

STUDY GUIDE



BACURAU

A film by JULIANO DORNELLES AND KLEBER MENDONÇA FILHO
BRAZIL, FRANCE / 2019 / 131 MIN
English and Portuguese 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 that film comes from.

The dynamic between the colonized and the colonizer in Brazil has been tumultuous since the time of its conquest by the Portuguese in 1500. According to author Beeman in "Labor Forces and Race Relations: A Comparative View of the Colonization of Brazil and Virginia", slavery became prominent and enhanced this division between the natives and the European colonizers. By 1620, there were over 40,000 slaves in Brazil, with thousands more imported from Africa every year.¹

Due to the presence of slavery, from this same article, Beeman writes, "Both contemporary testimony-plantation records, diaries, and travelers' accounts- and subsequent developments- the influence of the Indian and Negro on eating habits, speech, religion, and, most obvious, on the complexion of the Brazilian population- attest to the evolution of Brazil into a more racially mixed society than any other colony in North America"². This racially mixed identity has caused an identity conflict for Brazil as a nation and for its people.

- Investigate how this struggle to define a national identity plays into race relations and power dynamics between the natives of Brazil and those of European descent, and how it impacts Brazilian life today. Furthermore, what is the role of the United States and other developed countries in Brazil's economy?

INTRODUCING THE FILM

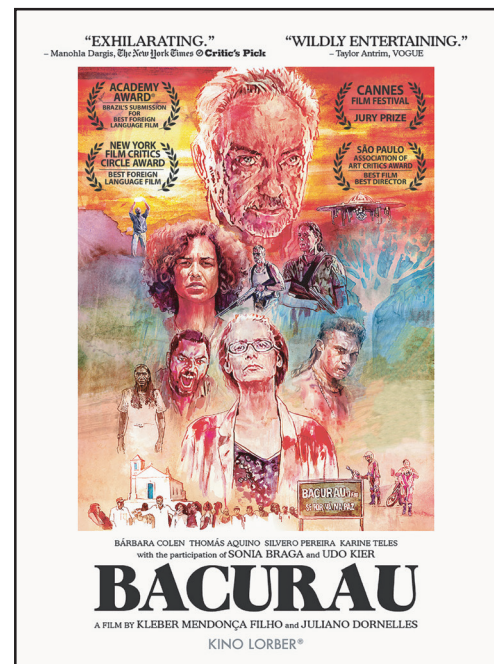
A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film's narrative, genre, style, and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film's marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for *Bacurau*:

A few years from now...

Bacurau, a small village in the Brazilian sertão, mourns the loss of its matriarch, Carmelita, who lived to be 94. Days later, its inhabitants (among them Sônia Braga) notice that their village has literally vanished from online maps and a UFO-shaped drone is seen flying overhead. There are forces that want to expel them from their homes, and soon, in a genre-bending twist, a band of armed mercenaries led by Udo Kier arrive in town picking off the inhabitants one by one.

A fierce confrontation takes place when the townspeople turn the tables on the villainous outsiders, banding together by any means necessary to protect and maintain their remote community. The mercenaries just may have met their match in the fed-up, resourceful denizens of little Bacurau.

Award-winning and critically acclaimed, *Bacurau* is a box office sensation seen in Brazil by over a million people.



(continued on next page)

¹ Richard R. Beeman. "Labor Forces and Race Relations: A Comparative View of the Colonization of Brazil and Virginia." *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 86, no. 4, Dec. 1971, pp. 609-636.

² Beeman.

INTRODUCING THE FILM *(continued)*

- ❑ 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)?
- ❑ What can you say, if anything, about the role of race in the film based on the characters shown in the movie poster?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ The film opens with a static sound that suggests some impending doom for a few seconds, and then has a stark transition to light, upbeat Bossa-nova-like ³ music. Why do you think the producers chose this musical contrast to be the first thing the audience hears?
- ❑ How does the opening shot of the earth, satellite, and music establish a sci-fi tone for the film? Does this grand shot add to the remote aspect of Bacurau?
- ❑ The camera often follows behind moving vehicles throughout the film. How do these moving shots engage the viewer?
- ❑ How does the use of futuristic technological props, such as the UFO, the device that Maria plants in the shop, the handheld high-tech translator, and the clock that appears on the screen when Rivaldo is killed, contribute to the video-game-like aspect of the film?
- ❑ Before the American team arrives at Bacurau to attack, there is a close-up shot of a series of the townspeople's mouths as they take the psychotropic drug. How does this scene differ from the rest? How does this technique add to the emotion of the scene?
- ❑ There are many examples of foreshadowing throughout the film, and one in particular appears within the first few minutes when the water truck driver asks Teresa why she wears a lab coat. Teresa responds saying that she wears it for protection. The lab coat reappears later in the film and acts as protection for Doctor Domingas. What role does costume play in the film (ex. The lab coat, Lunga's jewelry, Joao and Maria's biker suites, etc.)?



³ Bossa nova: (Portuguese: "new trend") Brazilian popular music that evolved in the late 1950s from a union of samba (a Brazilian dance and music) and cool jazz. (<https://www.britannica.com/art/bossa-nova>)

NARRATIVE

- ❑ Describe the town and people of Bacurau. What is the community like?
- ❑ How do you think the setting enables the plot of the movie?
- ❑ When Teresa and the water truck delivery man are driving into Bacurau they pass by the coffins on the side of the road, what does this image tell you about the film?
- ❑ What is the dynamic between Teresa, returning home, and her family and friends?
- ❑ How does Tony Junior treat the town of Bacurau on his campaign trail? How do the people react to his visit?
- ❑ A townspeople has a vision where she sees a blood-covered body laying on a table. After watching the film, how does this flash-forward technique add to the mystery and provoke a reaction from the viewer?
- ❑ How does the plot transition with the introduction of the American team at their “home base”? Does this scene change the audience’s view of Joao and Maria?
- ❑ Compare and contrast Bacurau before and after the American team’s attack. What changed within their community? What characteristics remained unchanged?
- ❑ What does Lunga’s character add to the plot? What aspects of Bacurau does Lunga’s character reinforce or reconstruct in the town’s identity?
- ❑ What genre would you say this film belong to? Is it a western, a thriller, a science fiction film, all of them, or something else entirely? Explain your answer in detail.



THEMES

- ❑ When Maria asks what the name Bacurau means, the shop owner says it is a word for a bird who hunts. How did you react to this, prior to the events that this scene foreshadows? Did you associate this label with the “visitors” or the townspeople at first?
- ❑ How does the town’s name contrast with its outpost sign that reads “If you go, go in peace”? How do the townspeople embody both messages?
- ❑ The idea of the colonizer-colonized dynamic is very prevalent in the film. How do the people of Bacurau reverse the native versus colonizer dynamic? What message does their victory send?
- ❑ During a conversation at the American team’s meeting, one team member says to Joao and Maria, “Please don’t speak Brazilian here”; and “How could you be like us, you’re not white.” Describe the idea of “the other” in the film, and list additional examples of otherism throughout the film.
- ❑ Considering the role of the United States and other developed countries in Brazil’s economy, what do each of the different groups of people appearing in the film represent?
- ❑ The film addresses a series of dichotomies: white vs colored people, developed vs. developing economies, North vs. South, educated vs. uneducated people, city vs. rural populations, etc... Choose one and explain in detail how each of these opposites are depicted in the film and what do they mean when thinking about Brazil’s current situation.
- ❑ The American team receives messages in their white earbuds that the audience can’t hear. Why do you think the director chose for these messages to remain hidden from the audience? What role does language, or the lack of in these cases, have in the film?
- ❑ Tony Junior’s campaign stops at Bacurau and the final conversation between him and Michael, the leader of the American team, represents the power imbalance between the government and the native people of Bacurau. What can you infer from this?
- ❑ One of the final scenes of Bacurau shows the Americans’ heads sitting on the entrance to the church while the people take pictures with their smartphones and tablets. Describe the contrast between modern technology and savage-like violence and how the two coexist throughout the plot.
- ❑ Several reviews of the film have described the Americans’ hunt as a “safari”? What connotation does this word have? How would you explain this analogy?

