

STUDY GUIDE



PERRO BOMBA

A film by JUAN CÁCERES
CHILE, FRANCE / 2019 / 80 MIN
Spanish and Creole with English subtitles



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BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a foreign film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country where that film comes from. Find two reliable sources on the rapid rise of Haitian immigrants in Chile over the last five to ten years and the consequences of this large migration. Look into what the Chilean law is for Haitian immigrants, as well as the conditions and stigmas they face. Below is one tragic example of the many cases of Haitians dying in Chile because of lack of social guarantees provided for immigrants:

“On May 16, in Santiago, Chile, the Haitian doctor Rebeka Pierre died in the public transport system after the hospital Felix Bulnes discharged without having made the relevant examinations. As reported by *La Tercera*, as revealed by the autopsy, Pierre died from a pulmonary thromboembolism and a deep vein thrombosis of a lower limb, among others, that **could have been traced and prevented in the hospital.**

The case of Pierre is added to the list of Haitians who die because of the lack of medical attention, due to **the lack of social guarantees and, in many cases, of migratory regularization.**¹

- Knowing Rebeka Pierre’s story, how do you think the film will deal with the issue of immigration?

INTRODUCING THE FILM

A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film’s narrative, genre, style, and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for *Perro Bomba*:

Steevens is a young Haitian immigrant living a challenging, but somewhat stable life in Santiago de Chile: he has a construction job, a home, friends, and fun. This precariously balanced life is disrupted when Junior, a childhood friend from Haiti, arrives in Chile seeking assistance from Steevens to establish himself. Junior has entered Chile without papers and doesn’t speak any Spanish. Steevens does everything he can to support his friend and even manages to get him a job with his employer. When an incident at their workplace erupts racial tensions and stokes a large anti-immigration sentiment in the city, Steevens loses his working documents. Now without a job, Steevens has to vacate his home and is left to wander the city, looking for a chance to restart his life beyond the margins of society.

- From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film?
- From this same text, try to identify the main elements from the film’s plot and the socio-political background to the film.
- How do the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- Can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about just from the marketing materials (i.e. trailer, poster, and still images)?



¹ “What happens with Haitian immigration in Chile?,” Latin American Post. Juan Gabriel Bocanegra. <https://latinamericanpost.com/28287-what-happens-with-haitian-immigration-in-chile>

AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- Think about the film's costume design, focusing specifically on what Steevens and his friends wear. How does the costume design give you a sense of the film's people? Look into the politics of "chav streetwear."
- The filmmaker mentions in an interview that his film is a "pure document. It's narrative, but we never wrote anything, everything just emerged through living with the people on camera." ² What do you make of this grassroots filmmaking approach? Why do you think they took this approach?
- Why do you think the filmmaker uses a documentary-narrative hybrid to tell the story? How might this film be different if it were completely narrative-focused and had a traditional script? How might it be different if it were just a documentary?
- How is the film more documentary-like than narrative and vice-versa?
- The film plays with a **cinema verité** style. ³ Why do you think this style is best suited for this kind of story?
- The majority of the characters in the film are played by first-time actors, playing a slightly different version of themselves. Why do you think the filmmaker wanted to use non-actors for the film? How does this style of acting change the film's tone and feeling?
- Why do you think the filmmaker shot so many of the scenes at night? What effect does this have on the film's color palette and cinematography? Why is nighttime symbolic for the film's themes?
- Analyze the film's heavy use of handheld footage. What effect does this have on the audience?
- The film is interspersed by a number of artificial musical dance numbers, distinguished from the other hyper-real scenes. What do you think is the symbolism behind these transitions? Why do you think the filmmaker decided to include them?
- Why do you think the filmmakers shot on the streets of Santiago, without using any sets, and including real people? How does this add to the hyper-realistic feeling of the film?
- Think about the film's lighting. Is there artificial lighting or natural lighting? What effect does lighting have on the overall mood and tone of the film?



² "Chile's Juan Cáceres on 'Perro Bomba,'" Variety. <https://variety.com/2018/film/festivals/juan-caceres-guadalajara-construye-hit-perro-bomba-1202726301/>

³ "Cinema Verite is a French film movement, which took place back in the 1960s. This film movement forced the movie industry to pay more attention to incorporating natural actions and authentic dialogue into the movies, which showed people in day to day lives. Basically, the movement was about observing and capturing life as it was or finding truth in the moving images." IndieFilm Hustle. <https://indiefilmhustle.com/cinema-verite/>

NARRATIVE

- Think about the film's opening scene: Steevens' mother braiding his hair and his family talking about his hair. Why do you think the film opens with this? Why is hair important in the film?
- How does the film successfully evoke empathy in the viewer and make you empathize with Steevens? Pick two scenes from the film where you felt profound empathy for Steevens.
- Early on in the film, Steevens questions why Haitians worship Jesus, a white man: "we are admiring a white man. That's the beginning of the problem." Why do you think he says this? How does Christianity play a role in the film's themes?
- Why do you think Junior is so surprised by the amenities Steevens has when he first arrives in Santiago? For example, Steevens' phone, the home's electricity, his earrings. What might this say about the economic situation in Haiti?
- How does Junior struggle with the new ways of life in Chile? What are the cultural barriers he faces?
- Think about the Chilean bosses that give work to Steevens: firstly, the construction manager, and secondly, the chocolate pimp. How are these characters not only racist but also exploitative? From a historical context, what do you think they symbolize?
- What do you make of the scene where the construction manager compares the skin color of the Haitian construction workers? How do you interpret this scene?
- What do you make of the construction manager statement, "When I was a boy, there were no black people in Chile, I was scared of them. Now there are so many black people because Chileans don't want to work." How does Steevens and his co-workers react?
- Do you think Steevens was justified in punching his boss? Why or why not? Do you empathize with him? Do you think he should have done it? Take into account what happens after.
- What do you think about the scene where Steevens listens to the news broadcast of his arrest? How does the news fail to capture the full story? What could the filmmaker be saying about the depiction of Haitian immigrants in Chilean media?
- Why do you think Junior doesn't defend Steevens? "I don't want any troubles," he says. What do you think about this? Do you understand why Junior did this?
- Why does Steevens cut his hair? Why is this scene so symbolic, and why does it mark a change in Steevens' character?
- What do you make of the romantic relationship between Steevens and the social worker who tries to help him? Do you think it's problematic in any way? Why or why not?
- Do you think the social worker exoticizes Steevens in any way?
- Why do you think Steevens leaves her house the next morning? He could have stayed and afforded a more decent life for some time. What do you think drives him to make this decision?
- Think about the film's closing shot: a line of Haitian kids sitting on a bench singing in Creole. Why do you think the filmmaker wanted to close the film with this image?
- Do you think the film has a resolution, a happy ending? Why or why not?
- What do you think will happen to Steevens after the movie ends? Do you think he will find a stable job to make a living? Do you think he will stay in Chile? What do you imagine his future to look like? Explain your answer.
- Juan Cáceres, the director of the film, refused to sugarcoat the Haitian experience in Chile. Do you think he should have added more glimmers of hope or happiness to the film's narrative? Why or why not?

THEMES

- ❑ Think about the film's focus on labor and the difficulty of earning a living. Think of scenes in the film which show how money drives every character's action and feeling.
- ❑ What kind of food does Steevens and other Haitian immigrants eat throughout the film? How is food important to Haitian culture? How might it be different from Chilean food?
- ❑ Think about the important role language plays in the film. How is the language barrier a serious difficulty for many Haitian immigrants wanting to find a better life in Chile? How is the language barrier shown in the film?
- ❑ How is language used as a way of solidarity between the Haitians themselves in the film? Think of two examples in the film where Haitians speak Creole with each other and Chileans can't understand them.
- ❑ Do you think the film turns the Haitians into "The Other"? Remember that the actors are largely playing themselves, and that these communities continue to suffer after the credits roll by. Do you think the film is exploitative in any way? Why or why not?
- ❑ What role does music play in the film? What kind of music plays throughout the film? Is the music in Creole or in Spanish? Why do you think this decision is significant?
- ❑ Racism is a big theme in the film -- in every scene, the characters face some kind of racism. But how is economic inequality also a big theme? Come up with two scenes where the characters face economic inequality.
- ❑ Do you think immigrants in the United States face similar challenges as Haitians in Chile? Think of two similarities and two differences.
- ❑ Think of the scenes where Steevens gets help from the Chilean government. How is the government itself inefficient in providing help?
- ❑ How does inequality in Chile contribute to Steevens' story? How does Steevens come face-to-face with this problem?
- ❑ Do you think African-Americans in the United States experience a similar kind of racism as Haitians in Chile? How is the racism in Chile different from the racism in the United States? How is it similar?
- ❑ How does the film explore the relationship between class and race? Who are the wealthier members of society in the film? Who are the poorer members of society in the film?
- ❑ How does the film demonstrate that Steevens and other Haitians have to work twice as hard as Chileans to make a decent living?
- ❑ Why do you think the film is named *Perro Bomba* (Dog Bomb)?
- ❑ How does the film speak to a larger conflict happening today, i.e. global migration? Where else in the world are there stories like Steevens?
- ❑ Think about the kinds of jobs Haitians must take because of their lack of citizenship. How does their status as immigrants affect them at an institutional level? What about healthcare and public education?
- ❑ Why do you think there is so much racism against Haitians in Chile? Why do you think there is so much racism against immigrants in general?

