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The Precarious Multitude of *Bacurau*

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate the political and conceptual power of the successful and highly praised film *Bacurau* (Juliano Dornelles and Kleber Mendonça Filho, 2019) by inserting it within general trends of contemporary visual culture surrounding the issue of cinematic precarity. The discussion will find its analytical coordinates around the notions of chronotope and dialogism. These tools are notoriously attributed to Mikhail Bakhtin and are intended to investigate regular patterns in aesthetic experiences and to evaluate the differential and subversive potential to be attributed to every case study. The grounding assumption of the following analysis is to understand cinematic experience as an ecological encounter and an affective and conceptual interaction in which viewers find the opportunity to explore and experience complex ethical systems: a productive interrelation that allows us also to connect the discussion with reflections upon general dynamics of neoliberal governance and with trajectories of resistance and revolt against it.

Keywords

cinematic chronotope, film-philosophy, multitude, neoliberal governance, precarity

> Enclosures have appropriately been called a revolution of the rich against the poor. The lords and nobles were upsetting the social order, breaking down ancient law and custom, sometimes by means of violence, often by pressure and intimidation. They were literally robbing the poor of their share in the common, tearing down the houses which, by the hitherto unbreakable force of custom, the poor had long regarded as theirs and their heirs'. The fabric of society was being disrupted; desolate villages and the ruins of human dwellings testified to the fierceness with which the revolution raged, endangering the defences of the country, wasting its towns, decimating its population, turning its overburdened soil into dust, harassing its people and turning them from decent husbandmen into a mob of beggars and thieves. Though this happened only in patches, the black spots threatened to melt into a uniform catastrophe. (Polanyi, 2001: 37)

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Introduction

Already the object of much journalistic and academic attention and debates, *Bacurau* is widely acclaimed on the international scene as an emblematic case of contemporary political cinema and sometimes associated with other commercial and critical successes of the moment, such as Bong Joon-ho's multi-Academy Award winner *Parasite* (2019; see Bittencourt, 2020). In this essay I aim to follow this enthusiastic drive in particular by addressing the film for its capacity to produce and activate alternative and revolutionary subjectivities to be related to current radical political theories.

In ongoing researches and analyses (Sticchi, 2021: 249–53), I am attempting to use audiovisual culture as a mapping instrument, as a creative and operational tool by underscoring its capacity of building, constructing, and assembling new forms of life and parts of reality. In line with a long tradition of film-philosophical and non-representational theories, in fact, these elaborations consist exactly in evaluating the way in which cinematic experience operates and generates ethical and political worlds, with their own 'agents', to be affectively and conceptually engaged by viewers (see Deleuze, 1997: 189–98; Marks, 2000: xii–xvi, 138–9; Pisters, 2012: 30–32; Shaviro, 1993: 23–7). More specifically, I am interested in examining how recent films and TV series enact the dynamics of contemporary biocognitive capitalism and give a body to the various and extremely heterogeneous precarious existences proliferating around the globe. Another key assumption of the article is that interacting with cinematic spaces and with the subjectivities inhabiting them allows a process of creation and composition rather than one of simple sympathetic connection. The concepts of *chronotopes* and *dialogism* elaborated by Mikhail Bakhtin have been paramount in guiding such a discussion, meant to go beyond the identification of regular aesthetic, semantic, and syntactic patterns (1981: 84–9, 247, 262–4, 280–2). Indeed, Bakthin's work was essentially moved by the desire also to develop a method to evaluate, together with specific consistent formal categories, the irregular potential and the 'subversive' discursive substance of each artistic experience (1990: 269–72). When arguing that chronotopes generate or thicken space-time relationships, Bakthin highlighted the material and non-contemplative nature of the artistic experience, and emphasised its multiple and dynamic nature, one capable of exceeding fixed and monological structures (Bakhtin, 1981: 84–5, 252; Hesselberth, 2014: 7–14). Consequently, we will see how the empathic, ecological, and relational mechanisms grounding filmic experience and connecting viewers with specific modes of marginalised existence allow for practices of solidarity-building, or rather, for a transformative politicisation of supposed subjective and individual sufferings. This implies that a bodily participation in cinematic experience does not simply involve the detached identification of affective and sensori-motor states/images on behalf of the viewer; this connection entails the creation of bodies, the potential process of reconstructing and reassembling its composition in an ethically affirmative sense (cf. Bakhtin, 1981: 283–4, 347–53; Pisters, 2012: 209–13, 254).

Concurrently, the analysis of affective, social, and psychic pain is not meant to put forth a simple pietistic examination of a film's effectiveness in representing the struggles of a precarious life. This latter attitude, in certain ways, could also reduce the political potential of particular films to an even regressive eulogy for the helpless victims of global

capitalism. On the contrary, the process of mapping political and ethical cartographies of cinema is moved by the desire to activate possibilities through 'the encounter', to politicise spaces and subjectivities and, thus, at the same time, to reveal the exploratory and experimental nature of cinema. In this sense, *Bacurau*'s communal tale of revolt against neo-colonial extractivist and racialised violence allows us to move more directly to an emancipatory terrain, since it presents a fascinating enaction of the 'becoming-class of a precarious multitude' and challenges traditional categories of identity and belonging.

Enclosing Communities

The very opening of the film problematises the narrative, dramatic, and ecological focus of our storyworld. Though the action is set and unfolds exclusively in a very specific ecology, the small 'out of official maps' village of Bacurau, a *sertão* (backcountry) set in a remote area of western Pernambuco (northeast of Brazil), the initial images insert this context in a global political spectrum. Indeed, the opening titles start off on an extra-terrestrial landscape, with planet Earth slowly coming to dominate the background, while a satellite crosses over the screen (left to right) in the foreground. The camera, then, progressively zooms into the continental and national context of the dramatic action and dissolves (editing by Eduardo Serrano) into a bird's eye view of Teresa's (Bàrbara Colen) travel back to the village for the funeral of her grandmother Carmelita.[1] The geographical and topographical location is clearly presented as a chronotope of ecological marginalisation; abandoned schools and crumbling buildings sometimes appear in the background of a deserted landscape dominated by local vegetation. Furthermore, the cinematography contributes in reiterating this state of destitution through constant use of saturated colour palettes (cinematography by Pedro Serrano), which manage to emphasise the perennial extreme heat affecting the chronotope (a characteristic often mentioned also in the dialogues). The village of Bacurau, as we discover later on, has disappeared from online maps and is untraceable through other GPS mapping tools (thus, seemingly contradicting the function of the satellite early on), whereas only manually crafted and rudimental charts used in the local school display the village and report the life of its inhabitants. These features of isolation and exclusion are dialogically reinforced by the rituals and magical elements that accompany everyday life in Bacurau; the very access to the village is displayed in 'tribalistic' terms as we see Teresa taking a mysterious psychotropic drug (offered by the shaman gardener Damiano [Carlos Francisco]) used to bond the community together and to unleash their warrior might. In a similar fashion, the preparation for the final battle displaying a conflict between the village and the common enemy (a group of postmodern North American 'colonisers/bounty hunters' ruled by the pitiless and despotic Michael [Udo Kier]) is enacted through a nocturnal capoeira dance, further reinforcing the close sense of unity among our 'good guys'.

In this sense, the oppression and struggle featured in *Bacurau* seem to repeat a very common trope in western and genre cinema by presenting a self-sufficient community under the threat of brutalisation by external invading forces. From Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin no Samurai*, 1954), or *Rio Bravo* (Hawks, 1959), to *Assault on Precinct 13* (Carpenter, 1976), together with blockbusters such as *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009), among many other possible examples, the pattern of a group under siege has been

often explored in association with an idealised model of identity (or revealing the weakness of this very image). Sometimes, the romantic construction of the inner 'untouched' purity of the community comes together with clear Orientalist and colonialist narratives, implying the 'primitive' rejection of alleged notions of modern rationality and of complex social structures. It is not incidental, therefore, that some critics and reviewers have responded to these elements of the film – and to its violent and gory aspects – by indicating it as a 'celebration of barbarism', or to put it simply, as a populist and Manichean revenge fantasy (Dias Jr., 2020; Guaraná, 2020; Ikeda, 2020).

Notwithstanding the visible separation and isolation of the community, Bacurau and its inhabitants never appear external to globalised economic dynamics. As noticed, for instance, by Patrícia Mourão de Andrade and David L. Pike, the horizon of the film never lingers on this group by framing it as a purely excluded social body (Mourão de Andrade, 2020; Pike, 2020). Furthermore, the continuous interrelation between Bacurau's enclosure and more general power relations comes across in the opening narrative segment also with the discovery that an official mandate and reward against Lunga (played by the drag artist Silvero Pereira), a homegrown bandit, has been released by regional and national security forces. The very crimes pinned on this latter character, in fact, have to do with an attack against a dam in order to free the access to water for the local population, while this same site is strictly under control of a private company and managed with the collaboration of a crooked politician acting as Sierra Verde mayor (Tony Jr. [Thardelly Lima]). The villagers, consequently, have to continuously undergo shortages of water and to ration its use (together with suffering the lack of other necessary supplies) in order to survive, while facing a parasitic governance from contextual authorities.

Indeed, Tony Jr.'s assistance and support of private economic activities is accompanied with the research for political consensus among the villagers through the discretional distribution of water, materials for schooling and other fundamental activities (even anxiolytic drugs meant to control the mood of the villagers). Together with that, we see this same figure's henchmen kidnapping Sandra, a young sex worker, and the very entrance of Tony Jr., in the first section of the film, is constructed in the features of an external invasion. Indeed, his arrival in the village, accompanied by a truck with speakers loudly playing his electoral jingle, is noticed and announced by Darlene (Danny Barbosa) and her partner living at the extreme borders of the village and, therefore, acting as signallers of any 'incursion'. The communication of this arrival, in turn, is displayed with an emphatic deep focus featuring Darlene close-up in the foreground and Tony Jr.'s caravan crossing in the background (thus echoing the aesthetic of westerns). Not surprisingly, the people of Bacurau respond with irony and contempt to his slogans by covering him with insults while he stands alone in the main street and evokes the necessity of coming together while 'moving forward for the future elections'.

Notwithstanding the rebellious attitude of the village and the open distrust and conflictual stance presented by this indigenous multitude, a clear top-down dynamic of control and domination is in place, one that would appear to compromise any political autonomy and agency for the group. By taking into account all the elements discussed so far, indeed, we can already notice some of the complex dialogical coordinates the film enacts for the viewers. On the one hand, the main chronotope of the film features a visible enclosure separating it from a larger political topography and involving a clear idea

of marginality connected with this exclusion. At the same time, the village does not appear completely detached from a wider political context and from more general mechanisms of capitalist exploitation. In reverse, the ecology of Bacurau constitutes a clear case study for what we could define as extractive practices and operations characterising the core of contemporary world economy. More than a univocal or 'unproblematic' exclusion, therefore, the inhabitants of Bacurau face a continuous worsening of living conditions together with the deployment of coercive dynamics meant to favour the reproduction of particular extractive activities. The setting of the events in 'a few years from now', indeed, while playing with the 'mythical' temporal indeterminacy typical of western films, also emphasises the existential proximity of the ecological and ethical dimension of the movie.

In line with Verónica Gago, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, among others, we could define Bacurau's ecology as one of those 'outsides' global capitalism identifies and produces at any turn (and depends upon) in order to put forth the continuation of value-extraction and of consequent economic expansion (Gago, 2017: 37, 48; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2019: 4–7). It is exactly by exploiting the complete heterogeneity of communities across the globe and of variating forms of collective existence that global financial fluxes find their way to proliferate and persist, pervading a fractal and irregular geography and anthropology and, concurrently, enclosing it within strict productive parameters. This dynamic can be, therefore, connected with an endless movement of primitive accumulation, one that envisages every possible space and form of life as a site for valorisation (Gago, 2017: 92; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2019: 99, 128, 140). This same perpetual movement shatters and reframes distinctions between global Souths and Norths by building differing Third Worlds within every ecological context, even within the so-called peripheries of key international financial centres (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 468; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2019: 189–91). In this sense, we may argue that colonial practices and forms of conquest are not to be bound to the violent origins of capitalistic governance but constitute, instead, a transforming necropolitical practice (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2019: 52, 79–80; Mbembe, 2019: 115–16). It is by multiplying destruction, creating scarcity, and reducing life-standards that private accumulation reterritorialises itself and constitutes a manageable order, concurrently depriving subjects of agentive potential and of common grounds for collective existence. The despotic level of domination operated on the population of Bacurau appears alongside as a 'realist' enactment of neoliberal governance finding its core values around a Malthusian logic of endless 'sacrifice' of the disposables. The absence of democratic forms of participation and negotiation, in fact, bluntly *reveals* rather than extremises the constant expansion of precarity driving this system. These dynamics clearly shatter any substantial distinction between 'progressive/moderate' and 'reactionary/authoritarian' regimes within the neoliberal framework and allow us to evaluate these discrepancies as varying degrees of coercion and violence (cf. Gago, 2017: 17; 2020: 200–7).[2]

In this sense – notwithstanding the fact that the film is now received as a fierce criticism of Jair Bolsonaro's right-wing government – it is not incidental that it was written and planned before the latest Brazilian presidential elections (Allen and Carneiro Leão, 2021). *Bacurau*, therefore, signals the continued existence of strict intersected class, race and gender-based power relations within the wider body of the nation, in particular

referring to the political authority and command exercised by big landowners (*coronéis*), whose rule (in particular on the northeastern part of the country) does not confine itself to a very limited socio-historical moment (Rubinstein, 2020). As we have seen, these same dynamics can be extended beyond their local characteristics in order to understand the functioning of capitalism on a global scale. However, it is still important to point out that, in the current Brazilian political landscape, these same logics are probably undergoing one of their more radical enforcements together with a connected effort to repress artistic freedom and the critical role of cinema and culture (a despotic turn even exacerbated by the success of *Bacurau*; see Allen and Carneiro Leão, 2021; Dennison, 2020: 197–8). Of course, the purpose of the article is not to attribute to the film a higher status and analytical awareness within the complex panorama of contemporary Brazilian film culture, which displays multileveled modes of political negotiation and engagement (Dennison, 2020: 2–4). What *Bacurau* allows us to effectively examine, we could say, is the complete conservative/reactionary realignment of neoliberalism as readjustment of its governance, a fascist and necropolitical torsion that is (as in the film) met by popular uprisings and resistance across South America and the world (Gago, 2020: 243–6; Hyde Park Picture House, 2020).

A Community of Care

As we can see by simply taking into account the power dynamics displayed in the film, the experiential codification of this community is far more articulate and nuanced than a solid and homogeneous category, to be understood and reported through likewise static normative structures. Similarly, it is also necessary to point out how the stylistic heterogeneity of the film openly defies clear monological coordinates. Indeed, as has already been pointed out, *Bacurau* constructs its experiential dynamics within recurrent parameters of sci-fi and western (for instance, the use of the Panavision format with a 2.39:1 aspect ratio), while also resorting to the language of exploitation cinema (Dias Jr., 2020; Guaraná, 2020).[3] On the other hand, the film exhibits and blends these features together with patterns of avant-garde and militant filmmaking (with clear references to Cinema Novo; see Pike, 2020) by adopting an elliptical, often associative and discontinuous editing style, or by lingering on static situations with a more realist approach (Guaraná, 2020; Allen and Carneiro Leão, 2021).

It is interesting to notice, however, how this aesthetic multiplicity operates in conjunction with the diversity and complexity of the subjectivities inhabiting the cinematic chronotope. The villagers, indeed, although belonging to a specific setting, are not bounded by any ideas of ethnic or racial purity and, as often repeated in many dialogues, appear as a transnational and *mestiza* multitude. During the opening funeral ceremony, indeed, we observe Plinio ([Wilson Rabelo] local teacher and son of Carmelita) commenting on the fact that among the people of Bacurau 'there are teachers, architects, scientists, gigolos, and whores' and that while some stayed in the village for their entire lives, others, like Teresa, have instead populated various areas of the globe. Plinio's unconventional attribution of an equal dignity to very different professions together with the recognition of a transnational composition are not, however, the only interesting features of a group that seems also to avoid traditional gender dynamics. It could be said

that the village appears as a sort of matriarchal community (although actually explicit hierarchies are not visibly enforced), constellated by various LGBTQIA+ subjects, who do not suffer any blatant form of internal marginalization (Darlene is a transgender person with a male partner and a child); the very distribution of care-work activities defies traditional binary/sexualised divisions of labour. In this sense, the most evident case of a queer identity, among the villagers, is embodied by Lunga, who is never indicated through specific sexual categories and displays a rich iconographic complexity (very classical ‘masculine’ and warrior-like features are associated with lavish make-up and jewellery; see Pike, 2020). Indeed, they (who ironically compares themself to Che Guevara) very much operates as a legendary figure for the first half of the film, mentioned in tales and discussions of the villagers, but clearly participates in the action only as the final conflict breaks out.

Exactly from the iconographic point of view it is also possible to point out how the villagers relate to global popular culture using smartphones, tablets, and conventional – although not particularly sophisticated – modern technology. In addition to that, characters like Dj Urso ([Black Jr.] public newscaster of the village) wear a T-shirt of the famous Wu-Tang Clan or listen to commercial music, establishing a clear connection with a transnational artistic scene (similarly, the communal capoeira dance is blended with the extradiegetic minimalist techno track *Night* by John Carpenter). An even more interesting component, in this sense, is constituted by the strange mixing between a magical and pre-modern medical knowledge together with more conventional and standardised scientific practices. This hybridisation emerges from the already mentioned shamanic role of Damiano and, more distinctively, from the ‘broken’ friendship between the two elder women of the community: the now dead Carmelita and the village doctor, Domingas (Sônia Braga). The first appears as a mythical matriarchal figure (also because of her ‘perceivable’ absence and oneiric intrusion near the end of the film), whereas the latter uses her competence to support the welfare of the villagers at any turn (she constantly wears her white medical coat). Together with that, Domingas exhibits a passionate and rebellious attitude, reflected in her aggressive threats against Tony Jr. or by her acting with rage at Carmelita’s funeral (exhibiting her suffering for the loss of the old friend, a desperate reaction for which she apologises in a future communal meeting). The clear emotional connection between the two women, together with all the general integration of modern and ritualistic elements that blend this multitude of care, resonate with a certain image of *witchcraft*, as discussed by Silvia Federici.

Federici has pointed out how witch-hunts operated to confine ‘female bodies’ (in particular those existing in more communal and cooperative forms) in order to make them functional for the construction of the heteropatriarchal family unity and, therefore, for the completion of capitalist primitive accumulation (2019: 15–17; 2020: 12–13). This violent gendered enclosure involved, in turn, the expropriation of the medical knowledge produced in the female-centred spaces of collective existence (Federici, 2018: 11–13; Gago, 2020: 222–3). These logics, as we have discussed, are not bound to the dawn of the capitalist era and are explicitly directed to the expropriation of ‘the common’ and to land grabbing practices affecting, more viciously, peripheral and indigenous social assemblages (Federici, 2018: 20; 2019: 121–7). At the same time, the communities experiencing neocolonial violence often feature knowledges and practical forms of collective existence

which, as Federici underscores, display an alternative and resistant potential working against capitalistic enclosures (2019: 107). Likewise, experimentations in commoning (or in the construction of new commons) are always in place, in particular for what concerns the establishment of cooperative structures of care and mutual support, or for the construction of entirely new modes of relating to contextual 'ecologies' (2018: 76–80; 2019: 88–9; 2020: 5, 39, 86). Domingas – among other characters – expresses a similar ethical agency, as her medical practice is based on the continuous process of sharing and building together, rejecting strict hierarchical roles and fixed ideas of knowledge. Emblematic of this horizontal praxis is the sequence showing the community coming together to discuss the value of the supplies at their disposal (including the drugs left by Tony Jr.). Domingas intervenes by pointing out the dangerous and sedating nature of these same medications, while suggesting that the members of the village are free to use them at their own risk, thus reinforcing the democratic and socialised nature of scientific knowledge for the group (they also choose together which are the best books to use in the school and library).

Their assemblies embody, as Verónica Gago would argue, a twofold temporality; on one side, these continuous moments of coming together display a strategy in effectively facing contingent issues. At the same time, though always recognising its situatedness, *the assembly* enacts and displays a processual nature that is never concluded and resolved within specific segmented conditions (Gago, 2020: 155–7). Indeed, these same modes of convergence, in the film, are not enacted as special moments featuring an idealised and utopian model of pure unbounded democracy. The communal meetings constitute concrete pragmatics intended to transversally construct solutions, even on a very limited molecular scale, together with the creation and experimentation of differentiated and continuously transforming subjectivities (Gago, 2020: 164–6). The visual style of the assemblies, as well, does not display particular distinguishable characteristics and, therefore, is experienced as the realisation of something that pre-existed the narrative events of the film. The chronotopic twofoldness and ambiguity of the film functions exactly in diminishing or renouncing to any monological unity and purity, indicating multiplicity and indeterminacy as grounding facets of the life of this community. This experiential feature, we could add, is also emphasised by the consistent narrative retardation operated by the film, postponing the 'main incident' and the discovery of the villains to the middle of the narration, and thus contributing to this general sense of openness. The collective strength of Bacurau, therefore, is not constructed as a display of inner exceptional qualities but rather as a political and ethical agency to be configured and assessed in differing modalities (Gago, 2017: 8). Choosing open conflict against more 'pacific' and institutional resolutions is not a matter of a generalized and fixed strategy; to adopt a conceptual reversal put in place recently by Hardt and Negri, these choices are simple tactical modalities within a larger antagonistic strategic ground, which is aimed to affirm, in all possible forms, the power of the multitude to assemble itself (2017: 18–23, 227–8, 290–1).

The dialogical richness of Bacurau's villagers is contrasted and associated, on the other hand, with a constant external diminishment; indeed, if we could argue that the community suffers a continuous forced enclosure (in particular for what concerns their lack of material resources), it is also framed as a racialised 'inferior' group. Emblematically, the two southern Brazilian hitmen, working for the villainous colonisers, while talking to

their North American employers, stress their difference from the people of the *sertão*, whom they see as 'blacks' in relation to their whiter and more civilised status. This contempt is reflected, of course, in their merciless murdering of several inhabitants of Bacurau, but it is also reiterated in their diffidence and fear in response to Pacote ([Thomas Aquino] a former member of Lunga's gang) touching their precious motorbikes. Likewise, they dismissively react to any invitation to visit the local museum, implying a devaluation of a contextually rich and complex history of anti-colonial resistance and political organising. They even argue, in conversation with Michael and his comrades, to be like their international colleagues, and continue by saying 'we come from a richer part of the country based on German and Italian colonies'. This overt appreciation and valorisation of *whiteness* finds its ironic and dialogical counter-enactment precisely in the instantaneous rejection of an equal status on behalf of the 'Western' employers, who brutally shoot the two contractors a few moments after this conversation.

Bacurau, then, is affected by those racialised discourses which, as Verónica Gago demonstrated, define monstruous bodies within general national territories (2017: 178–80). Through these mechanisms of individuation, indeed, peripheral communities and so-called informal economies always accompany their enclosure and the recodification of their autonomous power – 'from below' – within conventional extractive dynamics 'from above' (2017: 4–6). Labels of anti-modernist behaviours and denunciations of a barbaric and dangerous way of life, detrimental for the well-being of a national or larger homogeneous community, therefore, implicitly evoke disciplinary policies to be imposed on the same agents of such vitalist pragmatics (2017: 189–91). The very absence of Bacurau from online maps, we discover, was actually the result of an erasure and progressive dehumanisation that preceded and inherently supported the planned slaughter. With this cancellation, the lives of the villagers are, thus, completely commodified and sold (with the complicity of Tony Jr.) to the group of colonisers-killers for their human hunting game, a challenge involving the use of 'traditional fire weapons' against inferior subjects.

The *monstrous* nature of Bacurau (indeed, the term is also the Portuguese name for nightjars/nighthawks) is reiterated in many moments; for instance, the very funeral chant dedicated by the villagers to Carmelita refers to a horror-like imaginary: 'It's very late in the night/ Now is the time for the bacurau / The jaguar dances forward / The capora and babau dance / A feast of fear and terror / Phantoms haunt the wake / Punching holes in the trunk of night, the woodpecker's beak / Spells are floating in the air / The work of an evil sorcerer / Charms and jinxes dreamed up at the xangô in Nicolau's.' These words are, as well, associated with oneiric images of water pouring out of Carmelita's coffin and with an iconic ultimate goodbye of the villagers all waving white handkerchiefs (Pike, 2020). The song, nonetheless, does not refer to any folklore tradition and emerges, therefore, as a unique product of the community or of the artistic work of the rockabilly troubadour (Sérgio Ricardo) of the village (Pike, 2020). Paradoxically, by examining the dialogical strategy the film enacts, we could say that the reactionary and regressive dream of a pure and crystallised identity falls solely on the shoulders of the colonisers instead of characterising the mechanisms through which the villagers identify themselves. The appreciation and valorisation of the complexity of the community was, indeed, also a central intention of the directors, aiming to counter conventional paternalistic depictions of

*sertão*s and their inhabitants. In a recent interview, they highlighted how, at best, contemporary visual culture addresses these sectors of the population by simply denouncing their condition of indigency, a sort of externalised compassionate look which, at the same time, reinforces prejudices against their existence as 'barbaric and savage' groups displaying pre-modern characteristics (Allen and Carneiro Leão, 2021). Exactly opposing these narratives and the conventional hierarchical codification of the subjectivities inhabiting the ecology of the film, we see, therefore, the enactment and production of a creative multitude that surprisingly defies strict definitions and determinations. The 'monstrous' rationality of Bacurau emerges also from the consistent visual focus on the group as central character opposed to singularised storylines that appear more as pieces of a multiform mosaic.

Likewise, it can be said that there is a conflictual, revolutionary and even communistic way of organising and mobilising for the people of Bacurau, though this same political assemblage cannot be considered to be built around traditional universalist notions of class consciousness. More than an identity, the villagers embody and enact 'existential territories', an immanent power of composition that is exactly what capitalistic extraction incessantly attempts to enclose (Gago, 2020: 104–5). The 'class' that this community enacts and puts in place operates as an intersectional experimental horizon, as a body territoriality, to use Gago's recent elaborations, always featuring an unexperimented and indetermined *dark potencia* (2020: 86–9). Instead of fighting to recover a (imagined) lost purity, the villagers in fact position the terrain of struggle around the desire and capacity to transform and reassert collective existence against contextual forms of subjection exactly by vindicating the ecological, composite, and indetermined nature of the human (Gago, 2020: 3, 251 n3).

Therefore, the community, in its internal heterogeneity, opposes a quite homogeneous racialised group sharing and exhibiting a moral and agentive privilege in accordance with this position; this status is even emphasised in a conversation during which one of the bounty hunters (Terry [Jonny Mars]) questions Michael's German heritage, attributing to the origins of the leader a sort of detrimental factor undermining his legitimacy. For this reason, and because of his overt militaristic and pitiless attitude, reinforced by the indifference to the murder of a child, Terry arrives to the point of identifying Michael as a 'Nazi'. To this criticism Michael replies by stating that he moved to the US before Terry was even born, implying to be more 'American than him' and dismissing as banal and ridiculous the stereotypical claims against him. The contrast and confrontation between different embodiments of a white-male dominant status (defining also the limits and excessive modes of its enactment) is dialogically complicated by Terry's sharing, later on, misogynistic personal views and anecdotes (he wanted to shoot his ex-wife after their divorce). He also comments on the fact that killing the people of Bacurau is a God-given opportunity to unleash his righteous anger in a legitimate fashion. In the paradoxical opposition between Terry and Michael, or in the different ways in which the bounty hunters express their power and position, we continue to see how a specific social hierarchy, constructed on the line of race (intersected with gender and class), involves concurrent (human) capital values associated to it. The strategy of colonial violence described here reiterates how neoliberal necropolitical governance, based essentially on the progressive precarisation of life in its complexity, shatters any distinction between life and

labour, identifying every part of the organic and inorganic world as differently valuable or disposable (in a trajectory of life subsumption; see Fumagalli, 2019: 80). Every group is, then, associated with a certain financial and existential value attributed in connection with its adhering to an identity-hierarchy, which, in turn, understands communities as atomised and distinguishable blocks governed by entrenched vertical power relations. The connection between the continued logic of enclosure and racialised capitalism is emphasised also by Michael's first appearances on the scene. While moving around the mansion he and his group use as their base, indeed, we see him cleaning a metal box displaying the label 'Massachusetts-produced cotton gin' that clearly hints at a slave labour dimension operating as a contingent and persistent element of the surrounding social context (Pike, 2020).

The privilege Michael and his fellow bounty hunters incorporate is demonstrated also in the lack of accountability they face in relation to their actions and crimes. 'I have documents that prove that we are not here' Michael smirkingly argues against the two southern Brazilians trying to justify their wrong deeds, thus underlining even more emphatically his superior status. These characters exhibit such a level of impunity – and so despise their 'inferior' victims – that, during their failed final attack against the village, they act recklessly, without strategies or planning with accuracy their movements (thus becoming easy prey for the villagers' counterattack). This affective and dialogical element is expressed, at its purest, in Michael's delusional and suicidal killing spree. Irritated or simply bored after finding Bacurau apparently deserted, in an outrageous demonstration of such a sense of domination and moral detachment, he starts blindly targeting buildings and animals, shoots at his associates and even points his gun against himself. Such a sense of colonial superiority is reiterated even after his capture. Instead of simply realising the victory of the people of Bacurau he asks for the intervention of a complicit Tony Jr. (who arrives in the village in the aftermath of the battle to allegedly rescue the hunters) screaming, 'Amigo, Dinero, You Promised.' These words suggest the corruption and connection Michael has with the local authorities and further highlight the promise of safety and unaccountability the villain thinks is already entailed in his economic and political power. Not incidentally, his final words, before being buried alive in the city's underground, are: 'this is only the beginning', suggesting an unfinished struggle for liberation to be carried out.

Collective Intelligence and Affirmation

Ironically opposing the monological configuration of the colonisers, the guerrilla-style ambush, coordinated mainly by Lunga, which ends up defeating Michael and his fellows, involves the reconfiguration of the entire urban setting as a battlefield. The school is turned into one of the main sites for responding to the incursion and, more distinctively, the museum acquires a fundamental role in the struggle. During the narration – although mostly in the background (with no interior shots of it) – we have experienced this building as a traditional container of collective memories, celebrated and indicated with pride by the people of Bacurau for its richness, and we have appreciated its architectural centrality and peculiarity. Indeed, the museum is visualised as being more important than the local church (which is used mostly as a storeroom) and appears quite distinctively as the

most well-kept edifice in the village, featuring a peculiar external stone wall. In the final showdown, it is used for various purposes; it provides weapons for the villagers (we find out that several pieces of the exhibition are guns and blades used in past revolts) and a hideout for Lunga and their fellows ready to surprise the invaders. Together with these aspects, the museum is connected through an underground tunnel to the main street of the village, and this same hidden part of the building will function, in the end, as Michael's living tomb. When we enter with Terry for the first time the interiors of this location, several close-ups and detail shots show sculptures and artwork produced by the community (Terry steals one of these in a symbolic recurrence of traditional 'colonial theft') and pictures of previous inhabitants, together with newspaper headlines and photos of past rebellions.

As discussed by Mourão de Andrade (2020), the museum holds the iconography of popular struggles in the region, of social bandits (*cangaceiros*), main subjects also of renowned films by Glauber Rocha, such as *Antonio das Mortes* (*O Dragão da Maldade contra o Santo Guerreiro*, 1969) or *Black God, White Devil* (*Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, 1964). The role of the museum in the chronotope of the film is that of problematising even further the political complexity of this cinematic ecology and of our encounter with it. The building exists as a concrete space of resistance, and not as an inert and metaphorical location and, we could add, acts as an organic museum of Brazilian cinema, honouring and dialogically interacting with its militant images. It operates as refuge and site of political practice, and the information and instruments it features are materials for continued struggles instead of dead objects of monumentalised past glories to be remembered with a nostalgic and distant look (Mourão de Andrade, 2020). The building, therefore, concretely participates in the production of renewed collective intelligence and awareness, a characteristic that is experientially reinforced by its connective architecture, bringing together the foundations of the village and, thus, establishing a grounding common plane.

The manifold dialogical composition and pragmatic reality of this architectural element reiterates the constructive and affirmative role of knowledge as a horizontal and transformative process, never crystallised around stable notions. Mourão de Andrade, indeed, even compares *Bacurau* to popular comedies such as *A Night at the Museum* (Levy, 2006) in order to highlight how, where the latter plays with the ironic theme of bringing back the dead relics that compose historical exhibitions, the former enacts their endless vitality. This same energetic participation of historical awareness in collective knowledge is enriched in a late sequence of the film, in which we see, after the victory, people of the village cleaning the interiors of the museum from the blood of the battle. One of the villagers asks her fellows to carefully scrub the floor but to leave the walls dirty, as they are, though she adds a laconic 'unfortunately' at the end of her request. The museum, thus, appears as a living and breathing architectural body registering the troubles, pains, defeats, and victories of the community; a body wearing historical scars that, concurrently, are never polished or magnified.

Exactly because of this critical awareness, which prevents a banal glorification of Bacurau's revolt, we can also see how the film enacts a very effective politicisation of violence. We have discussed how an endemic and intrinsic Malthusian cruelty pervades the ecology of the film, through systems of renewed primitive accumulation, enclosure

and, eventually, of explicit genocidal drives. Against such levels of brutalisation, resorting to a physical and active resistance is indicated as a sign of awareness about these same circumstantial dynamics. Concomitantly, this same political stance is neither described as righteous nor as a heroic decision. Rather than that, the choice of armed struggle on behalf of the community (even described in its gruesome details) appears as a strategic expression of the previously discussed collective intelligence of the villagers. This is reflected not only in the planning and accurate coordination of the resistance but also in the actions that follow the armed response. It is worth noticing that, while promptly opposing the colonisers, the people of Bacurau offer medical assistance to their wounded enemies after the battle and do not indulge in further retaliations. They bury their enemies and prefer humiliating Tony Jr. – instead of attacking him – by leaving him naked on the back of a donkey, wearing a ritual 'demonic' mask, and banish him to the deserted areas surrounding the village. The cruelty of the conflict is, nonetheless, widely acknowledged, as demonstrated by Lunga's cutting off the heads of the attackers, reversing the type of punishments received by 'bandits', detectable in the photos and pictures from the past. Exactly in response to this act of additional violence we see Pacote asking Teresa if Lunga went too far with their actions, a doubt to which she replies with a firm 'no', implying an acknowledgement of it as a necessary symbolic overturning of the same humiliation suffered by the people of the *sertão*. On the other hand, the same military centrality and leadership of Lunga appears as a momentary tactical choice and does not involve conferring on them the political sovereignty over the community. The violent uprising does not constitute a closed event but it is part, again, of a longer and slower process of becoming, which finds its micro-events and revolutionary openings at every turn, in every possible composition and challenge. By doing so, the film denies or openly rejects any common-sense political wisdom, identifying in 'moderate positions', such as struggles within clearly established institutional boundaries to be solved through rational compromises between opposing forces, an illusory lack of political realism. This, of course, does not imply the confinement of political agency only in the realm of the revolutionary moment and of the spontaneous revolt, nor a celebration of armed conflicts. It is, we could argue, a further indicator of a productive openness, an invitation to embrace all the contradictions of situated conflicts without erasing problematic areas and unresolved tensions which, to be properly addressed, require an active stance rejecting easy conciliatory solutions.

This articulation of political revolt indicates, as put forward by Gago and others (following the trajectories drawn by Rosa Luxemburg), an overcoming of the debate about reform or revolution in an affirmative ethical sense (Gago, 2020: 169–73). The never-ending path of political emancipation is built on transversal cooperation and creation against 'representation' and, in line with current transfeminist movements' praxis, foresees the generation of a diverse and autonomous rationality tactically interacting, at different levels, with contextual social ecologies and related institutions (Gago, 2020: 241–3). Against the trivialising and mortifying utilitarian logic that governs neoliberal rationality, the people of Bacurau, as a revolutionary community of care, oppose political calculation with a vitalist pragmatic – the strategic intelligence through which a collectivity composes and transforms itself against the boundaries of individualised existence (cf. Gago, 2017: 161–4). The multitude, as we have seen, is a body territory, an immanent composite resistant to 'individualised sociality' through uncharted experimentation. Capsizing the sad body-politics of Thomas

Hobbes, describing subjects overdetermined by a sovereign Leviathan, it is possible to follow the example put forward by this small village and *bacurize* the world (cf. Gago, 2017: 142; 2020, 242–3; Mourão de Andrade, 2020; Rubinstein, 2020). Similarly, this tension invites us to embrace visual culture as an ecological ground for ethical and collective experimentation and as a concrete imaginative practice to assemble new monstrous communities.

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Notes

1. This character is played (in a nonspeaking role) by Lia de Itamaracá, celebre *cirandeira* (dancer, composer, and singer) closely connected to Pernambucan culture (Pike, 2020).
2. Although, of course, this *realist* awareness is not meant to dismiss all sorts of differential conditions accompanying varying political circumstances (Gago, 2020: 227–33; 245–8).
3. The film even deliberately features markers of a tacky B-movie aesthetic indicating the explicit desire to recall and reference national/international genre filmmaking and pays homages, such as the name of the village public school attributed to 'Joao Carpinteiro' (John Carpenter) (Guaraná, 2020; Allen and Carneiro Leão, 2021).

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