"The Human Factor": *World War Z*, the 2005 World Summit, and Competing Narratives of the Role and Future of the United Nations

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1.1 The Report of the United Nations Post-war Commission

In Max Brooks' apocalyptic novel *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*, an unnamed agent of the United Nations Post-war Commission recalls his experiences in interviewing survivors of humanity's cataclysmic war against zombies. The interviews were part of an effort to document the events of the war for future generations, for which purpose the commission was established. To the agent's dismay, however, he finds that many details and personal anecdotes from his interviews were omitted from the commission's final report. "It was all too intimate," retorted the chairperson of the commission to the agent. "Too many opinions, too many feelings. That's not what this report is about. We need clear facts and figures, unclouded by the human factor."[1] The agent grudgingly concedes, but decides to publish the individual accounts he so painstakingly collected himself. That publication is *World War Z*.

Of course, there is no such thing as a United Nations Post-war Commission—let alone a Zombie War. But *World War Z* speaks to the imagination in helping to envision scenarios that occur regularly in world politics: that of a transnational viral epidemic and armed conflict. It does so from the perspective of a United Nations (UN) agent, which is quite remarkable, as the UN and its personnel nowhere nearly feature as strongly in fictional works as, for instance, national governments and their representatives. The text represents specific understandings with regards to the nature of world politics and weaves a narrative of the place and role of the UN in the international system. *World War Z*'s narrative strongly resonates with official representations of the UN that were communicated at the 2005 World Summit at the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the world organization. In particular, the novel both reflects and engages with narratives presented by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and United States President George W. Bush, and positions itself vis-à-vis their views and statements. Fundamentally, all three narratives deal with issues of cooperation in a highly interdependent world, where threats to security are no longer bound within the borders of territorial states. However, the three narratives all present different conceptualizations of what that cooperation means, how to go about achieving it, and what its ultimate end goal should be.

Most people, however, have not seen the speeches by Annan and Bush, nor read the reports written by them or their staff, nor have kept track of scholarly studies on these issues and how they affect the UN. Perhaps some follow the events through mass media news coverage. Chances are, however, that most of them watch television series and feature films, read novels, play video games, and enjoy other

[1] Max Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006): p. 1.

artefacts of popular culture. These are not simply neutral forms of entertainment. Popular cultural texts such as *World War Z* express particular values, beliefs, and biases. They raise awareness of issues, actors, and phenomena, and construct specific understandings of them. Sources of popular culture can thus contribute to (or challenge) what people consider as common sense or take for granted. This also holds true for common understandings of the UN. It is thus important to extend our public and scholarly discussions to also incorporate examinations of the UN in popular cultural sources.

1.2. The United Nations in popular culture

This thesis project aims to contribute to mapping out the place of the UN in political imaginaries that spring from (and feed back into) global popular culture. It is a subject area in which a lot of work needs to be done. How the UN has been represented in popular culture is a strand of inquiry that so far has been largely neglected by scholars. So far, only one recent article by Pablo C. Diaz has probed the image of the UN in popular culture by examining how the organization is represented in films and television series. Diaz, who is currently working as a Protection Specialist for the United Nations, also noticed how little the UN is featured in feature films and television series. "At 70 years of age," he writes, "spanning the best decades of cinema and television, the most famous, iconic, and telegenic organization in the world barely registers in the history of either the big or the small screen, and when it does, the results are markedly unflattering."[2] He suggests two explanations for the UN's underwhelming amount of screen time. First, he argues that in the US, for example, a negative view towards the UN by American audiences have made the organization and its policies an unpopular subject for films and television series. If producers do adopt the UN as a central element in the storyline, they tend to focus on the organization's failures rather than its achievements. His second explanation is that the structure, internal workings, and policies of the UN are too complex to accurately grasp in a compelling plot line. He insists it is still a worthy and important endeavour, implicitly calling upon writers and producers to give the UN a shot.[3] Diaz's study is an excellent start to consider the place of the UN in popular culture, but it mostly addresses the quantity of representations of the UN; Diaz hardly probes the content and quality of the works he lists. Furthermore, he limits his analysis to cinematographic media such as feature films and television series, thus excluding other media such as novels.

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[2] Pablo C. Diaz, "The UN Through the Pop-Culture Looking Glass" *E-International Relations*, 24 January 2016, accessed 24 March 2016,http://www.e-ir.info/2016/01/24/the-un-through-the-pop-culture-looking-glass.

[3] Ibid.

1.3. Outline of the thesis

My thesis project builds on the work of Diaz and attempts to analyze in more depth how the UN is represented in works of literary fiction. Specifically, I have conducted a socio-historically situated textual analysis of representations of the UN in Max Brooks' apocalyptic novel *World War Z*. The aim of my study was to find out how representations such as these constructed particular images of the UN and its role in contemporary world politics, and how such understandings are conveyed to readers through narrative techniques. I have compared the understandings of the UN that are represented in the novel with the understandings that Kofi Annan and George W. Bush attempted to construct with the strategic narratives they presented at the 2005 World Summit. In doing so, I have assessed how far the narratives by Annan and Bush are mirrored and legitimized or deflected and challenged by the narratives in Brooks' novel.

The thesis is outlined as follows. Chapter 2 situates the study in a theoretical framework. It links my project to recent attempts to theorize the interrelationships between world politics and popular culture. In chapter 3, I present my methodological framework by explaining the selection of my cases and primary sources and elaborating upon my research methods. My discussion of the actual analysis is spread out over two chapters. Chapter 4 examines the strategic narratives on the United Nations as presented by Annan and Bush at the 2005 World Summit, whereas chapter 5 considers the narrative from *World War Z* and how it positions itself vis-à-vis the narratives of Annan and Bush in the discourse surrounding the role of the United Nations. Finally, I will briefly sum up my findings in the conclusion and reflect on their implications and the possibilities for future research.

2. Theoretical framework: Popular culture and world politics

2.1. Issues of representation and the aesthetic turn in world politics

One of the reasons why representations of the United Nations in the realm of popular culture have so far remained unexamined has to do with prevailing approaches to the study of world politics more broadly. In particular, it centres on ontological and epistemological issues surrounding the concept of *representation* itself and the various ways in which different schools of thought within the study of world politics deal with these issues. How they do so, in turn, leads to wildly different understandings of the nature of politics—what it is, how it works, and where it is located. These understandings, again, lead to different ideas of the political relevance of culture.

Prevalent ideologies such as realism and liberalism have subscribed to fundamental social scientific conventions that suppose the realities of world politics can be understood regardless of our personal values and assumptions. Such conventions are widely shared by policymakers. Since reality is directly observable and understandable, as this view supposes, scholars and policy makers do not need to worry about issues of representation. As a result, the approaches to world politics that are founded on these fundamental conventions focus on political reality 'as it is'.[4] In other words, there are entrenched assumptions about what exactly world politics is and who participates in it. Most scholars naturally associate it with a domain made up of mostly formal institutions such as state governments and some other actors such as non-governmental organizations and multinational corporations. This domain is often referred to as belonging to "high politics."[5] In their study of this domain, scholars are predominantly concerned with the interests, institutional arrangements, and decision-making processes of these actors and how these affect the relationships between them.[6] Thematically, issues of national sovereignty, militarized security, war and peace, and diplomacy are central in most of their studies.[7] All this, then, is what world politics is supposedly really about. The United Nations as the world's most important intergovernmental organization resides quite comfortably in this domain and features prominently in studies of world politics and global order.

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[4] Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): p. 5.

[5] See, for example, Jutta Weldes, "Popular Culture, Science Fiction, and World Politics: Exploring Intertextual Relations," in *To Seek Out New Worlds: Science Fiction and World Politics*, edited by Jutta Weldes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): pp. 4-5.

[6] Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies, and Simon Philpott, "Pop Goes IR? Researching the Popular Culture-World Politics Continuum," *Politics* 29, no. 3 (2009): p. 155; Kyle Grayson, "The Rise of Popular Culture in IR: Three Issues," *E-International Relations*, 30 January 2015.

[7] Jutta Weldes, "Popular Culture, Science Fiction, and World Politics," p. 5; Kyle Grayson, "The Rise of Popular Culture in IR: Three Issues."

In this strand of thought, popular culture is often not deemed worthy of academic attention with matters relating to world politics. Jutta Weldes and Christina Rowley note how popular culture is often considered merely 'low politics' or perhaps not even political at all.[8] A reason for this, according to Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies, and Simon Philpott, is that most scholars tend to view popular culture and world politics "as potentially interconnected but ultimately separate domains."[9] These views go a long ways in helping to explain why no scholars who have studied the UN's image have found it necessary to probe representations of the UN in popular culture, as issues of representation are still widely seen as irrelevant to the study of world politics, and culture is still perceived a domain that is quite separate from it.

A growing range of scholars with very different ideas about the nature and importance of representation in the study of world politics have challenged this view. They argue that the realities of world politics—indeed, reality in general—cannot simply be objectively understood regardless of personal values and assumptions. Instead, reality is always mediated and needs to be made meaningful through interpretation. Since reality is then always mediated in some form, it becomes crucially important to consider how this is done—how it is *represented*. Roland Bleiker has conceptually separated these two different ways of dealing with issues of representation. He distinguishes between "mimetic" representations on the one hand and "aesthetic" representations on the other. The first category, he argues, seeks to "represent politics as realistically and authentically as possible," whereas the latter category acknowledges the impossibility of this aim, and instead "assumes there is always a gap between a form of representation and what is represented therewith. Rather than ignoring or seeking to narrow this gap, as mimetic approaches do, aesthetic insight recognizes that the inevitable difference between the represented and its representation is the very location of politics."[10] If we take seriously the issue of representation and the underlying assumption that reality is made meaningful through processes of constant interpretation, this opens up space for a critical re-examination of how what we naturally consider to be political reality is actually socially constructed through representations of various kinds. This has a few important implications. First, it changes our conception of how politics works. There is tremendous power in deciding what gets represented where and how, effectively shaping how common understandings are created. Second, it changes our conception of where politics takes place. The increasing amount of scholars that have taken an aesthetic approach towards representation, argue that common understandings of world politics are not necessarily only constructed through sources that we traditionally associate with it, such as policy

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[8] Jutta Weldes and Christina Rowley, "So, How Does Popular Culture Relate to World Politics?," in *Popular Culture and World Politics: Theories, Methods, Pedagogies*, edited by Federica Caso and Caitlin Hamilton (Bristol: E-International Relations, 2015) p. 12.

[9] Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies, and Simon Philpott, "Pop Goes IR? Researching the Popular Culture-World Politics Continuum," p. 155.

[10] Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics*. pp. 18-19.

documents, political speeches, statistical data, and academic studies. Instead, understandings of the international are also constructed through a wider range of aesthetic sources, including ones we usually associate with the cultural domain, such as literature, poetry, film, photography, architecture, music, and so on.[11] During the last two decades there has been such a growing engagement with examining how cultural sources are related to world politics that Bleiker has referred to it as an "actual 'aesthetic turn' in international political theory."[12] The scholars that are part of this engagement thus consider the domains of culture and politics to be inherently implicated in one another. This view supposes that for us to gain an understanding of either, we cannot limit our examinations to only one of them.

2.2. Popular culture and world politics

The growing acceptance that epistemological issues of representation and the use of aesthetic or cultural sources are relevant to how common-sensical understandings of world politics are created have spurred scholars to also consider sources within the 'popular' domain. These scholars argue that the boundaries between the domain of 'political' culture and 'popular' culture—or 'high politics' and 'low politics'—are not that clear-cut. One of these scholars, Kevin Dunn, even insists that the "dichotomy between the two is an illusion that obscures more than it reveals."[13] Together, these scholars draw on the work of cultural thinkers from the past few decades and follow their example in proposing to conceptualize "popular culture as indivisible from politics."[14] Indeed, Elisabeth Bronfen argues that "mass media and popular forms of aesthetic expression are precisely the arena where anxieties and desires most prevalent in a particular culture surface and thus encompass that part of the public imaginary domain most in need of our critical attention."[15] This imaginary is crucial, she writes, because it is in this imaginary "that we make sense of the world by producing coherent narratives, which in turn serve as the basis for any sense of community and political action."[16] She stresses how any political reality "only works with the help and within the parameters of our collective cultural imaginary. … it is precisely within the cultural imaginary that real political battles are fought."[17] How these contesting narratives in collective cultural imaginaries relate to world politics more concretely is explained well by Weldes in her discussion of science fiction literature and world politics. She argues

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[11] Ibid., p. 2-3.

[12] Ibid., p. 3.

[13] Kevin C. Dunn, "Historical Representations," in *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*, edited by Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): pp. 90-91.

[14] Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies, and Simon Philpott, "Pop Goes IR? Researching the Popular Culture-World Politics Continuum," p. 155.

[15] Elisabeth Bronfen, "Reality Check: Image Affects and Cultural Memory," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (2005): p. 21.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p. 23.

that cultural texts either support or undermine existing political order and relations of power. Weldes describes a two-fold dynamic with regards to texts that are supportive of the status quo and reproduce existing power relations. First, representations from such texts inform the views and understandings of state officials, she argues. Second, other people accept the representations (and the policies that are founded on them) by these officials more easily when they align with dominant understandings in their cultural imaginary.[18] However, cultural texts do not have to agree with the status quo, she stresses; they can also challenge it. In this case, she argues, popular culture can offer "modes of thinking that resist dominant constructions of world politics." Through these modes, she continues, we gain access to "alternative visions of world politics [and] possibilities for transformation … [that] allow us to imagine how we might better organize and structure local and global politics."[19] Whether sources of popular culture support or challenge the existing political order and its dominant relations of power, through their representations they produce meaning and contribute to common understandings of world politics. Popular culture can thus be seen as a crucial site in which imaginaries of world politics are shaped and contested. Unfortunately, Diaz seems to be the only scholar who has applied the issue of representation and an engagement with sources of popular culture to the UN. And although his study has suggested that the organization is often misrepresented or critiqued in films and television series, he has not elaborated on how this is done. Therefore, let us move on to consider how representations of the UN in the case of *World War Z* relate to the official representations presented at the 2005 World Summit.

[18] Jutta Weldes, "Popular Culture, Science Fiction, and World Politics," p. 7.

[19] Ibid., p. 8.

3. Methodological framework: Sources, case selection, and research methods

3.1. *World War Z* and the 2005 World Summit

I have selected Max Brooks' apocalyptic novel *World War Z* as a case study, first, because the main character is an agent of a United Nations commission. This makes it one of the rare works of popular fiction that is more or less told from the perspective of the United Nations. Second, the semi-fictional universe presented in the novel contains clear and extensive analogies to both the United Nations and several important themes in world politics, such as pandemics, conflict and war, nuclear proliferation, human trafficking, illicit trade in arms and human organs, and refugees. Third, the scenario of a zombie apocalypse is a sound case study, as a range of international relations theorists have engaged with the theme of zombies recently. Taking *World War Z* as a case study allows me to get involved in this engagement and what it means for the study of world politics. Fourth, it is important to study the political content of Brooks' novel, as he himself intended the book to be a critique of political systems and the behaviour and policies of political actors.[20] Finally, *World War Z* is an excellent case study since it has been immensely popular. The original novel by Brooks was adapted into a feature film in 2013, directed by Marc Forster and starring Brad Pitt as the leading character.[21] I chose to stick to the novel because only a handful of authors have examined novels in the study of the interrelationships of world politics and popular culture—most scholars have focused on feature films and television series. This is also the case in the only study of representations of the United Nations in popular culture, as mentioned earlier.

I will compare the narrative in *World War Z* with the narratives on the United Nations presented by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan and former president of the United States George W. Bush at the 2005 World Summit. This allows me to situate my analysis and point out the interrelationships between representations in popular culture, on the one hand, and world politics on the other. By examining how the different texts rely on similar or diverging narrative techniques we can establish how they are positioned towards one another. I have decided to contrast *World War Z* with the World Summit since the World Summit is an important moment in recent history with regards to the role and future of the United Nations in global affairs. Various actors have used the sixtieth history of the United Nations as an occasion to reflect on its functioning and to outline a narrative for its future. I have focused on the narratives articulated by Annan and Bush, as these are two of the most important narratives at this juncture in the discourse surrounding the United Nations. Furthermore, the

[20] Jim. "Exlusive Interview: Max Brooks on World War Z," *Eat My Brains*, 20 October 2006.

[21] See here for the film's entry in the Internet Movie Database: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0816711/.

narratives directly contest one another in many ways. Second, *World War Z* is written during the period that the World Summit was held and the narratives of Annan and Bush contested with each other for legitimacy. It engages with many themes that are prevalent in the narratives and explicitly or implicitly positions itself vis-à-vis them. The book was first published in September 2006—one year after the World Summit took place.

3.2. Textual analysis and narratives—in literary fiction and beyond

This thesis uses textual analysis as a methodological framework. I use the term 'text' as it is commonly understood in cultural studies, namely as "a finite, structured whole composed of signs."[22] This broad understanding of a text does not limit the concept to a linguistic text in particular. However, in this case, these are precisely the texts that were used. The main primary sources for the analysis consist of a literary novel, reports by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the official transcriptions of the addresses to the World Summit by Kofi Annan and George W. Bush.

The analysis focuses on narrative as a key methodological concept. Jessica Stokes, in her excellent textbook on methods for cultural analysis, notes how narrative is an essential part of how human beings make sense of the world and their place in it. "The drive to narrativize", she writes, "is present in human responses to the world—we can't help ourselves; we interpret the world through narrativization. Narrative also conveys the ideology of a culture, and it is one of the means by which values and ideals are reproduced culturally."[23] As narrative is an in important part of how we make sense of the world, so it is in various forms of expression across different media. It is naturally accepted that authors of literary fiction employ narrative devices to tell a story, but politicians and policy makers rely on convincing narratives just as much as novelists do.

When political actors narrativize lived experiences to attain their goals and desires outcomes, we speak of strategic narratives. Political scholars Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle define strategic narratives as "representations of a sequence of events and identities, a communicative tool through which political actors—usually elites—attempt to give determined meaning to past, present, and future in order to achieve political objectives. Critically," they add, "strategic narratives integrate interests and goals—they articulate end states and suggest how to get there."[24] Strategic narratives then give meaning to a complex reality, and, in terms of world politics and international policies, define issues and argue how to go about solving them. A crucial component of narratives is thus a sense of temporal movement. Terry Eagleton, a notable literary critic, explains how narratives

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[22] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (3rd Ed. Toronto: University of Toronto, 2009): p. 4.

[23] Jessica Stokes, "Researching Texts: Researching Texts: Approaches to Analysing Media and Cultural Content," p. 144.

[24] Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*. (New York: Routledge, 2013): p. 5.

rely on a series of events that are connected through a plot. Usually, he argues, "stories are possible because some initial order is disrupted. … the point of the ending is to restore this order, perhaps in an enriched form."[25] In the case of strategic narratives in world politics, the movement towards restoration of the order then involves specific actors and instruments and attempts to legitimize specific ideas and (sometimes highly contested) policies.

3.3. Content and form

Most studies so far that have examined the co-constitutive nature of world politics and popular culture have adopted textual methods to highlight and examine the ideological content of cultural texts. These studies have yielded valuable insights, but I find that most of them focus on *content* so much that they neglect the *form* of the texts they study. Although both political actors and literary authors use narrative devices strategically to tell their 'stories', the manner in which the narrating is done differs according to the form or style of a text. Asa Berger, a veteran communications scholar, has emphasized the same point. The styles we adopt," he argues, "are shaped by our intended audiences, the kind of texts we are writing, the situations in which we find ourselves, and various other social factors that play a role in our interaction with others."[26] Therefore, in analyzing textual narratives, it is not enough to focus solely on the political ideology and the norms and beliefs that can be found in the content of the texts. It is also important to take into account the form or style in which the narrative is presented, and how that impacts the communication of its message.

Speaking of the form of cultural texts in general, or works of literary fiction in particular, Eagleton outlines some compelling features to keep in mind. "Fiction," he writes, "does not primarily mean a piece of writing which is not true. … Works of fiction can be full of factual information. Yet texts we call literary are not written primarily to give us facts. Instead, the reader is invited to *imagine* those facts, in the sense of constructing an imaginary world out of them. … They are used to help build up a certain *way of seeing*."[27] In this way, literary fiction differs from texts that have a specific practical context—such as political speeches—Eagleton argues. On the one hand, this gives literature a more timeless appeal and influence vis-à-vis statements articulated from a clear political actor with a clear political intention, as the immediate relevance of fictional literature (if it is valued for its quality, that is) does not decline when the surroundings of its practical context changes. On the other hand, however, this means that literary texts are often more ambiguous with regards to its meaning. Eagleton here stresses that these works are best understood as being "capable of generating a whole range of possible

[25] Terry Eagleton, *How to Read Literature*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014): p. 104.

[26] Arthur Asa Berger, *Media and Communications Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 4th Ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2016): p. 176.

[27] Terry Eagleton, *How to Read Literature*, p. 121. Italics added for emphasis are mine.

meanings."[28] Textual analysis—in fact, all analysis—always requires a great deal of interpretation. But in dealing with literary fiction, then, we need to be particularly careful in placing the work in its socio-historical context and considering textual evidence upon which to base our claims.

In the next section, I will move on to the analysis of the actual narratives. The section is two-tiered. First, in chapter 4, I will consider the narratives as presented by Kofi Annan and George W. Bush at the United Nations 2005 World Summit. Subsequently, in chapter 5, I will consider the narrative of *World War Z*.

[28] Ibid., p. 144.

4. Analysis, part 1: Competing narratives of the United Nations at the World Summit

4.1. The 2005 World Summit

Two important and contesting strategic narratives of the United Nations were outlined by Secretary-General Kofi Annan and United States President George W. Bush for the occasion of the 2005 World Summit. The summit was initially meant to be a gathering to review the progress made since the United Nations member states adopted the Millennium Declaration in 2000. However, Annan used the fact that the summit coincided with the sixtieth anniversary of the UN to not only reflect on the progress made with regards to the Millennium Declaration in particular, but also on the role and work of the United Nations in general. To attract media publicity and raise global support for the work of the UN, Annan launched an elaborate public relations campaign around the event.[29] A press release by the UN Department of Public Information called the event "a once-in-a-generation opportunity to take bold decisions in the areas of development, security, human rights and reform of the United Nations."[30] The same press release stated that the summit would bring together more than 170 world leaders, spurring it to present the event as "the largest gathering of world leaders in history."[31] Annan hoped that the leaders present would revitalize international consensus on key issues and challenges the international community face and push for collective action to tackle them. All the while, the Bush administration did all it could to sabotage the summit and sideline the UN in world affairs to prevent it from hampering US counterterrorism measures and regime change in Iraq. Both Annan and Bush presented strategic narratives to legitimate their views and positions.

4.2. Setting: an interdependent world with interconnected threats

The strategic narratives of the United Nations by both Kofi Annan and George Bush are set in the context of a globalized world in which threats and challenges are greatly interconnected. Both argue that, unlike any period before, threats or instability in specific parts of the world have the potential to spill over into other parts. The fact that threats and challenges are thus interlinked means that the wellbeing of actors is also interrelated. In other words, they are increasingly dependent on one another. "At no time in human history", Annan writes in his report, "have the fates of every woman,

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[29] Joon-lim Young, "Promoting the Image of the United Nations: Kofi Annan's Celebrity Ambassador Program and World Summit," *Journalism History* 40, no. 3 (2014): pp 192-193.

[30] United Nations Department of Public Information. "The 2005 World Summit: An Overview" *United Nations Official Website*, July 2005: p. 1.

[31] Ibid.

man and child been so intertwined across the globe."[32] In his address to the world summit, Bush underlines Annan's conviction that the world is increasingly interdependent. "In this young century," he states, "the far corners of the world are linked more closely than ever before—and no nation can remain isolated and indifferent to the struggle of others."[33] As a key example of the interdependence of the contemporary world, both Annan and Bush mention the terrorist attacks in the United States of September 11, 2001. "Small networks of non-State actors … have … made even the most powerful States feel vulnerable", writes Annan in his report.[34] In his speech, Bush warns about the transnational nature of terrorism: it "passes easily across oceans and borders, and could threaten the security of any peaceful country."[35] He acknowledges that the transnational nature of this threat requires global engagement. "The lesson is clear", he claims. "There can be no safety in looking away, or seeking the quiet life by ignoring the hardship and oppression of others."[36] Thus, both Annan and Bush situate their strategic narratives in a globalized world by taking note of the transnational and interlinked nature of contemporary threats and challenges, and argue that to face these challenges international actors must adopt a global outlook and engagement.

4.3. Disruption: the war on terror and a divided world

The disruption that propels the plot in the narratives of both Annan and Bush centre around the same pivotal event: the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. Despite this convergence, however, the event and its aftermath are given entirely different meanings in the two narratives. For Bush, the terrorist attacks have ushered in a full realization of the interdependent nature of a globalized world. This was the first time that the negative consequences of an increasingly interconnected world truly hit home. Annan's remark that, after the attacks, the United States as well felt vulnerable to transnational threats was painfully accurate.

For Annan, however, the event was disruptive in another sense. In his narrative, he marks the improved spirit of cooperation and collaboration at the United Nations after the end of the Cold War heralded the end of great power rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Never before was there such "a growing belief in the importance of effective multilateralism", he notes in his report.[37] Annan envisioned the international community making great strides forward in facing the

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[32] Kofi Annan, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All" *United Nations General Assembly*, (21 March 2005, A/59/2005): p. 53.

[33] George W. Bush, "Statement of H.E. Mr. George W. BUSH, President of the United States of America" *2005 World Summit: High Level Plenary Meeting.* 14 September 2005, p. 1.

[34] Kofi Annan, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All," p. 4.

[35] George W. Bush, "Statement of H.E. Mr. George W. BUSH, President of the United States of America" p. 1.

[36] Ibid., p. 2.

[37] Kofi Annan, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All," p. 4

world's challenges by working together. He saw the adoption of the Millennium Declaration in 2000 in this light as well. In the declaration, he argues, "world leaders were confident that humanity could … make measurable progress towards peace, security, disarmament, human rights, democracy and good governance." [38] But the terrorist attacks disrupted this gradual progress towards effective multilateralism. Bush's declaration of a 'war on terror' after the attacks, and his administration's consequent pursuit of a variety of unilateral measures greatly divided the international community. The US invasion of Iraq without a mandate from the Security Council was regarded as particularly damaging. In an interview with the BBC, Annan stated that the war on Iraq "was not in conformity with the UN charter", and he called it "illegal".[39] He argues that the disruption and division sparked by the Bush administration's drift towards unilateralism has exposed a lack of consensus about goals and methods in the international community. He sees the major powers and member states divided on some of the most pressing issues they face.[40]

This, then, in Annan's narrative, presents the most alarming threat the international community faces: its internal divisions and lack of consensus. Annan argues that, in a globalized world in which threats are interconnected, unilateral action and only looking after your own interests are counter-productive. Only through effective cooperation can contemporary challenges be met. Thus, Annan argues that it would be "in each country's self-interest" to cooperate and effectively tackle the challenges together.[41] In his opening address to the world summit he stated: "whatever our differences, in our interdependent world, we stand or fall together." He stresses that, whatever the challenge, "even the strongest amongst us cannot succeed alone."[42] If all threats are interrelated and need to be tackled trough collective action, there needs to be at least a shared understanding about priorities and policies—there needs to be unity.

4.4. Towards restoration: collective cooperation and coalitions of the willing

The actions and policies that Annan and Bush propose in their narratives to mend the disruption that has taken place and restore order (enriched or otherwise) are just as divergent from each other as the their interpretations of the disruption in the first place. Annan argues that the most important thing is for the international community to again find common ground. States should be "working together on

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[38] Kofi Annan, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All," p. 4.

[39] Ewen MacAskill and Julian Borger. " Iraq War was Illegal and Breached UN Charter, Says Annan." *The Guardian*, 16 September 2004.

[40] Kofi Annan, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All," p. 4; Kofi Annan, "Address to the 2005 World Summit" *2005 World Summit: High Level Plenary Meeting*. 14 September 2005, p. 1 and 3.

[41] Kofi Annan, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All," p. 6.

[42] Kofi Annan, "Address to the 2005 World Summit".

the basis of shared principles and priorities", he argues.[43] A principle Annan invokes regularly is the need to recognize "our common humanity".[44] Effective collective cooperation," he stresses, can only be "possible if every country's policies take into account not only the needs of its own citizens but also the needs of others."[45] An important priority should be then to advance "everyone's interests".[46] Only when states thus establish common ground on key principles and priorities can they pave the way for the sustained collective action that is needed to tackle the issues they all face but cannot solve alone.

Annan argues that a crucial second step is updating common institutions and international frameworks. Although he acknowledges that states are still the main actors on the international scene, he claims that they "cannot do the job alone."[47] He lists some of the tasks non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society and the private sector have gradually taken over from state governments and the important role they play in contributing to "global security, prosperity and freedom." [48] In particular, Annan sees a special role reserved for regional and international organizations. The UN, he argues, "bears a special burden" as "the world's only universal body with a mandate to address security, development and human rights issues."[49] In his vision, the organization serves a key role as an "instrument for forging a united response to shared threats and shared needs".[50] In fact, an implicit theme in Annan's narrative is that this intended role of the UN in global affairs has so far not been realized—the organization has not been able to live up to its full potential. Indeed, as was mentioned, the occasion of the summit was used by Annan to reflect on the proper role of the UN in world politics. In his report, he proposes to thoroughly reform and empower the organization to meet the new challenges of the twenty-first century. This also involves a strengthening of the executive branch. "The Secretary-General and his or her managers must be given the discretion, the means, the authority and the expert assistance that they need to manage an organization which is expected to meet fast-changing operational needs in many parts of the world", he stresses.[51] The UN is thus a crucial instrument in Annan's narrative. Like no other actor it can mobilize the principles and priorities that could support international consensus on key issues and priorities, and it can coordinate the collective action to effectively tackle these issues. The strategic message of Annan's narrative, in

[43] Kofi Annan, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All," p. 6.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., p. 6, 39, and 40.

[49] Ibid., p. 6.

[50] Ibid., p. 59.

[51] Ibid., p. 46.

essence, thus envisions a more dominant role for the UN in global affairs, in which the organization takes over leadership from the US and unites the world in common purpose.

Annan's call to international unity and collective action under strengthened UN leadership differs fundamentally from Bush's narrative. Bush also acknowledges the importance of collective action and he too speaks of unity, but his conception and priority of both have crucial qualifications attached to them. For instance, Bush tells the audience at the summit that, for him, the displays of international sympathy and assistance offered to the US after hurricane Katrina hit the American Gulf Coast have shown "that the world is more compassionate and hopeful when we act together."[52] He also claims it is "essential we work together" to "fulfil a moral duty to protect our citizens".[53] But despite this "moral duty" and "compassion" and other rhetoric of unity that Bush also adopts, in his view, collective action is simply a means to an end. And if the end is reached better without collective action, then so be it. The overriding objective in Bush's strategic narrative is to remove the conditions that potentially bring forth threats to American national security. The main aim of his narrative is to persuade other international actors that sometimes the national security "will require confronting threats directly".[54] In other words, he argues that multilateral action is beneficial, but if it hinders national interests, unilateral action is to be preferred. In effect, Bush legitimizes the military action and the US invasion of Iraq with his "great coalition of nations" without the mandate provided by a Security Council resolution. National security thus overrides international law and the collective institutions that have been put in place to safeguard international peace and security.

The nature of terrorism as the biggest threat the United States and the world faces in Bush's view also provides a crucial inhibition to unity and collective action in his narrative. Bush never provides a solid explanation for the structural problems that undergird the proliferation of terrorism—he simply blames repressive political regimes. He argues that "failing states and stagnant societies … provide fertile ground for the terrorists", and "rulers of outlaw regimes … sponsor terror and pursue weapons of mass murder."[55] The nature of governance in these regimes leads to "anger and despair", he argues, which causes countries to be "vulnerable to violent and aggressive ideologies."[56] Naturally, then, Bush refuses to cooperate with the states and countries that are spawning the very threats he seeks to eliminate. On the contrary, these states need to be confronted. Bush thus draws up the battle lines between democratic states and authoritarian ones. In his speech, he distinguishes between "the world's free nations", "democratic nations", "the democratic world", "civilized nations", and "peaceful countries", on the one hand, and juxtapositions them against the "enemies": "outlaw regimes", "failing

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[52] George W. Bush, "Statement of H.E. Mr. George W. BUSH, President of the United States of America", p. 1.

[53] Ibid., p. 2.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., p. 1.

states", "stagnant societies", and "the terrorists and their allies".[57] Bush couches his rigid simplification of complex global political realities into this dichotomy of the free world versus their enemies in an apocalyptic vision of history that manifests itself in another binary opposition. "In each era of history," he dramatically insists, "the human spirit has been challenged by the forces of darkness and chaos".[58] Bush takes on these forces. By "spreading the hope of freedom to millions who've never known it" and "advancing the cause of liberty" he suggests terrorism can be stopped.[59] Bush wants other countries to adopt democratic governance in an attempt to take away the root causes of "anger and despair" and "darkness and chaos" that lead to terrorism. The "human spirit" and "hope" must prevail. For Bush, this is enough reason to legitimate military intervention and regime change, as was the case in the war on Iraq.

Bush attempts to sideline the role of the UN in global affairs in his narrative. Instead, he uses the goals and principles of the organization to legitimate the US war on terror and its campaign of democratization through forced regime change in Iraq. "The advance of freedom and security is the calling of our time. It is the mission of the United Nations", he states, thus attempting to rhetorically align the world organization to his cause.[60] Hinting his disagreement with the institution, Bush warns that "the world needs the United Nations to live to its ideals and fulfil its mission."[61] As a crucial step in this direction, Bush states he wants to see the UN reformed. The organization needs to be "free of corruption" and "accountable to the people it serves", he argues. He singles out increased oversight, cost savings, and measures to prevent the squander of resources as important reforms. Far from strengthening the UN and seeing for it a crucial leadership position in uniting the world, Bush is critical of the organization's performance and wants to increase its oversight and reduce its costs. He emphasizes that the US will lead the reform effort.

[57] Ibid., p. 1-5.

[58] Ibid., p. 5.

[59] Ibid., p. 2 and 4.

[60] Ibid., p. 5.

[61] Ibid.

5. Analysis, part 2: Narratives of the United Nations in Max Brooks' *World War Z*

5.1. An oral history of the Zombie War

World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War is an apocalyptic horror novel that narrates humankind's war against zombies in an alternate historical timeline. Its author, Max Brooks, is well-known for his zombie stories. An earlier work by Brooks was his tongue-in-cheek survival guide for the zombie apocalypse.[62] *World War Z* is his first attempt at realist fiction. When I say it is realist, I do not mean that the novel mirrors reality exactly—a zombie apocalypse is not something that actually has occurred nor something we can expect to occur—I mean that Brooks' portrayal of the world in which the zombie outbreak occurs "conforms to what people of a certain time and place tend to regard as reality."[63] In this case, Max Brooks has researched the elements that compose his story meticulously, and his work contains many references to existing social, economic and political realities. Indeed, with regards to world politics, the book quite accurately captures common understandings of how world politics works. The fact that the book follows the realist tradition means that its narrative devices closely follow the techniques employed by political actors in their strategic narratives. As Eagleton explains: "realist novels can be seen as problem-solving devices. They create problems for themselves which they then seek to resolve."[64] As we have seen, the same devices are used by Annan and Bush in their narratives: they present a disruption in the status quo, which they construct as an issue. They then propose strategies to counter this disruption, which leads to a restoration (and, mostly in Annan's case, enrichment) of that status quo.

The events of what in the novel is mostly referred as the "Zombie War" is told through a series of interviews with 42 survivors of the war. Brooks has adopted this format after being inspired by Stud Terkel's *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War Two*.[65] The interviews are conducted and commented upon by an unnamed agent of the United Nations Post-war Committee (UNPC), and the novel presents itself as the fruit of the agent's efforts—the introduction is also by his hand.[66] Although the agent is marked as an important narrator, he is neither omniscient nor the only character doing the narrating. The narrative is presented to the reader through all the characters in the interviews, all of them with their own backgrounds, personalities and viewpoints. Amongst others, the agent speaks

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[62] Max Brooks, *The Zombie Survival Guide*, Three Rivers Press, 2003.

[63] Terry Eagleton, *How to Read Literature*, p. 126.

[64] Terry Eagleton, *How to Read Literature*, p. 105.

[65] Studs Terkel, *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War Two*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

[66] In an interview, Brooks was asked whether he saw the interviewer in the novel as himself. He hinted that he did. Thus, I will also use the masculine pronoun 'him' and possessive 'his' when referring to the agent.

with medical doctors, human traffickers, a filmmaker, an astronaut, an architect, a maritime captain, soldiers and war veterans, the wartime Vice President of the United States, the wartime director of the US Department of Strategic Resources, a spy for the Israeli intelligence services, a Japanese warrior monk, just to name a few. The characters are from different nationalities and the interviews take place at locations across the world. The reader thus never gets a 'complete' account of the narrative—it gets presented in piecemeal accounts that offer different perspectives to the events in the story, and it is up to the reader to put them together and envision their place in the whole. It might seem as if this presents a balanced and global portrayal of the events, but there are ways in which this form of narrating can treat its subject matter with notable biases and blind spots. For one, most of the characters are American. Attentive readers might also quickly notice that most characters are male (only 6 out of 42 are female), especially the ones in powerful positions. Let us keep that in mind as we move on to consider the narrative that the characters present.

5.2. Disruption: the Zombie War

World War Z centres around the scenario of a zombie outbreak. This is a convenient way to disrupt the initial status quo and start the book's narrative. In a manner that does not deviate from earlier classics in the zombie pantheon, the transformation of humans into zombies occurs after they have been infected with a virus that affects the brain. Infected people die as soon as the virus reaches the brain, but they reanimate after some time as zombies. People who have turned into zombies then spread the virus by biting other people. The scenario of a viral disease sets the stage for a global epidemic. The "patient zero" of the zombie outbreak is discovered in a rural area in China's municipality of Chongqing. Person to person contact quickly spreads the virus throughout the country. Despite the Chinese government's efforts to contain the threat (and cover the outbreak in secrecy), the virus spills over into neighbouring countries and even travels to other continents through transnational flows such as migration, human trafficking, air traffic, and illegal organ trade.

The contagious zombie virus in *World War Z* mirrors cases of pandemics in recent history. In particular, there are clear analogies to the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003. The SARS virus was also first discovered in China. In the case of SARS, as well, the Chinese government failed to notify other countries or international organizations. The World Health Organization (WHO) had to request information from the Chinese authorities after one of its partners in the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) suspected a transnational health threat when it picked up media reports of an influenza outbreak in the Chinese mainland. Indeed, in a paper commenting on the outbreak, WHO affiliates David Heymann and Guénaël Rodier warn that

"inadequate surveillance and response capacity in a single country can endanger national populations and the public health security of the entire world."[67]

World War Z thus presents a setting of an interdependent world that also features in the narratives of both Annan and Bush. The threat of the zombie virus and the unstoppable transnational flows of various kinds that relentlessly spread the viral infection to other parts of the world also mirrors Annan's emphasis on the interdependent nature of threats in a globalized world in particular. However, *World War Z* differs from the narratives of Annan and Bush in a fundamental sense. Instead of simply warning of these threats, its communication in the form of a novel builds an entire world around them, and—to paraphrase Eagleton here—the reader is invited to *imagine* them. The many individual accounts that present the narrative from different socio-political, moral, and geospatial positions help construct a vivid imaginary around the geopolitical threat of transnational flows, deconstructing the often fixed conception of territorial borders.

At first consideration, the zombie virus as a geopolitical transnational threat does not resemble the main disruptive moment in the status quo that Annan and Bush present in their narrative: the global threat of terrorism. However, on second consideration, there are more similarities than one would have thought. For one, the apocalyptic nature of the zombie outbreak clearly reverberates Bush's narrative of the war on terror, in which the "human spirit" and "hope" are challenged by "darkness", "chaos" and "violence". Furthermore, the viral nature of the threat resembles the Bush's rhetoric of the spread of "violent and aggressive ideologies". Finally, the nature of zombies as undead—having no intelligence, no feeling, only instinct to consume and spread—mirrors Bush's completely dehumanizing construction of "terrorists". Eric Boyer has noticed this similarity between zombies and the enemy construction of terrorists in the rhetoric of the war on terror as well. He notes that from the rhetoric of the Bush administration, one would assume it faces "not a group with political grievances, but … an undifferentiated hoard of zombified automatons … The construction of this enemy cuts off any attempts to study root causes of political violence."[68] Both zombies and terrorists, then, are portrayed as a completely non-human Other. Vikash Yadav has also questioned the wisdom of promoting a discourse in which enemies are constructed as zombies. He commented on Drezner's *Theories of International Politics and Zombies* as a means of explaining world politics through zombies and stressed that "this kind of alienation [is] precisely what should be countered and resisted through academic dialog and debate".[69] Although *World War Z* is, of course, a fictional novel, and not an academic study, its stress on 'realism' and the political commentary in the book make the zombies as

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[67] David L. Heymann and Guénaël Rodier, "Global Surveillance, National Surveillance, and SARS," *Emerging Infectuous Diseases* 10, no.2 (2004): pp. 173-175.

[68] Eric Boyer, "Zombies! All The Janus-Faced Zombie of the Twenty-First Century," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 47, no. 6 (2014): pp. 1148-1149.

[69] Vikash Yadav, "Apocalyptic Thinking in IR," *Duck of Minerva*, 19 February 2011.

dehumanized enemy construction not any less problematic in the imagining of a geopolitical conflict scenario.

5.3. Towards restoration: the Warmbrunn-Knight Report and Redeker Plan

Through the many individual accounts in the novel, the reader is presented different ways in which the members of the international community have responded to the zombie apocalypse. Some are more successful than others, but eventually humanity manages to turn the tide in the fight against the zombies. The narrative has two key events, in particular, that both have a potential for steering the narrative towards restoration. These events are the publication of the Warmbrunn-Knight Report on the one hand, and the setting in motion of the Redeker Plan on the other. As we will see, the former draws the short end of the stick, and it is the latter that ends up leading humanity to victory. Both the report and the plan are no different from strategic narratives themselves, and they propose wildly different policies.

The Warmbrunn-Knight Report centres on the failure of multilateral institutions and international organizations such as the WHO and the UN to identify the threat of a looming viral epidemic and their lack of countermeasures. In the beginning of the narrative, characters describe a phase in which the initial outbreaks of the zombie virus were dismissed by both general publics as well as public officials. A spy in the Israeli intelligence services was one of the first to take it serious. He started gathering data by going through "mountains of unread reports" from the WHO and the UN. "I found incidents all over the world," the man tells the interviewer, "all of them dismissed with 'plausible' explanations."[70] Together with other experts, amongst which a retired intelligence officer from the US and a field officer from the UN, they published a report in which they warned of the looming threat. "Our report was just under a hundred pages long", he says. "It was concise, it was fully comprehensive, it was everything we thought we needed to make sure this outbreak never reached epidemic proportions."[71] However, the report was not widely read, and the outbreak did reach epidemic proportions. Only the state of Israel acted decisively. It announced in the General Assembly that it was enacting a policy of "voluntary quarantine" and that it offered asylum to Jews and Palestinians.[72] Other states reacted with confusion or hesitation and were completely overrun.

This fragment is a key one for understanding the role of multilateral frameworks and international organizations in the narrative. First, the WHO and UN are depicted as being overly bureaucratic, incapable, and not often listened to. The reports by the organizations fail to identify the threat of the virus and it is up to state intelligence services to pick up the ball. This is not a fair representation. Brooks never mentions the increasingly sophisticated early warning systems that are now globally in

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[70] Max Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*, p. 34.

[71] Ibid., p. 36.

[72] Ibid., p. 37.

place, such as the GOARN since 1997. Brooks' image of dusty reports that no-one looks at feels more like it is a description from a few decades past. While the UN is not as all-encompassing as some of its proponents would like to see it, the various roles it serves in the international community are more elaborate and pivotal than Brooks in his novel presents them to be.

The Redeker Plan centres around the attempts by states to deal with the zombies. At this point it is not even a plan against an epidemic virus anymore. The transnational health threat has escalated into global and total warfare rather quickly in the narrative. However, the Redeker Plan heralds the course of action that eventually propels humanity to successfully counter the zombie threat and restore order. The plan is conceived by a South African and first implemented by the South African government, after which other governments adopt similar plans. The premise of the plan is an acknowledgement that not all parts of the citizenry can be saved, and thus it proposes to sacrifice certain segments of the population by moving them into areas that attract the zombies, so that strategic areas can be kept relatively secure from which the government can regroup and reclaim its territory. Although this approach turns out to be successful, its implementation naturally raises moral dilemmas, and many characters struggle with these dilemmas in their accounts of the war. The first country to win back most of its territory successful is the United States. At a conference of the "new UN" (with now only 72 delegates left) on a makeshift headquarters aboard the USS Saratoga near Honolulu, the American Ambassador then proposes a general vote to move permanently on the offensive and reclaim the planet from the zombies. His proposal is accepted with a small majority (24 delegates vote in favour, 17 against, 31 abstain), and a multinational force is established under the aegis of the UN to help other nations reclaim their territory as well.[73] In one of the final interviews, the wartime Vice President of the US remarks that he "caught a lot of flak for going UN instead of making it an all-American crusade", and he concedes that "it's made the overseas campaigns a little slower." But he argues that he still thought it was a fair deal. "We're all in this together," he tells the interviewer.[74]

The successful vote in favour of the US Ambassador's offensive action proposal at the "Honolulu Conference" is a direct critique of Bush's overseas military intervention without Security Council backing. It acknowledges that unilateral action might be more effective, but implies that the legitimacy bestowed by multilateral action is the better option. This clearly supports Annan's strategic narrative of the centrality of the UN as a key instrument in mobilizing consensus and coordinating collective action. However, there are parts of *World War Z*'s plot that still resonate more with Bush's narrative. Most of this has to do with downplaying (or downright neglecting to mention) the possibilities for effective actions against the viral outbreak by international actors and multilateral frameworks and instead steering the plot towards a direct confrontation with the enemy spearheaded by national intelligence services and military strategists. And the confrontation with the zombies is quite direct—

[73] Ibid., 264-269.

[74] Ibid., 328-329.

technologically advanced weaponry fail to effectively kill the zombies on a large scale, so humans are forced to engage in close quarter combat. This sequence of events again resonates with Bush's assertion that sometimes the national security "will require confronting threats directly".[75] Above all else, it naturalizes the primacy of national security as the government's objective. There is hardly any international cooperation in the early stages of the outbreak. Not even the Security Council is mentioned, despite the overwhelming outbreak of an epidemic virus that threatens international peace and security. Instead, national governments abandon great parts of their populations to reclaim their territories from a position of relative security. Only when the United States shows leadership in the international community is effective multilateral action undertaken.

[75] George W. Bush, "Statement of H.E. Mr. George W. BUSH, President of the United States of America", p. 2.

6. Conclusion:
The human factor

6.1. Contesting narratives

In Max Brooks' apocalyptic horror novel *World War Z*, humanity is confronted with a viral epidemic that quickly spreads across borders and threatens global security. The mode of narration in the novel through individual accounts helps readers vividly imagine the geopolitical threats that unwanted transnational flows present to the international community. The narrative's deconstruction of the often fixed conception of territorial borders underlines the insistence of Kofi Annan and George W. Bush that today's globalized world is more than ever interdependent.

The scenario of a viral epidemic as a global health threat, however, is quickly abandoned as the spreading zombies push humanity to the brink of extinction and force total war on the world. This plot development pushes the narrative of *World War Z* to resonate significantly with the strategic narrative communicated by Bush at the 2005 World Summit. For one, the novel hardly pays any attention to the possibilities for effective actions against the viral outbreak by international actors and multilateral frameworks. Instead, international organizations such as the UN and the WHO are depicted as being overly bureaucratic and incapable. The organizations fail to identify the transnational threat of the zombie virus, and reports that were published were not widely read anyhow. Brooks also never mentions the increasingly sophisticated early warning systems that are in place, such as the GOARN since 1997, which are triggered in actual events of transnational health crises—as was the case with SARS in 2003. In sum, the world's multilateral institutions and international organizations in *World War Z* have failed to prevent a global epidemic and could not come up with significant countermeasures against the zombie threat. Instead, national intelligence services and military strategists pick up the ball and guide humanity in its direct confrontation with the zombies. This all hardly supports Annan's vision of strong common institutions, with the UN at the centre, that coordinate collective action to tackle the world's interconnected challenges. Instead, *World War Z* reflects international disappointment with the performance of the UN and its institutions.

The shift towards a plot of direct confrontation with the zombies in a fight for humanity's very survival mirrors Bush's 'war on terror' narrative. The apocalyptic nature of the zombie outbreak matches Bush's dramatic and Manichaean rhetoric, and the nature of the zombies as a completely non-human Other is similar to Bush's dehumanizing enemy construction of terrorists. The restoration of order in the novel's narrative centres around state governments salvaging what they could to re-establishing control over their territories, which legitimizes Bush's primary objective of safeguarding national security by all means necessary. Despite the novel's direct critique of Bush bypassing the Security Council in his invasion of Iraq with the "Honolulu Conference," it concedes that

multilateralism is not always to be preferred. Only when states have re-established order do they expand their concern to the fate of others.

A common trope in all three narratives is the appeal to human nature. The UN agent in *World War Z* is disappointed with the "cold, hard data" in the Post-war Commission's report and stresses the importance of "the human factor". He asks himself: "in the end, isn't the human factor the only true difference between us and the enemy we now refer to as the 'living dead'?"[76] Annan also calls on the peoples of the world to recognize their "common humanity," and Bush warns that the "human spirit" must be protected. Although *World War Z* frequently attempts to align itself with Annan's vision of unity and collective action through the content of the individual accounts of the survivors, its plot and narrative side with Bush's divisive enemy construction and objective of national security.

World War Z does not challenge the limits of discourse surrounding the UN—its representations of the organization stay within conventional understandings of world politics and constructs a rather narrow conception of what the United Nations does. On the contrary, Brooks neglects to mention many aspects of global governance and multilateral frameworks that are in place (such as the early warning systems in global health care), and his readers are presented with the traditional state-centred conception of world politics in which national interest and state policy remain the highest priorities. This conception makes it harder for Annan's call for collective action under UN leadership to tackle the world's challenges to resonate with his audiences.

[76] Max Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*, p. 2.

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