of the living dead.

Literary scholar Anna Branach-Kallas's article '*Tirailleurs Sénégalais, Savagery, and War Trauma in At Night All Blood is Black* by David Diop' underlines the finding that Diop does a good job of staying away from the banal valorization of the *tirailleur* as a super warrior that is usually based on parochial racial stereotypes afforded to them such as extreme loyalty, savagery, and natural strength such as those put forth by Mangin. Instead Branach-Kallas demonstrates how Diop explores the affliction of these African soldiers who would have suffered the same as everyone else, to such an extreme degree that they could experience splits in their personality: "From Alfa's perspective, war releases the most savage of instincts: it dissociates the soldier from his previous life and fabricates a new self"(Branach-Kallas 54). This is how Branach-Kallas accounts for the soul swap between Mademba and Alfa; it is a fracturing of

Alfa's personality which causes him to refind his own humanity through the absorption of Mademba in order to rid himself of his guilt. Having a framework to understand the soul swap within the novel is a key element to interpreting the work, Branach-Kallas does this primarily through trauma. The connection with trauma studies is more substantially outlined in Branach-Kallas's book *Decolonizing the Memory of the First World War* in which the context between the disparity of technological advancement and traditional superstition can explain the supernatural undertone of Diop's novel, "The ostracization of the protagonist reveals a gap between the first industrialized war, relying on science and the latest technological innovations, and the soldiers' vulnerability, as well as their "uncivilized", irrational behaviour." (Branach-Kallas 30). The work of Branach-Kallas posits an interpretation of Alfa as a *dëmm* as an inability of his comrades to apprehend the condensing together of the extreme violence of the war and rapid technological advancement. It is also pointed out by Branach-Kallas that Diop could be writing Alfa as a *dëmm* in order to decolonize these western hermeneutics that try to isolate a set of theoretical conditions that explain an extraordinary phenomenon. By explaining that the fantastical happenings of the novel are the work of a *dëmm* the reader is situated within a decolonized context which gives power back to the colonized by using this as the explanation for such happenings.

However, Diop does explicitly make references to forms of labor in the work itself: the history of peanut farming in the Senegambia region is a prime example of this. The labor of peanut production in and of itself is not representative of a macabre type of occult labor that conjures images of a *dëmm* for instance, but it does nonetheless inspire a dreadful image of economic breaking wheel where an unending cycle of indebtedness is engendered. My argument distinguishes itself from the current scholarship on the topic through using a different framework

to analyze specifically the labor of the *tirailleurs* by borrowing from the work of Warner, but it also aligns with other scholars such as Branach-Kallas. For instance, it appears that the labor of writing the novel itself is a means to regain some power against the colonizers. If using the figure of the *dëmm* is a means to rebel against colonial oppression by not using the institutions of the West to diagnose mental illness, then likewise incorporating the history of peanut farming from the perspective of Alfa's father is a means by which the African perspective can be centered over the economic capitalist concerns of France. In this way, the dead continue to labor through their commemoration in the form of novels and statues, for instance, and hopefully one day they may be adequately compensated.

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