



FILM REVIEW

Erasing Territorial Sovereignty: *Bacurau*

Caroline Schmidt Patricio ⁱ
Edgar Garcia Velozo ⁱⁱ

Bacurau

Written and Directed by
Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles
2019

Runtime: 2 hours, 11 minutes

Original languages: Portuguese and English

More information at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2762506/>

Border scholars are predominantly aware of the geopolitical use of territory, i.e., using the territory, and especially its borders, as instruments of control. This strategy has historically been, and continues to be, used by leaders and heads of state to expand their domain and influence. In the film *Bacurau* (2019) we see this practice in action.

The Brazilian film, written and directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, raises timely themes about borders. Rebuffing a stereotypical appeal of the interior of northeastern Brazil as a space devoid of contact with technology, the feature begins with an unidentified flying object (UFO) that travels through the sky of the small town of Bacurau. The figure of the UFO is often linked to something extraterrestrial, an invader from another world and can be used as a symbol to reflect that the dangerous unknown may be closer than we imagine. In fact, the entire film exists in



ⁱ **Caroline Schmidt Patricio** is a History Master's Degree student at Lehigh University, United States.
Email: cas521@lehigh.edu

ⁱⁱ **Edgar Garcia Velozo** is a Geography Master's Degree student at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil.
Email: edgar.velozo@ufrgs.br Twitter: [@edgrvlz](https://twitter.com/edgrvlz)

the shadow of mysterious strangers, predators who act as if they were a superior race.

We learn that this "superior race" is an English-speaking group of Caucasians who are hunting local Brazilians with their advanced, alien-like technologies. This terrorist group uses two main strategies in order to attack their victims. They erase Bacurau from the virtual map and block the satellite signal of Bacurau to other cities. As we can see, there is an ongoing representation of the group who has the technological means consequently also possesses the power of command.

When talking about territorial conflicts outside of fiction, such as the present situation in the Palestinian territory, it is common to see the movement of hegemonic forces within the current capitalist logic in which we live in; oppressing peoples and suppressing their territorial connections. In August 2020, the Google Maps platform, one of the most used worldwide for navigation and map searches, appeared to remove from its database the demarcations of the **Palestinian territory**.

With their film, Kleber and Juliano raise questions such as "what does it mean for a territory to be excluded from a map?" Most people do not have to worry about this, but erasure from maps is denying existence in space; this is the denial of sovereignty. The State of Palestine as well as Jammu and Kashmir are practically invisible from the US-dominated platform Google Maps. What is defined within the virtual map, using Palestine for example, is a dashed limit, a porosity, or an indetermination. Why are there states in the Middle East not recognized by a map, by people around the world, and by the great world

leaders? Why is the sovereignty of these spaces not recognized?

As in Bacurau, it is certainly not by chance that maps gradually hide spaces that previously had political autonomy. Digital porosities are also physical and allow the power of economically dominant nations to enter regions considered peripheral with the sole objective of exploiting their natural resources and local labor.

In 2020, the CEO of Tesla, Inc., Elon Musk, declared on his personal Twitter account that he (as an American) would stage a coup wherever he wanted ["We will coup whoever we want! Deal with it" (reproduced below)] when asked about the 2019 US-backed coup against Bolivia that ousted President-elect Evo Morales. What is Musk's interest in destabilizing Bolivian democracy? Bolivia has one of the largest unexploited lithium deposits in the world, a vital component of modern technology.

With these comments and intertextualizations we intend to show that even a film about a fictional city in the northeast of Brazil can allude to situations present and pertinent. This speaks directly to border conditions around the world, where intercultural and dynamic spaces formed in border regions are marginalized, through the purely political and hegemonic thought of visualizing territorial limits as symbols of state power.

We should remain attentive to these movements and actions put into practice by international actors in order to realize how borders can be and are used in a hegemonic way and to seek fighting this improper and exploitative use of such rich regions. The film *Bacurau* also represents how the strength of the people, acting collectively, can fight and combat hegemony both on a local and global scale.



The post (<https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1286866843307737088>) was subsequently deleted but has been archived (e.g.: <https://archive.ph/mIIIRM>).