White Supremacy and Resistance in *Bacurau*'s Brazilian Northeast

Catherine Patillo
University of Texas, Austin

The 2019 Brazilian film *Bacurau*, co-directed by Juliano Dornelles and Kleber Mendonça Filho, follows the eponymous small, rural town of Bacurau. In the film, this community faces profound external threats from politically and physically abusive outsiders who exert control over the people of the town and their physical resources. Set in the Northeast of Brazil, *Bacurau*'s narrative extends issues of race and development into a near future where exploitation and marginalization force the town's inhabitants to the edge of extermination. The narrative invokes historical and contemporary struggles against global white supremacy; which, for the purposes of this article, will be defined as "modalities of social domination and systemic, targeted physiological and ecological violence…" executed "through the planning, imagination, (re-)planning, and institutionalization of group-based human and cultural hierarchies" (Rodríguez 23). Brazil utilizes the technology of white supremacy through its political, social and economic structures, as well as the relationships that Western individuals and states form with the country. And despite prominent features that alienate the film from its own themes of resistance to white supremacy, *Bacurau*'s narrative identifies and opposes the ways in which white supremacist sociopolitical structures weaponize historical and modern technologies, politics and access to perpetuate racism against non-white rural communities in the region. Dornelles and Mendonça Filho's film demonstrates the political and social tools at the disposal of marginalized and racialized groups, as well as how the oppressed mobilize those tools to effectively resist national and international forces of white supremacy.

HISTORICAL AND NARRATIVE CONTEXT

Appreciating the significance of resistance within *Bacurau*'s plot necessitates an understanding of the history of white supremacy in the region, as well as the ways that Black and indigenous people have resisted hierarchical and marginal oppression in colonial contexts. During colonization and the era of empire in Brazil, the importation of enslaved Africans was directed through Northeastern coastal port cities (Santiago 263). As the slave trade and the plantation economy expanded at the expense of the enslaved, the resistance to colonial expectations increased. Accordingly, many enslaved Black people extricated themselves from the slavery-based economy of colonial Brazil by fleeing inland to the arid, sparse region that covers much of the Northeast. There, they formed free autonomous Black settlements that now fall under the umbrella term of quilombo, "um espaço de luta e de resistência do negro contra a escravidão, neles os cativos buscavam abrigo como forma de resistência, marcada pela violência, repressão, castigo e controle" (264). Their name, quilombo, invokes a connection to Angolan communities contemporary with Portuguese occupation and enslavement in the region; wherein people from various ethnic groups joined to form a society characterized by the constant threat of military violence (Anderson 558). In the Northeast of Brazil, the quilombo of America faced tremendous violence from the colonial authorities (552); but their geographical placement on the fringes of the unconsolidated Portuguese colonial territory afforded them a high degree of autonomy and freedom from colonial oversight (Ferretti 1642). These anti-imperialist Black communities By maintaining interior sociopolitical autonomy, quilombos afforded their residents leverage against violent, racist power structures that would otherwise willfully dehumanize and exploit them.

In the colonial and postcolonial periods of Brazilian history, free Black people have built communities in the sertão, a marginalized region that to this day receives little support from both Brazil's government and private economic interests within the country alike. The sertão is best known for the challenges of its environment and its corrupt governance. In the early days of Brazil's history as a republic, Euclides da Cunha tied this region's political identity and fate to its prolific droughts and its geographical isolation (58-61). Politicians of the region have, for decades, reliably elevated clientelism and patronage over the establishment of stable, dependable infrastructure for its citizens (Nelson and Finan

303). In the modern era, the region has developed unequally, and its residents experience a far lower standard of living than other parts of Brazil. The concept that sertanejo politics constitute a struggle between those without power and the extreme minority of those politicians and businessmen *with* power—who claim to represent the people's interests but really seek only to maintain their dominance (308)—lies in tension with the racial-historical account of power dynamics in the region. In post-imperial Brazil, the ideological political centerpiece of racial democracy holds that a monopoly of national power rests "nas mãos da camada «branca» minoritária...como se tratasse de um fenômeno de ordem «natural» ou de um perene direito «democrático»" (do Nascimento 17). Explanations that evade a reckoning with white supremacy in Brazil permit racism to continue defining national, regional and personal relationships. Black people's persistence as well as their erasure define the communities, politics and power dynamics of the region as they navigate the intersection of white supremacy, geographical marginality and socioeconomic dependence.

The interlocking identities of quilombola and sertanejo define the concept of community in *Bacurau*, tying the struggle against white supremacy to the struggle against marginalization from development. But the narrative's approach to the quilombo, made explicit through interviews with the directors, lacks critical insights into the nature of quilombismo. The directors of the film identify the eponymous village of Bacurau as "a type of 'remixed *quilombo*': a black community, a historical place of resistance, but with some white, indigenous, trans, and other inhabitants" (*Interview*). This perception of quilombismo flattens the intersectionality that has always been implicit in these communities of resistance that explicitly resist categorization and segmentation, and evades an understanding that all of these elements must necessarily coexist within individuals and communities. Despite their questionable conception of quilombismo, Mendonça Filho and Dornelles emphasize that Bacurau hosts Black, indigenous, trans and queer people, as well as sex workers; and people of all these identities contribute value to their community. The film combines the programs of resistance established by Black people to liberate themselves from racist superstructures with programs of resistance enacted by other marginalized groups, but in doing so the film visually decenters Black people and characters from the narrative of their own resistance.

Bacurau is a miniature, communalist utopia structurally modeled on the quilombo, but the characters who drive the plot of radical autonomy and self-defense are not Black. The political and personal liberation of many identities are interwoven in this film under the banner of Black historical resistance; but here, non-Black and light-skinned characters lead the way.

Throughout *Bacurau*, the conflict centers on politicians and unaffiliated white outsiders who threaten the town of Bacurau materially and culturally. The audience meets three distinct factions throughout the film. From the beginning, the film entrenches itself in the day-to-day experiences of the town of Bacurau. The returning townsperson, Teresa, interacts with various residents of Bacurau. Through her, the audience observes the interpersonal relationships that propel the town's operation—who teaches, who disseminates information, who coordinates and executes the procurement of vital resources. All of the town's residents are complex, distinct individuals who nevertheless cooperate in the interest of their community. Once the audience is familiar with the inner dynamics of the town, the film introduces Tony, Jr., a white, corrupt low-level Brazilian politician who serves as an emblem of the Brazilian political order at large. Tony, Jr. enters loudly and obnoxiously, attempting to perpetuate patronage in the region. He disrupts the normalcy of the town's daily operations and attempts to leverage the town's political will in his favor in exchange for small symbolic gestures of solidarity with the community. This initial encounter upsetting the status quo of the town marks the first of an escalating series of encounters between the residents of Bacurau and outsiders. After Tony, Jr. visits the town, two white people from the south of Brazil pass through Bacurau on behalf of a group of white Americans and kill two men outside the town after they leave. The white Americans who hired them proceed to reveal a sinister, sadistic and racially motivated intent to exterminate the people of Bacurau. As the encounters between Bacurau and external agents utilizing white supremacy escalate along the continuum from uncomfortable and sinister to explicitly violent and genocidal, the film tracks Bacurau's parallel escalation of active resistance.

TECHNOLOGIES OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN *BACURAU*

One of the primary, real-world tools of white supremacy explored in the film is the use of technology to promote development and state-control. In the dry conditions of the sertão, for instance, the mid 20th century indicated a concerted effort by Brazil's political and scientific apparatus (in coordination with international scientists) to increase access to vital resources by developing cutting-edge technology to counteract and overcome drought. As a result, international scientific collaboration yielded "giant dams to store water, fleets of cloud-seeding planes...massive relief programs…[and] most recently, a highly sophisticated climate-forecasting system" (Nelson and Finan 302-03). But instead of these revolutionary technologies resolving "the basic underlying vulnerabilities of the rural population," they have integrated into the overarching vulnerability of sertanejos as a tool to perpetuate "socially instituted inequities that preclude any escape from poverty" (303). This historical systemic failure to facilitate sertanejos' direct access to water manifests itself in *Bacurau* through the first point of conflict between Bacurau and the state.

The film's exposition confidently and repeatedly exposes the restriction of Bacurau's access to water and the town's struggle against the white supremacist technologies that enact this restriction. *Bacurau* opens on Teresa's passage through the lush green landscape of the Northeast, as she sits in the passenger seat of a water delivery truck. She and the driver briefly get out of the truck to observe a newly constructed dam that has impeded Bacurau's water access, but they resume their journey quickly because of the threat of armed guards at the dam. When Tony, Jr. comes to town, trying to buy the townspeople's political support with symbolic and useless gifts, the people of Bacurau reject him. Instead, they shout him down, demanding that he resolve their restricted water access by releasing the dam water; he dismisses their demand as unrealistic and unworthy of his attention. The foreign white invaders' first attack against the town is firing on the water delivery truck, attacking the resources necessary for survival before assaulting the town's inhabitants. Water is the first language used in the film to demonstrate the threat that white supremacist structures, agenda and individuals pose to the vitality of the people of Bacurau.

Conversely, in the face of these escalating tiers of material control exerted by political and international forces of white supremacy, the townspeople of

Bacurau respond with escalating acts of resistance. When the dam restricts access to water, a community member adopts the responsibility of traveling further to obtain water for the town. The bandit Lunga has the community's respect because of her valiant efforts to seize the dam and usurp the state's stranglehold on the region's water supply. When Tony, Jr. arrives with his stump speech for reelection and the teasing possibility of access, the community rejects his posturing and the entire language of political favors that he uses to call him to account for his abuse of their right to water. The people of Bacurau respond to the white Americans' threat to their water access (and to their lives) by arming themselves and engaging in defensive conflict. And finally, when Tony, Jr. admits his transparent deception about the political will that obstructs the town's water access, the town strips him to his underwear, puts a bag over his head and straps him backwards to the back of a donkey in a comical, retributive exile-cum-death-sentence.

In the expository act of the film, Mendonça Filho and Dornelles assert an indelible, mystical connection between the community, vitality and water. Teresa originally returns to Bacurau to attend the funeral of her grandmother, Carmelita, who had been the matriarch of the quilombo before her death (*Interview*). Every single member of the community in Bacurau participates in the celebration and remembrance of the matriarch Carmelita's life. As the town mourns Carmelita over her open grave, Teresa sees clear, fresh water pouring from Carmelita's coffin, transforming her into a wellspring of the most restricted and important resource in the sertão. Her vision, taken in the context of an intimate, community-wide event of celebration and mourning, demonstrates a strong ideological link between the structure and closeness of the community and their ability to survive and defend themselves against intrusions on their autonomy.

The visual symbol of Carmelita becoming a source of water, and therefore life, lays a complicated foundation for the film's narrative, however—it reveals a profound silence of the film. The late Afro-Brazilian activist Dr. Lélia Gonzalez condemned the suppression of Black women's "humanidade justamente porque nos nega o direito de ser sujeitos não só do nosso próprio discurso, senão da nossa própria historia" (14). Carmelita is the unmistakably Black matriarch of this quilombo and she is dead before the film begins. Her narrative place is not as an autonomous actor, leading her community to liberation; but as a voiceless and

lifeless affirmation that this community exists. Where the narrative might draw the audience to Carmelita as a Black woman who embodies the history of resistance in the Northeast of Brazil, the film instead commodifies and silences her. The actual matriarchal voice of the movie is Domingas, a light-skinned woman with complex relationships with the town and its inhabitants. She enters the film's narrative as Carmelita's brief chapter is closing. Even as all these marginalized identities unite under the banner of African ideological and cultural resistance (do Nascimento 17) in *Bacurau*, Black people (and specifically Black women)'s voices are displaced and overshadowed by their sertanejo allies and neighbors. Although Bacurau's technologies of resistance effectively highlight the way that marginalized communities of resistance in the sertão confront violent systems of oppression for self-determination, the film visually does not connect this resistance to its own inspiration in the Black Brazilian struggle for "auto-afirmação com integridade, identidade e orgulho" (do Nascimento 14).

Beyond technology's use to control the flow of material goods into Bacurau, white supremacists utilize surveillance to suppress individuals' movement into and out of the town. After Carmelita's interment, her son Plinio addresses the people of Bacurau and welcomes Teresa back to the village, noting that Carmelita has countless descendants outside of the sertão, but that the instability in the state of Pernambuco and the rest of the sertão has prevented many of them from making their way home for the occasion. This difficulty, taken on its own, is not explicitly a result of white supremacist action, but the isolation of Bacurau from inhabitants, friends and allies who might travel there recurs on explicitly violent grounds later in the film. The white American invaders escalate their threat to the town by intentionally fomenting political discord in Pernambuco by intentionally diverting travel away from the town. This is one of a series of progressive steps that the white Americans take to isolate Bacurau from the surrounding region and make it more vulnerable to racist violence.

When Plinio attempts to locate Bacurau on a web-mapping service to teach the children about the town's geography, he discovers that Bacurau has been erased from the mapping platform. After multiple attempts to locate the town on the mapping service, Plinio ultimately fails to locate anything except a nondescript space where Bacurau *should* be. This manipulation of web-based mapping systems

highlights the subjectivity of such systems, and the capacity that global surveillance technologies have, "as a domain of unobstructed Western vision, knowledge, and control" (*Cultures* 79) to serve white supremacy while playing at objectivity. The Western origins and institutions that govern global technologies make them compatible with white supremacy, and the invaders combine technology and racial violence to pursue the extermination of the people of Bacurau. Marronage settlements like quilombos have a necessarily fraught relationship with the legality of occupying and controlling their territory. But beginning with its 1988 Constitution, Brazil has taken steps to give quilombos legitimacy within the state political apparatus while tremendously restricting the legal definition of quilombos ("Leis"). While the erasure of Bacurau from digital mapping services is only symbolic, and its carefully orchestrated isolation is fictional, the restriction of Bacurau's visibility has a real-world analogue in the way that the Brazilian government controls and selectively legitimizes the right to territory and limited autonomy for quilombos.

Consequently, the people of Bacurau, who are already vulnerable due to their existence on the fringes of Brazilian society, become the targets of surveillance technology and white supremacist violence. The invaders' first introduction is via a futuristic, alien-looking drone that they use to observe and track movement in the entire area surrounding Bacurau. This technology advances their capacity to inflict violence on the people of the village. The narrative establishes the drone as "as much a technology of inscription as it is a technology of sensing or representation;" an object that "can change movements on the ground" through its mere presence above the earth, and capacity to direct harm towards those below ("Drones" 232). The drone that the invaders use is not equipped with the power to kill or inflict damage, but it allows these invaders to track the town's most vulnerable people and to communicate and hunt accordingly. The invaders alter the townspeople's relationship to their environment by introducing the acute awareness of their being hunted and targeted with advanced technology.

Before the film's climax, an invader assassinates a young boy who wanders off to explore the edge of town on a dare, then attempts to justify his act using familiar, racist language that defers blame to the child. This particularly intolerable act of violence raises the awareness of the town to the immediacy of the threat to

their safety posed by the invaders. The murder also leads two inhabitants of Bacurau, Claudio and Nelinha, to attempt to flee town the same night the child is murdered. But the drone tracks them and, seeing that they are vulnerable because they have left the relative security of the town that they have under siege, the white Americans murder them as well. The drone permits a high, extralegal level of control and capacity for violence, indicating the ways that the use of advanced technology is often compatible white supremacist ideologies and acts. Technology allows outsiders to control the behavior and visibility of the people of Bacurau, resulting in their manipulation and near extermination.

TECHNOLOGIES OF RESISTANCE IN *BACURAU*

However, Bacurau demonstrates tremendous flexibility in order to counteract the effects of this weaponization of technology for surveillance. Bacurau, like the quilombos that inspired it, demonstrates that belonging to a community is not synonymous with physically inhabiting it. The advocacy for and sustenance of quilombos often relies on members of quilombos leaving in search of diversified labor opportunities; this migration is a necessary condition for the preservation of the settlement (da Silva 7). The relationship between economically driven migration and the continued existence of quilombo communities indicates a necessity for a more expansive concept of membership in the community than one driven by occupation of the physically, and occasionally legally, delineated territory of the community. In this cultural context, Plinio's acknowledgment of Carmelita's descendants who could not return for her funeral clearly implies that they remain members of the community and active participants in its survival and prosperity. Characters like Pacote (also known as Acácio) and Lunga, who have connections to the town but either before or during the film indicate that they cut themselves off from the community, are received back into Bacurau with open arms when they rekindle their connection. Bacurau separates itself from explicitly white supremacist attempts to isolate the town by adopting an expansive and inclusive definition of community.

Met with the threat of extermination, Bacurau survives by drawing legitimacy from survival in its own traditions. When Bacurau disappears from global digital maps, the community turns back to its interior resources that are

compiled independent of the global agenda that seek to erase it by using a paper map of the town. Perhaps the greatest anti-surveillance tool at the disposal of the town, however, is their ability to conceal themselves from interlopers. Historically, free Black people in the Northeast have used concealment as an essential tool of survival in the face of racist state agents who intended to kill or reintegrate them into the slavery-based colonial order. In the legendary quilombo of Palmares, for example, soldiers frequently attempted to subdue the settlement, but they generally "found the settlement virtually abandoned when they arrived" upon receiving "advance word of expeditions" (Anderson 552). Similarly, the community greets Tony, Jr. with an apparently empty town. The people of Bacurau coordinate advance notice of the politician's arrival and refuse to engage with his performative politics by becoming invisible. Even though Tony, Jr. knows the townspeople are there, he cannot follow the normal form of Northeastern bargaining politics because nobody is listening. He has to prove himself worthy of their attention where he might otherwise assume his own legitimacy is a given. This concealment repeats itself at the climax, with far higher stakes, when the white Americans infiltrate the town with the intention of massacring everyone who lives there. Everyone in the town, including children, hide behind buildings, in basements and around corners, waiting for the moment to massacre their would-be assassins.

Under the threat of extreme surveillance and control, concealment and expansive solidarity within and without the community permit Bacurau to gain leverage over their assailants and effectively resist programs of suppression and violence. In keeping with their vested interest in resisting control and violence, the people of Bacurau tie their beliefs and daily life to local cangaceiros, or hinterland bandits of the sertão. Cangaço, the broad term for sertão banditry, arose in response to "[t]he scarcity of natural as well as of institutional resources and the control of these resources" (Marques 717). As such, cangaceiros form part of "the accepted backdrop in most studies of the sertão" (717). They are historically a rebellious but predictable element of resistance in the region that rarely advances lasting, profound social change. The delicate balance between cangaceiros and the Brazilian state was traditionally scorned by liberal and Marxist academics as futile resistance to "the 'unavoidable' march of civilization towards crushing barbarous and anachronistic rebels;" however, decolonial academics identify cangaço with

"the historical resistance of Black and indigenous communities against battalions of...Brazilian colonists from the coast" (Ferretti 1643). In the noble characterization of cangaceiros, they seek justice for individual transgressions, robbing or killing abusive landowners who profit from the exploitation of marginalized groups. In the ignoble characterization, the most famous cangaceiro Lampião was known for "atrocities committed by his band of *cangaceiros*, the escapes and fights with the police" and more (Marques 717). The ignoble cangaceiro commits acts of violence without direction, victimizing the poor and vulnerable as often as they harass the oppressors.

The two significant cangaceiros of *Bacurau*, Pacote and Lunga, adhere to the noble characterization. Pacote stars in morbid assassination film compilations, carefully orchestrated and ruthlessly executed; but these assassinations are unfulfilling. At the beginning of the film, Pacote is living in Bacurau under the non-cangaceiro name Acácio, trying to start a new life free of cangaceiro violence. Lunga, on the other hand, has not stepped away from cangaço. Instead, she lives outside of town with her own band of cangaceiros. Townspeople allude to her skirmishes with the dam guards and her status as an outlaw with a price on her head for revolutionary action. Nobody affiliated with Bacurau entertains the idea of reporting Lunga for the reward and Pacote's past as an assassin is an open secret for his sake more than it is for the sensibilities of the town. Lunga and Pacote are, at the beginning of the film, folk heroes, enjoying the respect of the community without participating in the community *as* cangaceiros.

The two cangaceiros of Bacurau find revolutionary purpose and success only when they reconcile their capacity for violence and resistance with the safety and strength of Bacurau as a community. Pacote drops the peaceful persona of Acácio and reclaims his cangaceiro name in the face of the white south Brazilians' intrusion. By introducing himself as a resident of Bacurau interested in its safety, with the name of a cangaceiro known for his assassinations, Pacote identifies himself as a force of resistance that is integrated into the community of Bacurau. He will not tolerate violent or exploitative interlopers. Though he struggles with the violence associated with the cangaceiro lifestyle and his own violent history, Pacote makes peace with that aspect of himself without forsaking the social and communal lifestyle of the town, all so he can better protect Bacurau. He is also the

one who brings Lunga, leader of the cangaceiros, to stand with the town, invoking Bacurau's support for her by saying, "People there know all you do for them." Though Lunga expresses that she has felt alienated from Bacurau, she makes peace with her alienation and the town welcomes her back with open arms, celebrating her outlaw lifestyle and accepting her as a trans woman. Under these terms, Lunga returns to defend the town. *Bacurau* produces an idealized, sensationalized and purposeful vision of cangaço.

Cangaceiros like Pacote and Lunga commit acts of physical violence against outside forces of oppression, but ultimately, they become truly revolutionary through their allyship with the town. In response to external threats' escalation from marginalization to extermination, the community's resistance culminates in the violent rejection and usurpation of their invaders. The violence of the oppressed, for Brazilian radical artists and activists, "não está incorporada ao ódio...O amor que esta violência encerra é tão brutal quanto a própria *violência*, porque não é um amor de complacência ou de contemplação, mas um amor de ação e transformação" (Rocha 169). *Bacurau* treats violence as the natural response of the oppressed to an exploitative social order. In a region where "o comportamento exato de um faminto é a violência" (169); how else could marginalized people respond to a system neglects, manipulates, starves and abuses them?

Violence is an integral part of the history and identity of Bacurau. The climax centers on Lunga and other people from the town ambushing the white American invaders with machetes and antique guns taken from the walls of the town's museum. Violence recalls violence, occurring in a space devoted to remembering the town's history of the violent defeat of bygone racist incursions. The museum, both as a resource for weapons and as a space for violence demonstrates the climax's roots in similar, contiguous acts of resistance against white supremacists. When the town cleans up after the climactic confrontation, scooping buckets of blood out of the museum and scrubbing bloodstains from the floors, the woman who runs the museum asks her fellow townspeople to leave the handprint-shaped bloodstains on the walls, as an addition to the history that the museum commemorates. She does so with the acknowledgment that the stains are morbid, but her dedication to Bacurau manifests itself in her dedication to accurately and fearlessly remembering the town's history and purpose, as well as

the recurrent threats that it opposes. Ultimately, in *Bacurau*, the characters' solidarity does not eliminate white supremacy; it holds it at bay and preserves the pseudo-utopian community as separate from the constant, historical and contemporary threat.

GENRE AND TECHNIQUE IN *BACURAU*

Until now I have primarily concerned myself with the internal logic of the narrative of *Bacurau;* I have reserved discussion of genre and the mechanics of the film for the end of this analysis. *Bacurau* combines elements of science-fiction, gore and suspense with the familiar faroeste, or Brazilian Western, film. Facilitated through science-fiction manipulations of near-future technologies, the community's invisibility reflects a heightened vulnerability to powerful groups that can perceive them and manipulate their visibility to the rest of the world. Consequently, Bacurau's erasure from maps and isolation from the rest of Pernambuco highlights and foreshadows the actualization of the tremendous anxieties of marginalized and racialized groups that once knowledge of their existence becomes privileged information, they are infinitely more vulnerable to acts of removal, exploitation and violence. Drones are often identified with their military use of *replacing* humans' need to participate personally in violence against vulnerable people ("Drones" 231), but the antagonists of *Bacurau* use their drone to achieve more intimate acts of extreme violence without having to engage their victims as human beings. The drone allows the invaders to focus on the act of killing without investing their energy in familiarizing themselves with the community, and their manipulation of global technologies allows them to act without being held accountable to anyone. Taken alone, this narrative progression heightens the audience's connection to the protagonists and their anxieties about the townspeople's extreme vulnerability. However, the film is framed, in the largest sense, from a distance. The first moments of the film track deep space before slowly turning to face the Earth from the outside, passing a satellite and zooming in on Brazil, then Pernambuco and finally the town of Bacurau. The audience is invited into the film as outsiders and voyeurs. They are introduced to witness the action from a distance. As horrifying as the acts against the people of Bacurau are, they are tolerable because they are remote, experienced in another time, by another people, in a completely separate

place (*Cultures* 145) from where the audience watches. Mendonça Filho and Dornelles use science-fiction elements to nestle insightful and engaging commentary on the white supremacist uses of technology inside a film structure that invites the audience to set themselves apart from the risks of these structures, and even physically align themselves with such structures through the angle of their observation.

In addition, *Bacurau* mediates the suspenseful elements of its narrative through the characters' relationship (or lack thereof) to their environment. Repeatedly throughout the movie, inhabitants of Bacurau dictate their own intimate relationships to the landscape of the Northeast. Men travel to collect water for the town, Lunga engages in acts of anti-establishment banditry and people travel to neighboring communities; but the film depicts none of these acts. Instead, the film follows recent Brazilian cinema's interest in foregoing complex engagements with the film's landscape as an active determinant of the narrative in favor of "quasi-photographic long shots" to maintain a "detached point of view" in the narrative (Andermann 60). The film is full of beautiful, cinematic shots of the sertão between scenes, but the actions of characters within that environment are quite limited. As the invaders engage in escalating acts of violence against the town, attempts to enter the landscape become moments of tension and suspense; characters who leave the community to interact with the landscape become victims. As such, the background remains just that: a background without dynamism that does not shape and is not shaped by the plot (Andermann 56). The separation between scene and setting is explicitly reinforced by the narrative as well because the landscape is constantly withheld from the characters and audience through violence. Teresa's observation of the dam is defined by the guards who interrupt her, threatening harm for daring to interact with her environment. As the invaders threaten the town, they target people who stray into the caatinga, interrupting each meaningful attempt to pass through or touch the landscape by killing them. The people of Bacurau cannot "touch" the landscape around them because it is mediated by suspense and the narrative threat of violence. As such, the characters, who are defined verbally and contextually by the way their identities entwine with the space they occupy in the sertão, never fully settle into a fictional reality in which the audience can immerse themselves.

And finally, *Bacurau*'s plot and clear resolution are predicated on the purposeful, intentional use of violence, a mainstay of horror and faroeste cinema. After the cangaceira Lunga has beheaded the invaders and placed their heads in the middle of town, Pacote asks Teresa, "Do you think Lunga went too far?" and she bluntly says "No." The white American invaders hunted and slaughtered various people, including a child, over the course of their exuberant mission to slaughter everyone from Bacurau and are consequently publicly slaughtered and beheaded. Tony, Jr. arrives in time to implicate himself in the facilitation of genocidal violence against the town, so he is sentenced to a humiliating death that implicitly condemns Brazilian political entities for their collusion in genocidal violence. Intent to destroy the community results in the community responding in equal measure; they eliminate the people who want them dead. *Bacurau*'s plot depicts active, even violent, resistance as a necessary countermeasure to colonial and white supremacist forces that seek to destroy entire communities for their historical, racial, marginal and pluralistic identities.

Even so, the internal logic of the film does not reflect the framing and context of its release. In a national film industry where violence is sprawling, overwhelming and often used to "criticize the entire nation" (de Andrade Tosta 28) *Bacurau* represents a culturally typical level of violence that is nevertheless contained by the plot. The invaders utilize white supremacy and technology to inflict violence on the community; for this, they are defeated with retributive, if extreme, violence. And more profoundly, this directed use of violence to resolve the plot and return to a meaningful, stable status quo in the town produces the audience's most visceral emotional connection to the film—the threat of violence and the inversion of that violence in service of self-defense. Where other iconically violent Brazilian films utilize violence to highlight murky ideologies and ethics, *Bacurau*'s cast feature a clear delineation between those who serve violent ends and utilize white supremacy for their own personal gains, and those who are victimized by and resist white supremacist violence and systems.

CONCLUSION

Overall, *Bacurau*'s transformation from a creative exploration of a marginalized, politicized and diverse way of life to the actual film that we see today obscures its

own themes by decentering Black autonomy in its narrative; and the structure of *Bacurau* consciously holds its audience apart from the narrative it shares with them. Even so, *Bacurau*'s characters and narrative eloquently outline the ways that community and violence work together to protect marginalized populations from erasure, violence and destruction. Though the uncritically accepted racial underpinnings of the film moderate its message, the narrative's demonstration of resistance to white supremacy is effective because it roots itself in the history of Black resistance in Northeastern Brazil and crafts a compelling narrative propelled by complex characters. Moderated by the biases of its directors and its context, *Bacurau* nevertheless taps into a rich, interconnected web of marginalized cultures to create a dramatic narrative of resistance and triumph for a threatened community. This web of knowledge and beliefs is ripe for education and inspiration as we navigate postcolonial, white supremacist states throughout the Americas.

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