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The Territory

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The Territory

Abstract

This is a film review of *The Territory* (2022), directed by Alex Pritz.

Keywords

Indigenous Rights, Brazil, Rainforest

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Author Notes

John Lyden is Professor of Religious Studies and the Blizek Professor of Religion and Film at University of Nebraska Omaha. He has been the Editor of the *Journal of Religion & Film* since 2011. He is the author of *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (NYU Press), and the editor of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* and co-editor (with Eric Michael Mazur) of the *Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. He also co-edited, with Ken Derry, *The Myth Awakens: Canon Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars* (Wipf and Stock 2018).



The Territory (2022), dir. Alex Pritz

The Uru-eu-wau-wau people live in a territory that is officially protected by the Brazilian government, but that has become a battleground in the war to protect the rainforest. This documentary covers their efforts to safeguard their land and their right to live in it.

In scenes from 2018, when Jair Bolsonaro was running for President of Brazil, we see the people listening to his radio address in which he promises to put guns in every home and to take away all land from the indigenous people of Brazil. After he is elected, illegal violence against them increases, and the government does little to stop this. Settlers cut down trees and burn the forest, believing that they have a right to this land, where they hope to create more cattle farms such as those that have already erased much of the rainforest. While their actions are illegal, they do not fear prosecution, and they claim that God and the Bible are on their side. Such behavior calls to mind how North American settlers invoked a “Manifest Destiny” ordained by God that

entitled them to take the land and kill the people on it. This conflict is a religious war as well as an economic one, as the indigenous people are targeted for extermination and justifications for this immoral and illegal behavior are given a religious basis once again. Neidinha, an activist who helps the people, is threatened with the kidnapping of her daughter; Ari, another activist, is murdered. The government continues to claim that there is no evidence of invaders of the protected land. Faced with this situation, the people take video cameras, drones, and cell phones to the forest to get evidence of the settlements, and when they find the settlers they record everything and arrest them, armed only with bows and arrows. As journalists pick up the story, the right-wing politicians retreat, and it seems that the people will have success. Their recordings are their weapons to reveal the truth.

At the same time, the postscript to the film notes that invasions doubled in 2021, and deforestation is at an all-time high. President Bolsonaro and his supporters believe that their version of economic progress is more important than the homes of these people or the rainforest. The indigenous people, for their part, have a solid scientific understanding of the importance of the rainforest for the health and survival of the world. They do not exist in some pre-technological paradise, unaware of the rest of the world, but instead use technology to protect themselves and to fight for their lives. Only time will tell whether their efforts are sufficient, but this film is a solid resource for publicizing the importance of this cause.