



Postcolonialism and Cultural Hybridity in the Cinema of Kleber Mendonça Filho

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Abstract

Brasil is a country that is rich in cultural diversity but at its heart still suffers from a complex range of societal tensions resulting from systemic racism and inequality that are a legacy of its colonial origins and which make it hard to form an understanding of what a central Brazilian culture of identity could be. Cultural expression allows for these tensions to be made visible and criticized. In Brasil's history, cinema has played an important role in this impulse, developing its critical voice continuously since the 1920s. One of the more recent contributors to this development is Brazilian filmmaker Kleber Mendonça Filho.

This thesis critically examines his filmography (at time of writing; 'O Som ao Redor' (2012), 'Aquarius' (2016), and 'Bacurau' (2019)) through the lenses of postcolonialist theories and concepts on cultural hybridity, drawing from theoretical frameworks on postcolonialism by Frantz Fanon and Achille Mbembe, combined with concepts on cultural hybridity described by Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Néstor García Canclini. This is combined with establishing the discourses that the films add to and by interpreting the accompanying semiotic elements.

The films are audiovisual expressions of socio political commentaries pushing for revolution, which is in line with Brazilian cinematic traditions from the Cinema Novo in the 1960s from which Mendonça Filho displays a large amount of influence. The final and combined analysis shows how Mendonça Filho's films interrogate colonial legacies, racial and class tensions and how hybrid cultural identities and communities can be formed, even under these conditions, that potentially can navigate these and rebel against the remnants of colonialism. In this way, Mendonça Filho's current filmography can be viewed as a combined, dynamic definition of postcolonial Brazil culture and identity and how the consistent physical location of the narratives, the historically marginalized Northeast, adds to the political effectiveness of his cinematic statements.

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1. Introduction:

Born in Recife, in the state of Pernambuco (Brasil), in 1968, Kleber Mendonça Filho has emerged as one of the most original and politically incisive filmmakers in contemporary Brazilian cinema. His career, moving from film criticism to art cinema, has created a body of work that has reinvented the way we look at Brasil's cultural and political state of being without reducing anything to folkloric stereotypes. Filho's filmography, in terms of traditional full-length features, provides an incisive portrait of Brasil's history, present and path into the future in the context of the country's cultural trajectory from colonization to coup and political post-coup recovery.

His debut, 'O Som Ao Redor' (2012), follows the growing tension in a middle-class neighborhood in Recife under threat from private security guards, won awards at the Rotterdam Film Festival and was hailed as a reinvention of the political thriller. Fundamental to this film's understanding is the interpretation of the soundscape as an overlapping of voices from national traumas left over from a colonial past in the background of explicit classism, using Frantz Fanon's works 'The Wretched of the Earth' (1963) and 'Black Skin, White Masks' (1967) as context.

Mendonça Filho's follow-up movie, 'Aquarius' (2016), explores another urban dynamic, the continuous striving for economic growth in the form of real estate speculation. We see the character of famous actress Sônia Braga resisting the process of, depending on the perspective, progress or gentrification and erasure of local memory. This offers a very literal expression of what is described in Bhabha's 'The Place of Culture' (1994) and Canclini's 'Hybrid Cultures' (1989), which explore the push and pull of so-called progress that a city's inhabitants and cultures experience.

Finally, 'Bacurau' (2019) is a far more explicit movie, both in content and metaphorical details, tackling the echoes of Brasil's period of colonialism, emphasizing that with time, new forms of colonial forces can find their impact on any corner of society through predatory capitalism and cultural erasure. This can be explored and specified, again using Frantz Fanon's works.

In this thesis, I propose a detailed and formal reading of Mendonça Filho's films, understanding his cinema not only as social criticism, but as a cartography of post-colonial and post-dictatorial Brasil; a country that, even after centuries, is still struggling to decipher itself. Whether in the claustrophobia of 'O Som ao Redor', the solitary resistance of 'Aquarius' or the collective revolution of 'Bacurau', the director reminds us that Brazilian culture is, above all, a battlefield. And it is in this clash that its power lies.

This research positions itself as a critical excavation of contemporary Brazilian culture and identity through the politically charged cinema of Kleber Mendonça Filho. At its core, the study asks the following:

How does Mendonça Filho's filmography, at the time of writing, function as a dynamic definition of postcolonial Brazil, revealing the persistent societal tensions like racism and inequality, particularly within its Northeastern heartland?

The analysis goes beyond simply cataloguing social criticisms, it seeks to understand how the filmmaker's unique aesthetic and narrative strategies embody and interrogate the complex realities of a nation still wrestling with the ghosts of its colonial past and the perpetuated violences in its neoliberal present.

1.2 Material Sampling

The thesis centers around the currently up to date filmography of Kleber Mendonça Filho: 'O Som ao Redor' (Neighbouring Sounds, 2012), 'Aquarius' (2016), and 'Bacurau' (2019) (co-directed with Juliano Dornelles). These three films are the primary texts that will be analyzed in this thesis.

'O Som ao Redor' (2012): Sampled as the quintessential analysis of urban post-colonial tension and the militarization of everyday life within the middle-class geography of Recife. It serves as the entry point, focusing on subtle structural violence, racial/class hierarchies under neoliberalism, and the pervasive fear masking historical guilt. The film's intricate soundscape and claustrophobic framing are key materials for analyzing how power operates acoustically and visually in supposedly "secure" spaces.

'Aquarius' (2016): Sampled as a powerful study of memory, embodiment, and resistance against cultural and real estate gentrification. Clara's apartment and her body become the central "material", a "third space" (Bhabha) and an "artifact of insurgent memory" (Jaguaribe) resisting the homogenizing force of capital. The film provides the lens to examine individual defiance, the politics of space, and the gendered dimensions of resistance within the urban landscape.

'Bacurau' (2019): Sampled as the most explicit allegory of necropolitics (Mbembe), collective insurgency, and the re-actualization of colonial extermination practices in the rural Northeast. It shifts the focus from subtle tension to open warfare, analyzing how historical violence resurfaces and how hybrid cultural identity fuels revolutionary response. The film's genre-blending (Western, Sci-Fi, guerrilla cinema) is a crucial material element demonstrating cultural synthesis as resistance.

1.3 Method of Analysis

The study adopts a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to textual analysis, applied to film, while actively incorporating elements from postcolonial theory, cultural studies, urban studies, and Brazilian history. This is not a fixed methodology, but rather a cohesive effort that integrates various interrelated analytical techniques in order to examine films and address the research queries.

A textual examination will serve as the foundation (McKee, 2003) of this thesis. The approach includes careful analysis of the films' structural components like storytelling framework and plot development: analyzing how the narratives progress (for instance, the tripartite structure in 'O Som ao Redor', the intertwining of past and present in 'Aquarius', the allegorical conflict narrative in 'Bacurau') serves to uncover hidden power structures and social commentary.

Theoretical implementation and intertextual engagement is where the methodology develops its critical dimension. Through a combination of semiotic and discourse analysis (Rose, 2016), where applicable, important elements of meaning can be identified and combining these insights with selected theoretical frameworks on the topics that provide the context, an interpretation of the films and their message as a whole can be understood.

In conclusion, the approach focuses on bringing together insights from detailed examination, application of theory, and contextual background to pinpoint and expand on key thematic issues: the ongoing impact of colonial oppression, the characteristics of cultural mixture and identity formation, cinema as a means of memory and defiance, the Northeast reflecting broader themes, and the influence of style on politics.

This approach is noted for its dialectical quality; consistently oscillating between the specific elements of film texts, the intangible structures of theory, and the grounding influence of historical and social settings. It seeks not merely to describe the films, but to utilize them as lenses to reveal the intricate, often distressing realities of post-colonial Brasil, showcasing how Mendonça Filho's cinema offers essential, aesthetically rich critical insights.

First, the theoretical framework will be presented, laying out the most important generalized theories that will be key to understanding the origins and effects of the cultural tensions that we will see in the films. After this, the development of Brazilian cinema will be explored, allowing understanding of how cinema developed under the influence of Brasil's historical milestones and what topics might be explicitly shown and what might be more hidden in the texts and discourse. From there, the films will be explored in two stages, first based on what the films present to the viewer, secondly on what immediate interpretations present themselves when having the theoretical framework and the context of Brazilian cinema in mind. Finally, the findings will be discussed and completed, after which a conclusion will be presented to answer the research questions.

2. Theoretical Framework

Considering the selected films and their context in Brazilian cinema, culture and history, to be discussed in chapter 3, there are some overall themes that can already be identified to be relevant in the analysis that will be presented. It requires being attuned to postcolonial Brazil's layered violences and inequalities that are set in a society containing many hybrid cultures and identities, built from a population based on indigenous people, descendants of colonizers, freed slaves and immigrants. Therefore, the material sampling for this thesis resulted in key theoretical frameworks that are essential for decoding the chosen texts.

It is evident that colonialism introduces an oppressive power structure, one that is rarely fully reversed when the explicit colonialism ends. It leaves implicit residual power structures behind that cause societal tensions, discussed in Frantz Fanon's works on Postcolonial Theory and the related violence, psychopathology, and revolutionary responses. From violence follows death, and the specific violence that is discussed here relates to the topic of 'necropolitics', as explored by Achille Mbembe.

Another side of Brasil's history means that there are many cultures that came together in one nation that over time have coexisted, mixed and merged, providing opportunities to apply the works of Stuart Hall on identity as a fluid negotiation and Homi Bhabha and Néstor García Canclini's works on cultural hybridity.

2.1. Colonial Violence and its Re-Actualizations: Fanon and Mbembe

Frantz Fanon, in 'The Wretched of the Earth' (1961), provides the basis for understanding how colonial domination, achieved by violence on many levels, does not end with political independence, but is reinscribed in social, economic and psychological structures. In extension, he also describes decolonization also in terms of violence, stating that "decolonization is always a violent event".

This approaches the themes discussed by Achille Mbembe in his book 'Necropolitics', where he describes that in democratic societies, there is often inequality that extends to the extreme, some groups benefit while forms of explicit violence or more political violence in the form policy force other specific groups to live under bad circumstances, ranging to the extremes of actual death. His work will help in identifying the ways this manifests in the situations depicted in the analyzed movies.

In 'Bacurau', for example, we will see the arrival of foreign mercenaries to exterminate a local population, echoing the colonial "founding violence" described by Fanon, in which the colonizer imposes his domination through the symbolic and material extermination of the colonized. We will also spot a more subtle example in 'O Som ao Redor', showing images of colonial era sugar mills at the start and at the end the reckoning of a past crime committed under the shelter of inherited colonial wealth as a form of counter-violence, showing that the countries political landscape contributes to perpetuated colonial power structures.

Fanon, drawing from his background in psychiatry, in 'The Wretched of the Earth' (1961), also discusses more individual psychological effects that are involved in the (post-) colonial power structures and changes in them. Further specified towards an existential analysis of race, he wrote 'Black Skin, White Masks' in 1952, focusing on different aspects of the personal experience of Black people in life in white-dominated societies. While a large portion of the upcoming movie analysis focuses a lot on more large-scale societal dynamics, this perspective

might prove useful when encountering interesting relevant aspects of individual character behaviors.

2.2. Identity, Diaspora and Cultural Hybridity: Hall, Bhabha and Canclini

Looking from a context of colonialism in Brasil's past and the involved slavery and the subsequent development of the country, including immigration, it is clear that Brasil brings together many cultures, which make 'the Brazilian cultural identity' a complex topic. Interpretations range from the sociable and personable 'cordial person' (De Holanda, 2012), to the critical observation that the identity is built on cultural elements selectively appropriated from Black culture by the elites (Vianna, 1999).

However, Stuart Hall, in 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' (1990) argues that a cultural identity is not fixed, but a process of constant negotiation between different cultural influences that are encountered in the world, calling it "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'". In 'O Som ao Redor', we will see this fluidity manifest itself in the ambiguity of the characters, who move between complicity and resistance to the system of surveillance and oppression that surrounds them. Brazilian identity, as Hall suggests, is always off-center, marked by racial and class tensions that cannot be resolved in one singular, harmonious syntheses.

Homi Bhabha, in 'The Location of Culture' (1994), complements this vision with the concept of hybridity, by introducing the 'third space', an ambiguous space where cultures mix through tensions and the creation of new meanings, generating unexpected forms of subversion. In this space, the tropes of our times place the question of culture in the sphere of what is theoretically and politically essential. In our context is to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences and changes.

Néstor García Canclini, in 'Hybrid Cultures', looks at the idea of cultural hybridity in the context of Latin America and interactions in developing modernity, tradition and globalization. The coming together of cultures amidst unequal modernization processes, which would happen in the so-called 'third space' as described by Bhabha (1994), shows where and how established 'popular' and so-called 'high' cultures intertwine, depending on shared or different (colonial) histories, economic situations and media landscapes.

Canclini offers a more transdisciplinary perspective on the idea of hybrid culture to understand the borders between the classifications of cultural space that are placed side by side. In terms of overall modernization and the way this interacts with premodern social structures, popular mass culture, cultural consumption and the potential democratization of culture. Rather than being inside the culture or cultural change, the perspective is more on the externalization and expression of the hybridity-creating process. We will see this come to light in for example looking at Mendonça Filho's cinema, showing a hybridization in the mixture of genres with strong ties to the regional cinema, for example 'Bacurau' is at once western, set in the typical Brazilian backlands in the country's Northeast, but has elements of science fiction and guerrilla

cinema, creating a mix of traditional regional cinema with more global references based in modernity.

3. Brazilian Cultural History and Cinema

Kleber Mendonça Filho was born in Recife, a city in the state of Pernambuco, located in the North-east of Brasil. After graduating in journalism from the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), Mendonça Filho began his career as a programmer for the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation film club in the 1990s, serving as a laboratory for his education in cinema.

Before releasing his first feature film, he was a respected film critic, collaborating with magazines such as *Continente Multicultural* and *Jornal do Commercio*, where he developed a sharp style of writing, foreshadowing his cinema, attentive to the fine details and the micro-violences of everyday life. His first short film *Eletrodoméstica* (2005), a disturbing study of urban solitude, showed him being an artist obsessed with cinema's ability to capture "the extraordinary in the ordinary," as he himself defined it in interviews. His filmography, as analyzed in this thesis, operates at the intersection between colonial violence, cultural hybridity and cinematic resistance. His films do not necessarily represent Brasil, but question it, exposing contradictions and injustice in society.

This chapter will first explore the important cultural and historical elements that have influenced Brazilian cinema and how those influences, over time, have also found their way into Mendonça Filho's work as he builds on the foundations of others before him.

While cultural history will always play an important role in any artist's expressions, the significance of the Northeast region of Brasil where his hometown is located also becomes recognizable. This will enable a well-informed investigation of the selected movies by identifying these influences in whatever way they will be presented. Revealing them allows them to be put into context of the concepts defined by Fanon, Hall, Bhabha and Latin American theorists such as García Canclini and, additionally, contemporary views on Brazilian culture and cinema presented by Jaguaribe and Nagib that will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Brasil's cultural history is built from erased violence, silenced resistance, and many cultural identities that are in constant negotiation. Since Portuguese colonization, the country has been shaped by processes of domination and economic exploitation, imposed racial hierarchies, cultural erasures and exclusionary modernization. However, this same history also contains revolution, insurgencies, from quilombos (autonomous communities formed by enslaved people that escaped) to popular revolts from black and indigenous cultures that resist assimilation.

Apart from colonisation forming a basis of what led to modern-day Brasil, another important chapter in the country's long history is that of a relatively short but highly impactful period of military dictatorship that caused a massive cultural shift in the country and the culture, in every sense of the word.

The Northeast of Brasil, in particular, is a region where these tensions clearly manifest themselves. A region marked by colonial times through slavery on large estates and economic cycles that left the region abandoned by the state, the Northeast is also a space of cultural reinvention. Here, African, indigenous, and European traditions merge into unique hybrid forms of culture. Recife, Kleber Mendonça Filho's hometown, is a microcosm of this dynamic, a metropolis that shows the marks of its colonial past in its architecture, social inequalities, and the persistence of marginalized cultures. This also makes it a dynamic region where cultural revolutions during and after the military dictatorship got the opportunity to flourish.

3.1 Colonial Legacy in the Brazilian Northeast

The colonization of Brasil by the Portuguese, from 1500 until about 1822, was a project based on radical exploitation; from the extermination of indigenous people to the enslavement of millions of Africans. As Frantz Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), colonial violence is not limited to territorial occupation, but is internalized in the social structure, creating an order in which certain bodies are disposable. In Brasil, this logic was perpetuated even after abolition (1888), through a structural racism that marginalized black and indigenous populations, relegating them to the physical and symbolic peripheries of society.

The Northeast was the site of the first sugar mills, where slavery shaped not only the economy, but also social relations. Gilberto Freyre, in his book *Casa-Grande & Senzala* (Freyre, 1933), romanticized this dynamic as a "racial democracy", but authors such as Abdias do Nascimento in *O Genocídio do Negro Brasileiro* (do Nascimento, 1978) and Lélia Gonzalez in *Racismo e Sexismo na Cultura Brasileira* (Gonzalez, 1984) showed how the myth of racial harmony served to cover up oppression.

While the South of the country industrialized in the 20th century, the Northeast remained a region largely abandoned by the State, treated as "backward" in relation to national progress. This marginalization was theorized by Josué de Castro (*Geografia da Fome*, 1946), who showed how hunger in the Northeast was not caused by a coincidental combination of factors, but the result of deliberate policies. Even so, the Northeast was never passive in facing adversity. It was there that movements such as the *cangaço* (social banditry, late 19th and early 20th century), which spawned a folk hero in *Lampião* (resembling a violent version of Robin Hood), the Peasant Leagues (social advocacy organizations, 1950s-60s) and Liberation Theology emerged here (Catholic based, focused on the poor's struggles), which all challenged the power of local oligarchies. These revolts echo Fanon's concept of "revolutionary violence" as a response to colonial oppression, both as it existed, as to what oppressive power structures were left behind afterwards.

Furthermore, the events of colonialism and slavery and subsequent course of history in the Northeast have left behind a situation where cultural hybridity came into effect, showing the results of the negotiation between cultures that leads to a non-fixed cultural identity, as argued by Hall (1990). Examples are *maracatu*, which mixes African and Iberian traditions in music and dance, *candomblé*, where both African orishas as well as Catholic saints are worshipped and

later in cordel literature, which unites European-style publications with Northeastern Brazilian literary style and topics. Homi Bhabha (*O Local da Cultura*, 1994) calls this “hybridism”; an ambiguous space where cultures mix, generating unexpected forms of subversion. In Recife, this mixture is visible in frevo (a dance that emerged as black resistance during Carnival) and, more recently, in the development of mangubeat, a music movement from the 1990s that mixed rock, hip-hop, and regional music.

3.2 Development of Cinema in Brasil

The origins of Brazilian film production history can be traced back to the early 1920s, coincidentally to Recife. The so-called Recife Cycle, spanning 1922-1931, was considered one of the first regionalist cinema movements in Brasil but had competition from faster developing areas in the South, drawing parallels to how the region was impacted by national policies at the time in general. Economic difficulties, distribution shortages and, above all, the emergence of sound films caused the productions in the state of Pernambuco to lose considerable market share in the early 1930s and started a period of scarcity (Machado, 2023). Some notable productions during the Recife Cycle were: “Aitaré da Praia” (1925), by Gentil Roiz and Ary Severo, “Herói do Século XX” (1926), by Ary Severo, and “A Filha do Advogado” (1926), by Jota Soares.

Following this short era, during the President Getúlio Vargas administration (1930-1945 and 1951-1954), national cinema received special attention through policies and financial incentives. However, Vargas' interest was directed towards its indoctrination potential, the possibility of reaching the greatest number of people with his vision of the country and government. This stance strengthened the production of documentaries and educational films in favor of fictional works, especially coming from independent productions, but brought technical progress to film production and greater protection and appreciation of national cinema.

Of course, there was still an independent movement that ultimately started the movements that are most fundamental to modern cinema as is investigated in this thesis. The following sections will describe the movements of Cinema Novo (late 1950s - early 1970s, peaking mid 1960s), based on Glauber Rocha's denunciation of the perspectives of the colonizer and colonized that were often portrayed in films up to that point, and that of the Retomada movement (1980s - 1990s), that further built on the successes of the Cinema Novo, bringing Brazilian cinema to the attention of world-wide audiences. These movements will also be put into a cultural and historical perspective where relevant for the aim of this thesis.

3.2.1 Cinema Novo: Glauber Rocha and Cinema Revolution of 1963

A central figure in the development of Brazilian cinema is Glauber Rocha (1939-1981). With elements of Brazilian cultural and class struggles always obvious in his works, he is considered not only a filmmaker, but also a fundamental figure in Brazilian culture. His most famous phrase “a camera in hand and an idea in mind” summarizes the project of Cinema Novo, a movement

that transformed movies into an instrument of denunciation and insurgency, focusing on themes such as class struggle, poverty and authoritarianism.

According to Rocha, cinema should not only entertain, but make people think and trigger their conscience. His films, such as *'Black God, White Devil'* (1964) and *'Entranced Earth'* (1967), are both works of art and political manifestos that continue to resonate in contemporary Brasil. In the former, the focus lies on the struggle to escape exploitation and poverty while the latter focuses more on an intellectual struggle within a complex political landscape. Both, however, stand out as conscious depiction and observation of the many struggles the Brazilian people face. These struggles are expressions of 'hunger', in terms of poverty, political deception and for identifiable Brazilian cultural expressions in cinema, as Glauber Rocha describes in his essay *'An Aesthetics of Hunger'* (1965), written for the Genoa Film Festival. He declares: "Cinema Novo cannot develop effectively unless it is based on a policy of hunger that overcomes not only chronic hunger but also superstructural hunger".

For him, hunger in Brasil was not accidental, but structural, the result of centuries of colonialism and exploitation. His films, therefore, should be as violent as the reality they portrayed. This violence was not gratuitous, but political. In *'Black God, White Devil'*, the backlands are the stage for a cosmic struggle between the sacred and the profane, the poor and the colonels. The character Manuel (played by Geraldo Del Rey) experiences an ecstasy of revolt, killing the landowner who exploited him. The scene is not about revenge, but about the historical necessity of revolutionary violence; an idea that echoes Frantz Fanon in *'The Wretched of the Earth'*. As Fanon put it; "[Colonialism] is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (Fanon, 1963, p. 61), and the act of killing in the movie portrays this as the physical act of violence in response to colonialism.

In 1967, at the height of the military dictatorship, Glauber released *'Entranced World'*, a film that anticipated the failure of the Brazilian left-wing. The character Paulo Martins (Jardel Filho) is a poet who oscillates between populism and revolution, ending up being murdered. The work is a fierce critique of political hypocrisy, but also a warning: without popular organization, change is impossible. The film was censored, and Glauber was persecuted. He went into exile in Cuba, Africa and Europe, where he continued to film (*'The Lion Has Seven Heads'*, 1971) and write politically inflammatory texts. His radical stance made him a character as great as his films; an artist who lived his art as a mission. In this film, and by extension in the Cinema Novo movement as a whole, there are strong elements of obvious representations of existing power structures and societal issues that are placed in a fictional and stylized context for cinematic effect. As the selected films are explored in chapter 4, clear parallels between this aspect of Cinema Novo and Kleber Mendonça Filho's work will be identified.

3.2.2 Cultural impact of Military Dictatorship

In the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s, Brasil was in the last throes of a military dictatorship that effectively lasted from 1964 until 1985. The dictatorial government was already

showing itself to be tired, while national cinema was going through a period full of contradictions and changes.

At the same time as light and popular films were providing guaranteed profits for movie companies and cinemas, a new movement of political productions emerged as a response to authoritarianism, as a continuation and evolution of the Cinema Novo movement.

Even under the military regime, there was an audience that was interested in works that subtly or directly exposed the problems and repressions of authoritarianism. This duality represents a period of transition, in which society sought both to escape difficult realities and to reflect on the country's current political situation. The paradox was evident: the public was consuming both lighter entertainment, but at the same time also engaged with more impactful stories about torture, censorship and resistance associated with the dictatorship. In this way, while simple films offering escapist entertainment dominated sales, political and social productions began to appear more and more as a relevant force in the cinematic universe. These productions, many of which criticized the military regime that was still in its final days, not only left a mark on the history of Brazilian cinema, but also attracted large audiences, reflecting the atmosphere of political openness and the desire for memory and justice.

The coexistence of these two opposites highlighted the period of change that Brasil was experiencing. On the one hand, there was a yearning for escape from the difficulties of the economy and society; on the other, there was a growing desire for stories that would help the country understand and deal with the traumas of the dictatorship. In this way, it created a cultural atmosphere that allowed for what the Cinema Novo strived for, but now with an increasingly receptive audience, allowing free exploration of difficult societal topics with a cinematic approach that was authentically Brazilian.

The final movement leading into modern Brazilian cinema was delayed by a deep economic crisis in the 1980s, big movie companies went under due to the lack of spending from both the government and the public. Some directors tried their hardest to persevere in these times, with their limited successes inspiring the movement of the return of Brazilian cinema, literally called the Retomada, meaning 'resurgence' or 'reclaiming' (Dennison & Shaw, 2004).

3.2.3 The Retomada Movement

After the crisis in the 1980s, the Retomada sought to revive film production at a national level and to bring it to the international market. The now democratically elected government started with the implementation of incentive laws which were essential for this revitalization of movie production and the political liberalization provided a favourable space for intellectual progress and innovation in cinema. In Brasil, the result was a growth from two feature films in 1992, to more than 200 between 1994 and 2000 (Nagib 2003), followed by an average of 100 feature films annually.

The interaction of Brazilian cinema in this period with the international market was fundamental to its choices, both in aesthetic and political terms. It was an interruption of old cycles, a break

with the image of 'underdeveloped cinema' and participation in an international environment through box office and awards. On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that, to a large extent, the Brazilian cinema produced from 1994/95 onwards was often not specifically tied to political projects anymore, as opposed to Cinema Novo. The new era was marked by a certain utopian enthusiasm (Nagib, 2011), reflected in pioneering works such as *Baile Perfumado* (Paulo Caldas, Lírío Ferreira, 1996) and *Central do Brasil* (Walter Salles, 1998).

The film that marked the beginning of the revival in the country was '*Carlota Joaquina: Princesa do Brasil*' (1995), by Carla Camurati (Dennison & Shaw, 2004). Set in the 18th century, this satirical historical comedy follows Spanish princess Carlota Joaquina living in Brasil, with her dialogue in Spanish, but the narration of the movie in English. This mix of languages can be extended to the mixing of cultures and nationalities, see for example in the 20th century Italian immigrants being portrayed in the '*O Quatrilho*' (1995), a US Ambassador's kidnapping by revolutionaries in the 60s in '*O Que é Isso, Companheiro?* (Four Days in September)' 1997 and an American family on holiday being held hostage by Brazilian street kids in '*Como Nascem os Anjos*' (1996). The eclectic mix of languages, nationalities and cultures could be (cynically) viewed as a way to capture wider international audiences and as a lack of identity, but also as an expression of how much of a cultural melting pot Brasil has become over its history and how that fact is being openly accepted and, in a way, celebrated. Also, the specific themes of national history, globalization (through immigration) and urban violence as result of poverty and associated (childhood) traumas are trademarks of the Retomada movement, anchoring it to the Brazilian foundations.

It is not irrelevant to recognize that the beginning of the Retomada in the mid- to late nineties was characterized by a wide variety of genres and the success of 'regional' films outside the prevalent Rio-São Paulo axis, with independent producers entering the national movie circuit, whose presence was fundamental in underlining the contributions from regions, such as the Northeastern states of Ceará and Pernambuco. From Recife (Pernambuco's capital), came for example the landmark movie '*Baile Perfumado*' (1997), by Lírío Ferreira and Paulo Caldas, based on the true story of a Lebanese photographer that in the 1930s befriended and filmed famous Northeastern bandit leader Lampião, a symbol of regional folklore. Partly due to the success of this movie, Pernambuco once again achieved a prominent place in Brazilian cinema, which created a favorable scenario for a dialogue between the field of independent and progressive cinematography and the government. This ultimately led to the development of funding initiatives and the creation of the Agency for National Cinema in Brasil (ANCINE) in 2002 (Marson, 2006). This happened to directly benefit Mendonça Filho's debut film '*O Som ao Redor*' (ANCINE Apoia "*O Palhaço*" E '*O Som ao Redor*' Em Festivais Internacionais, 2012)

3.3 Rocha's Legacy: The Northeast and Mendonça Filho's Cinema

Overall, it can be recognized that the Northeast has played an important role throughout the cycles of Brazilian cinema, in the movements of national introspection in Cinema Novo and in

the creative and cultural broadening of horizons during the Retomada. Within Brasil, the Northeast is often stereotypically viewed as an underdeveloped area mostly comprised of so-called 'sertão', agricultural backlands, which Dennison & Shaw state, is "one of the most significant of Brasil's regional identities to have impacted on its natural culture" (2004).

In times of poverty, part of the Northeast population have migrated to the South, where they again suffered injustice through prejudice based on their Northeastern culture. Persevering and building communities despite this dynamic, which, together with other cultural groups like for example freed slaves, came to form the 'favelas' we now see around the Southern big cities. In this way the favelas that are often linked to Brasil as a whole, can be partially seen as a result of the inequality and injustice as is portrayed in the movies set in the Northeast. As Lucia Nagib states; "The Brazilian north east is concentrated in the Rio hills" (Nagib et al., 2000). But while 'favelas' often illustrate contemporary problems in modern movies, they, in some ways, offer a less explicit and romantic setting to expose them than the Northeast and the Northeastern 'sertão' does.

The backlands were often the context in which many literature and films were set throughout the 20th century. Due to its perceived 'backward' character, it offers a background for stories to develop that encounter the widest variety of dimensions in society, in social, economical and racial inequalities. The region's history also contributes to this greatly. Brazilian cinema has always considered the Northeast as a symbol of national contradictions. Glauber Rocha, in 'Black God, White Devil' (1964), portrayed the 'sertão' as some mythical space of struggle between oppressors and oppressed, visualizing what he meant in his essay 'The Aesthetics of Hunger' (1965), advocating for cinema that reveals the structurally present violence, not as exoticism or for voyeurism, but as denunciation to the structures of inequality and injustice that cause it.

This tradition directly influenced Kleber Mendonça Filho, whose films revisit the Northeast as his canvas. Not as a folkloric landscape, but as a territory of contemporary conflicts. Kleber Mendonça Filho's cinema excavates the layers of Brazilian history, revealing a country still struggling to free itself from its colonial past. His films show that the hybrid culture of the Northeast is not just about survival, but about insurgency, a way of rewriting the future. In this sense, his work aligns with a larger tradition of Latin American thought that sees art as a political act. As Glauber Rocha put it, "A camera in the hand and an idea in the head" and in Mendonça Filho's case, that idea is that Brasil will only understand itself when it faces the shadows of its own past self.

Glauber Rocha died young (at 42), but his work remains urgent. In times of fake news and fascism, his cinema reminds us that filmmakers should strive for their "cinema [to] become an instrument of revolution that is as efficient as the political instrument of colonization which is the American cinema" (Rocha, 2017). Only a quick look is needed to recognize that 'Bacurau' (2019) is part of Rocha's legacy. The film shows a Northeastern village being slowly

exterminated by mercenaries; an explicit allegory of the black and indigenous colonial genocide, placed in contemporary Brasil to show its uncomfortable history. The final scene, in which the residents lynch the murderers, is a pure reflection of Cinema Novo: revolutionary violence as a response to colonial violence.

Mendonça Filho does not copy Rocha, but updates this revolt. If Rocha filmed the backlands of the 1960s, Mendonça Filho shows the high-tech Northeast, where drones and cell phones coexist with hunger and poverty. Rocha stated that Brazilian cinema should be a "camera in the hand and an idea in the head", an instrument of denunciation and a weapon for insurgency. Bacurau engages directly with this tradition by transforming the film into a political act, where the cinematographic image becomes a weapon. This will be shown in the following chapters, where Mendonça Filho's three films will be thoroughly described and interpreted, forming the basis for this thesis' conclusion in the final chapter.

3.4 Contemporary views on Brazilian culture and cinema

While having knowledge of Brazilian cultural and cinematic history, as described in the previous sections, by itself partly already shows the relevance of the theoretical concepts presented in chapter 2, the concepts related to postcolonial society and cultural hybridity are also valid outside of the Brazilian context. In contrast, this section will highlight the views of two specific scholars that are specifically developed from that Brazilian context.

Firstly, it is interesting to consider how cinema attempts to bring across a message. One method could be that of 'shock', drawing attention to a topic by emphasizing or even overstating it in a surprising or even horrifying way. Another way to look at it is that some realities might actually be shocking enough by themselves, and showing this to an unknowing audience in a focused way can already get a point across. Beatriz Jaguaribe, a professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, wrote essays on this, collected in 'The Shock of the Real: Aesthetics, Media and Culture' (2007). According to Jaguaribe, the 'shock of reality' can be used as an attempt to provoke a cathartic effect in the viewer by creating discomfort, provoking astonishment and, from that, inciting social denunciation towards aspects of (social) reality that are real but perhaps should not be. An important aspect in the understanding of this concept is that while the topic is not necessarily extraordinary, it is exacerbated and intensified in the medium where it is displayed. This contributes to what Jaguaribe defines as 'social reality', which is, in contrast to actual reality, culturally processed and manufactured by a variety of discourses, interacting cultures that offer different perspectives and contradictory points of view.

Expanding beyond cinema, Jaguaribe's book 'Rio de Janeiro: Urban Life through the Eyes of the City' (Jaguaribe, 2014), explores the city as a total expression of cultural memory and the legacy of political progress, connecting colonial heritage to evolving national narratives. She explains the contradictions of postcolonial Brasil through an interdisciplinary approach that combines cultural theory, urban studies and visual analysis. Jaguaribe sketches Rio as a synthesis of the Brazilian modernizing project, offering cinematic beauty of favelas that hides its tragic histories and genocides, echoing Fanon's views (1961) where spatial violence reoccurs

as a colonial legacy. This concept will be applicable to understanding 'Aquarius', where Clara's apartment is a "remnant" of a disappearing Recife under capitalist progress, forming a symbolic violence in Brazilian cities.

The work of Lúcia Nagib, professor at the University of Reading, particularly her seminal book 'Brasil on Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia' (2007), offers an understanding not only of the history of Brazilian cinema, but also its role in the construction and deconstruction of national narratives. Nagib proposes a vision of cinema that goes beyond entertainment or art for art's sake. For her, film is a political act, a "counter-archive" that can preserve what official history insists on erasing. This perspective expands on Cinema Novo's insurgent and revolutionary cinema, creating a cinematic theory that makes a point of highlighting the effects of violences in postcolonial Brasil in current context, defiantly stating that these should not be forgotten.

4. Film Analysis

In this chapter, the main set of data is presented. As mentioned, the films will first be described based on what the films present to the viewer and aims to give an overall image of the film and its narrative. After this, a section will be dedicated to the immediate interpretations that present themselves when having the theoretical framework and the context of Brazilian cinema in mind, described in chapters 2 and 3.

4.1. Description of the film 'O Som ao Redor'

'O Som ao Redor', or 'Neighboring Sounds', is the first feature-length fiction film by screenwriter, director and critic Kleber Mendonça Filho. The film premiered on February 1, 2012, at the Rotterdam festival, Netherlands, where he won an award from the critics. It was released in national cinemas in January 2013, distributed by Vitrine Filmes. Kleber wrote the script in 2008 and filming took place between July and August 2010. Most of the cast is from Pernambuco and, in addition to the professional actors, some well-known names and 12 non-actors also worked on the production. The film was made with a relatively low budget, R\$1.8 million (*Neighboring Sounds*, 2012). A considerable part of the budget came from the audiovisual fund of the Pernambuco state government. In addition, the film also received support from the National Cinema Agency (Ancine) and the Petrobras Cultural program (Robbins, 2015).

'O Som ao Redor' received positive feedback at the festivals in which it participated, receiving a total of around thirty awards and seventeen nominations (*Neighboring Sounds*, 2012). In addition, it was praised by most national and international critics. The American newspaper, The New York Times, considered it one of the ten best films in the world released in 2012 (25 *Favorites From a Year When 10 Aren't Enough*, 2012).

The film's credits begin with the sound of birds, leaves and an engine. When the title of the film appears on the screen, a song by DJ Dolores¹³ begins, followed by a sequence of eleven black

and white photographs. The photos show a rural and past setting, humble people, rural workers, fields, poor houses and, in contrast, there are two images of the “big house”, the rich house of the bosses. At the end of the film, after a surprising revelation by two security guards, these photographs gain a new narrative potential. After the photos, there is a cut that takes you to the color, to the present time of the film. Although this beginning is the only moment in which another time appears explicitly, the entire film operates in a mix between past and present. The film is divided into three parts: The Guard Dog; The Night Guard and The Bodyguard. The film is set on a middle-class street in Recife, the capital of the state of Pernambuco. Right at the beginning, there is a destabilization of the place due to the theft of the radio from a car that spent the night parked on the street. The arrival of private security guards reveals racial and class tensions. The ambiguous sounds; footsteps, barking, whispers, are metaphors for the structural violence that persists, even when invisible.

Little by little, the characters are introduced, residents and/or workers of the place, who will share their experiences with the viewer throughout the narrative.

Bia (Maeve Jinkings) is a mother of two children, a housewife who follows all the children's activities full-time, without much help from her husband. Throughout the film, Bia tries in various ways to get rid of the insistent barking of the neighbor's dog.

João (Gustavo Jahn) is a young, wealthy real estate agent and the grandson of the most powerful man on the street. In the film, he begins a romance with Sophia (Irma Brown), a girl he has just met and who lived on the same street when she was a child.

Francisco (W.J. Solha), João's grandfather, owns a sugar mill and divides his time between his rural property and life in the city. In both experiences, he enjoys power and prestige.

Mariá (Mauricéia Conceição), a maid in João's house, who is about to retire, is treated as if she were part of the family, but the boss-employee relationship is evident. Luciene (Clébia Souza), a maid in Francisco's house, does not enjoy the same freedoms as Mariá, and has a more rigid and hierarchical work environment.

Dinho (Yuri Holanda) is João's cousin and Francisco's grandson. The young man takes advantage of his family's power in the area, does what he wants and treats everyone with an arrogant attitude. During the story, he is responsible for the theft of some car stereos parked on the street, including that of Sophia, the girlfriend of his cousin João.

While these stories develop in parallel, new characters appear. A citizen's militia, led by Clodoaldo (Irandhir Santos), arrives on the street to offer "security and tranquility" to the frightened residents. Without much resistance, with the permission of the "powerful" Francisco and most of the residents, the group soon begins to work. Equipped with tents, cell phones, uniforms and bicycles, they start their guard activities.

As the film unfolds, it shows a middle class surrounded by undervalued employees, seeking shelter behind walls, fences, cameras, finding comfort in appliances and real estate speculation, and seeking little bits of imagined power through condominium meetings where they decide on the fate of condominium employees. However, even with the presence of the militia and the diversity of security equipment, the fear does not disappear. This is experienced for a large part in the soundscape, which lives up to the name of the film. The surrounding sounds generate a feeling of constant apprehension. As time goes by, Clodoaldo and his guard companions become familiar with the routine of the residents and easily notice the presence of strange individuals.

Near the end of the film, Clodoaldo's brother, Cláudio, arrives to join the security group. That same day, the two brothers have a meeting with Francisco, late at night, while most of the neighborhood is attending a birthday party. In an unexpected outcome, Clodoaldo and Cláudio reveal the real reason they are here. It is revealed that when they were children, their father was murdered on the orders of Francisco, due to disputes related to the boundaries and fences of rural properties surrounding Francisco sugar mill. As the three men slowly come to their feet, the film ends.

4.2. Interpretation of 'O Som ao Redor' - Subtle Violence of Postcolonialism

The director constructs a narrative that operates on three simultaneous layers: as a psychological thriller, as a sociological study of structural violence, and as a manifesto on the limits of social audibility. To decipher this multifaceted work, I propose an interpretation that dialogues with the ideas of Bhabha on hybrid cultures, Beatriz Jaguaribe on the "shock of the real", and Lúcia Nagib on cinema as a counter-archive; in addition to contextualizing it within the tradition of Cinema Novo and the recent history of Recife.

The film is born from Recife as it was in the early 2000s, when the city was witnessing an explosion of gated communities and the resurgence of the private security industry, driven by increased crime rates and a desire for the richer middle class to be separated from the 'normal public' (Coy & Pöhler, 2002). Mendonça Filho captures this development, where the colonial legacy of the mansion and slave quarters is reinvented under neoliberalism in the form of luxury apartments and favelas. As Jaguaribe (2007) observes, Brazilian urban space displays a "traumatic staging" of inequalities, and it is precisely this staging that the director puts forward, using the Boa Viagem neighborhood as a microcosm for representation.

The sounds that give the film its title, like the nightly barking, fragmented conversations, the constant buzz of activity in the background, are not mere atmospheric resources, but active characters that give valuable context to the characters and events. The word 'redor' is translated to 'neighboring' in the English title, capturing the scenario of neighbors living together and their existences overlapping through the sounds. However, the more literal meaning would be 'around' or 'surrounding', giving another dimension to the buzzing activity around the citizens, communicating an ever existing threat in the light of rising crime numbers.

This aesthetic choice can be viewed as echoes from the Cinema Novo, where, according to Glauber Rocha, “demand a precise identification of what is useful to political activism in revolutionary art”. While this might refer to a broader spectrum of what goes into the making of meaning in film, it also relates to the technical state of movie production in that era, where the soundscapes were crafted with emphasis on the mundane to bring the images closer to reality. Also the limited amount of music reflects this, as ‘O Som ao Redor’ only contains one example of non-diegetic (exists only for the audience) music (Porto & De Souza Rossini, 2021). Also the choice of what sounds are mixed into the foreground becomes a political power, emphasizing what one normally would ignore. The camera observes with documentary coldness the actions and rituals of a middle class that, as Frantz Fanon (1961) pointed out, reproduces colonial violence even when it imagines itself to be a victim in their current circumstances.

Sound, the central element, operates in a Bhabhiesque register of “hybridization” and globalization: urban noises (distant funk, the English of tourists, the slurred Portuguese of residents) create a sound collage that is postcolonial in essence, multiple cultural temporalities coexisting in tension. The sequence of the sound truck that invades the neighborhood announcing a political candidate is not a mere realistic detail, but a perfect metaphor for Brasil: democracy as a spectacle that hides archaic structures that uphold the structural societal tensions that this thesis is centered around..

The strength of the film lies in how it constructs its critiques on classism and racism. The scene in which the residents discuss whether or not to fire the longstanding doorman, without ever concluding, sums up classism in Brasil. The scene highlights the disdain from one woman, representing the looking down on certain jobs, while another brings up the point of fair compensation but then abruptly leaves the discussion, effectively ending it before a conclusion, leaving the problem up in the air. It’s stating that apparently society is fine with letting economical inequality exist as long as the rich stay rich and don’t have to do too much to help those in need. A more symbolic example is seen in the dream of one of Bia’s daughters, who dreams about a large group of shadowy figures climbing the walls and coming through the inner yard, forming a crowd of burglars. The silence in the scene gets broken by a growing volume of the rustling shuffled footsteps that grows to deafening levels, emulating the uneasy feeling of the rich being surrounded and slowly suffocated by the poor around them. Racism, or at least racial inequality, shows up explicitly by showing black or non-white people serving white families, there are also more subtle elements. For example, Francisco’s wealth and power are inherited from the historical legacy of slavery in the sugar mills of the colonial times. As Nagib (2007) observes, Brazilian cinema at its best functions as an “archive of the silenced”, and *O Som ao Redor* documents precisely these eloquent silences such of the maid who observes everything silently, and of the patriarch who dictates rules without raising his voice.

The seemingly simple plot; an already walled-in neighborhood community that hires private security guards, committing a series of small violences in the context of inequality, hides an x-ray of Brazilian racial and economic hierarchies. In this x-ray, the character of Clodoaldo embodies what Homi Bhabha (1994) would call a “cultural hybrid”, being an intruder and a

protector at the same time, a representative of order and a threatening body, positioning himself on the edge of the rich and the poor. His presence destabilizes the fragile peace of the neighborhood, revealing the unspoken pact that sustains Brazilian “racial democracy”, where black people can circulate, as long as they keep their place.

In a technical sense, the film innovates by treating the camera as an instrument of surveillance. The long sequence shots, inherited from Cinema Novo but updated with a modern sensibility in terms of framing and lighting, create the sensation that we are watching security footage, as if the architecture of the building itself were both complicit in the violence and at the same time, judging it. This approach parallels Jaguaribe's thesis on the “aestheticization of fear” in Brazilian cities, where the search for security generates new forms of segregation. If Glauber Rocha filmed hunger in the backlands, Mendonça Filho films paranoia in the city. Both share the notion that cinema should be uncomfortable, but while the first opted for the revolutionary epic, the second chose the domestic thriller, a genre that subverts by emptying catharsis. The ambiguous ending, with the disappearance of the security guards and life just continuing, denies any easy resolution, insisting that violence is not an event, but continuously present in the country's system.

As Nagib teaches, Brazilian cinema is that which transforms the camera into an instrument of archaeological excavation. In this sense, *O Som ao Redor* is not just a film about Recife, it is an essential piece to understand how the colonial project survives, adapts and echoes, literally, in the corridors of our apparently modern buildings. Its legacy is to make us realize that, in Brasil, even silence is political. ‘*O Som ao Redor*’ remains one of the most accurate diagnoses of contemporary Brasil because it understands that post-colonial violence is not only found in brutal events, but also in the subtext of everyday life; in the way an elderly woman treats her maid, in the selection of who deserves to enter the social elevator or who from the people down below get a fair treatment. By amplifying these ordinary murmurs, Mendonça Filho finally makes us hear the dissonant symphony of a country that has not yet settled its accounts with history.

As an archive of an era, the film captures Brasil before the 2013 protests, a time when the middle class was beginning to feel the collapse of the neoliberal pact, but still did not know how to name it. Seen today, the work seems prescient: the fear it captures would explode in the streets shortly after, and later at the polls, with the rise of Bolsonaro in the 2018 Presidential Campaign.

4.3. Description of the film 'Aquarius'

The film 'Aquarius' builds its narrative as a mosaic of memories, resistance and confrontation with time, following Clara (Sônia Braga), a 65-year-old retired music critic who becomes the last resident of the 'Aquarius' building, an art deco building in the Boa Viagem neighborhood in Recife, the same area as where ‘*O Som ao Redor*’ is set. The story unfolds in three interconnected movements: past, present and the real estate conflict, telling the story of Clara's biography and functioning as an allegory of contemporary Brasil.

The film starts in 1980, with a sequence that establishes the bond between Clara and the apartment. We see a family celebration: young Clara (Bárbara Colen) celebrates her birthday surrounded by her husband, children and siblings, to the sound of Iggy Pop's "Nightclubbing". Mendonça Filho captures sensory details; the swinging of Clara's dress, the children's laughter, the vinyl record spinning, creating emotional memories that justify her future resistance. The sequence ends with Clara discovering a lump in her breast, starting her battle with cancer, the first of many confrontations that will shape her indomitable personality.

Three decades later, Clara is now the only resident left in the titular apartment building 'Aquarius', which is now surrounded by modern luxury towers that symbolize the new Recife. Her routine is portrayed with a contemplative rhythm: dives in the sea, meetings with friends and nights listening to music. Her apartment has become a personal museum with books, records, photographs and old furniture that tell the story of her life.

The plot intensifies with the arrival of Diego (Humberto Carrão), a young executive from the construction company that wants to demolish 'Aquarius'. He offers generous compensation, but Clara refuses with cutting elegance: "My apartment is not for sale." The following 'negotiation' reveals the gears of power: Diego uses tactics ranging from seduction to intimidation as he hires neighbors to harass her with loud noises.

Alongside the real estate conflict, the film weaves in subplots that give Clara's character more depth and highlight some important societal themes. Flashbacks show her career as a critic in the 1970s, when she challenged machismo in the cultural scene. Interactions with her adult children (Julia Bernat and Zoraide Coletto) represent different generations and ideas on the direction of society, one of them supports her fight, the other thinks she is being stubborn. The subject of mature sexuality is displayed in daring scenes, when Clara hires a male escort (Irandhir Santos), demanding pleasure and autonomy over her body marked by a mastectomy.

The pressure from the construction company escalates into vandalism (homophobic graffiti), psychological violence by orchestrating loud parties in the abandoned apartments upstairs, leaving behind feces and even going as far as planting termite colonies in the building. It is clear that the building will not survive the impact of the termites, so the movie does not offer a happy ending. It merely shows Clara swimming in the sea, as she normally does, and then heads out to confront the perpetrators directly in their own office, ending the movie with dumping the termite nests on a desk at the real estate firm where Diego works, forcing them to take accountability for their practices or at least acknowledge them. Clara's resistance and defiant responses show her endurance over adversity, as she has already known through her earlier life, and shows strength as she kept living life on her own terms throughout all the forms of intimidation that Diego and his firm used.

4.4 Interpretation of 'Aquarius' - Memory and Gentrification

From a postcolonial perspective, Clara's struggle represents the fight against "progress," which frequently replicates the colonial logic of obliterating and destroying local identities, physical and

cultural. As Frantz Fanon (1963) reminds us, colonialism is more than simply political control; it also imposes a power structure on the colonized society that devalues and silences its histories and subjectivities. The gentrification process in 'Aquarius' is an update to this symbolic violence, in which real estate speculation serves as a kind of domestic colonization; a new form of colonialism that drives out bodies and memories in order to make way for capitalism. It highlights a structural problem that has continued from the colonial days until present day Brasil. There is a structural lack of respect for history and society gives little to no effort to stand in the way of so-called progress. An example of this was the Palácio Monroe in Rio de Janeiro, an American structure imported in 1906 and housed the Brazilian Congress from 1914 until 1960, which was demolished in 1976 for the construction of a subway system, by order of President Geisel.

According to Néstor García Canclini (1995), Latin American modernity is constantly experienced as an uneven negotiation between the global and the local. The contrast between Clara's old home and the surrounding luxury buildings, as well as the conflict of values, affection versus money, are both seen in this transaction in the movie. Clara epitomizes a hybrid modernity that values memory and sensory experience, while the real estate business symbolizes ruthless "progress". The transaction is also aesthetically driven: Mendonça Filho employs the soundtrack (from Queen to Gilberto Gil) as a means of linking the global to the local, demonstrating how popular Brazilian culture is itself a result of hybridization.

Clara's apartment is more than just a physical place; it's a symbolic temple where photographs of her family, vinyl records, personal belongings, and affective memories serve as an archive of resistance against the homogenization of neoliberalism. In 'Aquarius', we see Clara (Sônia Braga) occupy and defend a space, that holds the affective memory of her apartment and her life in it, from the modernizing pressure of real estate capital, where historical and emotional erasure meet head on with individual resistance born from a cultural awareness. Her resistance is not just physical, but symbolic: she refuses to be assimilated by the logic of progress that erases marginalized histories. In a way, this could be seen as a contemporary equivalent of colonialism, forcing original inhabitants out of their own space or into a new state of being. When putting this in context of Jaguaribe's 'Shock of the Real' (2007), the movie offers a recognizable, potentially real-life, scenario that would make one think about how it would be to be evicted from your cultural and historical place of origin by violent means.

In her discussion of urban aesthetics, Jaguaribe (2007) argues that Brasil's urban environment is the scene of symbolic conflicts. The structure in 'Aquarius' becomes a metaphor for the city of Recife itself, a place where real estate capital continually threatens to wipe out the past. According to Jaguaribe, urban memory can become a tool for rebellion rather than merely nostalgia. By having turned her apartment into an "affective archive"; a museum of her memories and affections, Clara acts as the curator of a history that modernization is attempting to eradicate. In addition to her overt refusals, her rebellion is evident in their daily actions, such as dancing alone to Queen, going to the beach she has been going to since she was young and had just started her life there, and keeping her old furniture.

According to Nagib (2007), Brazilian film serves as a “counter-archive,” protecting stories that have been suppressed by the official history. In a nation distinguished by patriarchy, Mendonça Filho revives this tradition in 'Aquarius' by bringing attention to a woman who maintains, through action, that she should be the protagonist of her own narrative. The persistence of Clara and her connection to her environment are highlighted by Mendonça Filho's camera, which captures long shots with a thoughtful cadence, allowing space for the viewer to reflect. The director turns the cityscape into a character and exposes the erasure process caused by gentrification by carefully capturing the contrast between the sea and the beach as pure, and the high-rise buildings, city noises, and all associated urban elements as a colonizing threat. To put colonialism in contemporary context, it implicitly also refers back to the colonialism from the past and how influences of it persist, whether society wants to admit it or not.

Historically, 'Aquarius' belongs to the Retomada movement of Brazilian cinema, which began in the 1990s and fostered an aesthetic and political revolution in the nation's film industry. During this time, regional productions like those in Pernambuco, which attempted to depict local realities with critical depth and creative aesthetics, grew stronger, but partly as a conscious decision to differentiate from Hollywood-style productions. As part of this effort, the tradition of Cinema Novo, especially the view of Glauber Rocha (1965), who argued that cinema should be a tool for protest and resistance, is being modernized by Mendonça Filho, who is a descendant of that tradition. Similar to the character Manuel in Rocha's 'Black God, White Devil' (1964), Clara rejects submission; her body and her space serve as battle grounds and weapon in the fight to retain your rightful place, against the “progress” that Brasil often pushes for at the expense of erasure.

'Aquarius' is a film that uses the tradition of protest cinema, critical postcolonial sentiments that are set in relatable scenarios, telling a story about belonging, memory, and resistance. Clara is a woman who fights against the destruction of her house, embodying the tenacity of a cultural identity that refuses to be consumed by neocolonial capitalism, setting up the apartment as a symbolic place of resistance.

4.5 Description of the film 'Bacurau'

'Bacurau', produced under the direction of Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, is set in the fictional town with the same name, in western Pernambuco. The film, combining elements of Western, light science fiction, thriller and dystopian horror, was filmed in the village of Barra, in the Sertão do Seridó region of Rio Grande do Norte. The main plot starts with a series of horrific and inexplicable murders of the inhabitants of the small Northeastern village, which started occurring after Bacurau inexplicably disappeared from online maps and geographic location systems, got cut off from electricity and the internet, and lost cell phone service.

The culture of Bacurau portrayed in the film is defined by combining tradition, progressive norms and modernity in their lives, countering the stereotypical image of Northeastern people living in the sertão as old-fashioned farmers who didn't keep up with society. The village, like the film's narrative, is largely run by women, who are very much in charge of their own lives in all aspects,

from positions of power to control over their own bodies and sexualities. Among them are Carmelita, the village matriarch, whose funeral is the opening scene, Teresa, Carmelita's granddaughter that returned to town from her studies abroad at the start of the movie, Domingas (Sônia Braga), a well-known local doctor who lives with her partner Isa (Luciana Souza) and Darlene (Danny Barbosa), a trans woman who lives at the entrance to Bacurau. Other characteristics reinforce the progressive image; psychotropic drugs are tolerated and used freely, there is some extra focus on the residents' use of cell phones and tablets, accessing the internet and a man and two women set up a brothel in the community.

It is Darlene that informs the town about the arrival of some American tourists. With their arrival, the strange occurrences around the town begin, with sightings of UFOs, water trucks arriving leaking from bullet holes through the tank, and finally the murders start. The tourists committing the murders turn out to be part of a hunting party that are hunting the people in the town for sport, a macabre game where they earn points for each kill they make. If the initial occurrences of forceful isolation and essentially displacement from the known world were not enough, it is hard to miss the colonial undertones in the physical violence that is shown, with the hunting party participants considering the locals as subhuman and having no moral questions at all about their desire and right to kill, even arguing over who should get a kill.

After finding the owners of a horse farm and two other residents of Bacurau, killed by two Brazilian outsiders acting as protection for the tourists, the townspeople realize it's time to take action. As the town has had a peaceful existence, they have no means to defend themselves or fight back to counter the violence that is committed to the community. For this reason, they seek the help of a former gang member, Lunga, who lives just outside of town, protecting and being protected by the town.

The first scene featuring the character Lunga is a narrative full of signs and meanings. After deciding to leave the village of Bacurau for reasons not revealed in the plot, Lunga lives as a fugitive, isolated with two companions in a decommissioned dam that has only a dried out lake behind. While being criminals and overall not entirely aligned with the town and its ways, they decide to help fight back against the tourists. Here it is hard to miss that the setting is directly portraying the classic location of a Northeastern sertão region, suffering a drought, poverty, forced displacement, exploitation and colonial violence, seeking help from types that fit the role of cangaçeiros as revolutionary anti-heros.

In the conclusion of the film, the tourists are all defeated and it is revealed that the wealthy mayor of the region, Tony Junior, sold the autonomy of the town because the townspeople were unwilling to vote for him in the upcoming elections. This adds another dimension to colonialism, the intention and the forceful nature of it illustrates how colonial power structures are almost intentionally perpetuated in Brazilian society, while at the same time, there exists a moral awareness of it. The film 'Bacurau' teaches us to question issues, identities, and what we perceive as life; a cinematic narrative that allows for "reflection and problematization of what we experience today as something uncertain, unstable, and contradictory" (Ferrari, 2013, p. 17).

The film premiered at a time when Brasil's audiovisual promotion policies were subject to interference and vetoes by President Jair Bolsonaro, who took office on January 1, 2019, during a period of extreme political polarization. The film sparked many discussions and debates on the interpretation of the story; some focused on it of being a metaphor for “political propaganda” (Magnoli, 2019), referring to the angle of the campaigning mayor that sold out the town, while others claimed that it portrayed “our barbarism” (Haddad, 2019).

4.6 Interpretation of ‘Bacurau’ - Necropolitics and Revolt

The resistance portrayed in ‘Bacurau’ is framed in a juxtaposition of genres. The setting and story elements echo of Western movies, with horses, secluded farms, a town under siege by the antagonists and a sort of rough anti-hero that helps out in the end. This makes the technology used by the invaders, especially with the UFO-like drones, almost look like science fiction by contrast, but in the whole of the story, it all makes sense.

The presence of contemporary technology in the village, which is seemingly brought to the foreground with some extra emphasis, mixes together with the traditional village structure as left behind by the matriarch that passed away at the start of the movie, showing a mix of a globalized world where local tradition still endures. The globalization is further referenced by the act of surveillance by drones and the erasure of the village from online maps. This mixture of elements reveals how the sertão is not an isolated space, but a place of encounter and negotiation between cultures, where the colonial past is reconfigured in contemporary disputes over identity under the pressures of globalization.

Furthermore, we see that local culture dialogues with global culture in a performative way. There are powerful expressions of community, seeing how Teresa receives help with her luggage, her suitcase being gently passed from person to person, and it is revealed that it contained modern medicine for use in the village, which Teresa has access to due to her having left the village to go live in the ‘modern’ world. The warm welcome she gets shows how traditional communal structures can endure even in modern times, further shown as we see communal expressions of grief and burial rituals. Even elements of folk medicine endure next to modern medicine, as we see the villagers take a mysterious psychotropic drug before the initial funeral and before the final fight, which seem to have some hallucinatory effects, but more so seems to enhance the strength of the community as they act as one, which is definitely a juxtaposition to the individualistic lifestyle in what is considered the modern society.

From this description of the film, elements of cultural hybridity on multiple levels can be recognized. It shows social culture being in the ‘third space’ as described by Bhabha (1994), inhabited by a mix of modern/colonizer culture and traditional/colonized culture, expressed in the villagers’ daily life and their navigation of the world in which they live.

At the same time, modern medicine contrasts with folk medicine, modern pop music contrasts with regional music, new technologies contrast with the simple means of the village, all showing a physical fabric of a hybrid cultural fabric. This is reminiscent of Canclini's (1989) discussion of

hybrid cultures in Latin America where cultural contradictions do not exist in simplistic dichotomies between the popular and the high culture, or the traditional and the modern, but can be mixed.

Zooming out and considering the film as a cultural product, the earlier mentioned mixture of genres is also an expression of cultural hybridization that fits Canclini's (1989) views. The invaders being 'new' colonizers (not the Portuguese from history anymore), violently colonizing the village with the villagers fighting back is a modern depiction of the early Cinema Novo films. The character of Lunga referencing a revolutionary cangaçeiro, reminds of 'Baile Perfumado' (1997) in the starting moments of the Retomada movement, which introduced more conversations between Hollywood-style and Brazilian-style cinema, further illustrated by the science-fiction elements in 'Bacurau'.

From a theoretical point of view, it is essential to observe how the film stages necropolitics, a concept that Mbembe (2003) describes as the sovereign power that defines who should live and who should die. The foreigners who hunt the residents of Bacurau for sport embody this necropolitical logic, repeating the colonial project that transformed racialized bodies into disposable targets. The commodification of violence, turning murders into a "game" for foreign tourists, also directly links to Fanon's critique of the dehumanization of the colonized (1963), highlighting how colonialism can reinvent itself in contemporary capitalism.

However, unlike a narrative of victimization, 'Bacurau' reverses colonial logic as the hunters become the hunted. Here, the sertão becomes a territory of revenge, evoking the aesthetics of 'hunger' of Rocha (1965), who defended violent cinema as a necessary response to historical violence. The Bacurau rebellion, therefore, is also a cinematic performance that rejects passivity; offering a counter-archive (Nagib 2007) that preserves and reinvents silenced memories, making sure that uncomfortable parts of history are not pushed away but remembered and learned from.

Historically, the northeastern hinterland bears deep marks of colonial violence, from slavery in sugar mills and large estates, through cangaço as revolutionary forces against oppression and peasant leagues campaigning for basic survival. As the fact stands that the Northeast is often portrayed as "backward" by hegemonic discourse, it is in fact a space for cultural reinvention. By representing Bacurau as a village where different expressions of modernity, tradition, gender and sexuality coexist, the film subverts stereotypes and presents the idea of hybrid culture as resistance against oppression and erasure.

Thus, Bacurau is not just a dystopian fiction, it is a manifesto about the survival and insurgency of popular and regional culture in the face of persistent coloniality by force or by overbearing cultural influences. It becomes clear how the cultural and colonial concepts of Bhabha and Canclini, Mbembe and Fanon are represented when combining all physical, narrative and symbolic content of the film. With this, Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles offer a film that goes beyond denunciation, constructing poetics of revenge and identity reinvention in the overthrow of colonialism. The sertão becomes a space of symbolic and political dispute, where

the colonial past is confronted with active resistance. Ultimately, *Bacurau* reminds us that Brasil's history is told by erasures and insurgencies. The hybrid culture celebrated in the film is an antidote to erasure and a weapon of survival in the face of contemporary neocolonialism.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

Covering Brazilian cinematic development and putting it into context of the country's history gives context to identify how Kleber Mendonça Filho's cinema builds upon the existing traditions with awareness of what needs to be told to not just let the films be simple entertainment.

His filmography is not just an artistic expression, but a portrait of symbolic disputes where the fissures of post-colonial Brazil society are revealed and where old colonial power structures still bleed through, even after the country's formal independence. The subjects that are brought forward all play a role in narratives that dismantle the idea of a homogeneous national identity, exposing instead the tensions between tradition and modernity, center and periphery, oppression and resistance, illuminating the fluidity of cultural identity and cinema's role as counter-narrative and even revolutionary force.

5.1 Synthesis of Postcolonial Brasil

Although formally independent since 1822, Brazilian postcolonialism is not a historical period with an end date, but an ongoing process of confronting the ghosts of slavery, structural racism and inequality that shaped the country. Political events in this year do not represent a real break with the system that colonization put in place. As Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro points out in *'O Povo Brasileiro'* (1995), Brazil was born as a "colonial entity" and its elite has always maintained a relationship of subservience to the centers of global power while maintaining their own position of power in the country. The abolition of slavery (1888), which was delayed and unremedied, created a mass of freed slaves that were abandoned to their own fate, while the (local) power structures of the large estates and sugar mills that used to profit from slavery remained untouched. As Fanon warns in *'The Wretched of the Earth'* (1961), formal liberation does not mean the end of domination. In Brasil, this reflected in a State that, even after abolition and formation of the Republic, treated the black and indigenous population as second-class citizens. Poverty, like in the favelas and in the sertão, police violence, mass incarceration and the genocide of black youth are direct legacies of this unresolved past. The idea of a mixed-race and harmonious Brasil, propagated as 'racial democracy' by sociologist Gilberto Freyre, served for decades to cover up structural racism. However, it is easy to look past this myth by looking at the societal tensions that exist today, frequently highlighted in the cinema that is mentioned and analyzed in this thesis.

If there is one place where Brazilian postcolonialism reveals itself in all its rawness, it is the Northeast. A region that knew a high concentration of the colonial power structures mentioned above, the region was later abandoned by national progress, treated as a backward and folkloric place. But, the Northeast also proved to be a territory of reinvention and revolt through

culture. Culture in the context of this thesis has never been just entertainment, but a space of dispute. Following the rich cinematic history of Brazil, the Northeast can be recognized as delivering contributions to important cinematic movements with a strong presence.

Postcolonialism in Brasil is not a past that has been overcome, but a present in dispute. Every day, in the favelas, on the outskirts of the cities or anywhere in the sertão, the country reinvents itself, challenging the structures that still keep it tied to its colonial past. As the poet Patativa do Assaré from Ceará said: "The backlands will become the sea, and the sea will become the backlands", in other words, the colonial order will one day be subverted. Postcolonial Brasil has yet to be made, and its history is being written by those who have always been silenced.

Kleber Mendonça Filho's filmography, viewed chronologically, seems to build up an understanding of what is described above by highlighting and critiquing problematic postcolonial expressions in society but at the same time presenting a certain amount of hope and encouragement that society may still be finding a way forward. These films form an audiovisual inventory of the historical, social and cultural tensions that reveal the persistence of colonial violence in its multiple forms: physical, symbolic and structural. This cinematographic approach, based on an aesthetic that combines political urgency with engaging narratives, confirms the power of art as a counter-archive and an instrument of resistance, as proposed by Nagib (2007).

The analyses show that Mendonça Filho's cinema doesn't just represent Brazilian reality, but critically rearranges it, dismantling myths of racial harmony, linear progress and homogeneous national identity. The filmmaker thus reaffirms the tradition of Brazilian political cinema from the Cinema Novo, as a tool for denouncing, remembering and imagining possible futures but allowing for elements of the Retomada to bring a contemporary aesthetic to the message, making the films effective for current day audiences. His films become arenas for disputing the narratives of Brasil, bringing tension to the viewer, showing the colonial past that insists on perpetuating itself but also pointing to the possibility that society should be able to break free from this and redefine itself to move beyond it. By articulating Fanon's concepts of founding violence and its re-actualizations and Bhabha's cultural hybridity, this research has shown how Mendonça Filho constructs cinematographic narratives that not only denounce the power structures inherited from colonialism, but also offer new spaces for identity negotiation.

The tension between the past and the present portrayed in 'O Som ao Redor', shows that history is not limited to a repertoire of past events, but manifests itself in the urban experience, from the city's structure, everyday interactions and gestures, noises and silences. City structures cause spatial segregation between rich and poor, highlighting inequality. Daily interactions between those house workers and their boss, commanding under a friendly facade, expose how colonial legacies of servitude reemerge in a neoliberalist state. The noises highlight the tensions that are felt in the society yet seem to silently be in agreement as the power structures remain. Rather than offering resolution, the film insists that the perpetrated violence is not an event but a systemic presence.

In 'Aquarius', the clash between history and colonial erasure is visualized as the clash between emotional memory and real estate speculation, a symbolic dispute, transforming Clara's apartment into a symbol of insurgent memory that challenges the logic of imposed progress that aims to erase the history of its subjects. The defiant Clara represents the need for a countermovement, or even counter violence, in the spirit of Cinema Novo, but now illustrated in a mundane and more civil environment, but at the same time representing a reality that shows how displacement is still an issue in postcolonial Brasil where any question of cultural history still does not cause to put a brake on progress and think twice. When Nagib (2007) analyzes how Cinema Novo captured struggle not as a picturesque subject but as a political reality, she shows that the camera can be a weapon against historical erasure by reminding the viewer.

When considering how Cinema Novo reinvented the sertão not as a folkloric setting , but as a space for political reinvention (Nagib 2007), Nagib seems to anticipate what 'Bacurau' (2019) would do decades later, presenting the Northeast as the stage for a symbolic revolution against new modernized colonialism, while creating an intricate example of how cultural hybridity can bring together tradition and progress into a powerful way forward. Despite the violence on display in the film, he essentially offers a positive outlook as his characters are not passive victims, but manage to rebel against oppression by virtue of the community they formed together.

This seems to be the synthesis of postcolonial Brasil according to Kleber Mendonça Filho's: a country that, despite all the tensions and violence in society, insists on fighting for its own narrative. While it may seem that Brasil is facing an ongoing crisis of self-image, torn between the myth of racial democracy and the reality of structural racism, between neoliberal discourse and the persistence of inequalities, cinema and its interpretations offer invaluable tools for understanding what harmful structures persist in society. The message in cinema could allow society to understand itself and dismantle these structures while also suggesting possible futures through revolutionary imagery.

Therefore, Kleber Mendonça Filho's cinema, analyzed in the light of the theoretical references presented, confirms that Brazilian culture is a territory where silenced voices, racialized bodies and buried memories insist on claiming visibility and justice. It is in this clash, where the present is continually rewritten in the light of the wounds of the past, that cinema finds its political strength and its relevance as an instrument of social transformation.

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