Centering Race and Class in Contemporary Argentine and Brazilian Cinema: Documenting Neocolonialism Through Film

By

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Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Latin American Studies

May 13, 2022

Nashville, TN

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Introduction

"The creation of colonial reality that occurred in the New World will remain a subject of immense curiosity and study—the New World where the Indian and African irracionales became compliant to the reason of a small number of white Christians. Whatever the conclusions we draw about how that hegemony was so speedily effected, we would be unwise to overlook the role of terror. And by this I mean us to think-through-terror, which as well as being a physiological state is also par excellence *of colonial hegemony: the space of death where the Indian, African, and white gave birth to a New World." –Michael Taussig*

It is my hope that someday colonization and neocolonization exist only as topics in a history course. However, we as scholars and as a society have yet to arrive at that destination. Power imbalances continue to characterize our world. Not two weeks ago, Russia invaded Ukraine in the largest invasion of a European nation since World War II. Unfortunately, imperialism, war, and crisis founded on the continual search for hegemony by empires new and old is not unique. Last year, forced displacement in Colombia increased by a staggering 57% due to an outpouring of violence between armed groups.[1] In Brazil, landslides take lives and shatter the landscape as we continue to ignore the violence against the environment that has become so common place. To our southern border, less than a month ago, migrants sewed their mouth shut to demand asylum.[2] These violations of human dignity at the most basic level, are made possible by the First World's inability to learn from its past mistakes. There is a saying in Bengali, *Kings wage wars with each other but it's the reeds that die*. What are your kings doing? I ask my readers to consider their home empires, to be critical of all incarnations of imperialism, not only

[1] "Forced Displacement in Colombia More than Doubled in 2021: Report | Conflict News | Al Jazeera," accessed March 7, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/16/forced-displacement-in-colombia-more-than-doubled-in-2021-report.

[2] "Migrants Stuck at Mexico's Southern Border Sew Their Mouths Shut in Protest," *Washington Post*, accessed March 21, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/16/migrants-mexico-protest/.

the imperialism of a foreign land. Colonizers exist near and far. Because of their actions, the Third World must process their countless mistakes, sort through terror and marginalization. In a show of defiance, it is this very processing that breathes life into the contemporary cinema of Latin America. Films that provide a record of the injustices of neocolonialism. These films are evidence that colonization is not composed of isolated incidences from long ago, that they are contemporary, urgent. While probably not what the original orator intended, empires were, in fact, not built in a day, and because of their staying power their sinister effects continue to ripple through nations everywhere like shockwaves. The following work examines four films can be read as a staunch criticism of neocolonization, two from Brazil and two from Argentina.

Argentine and Brazilian contemporary cinema provide thorough documentation of the avenues through which neocolonialism rears its head in modern Latin America. In the following work, four films are given treatment to provide thorough case studies of racism and classism as they present themselves in Argentina and Brazil. The thesis is divided into two parts, both containing a pair of films from either country. Part 1 examines the 2015 work of Brazilian director Anna Muylaert, *Que Horas Ela Volta?*, and the 2001 film by director Lucrecia Martel, *La Ciénaga*. Part 2 reviews the Brazilian film *Bacurau*, directed by Kleber Mendoça Filho and Juliano Dornelles in 2019, followed by the 2015 film, *Relatos Salvajes*, by Argentine director Damián Szifron. Chapters are paired based on similar stylistic choices on the part of the filmmakers such as lighting, use of sound, and narrative, but also taking complementary themes into account, such as sexism, police violence, slavery, and capitalism.

It would be a disservice to the films addressed in the following chapters to analyze them without first introducing the concept of Third Cinema. By the umbrella term Third Cinema, I do not refer to all films made in the Third World (referred to as “Third World Cinema”). Third

World Cinema is a filmic category that began decades prior to Third Cinema, which came into its own around the 1960s. Instead, Third Cinema is meant to indicate the filmic tradition prompted by increasingly tense relationships between classes in nations of the Third World and the cultural, political, and economic effects of neocolonialism during the second half of the 20th century. Argentine filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino popularized the phrase in their 1969 manifesto *Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World.* Solanas and Getino defined this movement as "the cinema that *recognizes in that struggle* [the struggle against neocolonial powers] *the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time,* the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as a starting point—in a word, the *decolonization of culture* (emphasis in original)."[3] Central to this argument is the idea that class and culture are inextricable, and that Third Cinema attempts to make film about, and for, *el pueblo*. Films provide a window into the cultural and artistic manifestations of anti-colonial movements. Imperialist powers drown the culture of their colonies, crowding out room for a revolutionary culture, as noted by Solanas and Getino:

> Culture, art, science, and cinema always respond to conflicting class interests. In the neocolonial situation two concepts of culture, art, science, and cinema compete: *that of the rulers and that of the nation* (emphasis in original).[4]

Other notable manifestos of the same period, artistic vein, and region include (but are by no means limited to) *Cinema and Underdevelopment* (Fernando Birri, Argentina, 1962), *The Aesthetics of Hunger* (Glauber Rocha, Brazil, 1965), *For an Imperfect Cinema* (Julio García Espinosa, Cuba, 1969), and *Manifesto of the National Front of Cinematographers* (Paul Leduc,

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[3] Scott Mackenzie, "Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology," 2014, http://web.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=87f599e0-f7ba-4e47-94a7-dc85d0a515d1%40pdc-v-sessmgr02&vid=0&format=EB. 232.

[4] Ibid., 232.

Jorge Fons, et al., Mexico, 1975). While Third Cinema is a term used to encompass the filmic creations of a much larger group of artists, these chapters will focus on recent iterations (2001-2019) originating from contemporary Argentine and Brazilian directors. Not only may filmmakers of Third Cinema flower from a variety of locations, they may also conceive of and define their work differently. As a grounding definition for what this work will be focusing on in the following chapters, I point to one of the descriptions offered by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam: "cinematic productions of Third World peoples (retroactively defined as such), whether or not the films adhere to the principles of Third Cinema and irrespective of the period of their making.[5]" While this work points out the connections the *La Ciénaga, Que Horas Ela Volta?, Bacurau,* and *Relatos Salvajes* have with Third Cinema and its rhetoric, they differ both in time period and in stylistic choices.

The films *La Hora de Los Hornos* (1968, by Argentine directors mentioned above, Solanas and Getino) and *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (1964, by Brazilian director Glauber Rocha) are foundational to the understanding of contemporary Latin American cinema and is especially critical to the four films examined in this thesis. Analysis of both films follows.

La Hora de Los Hornos (1968)

[5] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism,* Routledge (2014), 28. Shohat and Stam offer four intersecting definitions of Third Cinema (from which I elected the second for the purposes of this thesis). For context, I provide them here: " (1) A core circle of "Third Wordlist" films produced by and for Third World peoples (no matter where those people happen to be) and adhering to the principles of "Third Cinema"; (2) a wider circle of the cinematic productions of Third World people (retroactively defined as such), whether or not the films adhere to the principles of Third Cinema and irrespective of the period of their making; (3) another circle consisting of films made by First or Second World people in support of Third World peoples and adhering to the principles of Third Cinema; and (4) a final circle, somewhat anomolous in status, at once "inside" and "outside," comprising recent diasporic hybrid films, for example those of Mona Hatoum or Hanif Kureishi, which both build on and interrogate the conventions of "Third Cinema."

For my purposes here, only the first section of *La Hora de Los Hornos* will be analyzed, which has a run time of almost an hour and a half (all sections total over four hours). This first section is appropriately titled *Notas y Testimonios Sobre El Neocolonialismo, La Violencia, y La Liberación (Notes and Testimonies on Neocolonialism, Violence, and Liberation).* Notably, this film may be found on YouTube, entirely free of charge, which speaks to the dedication the filmmakers had to disseminating their message as well as its lasting impact. Director Fernando Solanas died only recently of Covid-19 in 2020 and could have ensured that the film was taken down had he considered it necessary.[6] However, the film remains, and its presence cements the intentionality and beliefs behind the filmmakers' actions. This film is a rallying cry to the popular masses, and as such must be made accessible by any means necessary. Not a product manufactured to be purchased and consumed, *La Hora* is a manifesto put in motion. A manifesto against neo-colonialism and capitalism which rids itself of any ties to commercialism by making itself accessible to the world at no cost. The film was not shown in Argentine theaters at the time of its debut due to censorship by the military dictatorship that took power in 1966, a few years before the film's release.

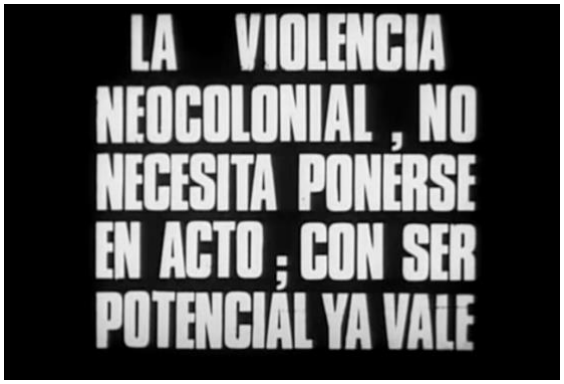

Figure 1: Text from La Hora de Los Hornos

[6] Daniel Politi, "Fernando Solanas, Argentine Filmmaker and Politician, Dies at 84" *The New York Times,* Dec. 4, 2020 https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/obituaries/fernando-solanas-dead-coronavirus.html

The film opens with a brief history of the origins of neo-colonialism in Argentina, and the narrator informs his audience of the "betrayal" of the popular classes by the elite at the time of the country's independence from Spanish rule. The local elite facilitate the neo-colonial rule by the new imperial power, the United States. The narrator cites the Monroe Doctrine and the "cuarenta-y-uno intervenciones armadas" (trans: 41 armed interventions) by the United States in Latin America as initial evidence of American domination. Despite the Monroe Doctrine's initial goal being to prevent European involvement in the Americas, overtime it morphed into what legal scholar Juan Pablo Scarfi defines as "an elastic and flexible principle to legitimize US interventions in the region [Latin America]."[7] Argentina's experience with this type of interventionism on the part of the US is not an anomaly in this regard. The Monroe Doctrine sanctioned interventions in Mexico (1914), the Dominican Republic (1916), Cuba (notably during the Cold War era), and Chile.[8] *La Batalla de Chile* (directed by Patricio Guzman), another notable film in the tradition of Third Cinema, chronicles the removal of democratically elected President Salvador Allende in 1973 and the heavy-handed military intervention of Chile by the United States, adding to the inventory of Latin American films documenting America's armed intrusions on the continent.

La Hora then gives a survey of the nation in statistics, noting the impact industrialization has had on Argentina's population distribution, causing 70% of the population to move to cities. In Buenos Aires, where the narrator informs us 60% of the population lives, is the center of the nation's industry. It is here where filmmakers delve into the plight of the Latin American factory worker. A cacophony of voices testifies to the dehumanization of everyday life inside the factory

[7] Juan Pablo Scarfi, "Denaturalizing the Monroe Doctrine: The Rise of Latin American Legal Anti-Imperialism in the Face of the Modern US and Hemispheric Redefinition of the Monroe Doctrine," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 33, no. 3 (September 2020): 541, http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/10.1017/S092215652000031X.
[8] Ibid., Scarfi, 541-552.

walls, one man recalling an incident where the police were called on to surround the building to force workers to stay on the factory line. The threat to production is interpreted as a crime requiring punishment, as explained by Foucault, "[c]riminals appear as social enemies through the violent power they exercise on the population and through the position they occupy in the process of production by their refusal to work."[9] In this scenario, the police are deployed to protect the interests of the upper-class, as also theorized in *The Punitive Society.*[10] Following these testimonies are numbers that should sound incredibly familiar to the modern viewer: 50% of land is owned by 1.5% of the population; 80% of Argentinians have no land to call their own. The elite classes are shown to be successfully hoarding the resources the nation has to offer, whether it be the labor of its people or the fruits of the earth.

Interviews with members of the upper-class provide contrast to the voices of the factory workers. Argentine elites sing the praises of the current government (what history has deemed an unforgiving military dictatorship) and the necessity of the "order" it claims to install. This so-called order is another facet of the bourgeois' grip on the nation and a requisite for maintaining production. Disorder is demonized by the elite because it is a threat to capitalism and to step off the production line is a horrible sin. This set of interviews equates wealth and a good pedigree with morality, forming a bond between legality and morality that essentializes the lower classes as criminals.

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[9] Arnold I. Davidson, Graham Burchell, and Michel Foucault, *The Punitive Society: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1972-1973* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 49 http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/vand/detail.action?docID=4720622.

[10] Arnold I. Davidson, Graham Burchell, and Michel Foucault, *The Punitive Society: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1972-1973* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 104. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/vand/detail.action?docID=4720622.
"…groups of a primarily economic character: a sort of private police charged with superintending bourgeois wealth in the new forms in which it is exposed at the height of a period of economic development (warehouses, docks, roads)."

High Argentine society, as portrayed by the filmmakers, is best encapsulated by the country's agrarian oligarchy. A bull, one that seems to be engorged beyond reason, is paraded around a ring while members of the aforementioned class place wagers. Later, in what is probably the film's most memorable scene, cows are brutally slaughtered in a montage against advertisements displaying products from the First World. The sequence is hard to watch, despite it being the fourth, fifth, or sixth time I've viewed it. The livestock, still alive, arrives at the slaughterhouse, excreted by a truck in which they were undoubtedly overpacked. Tied up by their hooves and then herded onto the killing floor, workers take sledgehammers to their heads. Patched together with these horrific moments are shiny and clean advertisements. Coca-Cola, Chevrolet, champagne, plastic wrap, cigarettes, and bathing suits rapidly pass by on the screen, seeming incredibly frivolous against the light fading from the animals' eyes. The contrast between the two highlights the escapism consumer culture can provide.

Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol (Trans: *Black God, White Devil*, 1964)

Director Glauber Rocha tells us in his manifesto *Aesthetics of Hunger* that without violence the oppressor, the colonizer, is incapable of recognizing those he is smothering: "[o]nly when he is confronted with violence can the coloniser understand, through horror, the strength of the culture he exploits. As long as he does not take up arms, the colonised man remains a slave." For Rocha, this type of action as a necessity is what defines the revolutionary films of *Cinema Novo*, the Brazilian variety of Third Cinema. The insanity caused by marginality is only "normal behavior," and this behavior is a direct effect of colonialism. As author Gonzalez Garcia explains, hunger is central to *Cinema Novo* (also clearly a key tenant of Rocha's manifesto), and is a "consequence of colonialism or dependence, is one of the social motors that propels the

political demands of the 20th century." In *Black God, White Devil* we see this insanity become commonplace in the film's protagonist Manoel. The storyline documents what seems to be unending hardship for Manoel, who jumps from one leader to the next, a follower unsure of how to properly craft his own future. While from seemingly opposite ends of the ideological spectrum -- a self-proclaimed saint (the Catholic imagery is heavy throughout the film, even when Manoel leaves the saint's side, alluding to Latin America's religious conquest), and a militant revolutionary -- both lead their followers to violence. These two actors parallel the nation's past, the former a clear allusion to the Catholic Portuguese Crown and the second the failed revolutionary movements in Brazil's history, possibly those led by the criollo population who could provide nothing more for the nation as a whole than the Royals before them.

Black God, White Devil is a pillar of this strain of cinema, and as such it pushes its female characters to the periphery of the silver screen, common for this method of cinema as noted by Shohat and Stam. Despite there being two female protagonists (if we could call them protagonists), they have very few speaking parts, and usually only interject during times where emotions run high. In the film's final scene, Manoel leaves his wife behind, letting her fall away as he runs madly towards the sea. Possibly, this is to show the need for the Latin American peasant class to lead themselves, however, I interpret it as Rosa being some*thing* Manoel must shed to reach fulfillment, even though she has been the only sane anchor throughout the film's entirety. This reveals that despite a progressive leftist politico-ideology on the part of the filmmaker, the cultural production of the time and place permeate the film's rhetoric, leaving it burdened with sexist tones. The films analyzed in the following chapters showcase female characters with stronger character development and more central roles, proving that films

influenced by this era of cinema have grown into a more intersectional and updated social critique than their predecessors.

Taken together, these two films provide context for the film in the following chapters. As countries around the world reckon with their racial and social histories, it is important to have a cinema that highlights these contours, and by doing so, can create an environment in which neocolonial behaviors are confronted. The films that follow emphasize important truths about modern injustices and offer up corresponding discourses.

Part 1

Chapter 1: *Que Horas Ela Volta?* (2015), Dir. Anna Muylaert

Anna Muylaert's 2015 film, *Que Horas Ela Volta?* (Trans. *The Second Mother)*, comments on an era of neoliberal socioeconomic change in Brazilian society that began at the outset of the 21st century and continues to affect it today. These socioeconomic changes are globalized, and therefore can be applied to both countries given treatment in this thesis, as well as internationally. Possibly due to this universal message, *Que Horas Ela Volta?* was well received around the globe, winning prizes at Sundance and the Berlin Film Festival.[11] In this chapter, I examine Muylaert's use of cinematographic tools to establish the class divisions and racism born out of the country's colonial origins and aggravated by its contemporary neoliberal policies.

[11] Tiago de Luca, 'Casa Grande & Senzala': Domestic Space and Class Conflict in Casa Grande and Que Horas Ela Volta? 212 and Luis Henrique Paiva, Teresa Cristina Cotta, and Armando Barrientos, "Brazil's Bolsa Família Programme," *Great Policy Successes (2019), 22-23.*

Que Horas Ela Volta? follows a tradition of films produced during and shortly after the Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva (2003 to 2010) government, and concludes by offering a hopeful depiction of the enormous changes in class structure that came about during this era due to policies implemented under Lula and his party, *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (the Workers' Party).[12] Muylaert offers audiences a case study of the growth and shift in the class composition of Brazilian society due to a healthy economy and policies formulated to target inequity, like conditional cash-transfer programs (abbreviated CCTs), instituted under then-president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002). Cardoso laid the groundwork for the more famous programs that would come during the Lula mandate, and the FHC government inaugurated three conditional cash-transfer programs: *Programa de Erradicação do Trabalho Infantil* (Program for the Eradication of Child Labor) in 1996, *Bolsa Escola Federal* (Federal School Allowance) in 2001, and finally *Bolsa Alimentação* (Food Grant) shortly before the conclusion of Cardoso's time in office.[13]

Inheriting these CCT programs and bringing the framework for the program *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger) from his time in Congress with him into his new position, President Lula sought to address financial and resource inequity in his country. In 2003, shortly after taking office, he instituted another CCT program called *Cartão Alimentaçao* (Food Card). However, bureaucracy took its toll on this initiative, and Brazilians found themselves without the promised funds due to lack of coordination between ministries, and misperceptions between local, state, and federal administrations.[14] Cue *Bolsa Família*, instituted by the Lula government later that year to address

[12] Ibid., Tiago de Luca and María Mercedes Vázquez Vázquez, Chapter 4: New Geographies of Class in Mexican and Brazilian Cinemas: Post Tenebras Lux and Que Horas Ela Volta?
[13] Fábio de Castro, Kees Koonings, and Marianne Wiesebron. *Brazil Under the Workers' Party: Continuity and Change from Lula to Dilma / Edited by Fábio de Castro, Kees Koonings, Marianne Wiesebron.* Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 129-130.
[14] Ibid., Fábio de Castro, Kees Koonings, and Mariann Wiesebron. 131.

the pitfalls of the original program, ensuring streamlined efficiency under a single federal initiative. Roughly translating to "Family Wallet," *Bolsa Família* is a cash transfer program designed to provide support to low-income populations in Brazil, supplying families with approximately 35 US dollars a month (about 190 Reais), in exchange for their children's regular school attendance and doctors' visits.[15] Other nations in the Global South have installed similar CCT programs following Brazil's success, such as Mexico and the Philippines.[16] Because three-fourths of those reached by *Bolsa Família* are Afro-Brazilian and over half are women, Muylaert's protagonist, Val, may very well have received funds from this program.[17] *Bolsa Família* was widely lauded for its efficacy in reducing national inequality rates, but has recently been eliminated under current Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro.[18] Bolsonaro, likely familiar to American audiences for his failure to address COVID-19, has called *Bolsa Família* recipients "*ignorantes*" and refers to the program as a "*...projeto para tirar dinheiro de quem produz e dá-lo a quem se acomoda, para que use seu título de eleitor e mantenha quem está no poder"* (trans: "project to take money from those who produce and give it to those who settle, so that they can use their voter registration card and keep those in power where they are"), rhetoric familiar to far-right politicians.[19] Programs like *Bolsa Família* and *Fome Zero* raised many out of poverty, and it is during this period that Brazil witnesses the ascension of a new middle-class. Muylaert's

[15] The World Bank, "Bolsa Família: Changing the Lives of Millions," (2010) https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2010/05/27/br-bolsa-familia

[16] Mark Stevenson Curry, Airah Tauli Cadiogan, and Rogério Gimenes Giugliano, "Brazil's *Bolsa Familia* and the Philippines' "4Ps" CCT Programs: Considering South-South Cooperation for Social Protection," *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* 13:1 (2013), 2.

[17] "Bolsa Família in Brazil," *Centre for Public Impact*, Sept. 2, 2019 https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/bolsa-familia-in-brazil#:~:text=In%20the%20late%201990s%20and,%2Dpresident%2C%20Lula%20da%20Silva.

[18] Deborah Wetzel, The World Bank, "Bolsa Família: Brazil's Quiet Revolution," *The World Bank*, (2013) https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2013/11/04/bolsa-familia-Brazil-quiet-revolution.

[19] Iara Diniz, "De Crítico a Defensor do Bolsa Família: Veja Frases de Bolsonaro," *A Gazeta*, Aug. 27, 2020 https://www.agazeta.com.br/es/politica/de-critico-a-defensor-do-bolsa-familia-veja-frases-de-bolsonaro-0820

film portrays the hope for change and the buoyancy felt by the working class and rising middle-class in Brazil prior to Bolsonaro's election in 2019, as well as the fear of impending invasion felt by the elite classes.

During the Lula era, the middle-class experienced intense growth and the lower-class began to scale the socioeconomic ladder. For the first time, the opinions and preferences of the lower-class began to be reflected in the Brazilian marketplace because of their increased financial stability. In short, they became consumers. In addition to this newfound commercial power, the working class also made their physical presence known in places that had been traditionally associated with the bourgeoisie, like airports and shopping malls, and for the purposes of this film: universities.[20] The sudden appearance of the middle and working class created (and continues to create) a fear of "invasion" in the upper-class, who worry they will lose their historically separate, elite spaces. The confrontation between the two classes in these public spaces and the resulting discomfort in the elite is well documented today, making it easy to recall videos published on social media of white people lashing out at those they deem to be out of place. There are hundreds of these events, but to mention a couple: the 2020 incident in which a white woman in Central Park called police to intervene on her behalf because she was being "attacked" by Christian Cooper, a Black man, who is shown in the video as standing calmly far from the woman, asking her to put her dog on a leash.[21] Similarly, the Los Angeles Times reported that in São Paulo, working-class teenagers were shown in a recording "fleeing tear gas or being threatened by police" for gathering in shopping malls, which are typically seen as a safe

[20] Tiago de Luca, 'Casa Grande & Senzala':Domestic Space and Class Conflict in Casa Grande and Que Horas Ela Volta?

[21] Erica Solano and Alexandra Robson, "'Imagine if Martin Luther King Jr. Had Facebook.' Watch TIME's Documentary on the Role of Social Media in Racial Justice Protests," *TIME Magazine*, August 4, 2020 https://time.com/5875479/viral-videos-racism-impact-protests/

haven for Brazil's upper-class.[22] These episodes reveal the upper-class' hysteria and distress, caused by the shift in social structure, in these two societies reckoning with a long history of segregation and racism. Fear of invasion by the working class, associated with the fear of crime, is well documented in Latin American cities, and author Teresa Caldeira explores the implementation of physical boundaries to segregate the classes in her book about São Paulo, aptly titled *City of Walls.* Because the other Brazilian film given treatment in this thesis takes place in the countryside, a framework for discrimination in urban settings is required, however, the vertical class hierarchy created by architecture in this film holds true for the film *Bacurau* as well. Chapter six of *City of Walls* offers critical information to understanding the segregation of classes and races in Brazil's cities, separating them into three distinct periods:

> The first lasted from the late nineteenth century to the 1940s and produced a condensed city in which different social groups were packed into a small urban area and segregated by type of housing. The second urban form, the center-periphery, dominated the city's development from the 1940s to the 1980s. It has different social groups separated by great distances: the middle and upper-classes concentrated in central and well-developed neighborhoods and the poor exiled to the hinterland. Although residents and social scientists still conceive of and discuss the city in terms of the second pattern, a third form has been taking shape since the 1980s, one that has already exerted considerable influence on São Paulo and its metropolitan region. Super-imposed on the center-periphery pattern, the recent transformations are generating spaces in which different social groups are again closer to one another but are separated by walls and technologies of security, and they tend not to circulate or interact in common areas.[23]

This film takes place during the third era of segregation, where the classes exist in closer proximity, but do not interact because they are separated by the architecture that divides different social groups. *Que Horas Ela Volta?* extends this type of segregation from the exterior of the home to the interior, allowing for the segregation even of cohabitators under the same roof. The second era of segregation, that took place from the 1940s to the 1980s, in which the classes are separated by large distances, is applied to scenes in the film that take place outside of the security

[22] Vincent Bevins, "Brazil shopping malls become centers of controversy," *Los Angeles Times,* Jan. 28, 2014 https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-ff-brazil-mall-protests-20140129-story.html
[23] Teresa Calderia, "Chapter 6: São Paulo: Three Patterns of Spatial Segregation," *City of Walls,* (2000) 213.

of the home. This type of segregation, where the upper classes are in the city center and the working-class inhabits the hinterland, could be readily applied to many Latin American cities. Caldeira's theoretical infrastructure allows for an analysis of the architecture and urban spaces as socioeconomic divisions incarnated in a physical form, present in the film with color, lighting, set design, and camera angles. Muylaert uses these tools to establish the seeming impossibility of mobility between socioeconomic classes.

Figure 2: Swimming Pool in Que Horas Ela Volta? (2015)

The first scene establishes spatial segregation as the film's thesis, utilizing architecture as a method of constructing divisions between the classes. In the opening shot, we see the family's swimming pool and the protagonist, Val, that works as a live-in maid in an upper-middle class home. Val (played by Regina Casé) is caring for the family's son, Fabinho (Michel Joeslas), who is playing in the pool. It is important to note the familiarity Brazilians will have with Val's position. In 2010, just a few years prior to the film's release, almost a fifth of all employed women in Brazil were domestic workers.[24] If you were not a Brazilian who could immediately identify yourself with Val, you very well may have been her employer or part of a family who

[24] "Nevertheless, Brazil has been notorious for having the highest number of domestic workers in the world; 17 per cent of all female workers (6.7 million) in Brazil were *empregadas domésticas* in 2010." Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, "'Sovereign Parenting' in Affluent Latin American Neighbourhoods: Race and the Politics of Childcare in Ipanema (Brazil) and El COndado (Puerto Rico)." *Journal of Latin American studies* 51, no. 3 (2019) 644.

employed someone like her. In this scene, Fabinho asks Val "*vem nadar conmigo?* (will you come swim with me?)*."* Val declines, citing her lack of appropriate swimming attire to evade voicing her real reason: the well-established (but rarely mentioned) rules that dictate the appropriate spaces for one's class. Val does not cite these prejudices because she has been brought up to respect the class boundaries of her society and has accepted that these injustices are part of Brazil. They are integral to her character. This scene provides the film's first iteration of the third era of segregation, where the classes are separated by security technologies despite living in a proximity that most would deem intimate. Fabinho has access to the pool – which will come to represent access to opportunities offered to the upper class – because he belongs to the elite of Brazil. Val, in contrast, does not benefit from these opportunities, and therefore she does not have access to the pool. The swimming pool, which operates as a symbol of hierarchical class structure, will be appropriated by the lower-classes in later scenes (and analyzed in the later part of this chapter), subverting the scheme of spatial segregation established at the film's outset. The Argentine film, *La Ciénaga* (2001), uses a similar swimming pool metaphor, however it is used to comment on the missteps of the bourgeoisie instead of their good fortune, and will be given treatment in a different chapter of this thesis.

Author Mária Mercedes Vázquez Vázquez corroborates this division, one between worker and employer, pool access or no access, as one associated with leisure (Muylaert confirms this association in an interview).[25] For the laboring class, leisure time would be inappropriate – they should not and cannot relax due to their precarious economic standing:

> The first scene of the film is set in an emblematic part of the house that is charged with class overtones: the swimming pool. The pool is reserved for Carlos, Bárbara and Fabinho, that is to say, as a place of pleasure that is restricted to the upper-middle class and off-limits for Val and

[25] "Anna Muylaert interview COURIEX DIGITAL," Interview by Pierre-Michel Meier filmed April 2015 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21UBRwgkYxo

> Jéssica. As the family's house cleaner, Val would never dare to enter this place, because she respects the rigid class separation that keeps her out.[26]

For the working class to engage in leisure or pleasure activities would be to fall dangerously close to vagabondage, associated with criminality as described by Foucault in *The Punitive Society*:

> In this work [referring to Le Trosne's 1764 *Mémoire sur les vagabonds et sur les mendiants*], vagabondage is given as the fundamental category of delinquency, which means, not that vagabondage is, as in earlier analyses, the, as it were, the psychological point of departure of delinquency—Le Trosne does not mean that one wanders around and this vagabondage gradually leads to theft, and then to crime, **but that vagabondage is the element on the basis of which other crimes are to be specified. It is the general matrix of crime that contains eminently all other forms of delinquency, not as potentialities, but as elements that constitute and make it up.**[27] [emphasis added]

If Val, or another member of her same class, were to take up leisure activities like swimming in a pool, they may succumb to delinquency. The threat of punishment society exerts on vagabonds maintains production from the working class. As the starting point for crime, exile and elimination await those members of the working class who "chose" unemployment. A warning also brandished in *La Hora de Los Hornos* in reference to Argentina's factory workers, Val is trapped inside the physical and socioeconomic constraints of her class by this unspoken threat of violence. The historic Argentine film projects the warning in all upper-case, white, block letters: "LA VIOLENCIA NEOCOLONIAL, NO NECESITA PONERSE EN ACTO; CON SER POTENCIAL YA VALE" (Trans: "Neocolonial violence does not need to be put into action; the potential is enough"). What happens to the lower-class when they do not labor and, consequently, partake in this vagabondage, is addressed more thoroughly in the chapter covering *Bacurau* (2019).

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[26] María Mercedes Vázquez Vázquez, "New Geographies of Class in Mexican and Brazilian Cinemas: *Post Tenebras Lux* and *Que horas ela volta?"*, *Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Resisting Neoliberalism?* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018), 73.
[27] Michel Foucault, *The Punitive Society: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1972-1973.* London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015, 46.

Figure 3: Val descends staircase in Que Horas Ela Volta? (2015)

Immediately following this scene, a shot of the stairs within the house introduces the audience to the location of Val's bedroom, which is situated on the lowest level of the house. Because of its location, it is the space in the house with the least natural light. The upper- and lower-class spaces are clearly designated by differences in light, spaciousness, and elevation. The lower class is pushed into a restrictive, isolated, space that is physically lower than the rest of the house. Based on Foucault's analysis above, it is not a stretch to connect the imagery of Val's bedroom to a prison cell. The prison cell in this imperial-influenced context may be interpreted as an extension of the *navio negreiro* (trans: slave ships). Like Val's bedroom, enslaved peoples were confined to the substructure of the ship, without access to the resources provided above deck, such as water, light, or proper ventilation. Because of her precarious economic status, one close to unemployment, she is constantly on the verge of Foucault's proposed construction of the criminal. Not only is her space dark and cramped, but the director goes as far as putting bars on her window, punctuating the connection of imprisonment to Val's social standing (and underlining how her escape would disadvantage the upper-class family). The shot of the stairs, which appears several times throughout the film, illustrates the descent

required of Val to fit into the archetype of how and where the working class should live; a descent into a profoundly dark place. The scenes where the audience is allowed into Val's space are captured with static shots, a technique utilized during the entire film to convey the lack of mobility granted to the working class.

Figure 4: Blueprint in Que Horas Ela Volta? (2015)

The idea that Val lives on the lowest floor of the home is referenced frequently during the film. Val's daughter, Jéssica (played by Camila Márdila), examines a blueprint of the house, again demonstrating architecture's importance in *Que Horas Ela Volta?,* and comments on the location of Val's room. In contrast to Val's space, the upper-class family inhabits spaces that benefit from sunlight and are on higher floors. These rooms are brighter and airier than the confined spaces where Val spends much of her time, like the kitchen. Fabinho's mother, Bárbara (played by Karine Teles), and her husband, occupy a room on the top floor of the house. The room has a large window that opens out towards the pool, reinforcing the metaphor of the pool as access to the world and the opportunities of the bourgeoisie. In other words, the architecture in the film establishes a vertical hierarchy, in which the upper-class can benefit from the earth's natural resources (like sunlight) on the highest floors of the home, and the lower class has limited

opportunities to do so because of their relegation to confined, lower spaces (see Figure 5). The working class digs progressively deeper; the lower your economic standing, the lower your living space must be. Such architectural structuralism effectively traces a parallel between resource ownership in the country and social class. I find it difficult not to connect the vertical hierarchy of the architecture and cityscape of this film to that found during the train scene in Fernando Birri's 1959 documentary film *Tire Dié (Toss Me a Dime).* During the film's conclusion, impoverished children chase a train in hopes that a passenger may throw a dime their way. Here, the filmmakers manage to capture a succinct visualization of the class system: children from the peasant class run along the tracks below the train windows and must reach their hands *up* to catch whatever scraps are thrown *down* to them. They run barefoot while relaxed passengers donning passive faces and stylish sunglasses merely observe their struggle. The hierarchy created here is more a binary than the graduated step-ladder found in *Que Horas Ela Volta?,* and presents a more extreme illustration of class division. However, the lower-class finds itself trampled and climbed on top of by the bourgeoisie all the same.

Figure 5: José Carlos and Jéssica in Dining Room in Que Horas Ela Volta? (2015)

The door between the kitchen and the dining room represents yet another barrier between classes in *Que Horas Ela Volta?* Notably, these spaces are on the mezzanine level, where it may

be the most appropriate for people from differing classes to mingle based on the vertical hierarchy in the film. In the scenes that take place in these rooms, the audience sees the set from Val's point of view, that is, from the kitchen (notably, Muylaert's first draft of the screenplay was titled "The Kitchen's Door").[28] The kitchen is small, like Val's bedroom, a restricted space characterized by its opposition to the grandiose dining room, an important reunion space for the upper-class family. Like Bárbara and José Carlos' bedroom, the dining room is a luminous space, with floor to ceiling windows. The tacit laws of segregation in the film are shown through Val's confinement, who is only allowed to leave her spaces when called by her employers, say, to serve dinner or take away dirty dishes. Despite living under the same roof throughout almost the entire film, the classes are firmly separated, and as theorized by Caldeira, Val and her employers do not usually interact in common areas, which would be construed as inappropriate. In a different scene of *Que Horas Ela Volta?*, guests mingle in the living room during a party. The camerawork is especially telling in this sequence, tracking Val when she emerges from the kitchen to serve hors d'oevres. Val and the party guests do not exchange words, she is a fly on the wall, her presence going almost completely unnoticed by those she is feeding, retreating to her assigned post in the kitchen to restock on crudité for the upper-class. The invisibility of the lower-class has a ubiquity to it; as the enslaved in the American South provided the basis on which the plantation owners would reap the rewards, Val and those before her are relegated to the periphery even though their labor the conditions are created in which hyper-prosperity is possible for the upper-class. In his book, *The Southern Hospitality Myth: Ethics, Politics, Race, and American Memory*, Szczesiul analyzes a 1925 cartoon of a Black man and two white Southerners, whose imagery parallels that of the party scene in *Que Horas Ela Volta?* The author

[28] "Anna Muylaert interview COURIEX DIGITAL," Interview by Pierre-Michel Meier filmed April 2015 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21UBRwgkYxo

notes that the enslaved person's "position in this background service role—excluded and unacknowledged—confirms the identity of the main figures: their social standing, their superiority, their community of belonging, in short, their whiteness…the slave was perpetually present and perpetually unacknowledged and excluded, both relied on for service and reviled for supposed racial inferiority."[29] Despite this, the camerawork invites the audience to sympathize with Val's experience, making it visually as well as auditorily central. Val occupies the center of the shot, and we follow her from behind, as if we are an intern learning her well-practiced patterns. In terms of audio, Muylaert does not linger on the upper-class conversations; their idle chatter is of no concern to Val or her duties.

Sun (Access to Natural Resources)
Family Bedrooms (Upper Class)
Common Area/Pool/Kitchen/Dining Room (Level Where Classes May Intermingle)
Val's Bedroom (Working Class)

Figure 6: Vertical Hierarchy in Que Horas Ela Volta? (2015)

This tradition of separation is interrupted by Val's daughter, Jéssica, who comes to live with the family while studying for a university entrance exam, more specifically, the entrance exam for the prestigious and highly competitive school of architecture at the University of São Paulo. Her choice to study architecture is especially important due to its connotations as an upper-class profession, and the announcement of her career choice (which notably takes place at

[29] Anthony Szczesiul. 2017. The Southern Hospitality Myth: Ethics, Politics, Race, and American Memory. The New Southern Studies Series. Athens: University of Georgia Press. 10. https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1523447&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

the family dinner table) makes the host-family visibly uncomfortable. Jéssica incarnates the possibility of a more equal Brazilian society, which causes Bárbara quite a bit of frustration, embodying the bourgeoisie with her preoccupation of the working-class characters invading her elite spaces. The believability of Jéssica's character is made possible by President Lula's time in office; a character from what Muylaert has called "the new Brazil," one with a fierce appetite for change.[30] As a new middle-class emerges during this era in Brazil, they seek out their corresponding representation in the country's cultural products, establishing their personal stake in goods like movies and books. Jéssica's character provides this important depiction for the new middle-class.

Changes in Brazil's class structure also includes the invasion of the highly-prized spots in a university course, normally occupied by children who come from well-to-do families. In 2012, the Brazilian government mandated a quota system for its universities to attempt to address the inequity of education in the country, reserving spaces for members of racially and economically marginalized groups. However, public universities were not forced to abide by this mandate. In Brazil, public universities are free and incredibly competitive, while private and paid for institutions are easier to gain access to, reinforcing not only an educational gap but an economic one as well. The University of São Paulo, where Jéssica's character hopes to attend classes, is in fact a public university that chose not to install the federally mandated affirmative action, opting for a "point system." Unfortunately, this system has not resulted in higher diversity and continues to guarantee spots for the upper-class. Heringer et al. explains this decision: "[…] Brazilian universities of greater quality cling to a maintenance of the status quo in higher education, which is to say, they continue to adhere to policies that reproduce social and racial

[30] "21st Sarajevo Film Festival Interview with Anna Muylaert," Sarajevo Film Festival, YouTube, Published Aug. 15, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4pEzvgkbb4

inequality."[31] Despite the odds, Jéssica will overcome this disadvantage, gaining admittance in the later part of the film. A character like Jéssica's before the Lula era would have made this film seem like more of a fantasy seen through rose-colored glasses instead of an inspirational message capable of provoking necessary conversations about change and inequity between different parts of Brazilian society.

At the outset of the film, Jéssica crosses the line in the architectural sand, literally, the threshold, when she expresses her wish to stay in the guest room, instead of the small space where her mother sleeps. This is the first time the audience sees this space (which is symbolic of the fact that it is not a room Val spends time in), and the knowledge that the family has an empty room in the house that is far more luxurious than the one Val stays in may be a shock. The connotation is clear: the bourgeoisie have an excess of resources, while the working class goes without. During the course of the film, no one ever comes to stay in this guest bedroom, and we are led to assume that if Jéssica had not sought to occupy it, no one would have, meaning it would inconvenience no one should Val be allowed to inhabit the room. This realization is made even more painful since it is the labor of the working class that enables the bourgeoisie to hoard wealth. Robinson elaborates, "[t]he function of the laboring classes was to provide the state and its privileged classes with the material and human resources needed for their maintenance and further accumulations of power and wealth."[32] It is only through Val's labor, and those like her, that the family's elite lifestyle is sustained.

Jéssica's access to the guest bedroom, which has never been occupied by someone from the working class, communicates that she, in contrast to her mother, is not satisfied with being

[31] Rosana Heringer, Ollie Johnson, Ollie A. Johnson III, *Race, Politics, and Education in Brazil: Affirmative Action in Higher Education,* Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
[32] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 21.

limited by the confinements set by Brazilian society. However, director Muylaert ensures that Jéssica's position is not mistaken for that of someone unhindered by her class. The director includes her in high-angle shots to showcase that she is in fact trapped like her mother, sequestered by high walls, while at the same time giving the audience the feeling of looking down upon Jéssica and her status. It is critical to the film that change originates from within the working class, and that Jéssica, while revolutionary, is not interpreted as having a different social standing than the rest of her comrades, effectively communicating that change is possible for all. While Jéssica is burdened by her social status like her mother, this high-angle shot takes place on the patio in the open air, deviating from the image of Val's cramped bedroom with a barred window, communicating that the change Jéssica seeks is within reach. A reverse shot takes us from Jéssica on the patio to the blue sky above her; showing the audience that she may reach great heights. Unlike those before her, Jéssica lives during a time period where President Lula has demolished barriers, enabling her to strive for a life that was once unattainable. Jéssica completely forgoes class barriers when she jumps into the backyard pool, demonstrating her capacity to reach for opportunities that were not offered to generations past. The connotations here could almost be baptismal – Jéssica goes into the pool a member of the lower class -- does she come out with a new lease on life, reborn with new opportunities? As a response to this transgression, Bárbara orders Val to drain the pool, citing the metaphor for a rat to comment on the connotation of the working class as dirty, representing the violation of her property by Jéssica. While the film's hopeful, young student may delve into uncharted waters, Bárbara's lashing out means to communicate that the waves Jéssica is making, or the changes Lula was seen as enabling the working class to make, were met by the upper-classes with unease, at best, and outrage and violence at worst.

Figure 7: Jéssica looks up in Que Horas Ela Volta? (2015)

This transgression of established regulations cements Jéssica, and her hope for a world with less barriers, as the antithesis of the colonial order that is continually reinforced by the dynamic between Val and the family that employs her. The dynamic here is best defined as the result of what Robinson calls "racial capitalism," explained in his book *Black Marxism*:

> The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism.[33]

Based on Robinson, class and race cannot be extricated from each other, instead they rely upon each other to form the working class. This binary originates from the Atlantic slave trade, modern capitalism's birthplace, where European descended peoples profited from the forced labor of those they had enslaved. This connection is more obvious in *Bacurau*, better said, the 2019 film is a more radical iteration of the consequences of racial capitalism. However, *Que Horas Ela Volta?* provides an important ideological space for contemporary Brazilians, serving as a starting point for what could unfurl later as immense social change. *Que Horas Ela Volta?* serves as a conversation starter, prompting reflection by the upper-classes on their personal

[33] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

actions, and receiving praise from the working class. *Bacurau,* released four years later, declares that there is no longer time for the niceties presented in Muyalert's film; rather, it asserts that the ghosts of colonization and their socioeconomic effects must be addressed today.

Robinson's "racial capitalism" provides a theoretical basis for the continual marginalization of domestic workers. The narrative of Val and her employers taps into the reality of the live-in maid, a not-so-far-off descendant of the domestic slave. Scholar Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas elaborates on the connection between *empregada* and the formerly enslaved:

> Often, domestic work in Brazil is viewed in terms of a modern-day continuation of the country's slavery past. By 1872, 16 years prior to the official abolition of slavery in Brazil, the line between slave and paid employee was beginning to blur; it became common among former slave-holding families to rent, rather than buy, house slaves. When the Consolidação das Leis Trabalhistas (Consolidation of Labour Laws, CLT), a considerable labour rights victory for low-wage workers, was adopted in Brazil in 1943, domestic workers were excluded from its coverage because it was understood they carried out 'non-economic' labour.[34]

The interruption of this imperial dynamic caused by Jéssica – the opposition created between Val and her bosses who are white (implying European descent) – is alluded to in a scene that takes place in the kitchen when Val attempts to arrange a set of coffee cups, which she had gifted Bárbara. The coffee set is black and white, a decision on the part of the director to visually reinforce the binary of master/enslaved, a division that continues to be realized along lines of race and class. During this scene, Val observes that the black coffee thermos does not fit on the tray with the rest of the cups and saucers, which represents Jéssica's refusal to fall into a preordained category and the separation of people based on class and race in Brazilian society at large.

[34] Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, "'Sovereign Parenting' in Affluent Latin American Neighbourhoods: Race and the Politics of Childcare in Ipanema (Brazil) and El Condado (Puerto Rico)." *Journal of Latin American studies* 51, no. 3 (2019) 644.

It would be remiss of this analysis not to consider the character of José Carlos' (played by Lourenço Mutarelli) as a particularly malicious force in *Que Horas Ela Volta?* Practically a caricature of the upper-middle class, José Carlos is a disillusioned artist who makes his living as a landlord. Bored with his current situation, he develops an obsession with Jéssica, asking for her hand in marriage. Taking the form of misplaced sympathy on the part of the director, the film does not provide space for Val, or anyone else, to respond to this proposal, reminding the audience that a man of José Carlos' stature is permitted to act out in ways that deviate from accepted social norms and religious ethics, a privilege not bestowed on those below his rank in gender or class. The audience may find themselves feeling sorry for José Carlos because he seems emasculated by his wife Bárbara, who is initially portrayed as the matriarch and breadwinner of the house (she dominates the domestic space and is often seen leaving for work while her husband stays at home). However, it is revealed to Jéssica later that it is in fact his inheritance from his father that supports their luxurious lifestyle, exposing that patriarchy continues to reign in the upper-class household. His position as the patriarch of the home is crucial, as he has the authority to banish, or invite, Jéssica into spaces that would normally be unavailable to her. He repeatedly welcomes her into unauthorized rooms in his house. She eats at the dining room table with him while Val serves them both. He also gives her a tour of his studio, a scene fraught with the tension of the possibility that José Carlos' will make a move on Jéssica. On a different occasion, he takes Jéssica and Fabinho both to tour the university building they may attend in the future, calling into question his categorization of Jéssica: does he see her as a daughter or lover? The dangers of the patriarchal family abound and are exacerbated by the colonial and capitalist influences present in Brazil, as they are in the United States. Feminist author bell hooks describes these perils in her book *All About Love:*

> Capitalism and patriarchy together, as structures of domination, have worked overtime to undermine and destroy this larger unit of extended kin. Replacing the family community with a more privatized small autocratic unit helped increase alienation and made abuses of power more possible. It gave absolute rule to the father, and secondary rule over children to the mother. By encouraging segregation of nuclear families from the extended family, women were forced to become more dependent on an individual man, and children more dependent on an individual woman. It is this dependency that became, and is, the breeding ground for abuses.[35]

While I assert that Jéssica's ability to gain access to these elite environments is a prowess all her own, José Carlos often overrules his wife's wish to put Jéssica in her so-called place. His flaws are not disconnected: his predatory nature towards Jéssica and his consumption of property are two sides of the same unsettling coin. His desire and perceived right to consume Jéssica as an object, may be misconstrued as the "intimacy" between the enslaved and their enslavers, spoken of by Gilberto Freyre in his book *Casa Grande & Senzala* (Trans: The Masters and the Slaves). Author Tiago de Luca comments on Freyre's point of view: "[…] this spatial proximity explained the high degree of interbreeding between the two groups in Brazil, with masters allowing male and female slaves into the private space of their home and allegedly establishing more a humane relationship than the ones observed in other slave-holding societies."[36] A similar relationship, one underscored by entitlement and ownership of another human being, is developed in Martel's film *La Ciénaga,* between Momi and her maid, Isabel. Neoliberal policies fail Brazilians in many ways but fall especially short regarding housing and land development, allowing characters like José Carlos to dominate his surroundings. During Caldeira's second stage of segregation, the process of urban planning was occurring simultaneously due to Brazil's shift towards industrialization. Authors Alain Durand-Lasserve and Lauren Royston summarize this phenomenon:

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[35] bell hooks, *All About Love* (Gloria Watkins), 2001, 130.

[36] Tiago de Luca, *Casa Grande & Senzala: domestic space and class conflict in Casa Grande and Que Horas Ela Volta?* In: da Silva, Antonio Marcio and Cunha, Mariana, (eds.) *Space and Subjectivity in Contemporary Brazilian Cinema. Screening Spaces.* London: Palgrave, 4. ISBN 9783319839004

> Urban planning from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s was characterized by the subordination of the state agencies to private interests. Therefore, national urban development policies were in the interests of the landowners and large companies that developed urban infrastructure (Fernandes and Rolnik, 1998). This was facilitated by the failure of the Brazilian state, prior to the constitution, to reform laissez-faire legal ideologies regarding the use and development of urban land.[37]

José Carlos represents these very same private interests and is allowed to hoard land to benefit himself while putting the working class at a disadvantage. As the master of his domain, he stockpiles these two valuable resources, just as capitalism provides a system for the accumulation of workers and land. José Carlos views himself as rightfully owning everything he lays eyes on, including property and people.

In direct opposition to José Carlos' position is Val's relationship with Fabinho, a dynamic I find to be absent from many other analyses of *Que Horas Ela Volta?* It is here that the audience may glean the true hardships of the labor of motherhood, explicit in the film's English language title, *The Second Mother*. While patriarchy is upheld by the elite family, Val is the true matriarch of the film, bringing to light that this colonial order can be subverted by the working class. The toil of leadership taken on by Val as the matriarch must be recognized as incredibly taxing; she is overcoming intersectional oppressions so that she may properly care for the children around her. It must be noted that the emotional and physical labor of motherhood is not a practice innate to all women, and this labor should be seen as particularly generous in the dynamic between Fabinho and Val. In an interview, Muylaert called motherhood "really sacred work" in reference to raising her first son, emphasizing the potency of this relationship in the film.[38] Again, bell hooks reminds us: "sexist thinking obscures the fact that these women make a choice to serve,

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[37] Alain Durand-Lasserve, and Lauren Royston. *Holding Their Ground: Secure Land Tenure for the Urban Poor in Developing Countries*. London: Routledge (2002) https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=108821&site=ehost-live&scope=site. 101-102.

[38] "Anna Muylaert interview COURIEX DIGITAL," Interview by Pierre-Michel Meier filmed April 2015 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21UBRwgkYxo

that they give of free will and not because of biological destiny."[39] Muylaert was inspired by her own motherhood, and her newfound understanding of the heartbreak required by many *empregadas domésticas* when choosing to work in their employers home.[40] While I find this relationship in the film to be one full of genuine love, it does not exist outside of Brazil's colonial influence. Val comments on Fabinho's looks, saying "A handsome boy like you. There's not a boy like you in Brazil! With these big blue eyes, you look like the English prince." Val has internalized the colonial and racist forces acting on society's idea of attractive, which has resulted in the ideal being a Eurocentric one: pale skin, blue eyes, and blonde hair. Every relationship in the film is deeply affected by Brazil's history as a Portuguese colony.

To address scenes in the film that take place outdoors, I utilize Caldeira's second era of segregation, that of center-periphery (reminiscent of the metropole/colony dynamic), where the classes are separated by large distances and the upper- and middle-class live in the center and the working class lives on the borders of the city. If one were to exist the home of Bárbara and Jose Carlos, you would be forced to descend, and even though we cannot be sure of the distance between the upper-class home and the apartment where Val and Jéssica will eventually live, the neighborhood where the film takes place is well-known to a Brazilian audience as an elite space, the Morumbi district, a space far away from the favelas and poorer neighborhoods in São Paulo.[41] This separation is not only physical, but bleeds into access to important resources provided by the state as well.[42]

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[39] bell hooks, *All about Love: New Visions / Bell Hooks.*, 1st Perennial ed. (New York: Perennial, 2001), 142.
[40] "21st Sarajevo Film Festival Interview with Anna Muylaert," Sarajevo Film Festival, YouTube, Published Aug. 15, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4pEzvgkbb4
[41] María Mercedes Vázquez Vázquez, "New Geographies of Class in Mexican and Brazilian Cinemas: *Post Tenebras Lux* and *Que horas ela volta?", Contemporary Latin American Cinema: Resisting Neoliberalism?* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018), 72.
[42] "The socio-spatial provision of public services and facilities is extremely unequal. Public transportation is insufficient and expensive and there is a poor quality of life." Alain Durand-Lasserve, and Lauren Royston. *Holding Their Ground: Secure Land Tenure for the Urban Poor in Developing Countries.* London: Routledge (2002)

Figure 8: Val in the Kitchen in Que Horas Ela Volta? (2015)

During the film's falling action, Val timidly crosses the barrier separating classes, propelled by her daughter's recent accomplishment (passing the entrance exam for the architecture school). Jéssica plays an important role in *Que Horas Ela Volta?,* disrupting divisions through her own education. To illustrate Val's ascension and her own family to a higher socioeconomic standing, free from her boss' orders, Val gets into the pool, demonstrating that she does in fact have access to some level of class mobility, although her options may be more limited than her daughter's or those of the elite (the pool has been drained of water as previously mentioned). Following this momentous scene, Jéssica and her mother are pictured in an apartment, drinking coffee together out of the same coffee set Val once gifted Bárbara. Val has reclaimed the coffee set, and by doing so reclaimed her property. This time, the black and white coffee cups fit together seamlessly unlike before in the upper-class home, returning to the idea that inclusivity may be made possible by Lula's policies. Val has quit her job as a maid, hoping to pursue a job as a masseur while she lives with her daughter in their apartment. The duo's new living situation is not simply a daydream written to succinctly close the film. In the

https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=108821&site=ehost-live&scope=site 102.

year's leading up to the film's release, 2012-2015, the number of head of household who were women increased by 1 million every year, and this figure continued to climb into 2019, when "there were nearly 35 million homes led by women in Brazil, approximately 2.7 million more than a year earlier."[43] The *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE) confirms that this trend continued to rise in 2020, when 47.5% of homes were led by women.[44] The movie closes with a hopeful feeling as the protagonists set out to begin new lives, demonstrating the hope that working class can overcome oppression through opportunities like education. Like Val, many workers around the globe today are quitting their jobs in a trend titled "The Great Resignation." Hoping for a more dignified existence, people are turning in their two-week's notice and refusing to continue to work for a fraction of a living-wage. In the United States, a staggering four million employees resigned in April of 2021, and in India, the information technology industry may witness more than 1 million people quit their jobs.[45] This hope for Val and her family may be inspired by university admission quotas in Brazil just three years prior to the film's debut, in 2012. Muylaert herself sees education as fundamental for the creation of a strong nation, the "difference between country and nation is education."[46] These quotas reserved half of available university spots for "Black and economically deprived students" and reveal the

[43] Teresa Romero, "Brazil: Number of Households 2012-2019, by Gender of the Head," *Statista,* July 5, 2021 https://www.statista.com/statistics/870645/brazil-number-households-head-gender/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20there%20were%20nearly,to%2037.5%20million%20in%202019.
[44] Carolina Desoti, "IDADOS na GloboNews: Cresce Número De Mulheres Chefes De Domicílio," Jan. 1, 2020, https://idados.id/mulheres-chefes-de-familia/
[45] Andrea Hsu, "As The Pandemic Recedes, Millions of Workers Are Saying 'I Quit,'" *National Public Radio,* June 24, 2021 https://www.npr.org/2021/06/24/1007914455/as-the-pandemic-recedes-millions-of-workers-are-saying-i-quit ; Mini Tejaswi, "Attrition in IT sector to cross 1 million this year," *The Hindu,* Sept. 27, 2021 https://www.thehindu.com/business/Industry/attrition-in-it-sector-to-cross-1-million-this-year/article36702884.ece
[46] "Anna Muylaert interview COURIEX DIGITAL," Interview by Pierre-Michel Meier filmed April 2015 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21UBRwgkYxo

PT's intention to reconcile with its colonial past and the legacies of slavery present in the distribution of economic opportunities. [47]

[47] Vânia Penha-Lopes, "Confronting Affirmative Action in Brazil: University Quota Students and the Quest for Racial Justice," *Lexington Books* (2017), 11.

Chapter 2: *La Ciénaga* (2001), Dir., Lucrecia Martel

To understand Lucrecia Martel's 2001 film, it is critical to look at the recession that took place in Argentina from 1998-2002, a financial crisis so severe the era has been titled the "Argentine Great Depression." In 2001, the unemployment rate in Argentina was over 22 percent and around 50 percent of the population was in poverty (from other numbers I have seen this is a conservative estimate).[48] This financial catastrophe followed the presidency of Carlos Saúl Menem in the early 1990s, who instituted typical neoliberal policies such as privatization and market liberalization, as well as the Convertibility Plan.[49] The Convertibility Plan, supported by Menem and his Economy Minister Domingo Cavallo, equated the Argentine peso to the United States' dollar and made it incredibly low-cost to import goods, creating an environment in which the Argentine worker was required to produce more at a lower cost "in order to survive the increased competition."[50] Under Menem, intense poverty continued and converted many Argentinians into what Noelia Diaz calls "economic desaparecidos," a reference to those disappeared by the country's recent military dictatorship.[51] The economic and politic turmoil that characterized the late 1990s heralded in the filmic style of New Argentine Cinema. This style fostered directors like Martel, Fabian Bielinsky (most famous for *Nueve Reinas* released in 2000 and *El Aura* released in 2005), and Israel Adrián Caetano (*Un Oso Rojo* released in 2002), all of

[48] "The Argentine Crisis 2001/2002," Economic Report, RaboResearch – Economic Research, August 2013 https://economics.rabobank.com/publications/2013/august/the-argentine-crisis-20012002-/

[49] Gastón Beltrán, "The Discreet Charm of Neoliberalism: The Paradox of Argentine Business Support of Market Reforms," *Latin American Perspectives*, Volume 42, Issue 1, January 2015, 28. https://doi-org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/10.1177/0094582X14560558

[50] Sebastían Pedro Salvia, "The Boom and Crisis of the Convertibility Plan in Argentina," *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy*, Volume 35 (2), Apr-Jun 2015 https://doi-org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/10.1177/0094582X14560558

[51] Noelia Diaz, "Gendered Violence and Neoliberal Desaparecidos in Luis Cano's Socavón," *Modern Drama* 64, no. 4 (2021): 458–77.

whom comment on the renewal of Argentina's colonial order under the capitalism of the modern era. While Martel's interpretation may be more subtle, filmmakers Bielinsky and Caetano use specific themes like robbery and betrayal as explicit references to Argentina's politico-economic situation at the time, questioning concepts around criminality and morality. In contrast to filmmakers like Bielisnky and Caetano, Martel's interpretation is centered around interpersonal relationships, and the way Argentina's politics of the late 20th and early 21st century sully them. The director does not invoke the classic Hollywood imagery of bank heists or fast-paced car chases to touch on the post/colonial dynamics that continue to ravage Argentina. Instead, Martel's more implicit approach allows viewers to grasp how class-based violence may appear in their own lives. She urges us to reflect on how said violence does not only exist on a macro-level; yes, corrupt politicians and foreign banks were/are cruel forces in this era of Argentina's history, but these players are only part of the problem. Martel attempts to point her audience towards the manifestations of class-based violence that exist on a micro-level, situations that occur between family members, friends, and employees.

The renewal of Argentina's colonial order during this period is what authors Duménil and Lévy term the "*neoliberal-imperialist mix,"* which can be defined as the current incarnation of dependency between imperialism and capitalism in which the wealth and potency of the ruling classes is reinstated following its decline in the post-World War II era.[52] Many nations were negatively affected by this new economic system, but Argentina's specific class hierarchy created unique results in relation to the country's social structure and economic crisis. The complicity of the "rentier class" of Argentina with the economic hegemony of the United States allowed for the elite to maintain their wealth by auctioning off a large portion of the Argentine

[52] Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, "Imperialism in the Neoliberal Era: Argentina's Reprieve and Crisis," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Volume 38, No. 3, Summer 2006, 389-389.

economy to foreign investors. To that effect, Duménil and Lévy note that, "in the early 2000s, 80 percent of the total product (value added) of the 500 largest Argentinean nonfinancial corporations is made by corporations owned by foreigners (with more than 50 percent foreign ownership)."[53] Under the world order of neoliberalism, Argentina's European-descendant ruling class must compete with the interests of the United States, creating a situation in which the vast majority of Argentineans are disadvantaged. *La Ciénaga* gives audiences a filmic incarnation of the poisonous effects of this economic tradition and the neocolonial relationships it reinforces.

At only a 100-minute runtime, director Lucrecia Martel's *La Ciénaga* (Trans: *The Swamp*) seems to lurch on endlessly as characters stumble through interactions in the hot and humid Argentine countryside. During the summer vacation of a bourgeoisie family, the audience is thrown from one interaction to the next as Martel ventures away from cinematic norms that favor a clear plot-point in favor of a story that is more character-driven. The matriarch of the family, named Mecha (played by Graciela Borges), and her husband Gregorio (played by Martin Adjemián), transplant themselves to their estate in the country with their four children, Verónica (often called Vero, played by Leonora Balcarce), Momi (Sofia Bertolotto), Joaquín (Diego Baenas), and José (Juan Cruz Bordeu). What for most would be a serene setting provides no distractions for this cast of characters, and their interactions with one another and around one another cry out for escape. Due to their isolation, the family (and by extension, the audience) must confront darknesses about themselves and their kin. The upper-class family has a cook and a live-in maid, named Isabel (played by Andrea López), whom, along with a young man from the town nearby, named Perro (Fabio Villafane), make up the film's working-class, indigenous "other." The interactions that play out between the elite family and their employees in the film

[53] Ibid., 392.

are especially revealing of the bourgeoisie's state of mind during the Argentine Great Depression, and work to create Martel's post/colonial discourse.

Despite what seems to be a ceaseless state of inaction, Martel overloads her audience with sensory information at every turn. In the opening shot, the image of red bell-peppers fills the screen, establishing the family's distribution business and consequential consumption of land and workers for viewers. This isolated image recalls a still-life, hinting at the swimming pool to come in the following scene and commenting on the family's (and by extension the upper-class') stagnating, or still, political and economic power. Later in the film, it is revealed that Mecha's family sells bell peppers to support themselves, thereby exploiting Argentina's natural bounty for their personal gain. What may already be clear to readers, but will be stated explicitly for emphasis, is that this family does not grow or tend to the peppers themselves; the labor of growing and harvesting this crop is not a part of their lives. The audience can therefore infer what Martel does not show: the working class of Argentina that must work in order for this elite family to accumulate wealth. To foreshadow argument that will be developed later on in this chapter, the upper-class family exploits the indigenous, working-class people they interact with, due to their interpretation of the indigenous as an extension, or facet, of nature.

Following this image, drunken and lethargic vacationers drag pool chairs alongside the putrid *pileta's* edge, resulting in a sound that can only be likened to nails on a chalkboard. Ice clinks and wine sloshes in expensive looking glasses. Headless bodies struggle to move through thick, sticky air. The swimming pool serves as the film's center of gravity (utilizing architecture as a metaphor like Muylaert's film), and it, along with the surrounding house and mountains are where most of the film's "plot" unfolds. Unlike its Brazilian counterpart, *Que Horas Ela Volta?*, this is not a tale of ascension through the class ranks, but rather one of decay; a family's fall from

the graces of the bourgeois lifestyle during a new economic world order. While the backyard pool appears and is central to both films, Muylaert's Brazilian film uses a pristine, crisp swimming pool to indicate the separation of social classes, while Martel's pool is unusable, saturated with mud and filth, indicating the decay of Argentina's rural-ruling class as the country moves steadily towards industrialization. Argentina's urban upper-class (like Muylaert's family) may have found a place in the world's neoliberal power structure, but Martel's rendering of the rural elite comments on the displacement felt by a family whose lifestyle and method of income would be recognizable to a plantation owner from the colonial era.

Figure 9: Animal Print Bathing Suit in La Ciénaga (2001)

Directors Muylaert and Martel share their real-world middle-class position, and both employ stylistic choices to prevent from obscuring the speech of oppressed demographics, working instead to prompt reflection and discomfort in peers from their own socioeconomic class. Using what author Matthew Losada refers to as "free indirect noise-scape," Martel creates a discourse on the incessant striving by the middle-class towards easement, a constant self-soothing, using the film's audio. In reference to Martel's 2008 work, *La Mujer Sin Cabeza* (Trans: The Headless Woman), Losada explains:

> The abundance of intensified acousmatic sounds – continuous deep roars or hums that emanate from off-screen space, punctuated by beepers, buzzers, sirens, alarms, and other noises – is Martel's most effective tool for exposing the mechanism by which the subject is brought back from a potentially productive crisis into the middle-class comfort zone. The noise-scape is formed by acousmatic sounds that form an ambient noise, and the free indirect aspect comes into play in the distortions in volume, pitch and timbre that correspond to the protagonist's ever-changing psychological condition: when she is experiencing moments of crisis these sharpen, but when she is reassured by friends or family or simply distracted, they fade into the degree zero of background murmur that filmmakers call "room tone."[54]

The Argentine director uses this unique tool of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds in her earlier film *La Ciénaga*, and again in her latest, *Zama* (2017). In the 2001 film, the scene described above, where the adults float about and bump into each other by the swimming pool, provides an example of this tool. At what should be the bourgeoisie's most relaxed moments, the ambient noise becomes almost unbearable, pointing to the family's discomfort not only with each other, but with their position in society. Scraping of metal against concrete as figures drag the pool chairs puts the viewers' hair on end, and the volume and repetition of ice clinking against glass makes it sound almost mechanical. During moments of "action," these sounds quiet, and even though the film's narrative is most dynamic at these points the viewer is permitted to relax and ease back into their expectations of cinematic norms. Another instance of this noise-scape occurs while the family eats dinner together – the sounds of chewing and silverware clacking against plates are so intense even the characters in the film comment on them – demonstrating that the familial relationships are fraught with trauma. There is an undeniably animalistic element to these chewing and smacking mouth-sounds in this scene at the dinner table. Mecha's family harbors great disdain for the lower classes (represented by the cook, Isabel, and Perro), however, it is they who, paradoxically, lack the manners or morals often associated with elitism. Several dogs who wander the property allude to the process of animalization that the family is

[54] Matthew Losada, "Lucrecia Martel's 'La Mujer Sin Cabeza': Cinematic Free Indirect Discourse, Noise-Scape and the Distraction of the Middle Class." *Romance Notes* 50, no. 3 (2010), 311 http://www.jstor.org/stable/43803153.

undergoing as part of their economic and moral decay. Notably, the upper-class family refers to the indigenous local man (who serves as their connection to the larger world) as Perro (Spanish for "dog"), despite their own animalistic behavior. This process of social decay is foundational to the film's post/colonial critique. Here, I do not use the term "post/colonial" to refer to an era characterized by its liberation from colonial structures, rather, it indicates "critical discourses which thematize issues emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath, covering a long historical span (including the present)."[55] My use of post/colonial does not imply a state of existence after the fall of empires, instead, it works to demonstrate how colonial-era power structures continue to define life for many around the globe.

Martel's most potent post/colonial commentary comes in the form of the process named above, and what Film and Cultural Studies scholars Ella Shohat and Robert Stam describe in their book *Unthinking Eurocentrism* as *animalization*:

> This [animalization] was rooted in a religious and philosophical tradition which drew sharp boundaries between the animal and the human, and where all animal-like characteristics of the self were to be suppressed. Colonizing discourse, for Fanon, always resorts to the bestiary. Colonialist/racist discourse renders the colonized as wild beasts in their unrestrained libidinousness, their lack of proper dress, their mud huts resembling nests and lairs.[56]

This concept is revisited several times during the film and is undermined from several angles. Its first iteration is during the opening scene, described above, where the upper-middle class family wears animal-print bathing suits as they lounge by the pool. As author Deborah Martin notes, the animal-print suits reveal that this family has assumed the role usually relegated to Black or brown people in the colonial hierarchy, that of moral and mental competence equal to a child.[57] The family will project these feelings onto the indigenous characters they interact with in the

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[55] Ella Shohat, "Notes on the "Post-Colonial", *Social Text,* No. 31/32, *Third World and Post-Colonial Issues* (Duke University Press) 1992, 101. https://palestinecollective.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/notes-on-the-post-colonial-ella-shohat.pdf

[56] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism in the Media* (Routledge, 2014), 137.

[57] Deborah Martin, *The Cinema of Lucrecia Martel,* 40.

film, Mecha being especially aggressive in her racist attacks. This scene provides an understated subversion of the Eurocentric expectation that white/European descended people are more civilized than the "savages" they set out to conquer, laying the groundwork for a more thorough dissection of this trope throughout the film.

Figure 10: Gregorio Steps Over Mecha in La Ciénaga (2001)

Animalization in *La Ciénaga* often comes in the form of gendered oppression. Gregorio and Mecha's marriage is empty, completely void of love, interest, and respect. When Mecha asks questions, Gregorio often does not respond, she may as well not have spoken at all. This action (or inaction) effectively silences her and reinforces her secondary role in the family. In Figure 2, Gregorio is totally unconcerned about Mecha's well-being after she falls on glass and begins bleeding profusely. He tells her to get up because "it's going to rain" but makes no move to help her, instead stepping over her body as if she were the family dog or an inconveniently placed child's toy. In the scene shown in Figure 2, the vertical hierarchy established in the *Que Horas Ela Volta?* holds true: the patriarch towers over his wife (his possession) while she is forced to submit. It would behoove the analysis here to make the comparison between Mecha and Bárbara,

the two matriarchs in *La Ciénaga* and *Que Horas Ela Volta?,* respectively. Both women seem to emasculate their husbands, dominating the visual and auditory space in the film. Mecha and Bárbara speak louder and more frequently than their husbands, seemingly calling the shots in their own households. As noted earlier in this paragraph, Gregorio rarely responds to Mecha's questions. However, he also rarely speaks up at all; he is more concerned with other things (most often his own appearance). This emasculation creates tension between the upper-class matriarch and her corresponding patriarch. Gregorio's silence may be explained by his lack of concern at being "over-thrown" by his wife, confident that his status as leader of the family is not in danger due to the power structures at play in modern Argentina. As noted in this work's first chapter on Muylaert's film, patriarchy prevails in a capitalist system and remains despite what may appear to be emasculated men and a strong matriarchal presence. As bell hooks has theorized, patriarchy and capitalism feed off each other, their existence reinforcing the other to create the elite's desired power structure. The scene described above ensures that the audience does not mistake the family dynamic as a matriarchal one by illustrating the hierarchy explicitly. The shot in Figure 2 is reminiscent of the painting shown in Figure 3, *"The Discovery of America,"* where an indigenous woman lies in repose as a man asserts himself in the visual space: a colonial and patriarchal dynamic. In the end, it is the family's maid, Isabel, and one of the teenage daughters, Momi, that are called to help Mecha, and they run to offer her assistance despite their tumultuous relationships. Following the fall, Gregorio is seen calmly using a hairdryer to style his hair, despite the frantic, hurried aura surrounding the event. He appears out of place against Isabel's rushed movements as she searches for a dress Mecha requested to wear to the doctor. He frets over what Isabel might have stolen instead of his wife's physical condition – the suspicion of the working class hangs around every conversation.

Throughout the film, Perro may be interpreted as a working-class counterpoint to José's character. This dynamic is established in a scene in which the family's teenage daughters, and Isabel, who is approximately the same age, go shopping in anticipation of José's arrival from Buenos Aires (where he is staying with his older lover, Mercedes – played by Silvia Baylé). In a clothing store in the near-by town, the young women chose articles of clothing for José (since José packs a bag of his own for his stay in the countryside, this trip/shopping spree may be interpreted as pointless consumerism to add fodder to Martel's commentary on Argentina's neoliberal policies). The working-class characters (Isabel, Perro, and a group of individuals who appear to be their friends) stand outside the shop's glass doors, visually near, but clearly separated from the elite space designated for material consumption. Some of the young women inside the shop press their faces to the glass, gawking at those on the other side of the door. The indigenous characters remain outside until they are called in by the daughters, who proceed to ask (or command) Perro to try a shirt on in José's place, despite a clear discrepancy in size between the two men. This discrepancy indicates to the audience that this sequence is for the young women's pleasure, not for ensuring they purchase the correct size shirt. The young women stare silently, some with mouths open. Martel deftly utilizes this scene to subvert the male gaze into an upper-class gaze, where the bourgeoise daughters visually consume Perro (who is obviously uncomfortable) as they order him around. Critically, Isabel looks away in this scene, showing not only that she may not take part in the upper-class gaze, but also that she recognizes the dynamic to be immoral and disturbing. The upper-class girls are undergoing the process of animalization in this scene, allowing their unrestricted libido and lack of manners to be publicly displayed.

During a night out in the same town, Perro and José get into a physical fight over Isabel's affection. In this scenario, Isabel is a maiden requiring a white savior to rescue her from the clutches of Perro, an indigenous man. This phenomenon is what Shohat and Stam term the Rape and Rescue Fantasy, in which "[…] virginal White women, and at times dark women, are rescued from dark men. The figure of the dark rapist, like that of the African cannibal, catalyzes the narrative role of the Western liberator as integral to the colonial rescue fantasy."[58] José's attempt to "rescue" Isabel undermines her intelligence and right to make decisions for/about herself. His actions reveal another facet of animalization: infantilization. Indigenous and Black people are seen in colonial discourse as having the mental prowess of children, adding fodder to the narrative that it is in the best interest of the people of the Third World to be colonized. The infantilization of Isabel is reinforced by Mecha's constant whining of Isabel's incompetence.

Figure 11: "The Discovery of America"[59]

[58] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism in the Media* (Routledge, 2014), 156.
[59] Johannes Stradanus, "The Discovery of America," c. 1587-79, Pen and brown ink, brown wash, heightened with white over black chalk, 19 x 26.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/northern/northern-ren-16c/a/johannes-stradanus-and-theodoor-galle-the-discovery-of-america.

The metaphor of the white liberator can be extended to land and nature, as discussed in the film's opening shot of the red bell peppers. The feminine is equated with the living world; a wilderness to be explored and civilized by the European man. In keeping with the value of the visual and cinematic, I believe the above painting titled "The Discovery of America" captures this colonial allegory well. The indigenous woman, the metaphor for the New World, reclines nude in a hammock, capturing the stereotype of women as passive and indigeneity as inherently promiscuous. The explorer in the painting is Amerigo Vespucci, who stands upright and clothed, holding a crucifix and an astrolabe as symbols of Europe's civility and superiority in the realms of science and religion. The equation of the feminine with the natural serves *La Ciénaga* in relation to the young boys who explore the mountainside surrounding the country home. They carry guns to conquer the wild terrain, a clear allusion to the masculine penetrating the feminine, like European explorers before them. The boys shoot carelessly along the way, disrupting the course of nature by murdering birds and a cow. Despite this, Deborah Martin posits that Martel uses these scenes to disprove the connection between indigenous and bestiary.[60] In a scene so uncomfortable I initially doubted my analysis of it, the son from the upper-middle class family, Joaquin, fondles a dog, while critiquing his indigenous playmates for doing exactly that (a suspicion given no footing throughout the film). Martel asserts here through her storytelling that in fact it is the colonial and his agents that defies morality.

Finally, on the topic of animalization, is Vero's (one of the four children in the family) telling of the myth of the "perro-rata." *Que Horas Ela Volta?* contains practically the same myth,

[60] Deborah Martin, *The Cinema of Lucrecia Martel Deborah Martin.*, Spanish and Latin American Filmmakers (Oxford, [England: Oxford University Press, 2016), 12.

playing out in the Brazilian film as a metaphor for the violation of elite spaces by the working class, recreated when Jéssica jumps into the swimming pool. In Martel's film, the infamous dog eats a woman's cat and must be taken to a veterinarian for further analysis. Here it is revealed that the dog is in fact an "Rata-Africana" (Spanish for "African Rat") with multiple sets of teeth; a title with no attempt to hide its racist and colonial underpinnings. This monstrous figure embodies the film's "others." However, this could be interpreted two different ways. Mecha's family solely interacts with the indigenous other, as seen through their interactions with Isabel and Perro, in a binary that may be represented by the article "Decolonization is not a metaphor" by scholars Tuck and Yang.[61] Both in the article and in Martel's film, the dynamic between colonizer and indigenous is heavily analyzed. Although this relationship deserves thorough scrutiny, the colonizer/colonized dynamic is, in reality, a triad (settler-enslaved-indigenous), not a binary. The telling of the "Rata-Africana" myth by Vero allows the filmmaker to incorporate Blackness into her post/colonial critique, creating a more complete commentary on this era of Argentina's history and the country's connection to its colonial past. It is important to note that Vero tells this story poolside, reinforcing the symbolism of both the *pileta* and the *rata* as representations of classism and racism.

[61] Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society,* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2012), 1-40.

Figure 12: José listens to the tale of the African-rat in La Ciénaga (2001)

Everything in the film is rotting, spoiling; the world surrounding this family is filthy, like the fabled Rata-Africana they fear. The rot seems to spill outward from the swimming pool, the swamp itself, contaminating everything within reach. The audience is constantly reminded of this festering through haunting shots of dead or dying animals. The first to appear is a cow stuck in the mud on the mountainside. Not yet dead, she is struggling, flailing, panicking. Reminiscent of the separation of Spain from its colonies, literally, a cash cow that can no longer be milked and must be put down. Argentina has separated herself from her mother, and the elite classes are identity-less without the nurturing Iberian figure. The luxury of colonial royalty, with its deranged purpose and riches extracted from the *conquista*, seems very far away from this group of practically unconscious characters. While the metropole no longer prospers in the way it once did, her influence over class structure remains. Colonial rule has grown into capitalism, and Argentina provides a fine example. The haunting image of the cow awaiting its fate in the mud evokes a famous, or infamous, montage from one of Third Cinema's first offspring, *La Hora de Los Hornos.* Directors Solanas and Getino intersperse bright and polished advertisements with a dark slaughterhouse sequence. Aryan-looking models -- thin, white, blonde – push Coca-Cola onto their audience while a whimpering cow has its head bashed in with a hammer. It is hard to

watch and hard to look away, the constant back and forth between the two very different images makes it difficult for the audience to know when to relax and when to hold their breath. However, the seeming contradiction is revealing: the horrors of production are very tangible in Argentina. The advertisements do not show Argentinians holding glass Coke bottles, they display an idealized European fantasy that displaces the culture of the people consuming it. Just as in *La Hora,* Martel's cow is finally shot and killed. It is no mistake that Argentina is one of the world's largest exporters of beef, and the murder of the cows in these two films may serve as a dark omen for the nation's future should its people continue on the same course, warning that the country's inequality is unsustainable. While director Martel hails from the middle-class herself, and her films do not pretend to speak for the working-class, this imagery communicates her belief that the current class structure is untenable.

Figure 13: Cow Stuck in Mud in La Ciénaga (2001)

Martel reinforces her focus on class structure by including characters of different classes and ethnicities in her stories. Isabel, the family's maid, features prominently in the tense home environment. Mecha seems to foster particularly hostile feelings towards Isabel, and repeatedly accuses her of stealing towels. Even when Mecha is bleeding profusely from her fall, all she can

seem to focus on is hurling insults at Isabel (who silently receives them). While the dialogue in the film occupies a secondary role to the intense auditory information and imagery, it is filled with derogatory racial slurs directed at *indios.* Mecha often refers to Isabel and people like her as "savages.*"* "Their" supposed laziness and inclinations towards criminality are constantly being called into question. Foucault provides a basis for understanding Mecha's paranoia, one based on class and their perceived associated behaviors:

> The division of labor means that the circulation of goods in large quantities and at successive stages of elaboration and transformation results in them being located at increasingly massive points—warehouses, docks—so that, at the very moment that the capitalist mode of production is developing, capital is exposed to a number of risks that were previously much more controllable. Capital is exposed not only to armed robbery and plunder, as before, but to daily depredation by those who live on it, alongside it. Depredation by those who handle this wealth thus exposed in a new way, due to the division of labor and the extent of markets and stocks, is one of the reasons why it will be necessary to establish a different order, a different way of controlling populations and preventing the practice of the transfer of property. The problem is one of the moral training of populations: their manners must be reformed so as to reduce their risks to bourgeois wealth.

Even though Mecha's familial wealth is clearly in decline, she continues to perceive her family's business as one that can be exposed to robbery. Mecha believes that the lower-class must envy her position and will try to take it, resulting in the family's displacement. The pepper business her family owns may be easily connected to the plantation, and in this colonial binary Isabel must be demoted to the position of enslaved. For Mecha, Isabel needs constant reformation and policing, she may at any moment be inclined to steal the family's wealth. Isabel's existence, as an indigenous working-class woman, is seen as a constant risk to Mecha. As is also seen in this work's analysis of *Que Horas Ela Volta?,* Mecha needs Isabel in order to sustain her own lifestyle, a parasitic relationship that also holds true for Bárbara and her employee, Val. Martel uses this relationship (one brimming with anxiety) to demonstrate how the upper-class depends on the lower-class to accumulate and hoard wealth. Due to this anxiety and fear, the bourgeoisie characters struggle to focus on what should be the film's most prominent moments. For example,

when she falls at the beginning of the film, Mecha seems to care only about peripheral details, unimportant in comparison to her own health as she begins losing more and more blood. She scolds Isabel for helping her up and sarcastically points out that it is only now that the towels appear, as well as fretting over the yard's hydrangeas as Momi hurries to pull the car around to take her to the doctor (Gregorio also cares about keeping up appearances and dyes his hair). She is overly concerned with maintaining the appearance of an elite lifestyle, one with a perfect yard and a maid who can follow instructions. From the film's outset, there is talk of Mecha firing Isabel. Vero informs Momi: "She [Mecha] says the sheets and towels are disappearing, so she's firing her." However, this never comes to pass, a hallmark of Martel's cinematic style – the unfulfilled promise, a plan that is never executed. The family's matriarch is rendered incapable of letting go of her maid, and in the end, it is Isabel who quits and leaves the dysfunctional family behind, alluding to the bourgeoisie's inability to take effective political action. Isabel's departure may be Martel's way of indicating that the working class is developing class consciousness, as Val does in Muylaert's film. Val also leaves her elite employers, which is indicative of the improvement in the quality of life for the working and middle-classes during the Lula era in Brazil. While these characters evoke each other, Martel's film cannot afford to be equally optimistic, due to Argentina's economic crisis at the time. Despite her relationship with the family's matriarch, Isabel has a prominent role in the film, serving as the children's connection to society outside of their country house and as Momi's unrequited love interest. Author Deborah Martin argues that Momi's affection towards Isabel masks the more insidious realities at play: Momi feels ownership over Isabel, and is shocked when Isabel makes the decision to leave the family's home permanently. This taboo attraction parallels Vero's attraction to her own brother, José, as is illustrated throughout the film, and most clearly in a scene where

José inserts his foot into the shower while his sister bathes. Taken together, these sexual undertones (and at times overtones) show the family's disregard for common moral codes. However, because of their class differences, Momi's attraction to Isabel is part of a larger exploitation scheme, where the upper-class takes advantage of the lower-class. As the object of Momi's desire, Isabel must bear the burden of the family's moral transgressions, whether fantasy or reality.

Even though Momi's rationale for her affection for Isabel may be questionable, she is possibly the only character that is willing to cross class boundaries. As seen in *Que Horas Ela Volta?* the swimming pool in *La Ciénaga* is symbolic of class relations. Like Jéssica, she jumps into the pool, only in the Argentine film the pool is stagnant, the water cloudy and full of leaves. It does not represent the opportunities and lifestyle of the upper-class, rather the imprisonment of Argentina's lower-class in a system designed to oppress them. The vertical hierarchy created when Gregorio steps over Mecha is reestablished in this scene, as Momi must descend into the putrid waters to comprehend, or attempt to comprehend, the life of her crush/maid Isabel. No one else dares immerse themselves in the pool, being careful to keep their distance from a confrontation that would force them to reckon with their social class.

Figure 14: Mecha Insults Isabel in La Ciénaga (2001)

Martel's interest in the colonial and its continual effects on class in Argentina are also well-documented in her more recent film *La Zama* (2017), a tale of a Spanish *corregidor* awaiting a transfer that never seems to arrive, the would-be climax deferred over and over (just as the trip Tali and Mecha plan to Bolivia never comes to fruition). *La Zama* contains all the quirks that make a Martel film a Martel film: important diegetic audio that comes from off-screen, fractured shots that obscure the audience's view, and a plot that never resolves itself. The director's off-kilter shots, while not classically structured, punctuate her ideas very clearly. The most vivid example of this phenomenon are the scenes in *La Zama* that include Black characters, slaves in this Argentine colony. Most of these characters do not speak (one of the more prominent, named Malemba, is said to be mute), alluding to their oppression and hardship during the Atlantic Slave Trade and the societies built on it. Despite this, Martel almost always places them at the center of her shots, while the white characters occupy the periphery. The resulting effect is spectacular: Black characters are successfully recentered in a story that might normally shirk them into the background. These characters that should occupy the film's margins recall Isabel, who manages to become a focal point despite her social class. Lower-class characters are

centered in these films, as they are in *Que Horas Ela Volta?*, in spite of the flashier upper-class characters, the film ends with a sequence about Val pursuing a new life. Their silence comes to be better understood as a form of protest when the protagonist Diego comes to call on his would-be lover, Luciana (yet another plot point that is eternally put off). Malemba, Luciana's slave, answers the door. Diego asks repeatedly that she makes his presence known to Luciana, "won't you announce me?", but Malemba simply walks into the house, leaving him stranded and unattended. Luciana even asks if someone has come to the door, and Malemba does not nod or acknowledge Diego in any capacity, successfully subverting the house's power structure and undermining the logic that seeks to keep her captive. In this scene, Isabel's character is conjured up by Malemba, both fulfilling the role of domestic servant/slave. Isabel frequently refused to answer the phone, as Malemba refuses to announce Diego. This act is interpreted incorrectly by Mecha as laziness, but is really an act of protest. By neglecting a ringing telephone, Isabel may silence her employers and prevent them from planning or communicating with others of their social class, just as Malemba neglected her duty to announce Diego. Isabel and Malemba's protests call into question the power structure on the freshly "conquered" continent. How powerful can these conquistadors be if they are subject to back talk from young women of a lower social standing? The narrative that the Spaniards swiftly and totally integrated the native population is subverted by Martel's acknowledgement of a more likely scenario: colonization was incomplete and hard fought due to the continual resistance by native populations.

Throughout the film, the family flicks back and forth between television channels they become absorbed in a local news channel that follows people claiming to have seen the Virgin. The murmurs surrounding the Virgin comment on the elite's inclination towards the escapism provided by the television, as well as providing space for Martel's narrative style in which plot

points are not allowed to come to fruition (the Virgin is never shown on the local news). In the film's final scene, Momi returns to the poolside from going to attempt to see the Virgin everyone has been talking about. She sits down in a chair next to Vero, who asks her if she in fact saw the Virgin. Momi replies *"no, no vi nada"* ("no, I didn't see anything"), a nothingness that alludes to the family's political and economic stagnation, the family that is in a state of nothingness. This state of stagnation reflects the upper-class' inability to take effective political action and promote revolution in the 21st century. In their place, the people of the working class must move towards cultural revolution, embodied by Isabel's leave-taking from her employer's family. Isabel flees her upper-class surroundings to return to her sister's home, where she can re-immerse herself into the working class.

Part 2

Chapter 3: *Bacurau* (2019), Dir. Kleber Mendoça Filho and Juliano Dornelles

Bacurau (2019) came to theaters following a firm shift to the right in Brazil's national politics. *Bacurau* comments on an era of intense socioeconomic changes following the end of the Worker's Party Era (*Partido dos Trahalhadores)*. President Lula da Silva introduced Fome 0 (Zero Hunger) during this period, a program that expanded on Bolsa Familia. This nation-wide conditional cash-transfer program designed to alleviate poverty, was implemented under President Fernando Ricardo in the late 1990s, and became a widely popular program that improved school attendance and health outcomes.[62] The program had a huge socioeconomic impact: the middle class exploded in size and the lower class was able to ascend the social ladder in a way unprecedented in modern Brazilian history.[63] This specific social program will be given more treatment in the section covering Anna Muylaert's film, *Que Hora Ela Volta?,* however, important historical context surrounding the Worker's Party follows.

As a departure from *Que Horas Ela Volta?,* the 2019 film is born in the wake of the impeachment of former-president Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) and the 2019 election of Jair Bolsonaro. To understand the rise of Bolsonaro's extreme-right government, this essay reflects on the causes of the *Jornadas do Juhno*, mass protests that took hold of Brazil's capital cities and spanned the months of June and July 2013. These protests, the largest Brazil has seen in decades, blossomed following a rise in economic inequality. This inequality originally took the form of an

[62] Luis Henrique Paiva, Teresa Cristina Cotta, and Armando Barrientos, "Brazil's Bolsa Família Programme," *Great Policy Successes (2019), 22-23.*
[63] Tiago de Luca, 'Casa Grande & Senzala': Domestic Space and Class Conflict in Casa Grande and Que Horas Ela Volta?

increase in public transportation prices in the country's largest cities due to the upcoming Olympic Games (an event which has, time and time again, put the interests of the government over the safety of a nation's people) and Confederations Cup.[64] While the political left made up most of the protest's participants in the beginning, conservative media coverage of the events as a platform to express general dissatisfaction with the current political party in office, the leftist Worker's Party, caused the demonstrations to balloon in size with followers from a wide variety of political affiliations, "some marches in July 2013 reaching over 1 million people."[65] Because of the new influx of opinions and missions, the marches became diluted and drifted away from their original goal, allowing the right-wing media to use them as a crutch for impeaching President Dilma Rousseff. The social unrest coupled with the oncoming economic recession made Rousseff and the Worker's Party an easy target for the political right, and the PT quickly lost popularity among voters spanning the entire political spectrum. The year Rousseff was impeached, 2016, Brazil's Gross Domestic Product dropped 3.6%.[66]

[64] Bianchi, Bernardo, Chaloub, Jorge, Rangel, Patricia, and Wolf, Frieder Otto, eds. *Democracy and Brazil: Collapse and Regression*. Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020. Accessed October 3, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central, 50.
[65] Ibid., citing Saad-Filho 2013, 51.
[66] João Pedro Caleiro, "Como o Brasil entrou (e pode sair) da maior recessão da história," *Exame (2017),* https://exame.com/economia/como-o-brasil-entrou-e-pode-sair-da-maior-recessao-da-historia/

Figure 15: Dilma Rousseff pictured on the cover of The Economist in 2016[67]

Both Lula and Rousseff were members of the leftist Worker's Party, and after her impeachment the party suffered substantial defeats in municipal elections, leading to a rise in right-center politics.[68] Michel Temer, Rousseff's former Vice President, took office following her removal, immediately slashing funding for social programs and installing other "standard neoliberal policies such as a fire sale privatization of state assets."[69] This was a startling shift from the politics of the previous administration. What came next, on January 1, 2019, was a populist wave seen in many parts of the world. In the United States it took on the form of Donald Trump, in Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro. This change ushered in an era of reinvigorated racism and classism, in what da Silva and Larkins call a shift from "cordial racism" to "more virulent and

[67] "Brazil's fall: Dilma Rousseff and the disastrous year ahead," *The Economist* (2016), https://www.economist.com/weeklyedition/2016-01-02

[68] Jorge Antonio Alves, "Transformation or Substitution? The Workers' Party and the Right in Northeast Brazil," *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 10, no. 1 (April 1, 2018): 99–132, https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X1801000104.

[69] Bianchi, Bernardo, Chaloub, Jorge, Rangel, Patricia, and Wolf, Frieder Otto, eds. *Democracy and Brazil: Collapse and Regression*. Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020. Accessed October 3, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central, 53.

explosive manifestations of antiblackness."[70] *Bacurau* works to unearth the colonial dynamic that breathes life into these present-day politics and inequities.

Bacurau (2019) is the collaborative fever dream of directors Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, that tells the story of a small, isolated town in Brazil, for which the film is named. Set into motion by the death of her family's matriarch, Teresa (played by Bárbara Colen) returns to Bacurau to mourn the loss of her grandmother with her family. Notably, Teresa brings medicine with her into town, and rides in on a truck transporting water to the community, drawing attention to Bacurau's remote conditions and the negligence of local and federal politicians.

Following the funeral, a series of dark occurrences threaten the town. Perpetrated by a team of outsiders, most of whom are from a variety of historically imperial and/or fascist nations, like the United States and Germany, Bacurau's power is cut, their water supply threatened, and several members of their community murdered, including a young boy. While most of this hunting team is made up of people from other countries, it does include two Brazilians (played by Karine Teles and Antonio Saboia) who make a point to distinguish themselves from the Bacurenhos (who they deem non-White and therefore less civilized, less human), by claiming European heritage and boasting the financial prowess of their more southern, home region of Brazil. While Bacurau is a fictional town, the economic differences between the regions of Brazil is a very real phenomenon. The team of invaders are heavily armed, with the goal of hunting the townspeople in what can only be described as a violent first-person shooter videogame come to life. Notably, the hunting team is exclusively white, and includes a German ex-pat living in the

[70] Antonio José Bacelar da Silva and Erika Robb Larkins, "The Bolsonaro Election, Antiblackness, and Changing Race Relations in Brazil," *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 24, no. 4 (2019): 893, https://doi.org/10.1111/jlca.12438.

United States named Michael (played by Udo Kier), and a corrections officer named Terry (played by Jonny Mars), drawing a clear association with Germany's history of genocide and the United States' current struggle with police violence against Black Americans and Americans of color. The film embodies not only racism, but class warfare at its most violent, making it hard not to draw parallels with its contemporary, Bong Joon-Ho's recent masterpiece, *Parasite.*

Bacurau follows trends in anti-capitalist discourse beginning in the 1980s that trades off the militant jargon (of the 1960s and 70s) surrounding hopes for a complete revolution for, perhaps, a more complex, and by this I mean more intersectional, "resistance." [72] Cinema Novo has been critiqued for its blind spots, often ignoring the feminist or queer movements happening alongside the revolutionary class movements of the 60s and 70s. The early revolutionary cinema is very blatant in its militaristic machismo, unable to decenter the patriarchal system so deeply imbedded in colonial societies. As a welcome departure, *Bacurau* offers space to these groups that were previously ignored, casting several women as complex protagonists, and includes queer relationships (Dominga, the town doctor, played by Sônia Braga, has a female lover) and sex workers. These characters may have been ignored by early Brazilian cinema, however this present-day iteration makes strides towards a more realistic and inclusive depiction of life; the town of Bacurau does not shun these characters or treat them as outcasts; they are all part of the tight-knit community and play their part in its defense and survival.[73] The incorporation of queer

[72] "The decline of revolutionary utopian hopes over recent decades has led to a remapping of political and cultural possibilities. Since the 1980s one finds, even on the left, a self-reflexive and ironic distance from revolutionary and Third Worldist rhetoric. A language of "revolution" has been largely eclipsed by an idiom of "resistance," indicative of a crisis of totalizing narratives and a shifting vision of the emancipatory project." Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (Routledge, 2014), 338.

[73] I use the term intersectional to lightly expand on the theory, originally coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*,"* to encompass class and sexuality in addition to race and gender in order to apply it to the field of contemporary Latin American cinema. *University of Chicago Legal Forum:* Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf

and feminist ideologies is a theme in all of the films analyzed in this thesis, and is critical for the realization of a more complete anti-capitalist rhetoric. Lucrecia Martel's film (analyzed in the Argentina chapter of this thesis), *La Ciénaga* (2001), complements *Bacurau*'s display of sexual practices or commonly sexualized images that refuse to conform to society's usual standards. Martel uses camera work to push back against the male gaze, as Felten explains: "En vez de ofrecernos cuerpos integrales conformes con la norma burguesa, nos confronta con cuerpos fragmentados en estado de decadencia. Esa técnica visual puede ser decodificada también como una parodia del voyerismo patriarcal tradicional que suele fragmentar el cuerpo femenino como objeto de deseo."[74] Directors Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles also use shots of bodies, ones that are not youthful or thin, those that would not traditionally be uplifted by advertising and commercialism (see figure 15), to call attention to the power of the male gaze that so often goes unnoticed in film.

Figure 16: Bacurau (2019)

While it's style may lean too dystopian to be considered under the same umbrella as the direct, revolutionary, call-to-arms movies of *Cinema Novo*, it does take up where these films left

[74] Ulta Felten, "Estrategias de transgression en La ciénaga," *Cine argentine contemporáneo: visions y discursos* eds. Bernhard Chappuzeau and Christian von Tschilschke (Iboamericana, 2016), 293-294.

off, continuing to criticize the flaws of late-stage capitalism and, by extension, colonial society.[75] However, despite its unique stylistic choices, the film firmly establishes ties to the famed progenitor of Brazil's *Cinema Novo,* Glauber Rocha. In *The Aesthetics of Hunger,* Rocha asserts that without the use of violence, the oppressor/colonizer is incapable of recognizing the humanity of those he attempts to smother: "[o]nly when he is confronted with violence can the coloniser understand, through horror, the strength of the culture he exploits. As long as he does not take up arms, the colonised man remains a slave."[76] It is only through violence that the citizens of Bacurau successfully (and repeatedly) fend off their colonizers.

The film forces its viewers to reexamine the line between colonial rule and its younger brother, neocolonialism, as characters designed to evoke imperial powers descend on the community of Bacurau. As an example of post/colonial cinema, Bacurau grapples with the disequilibrium of economic, social, and political power between colonizer and colonized, seeking to show that the parasitic relationship between colony and metropole has not stopped, but simply evolved, over the past five centuries, morphing from explicit exploitation to the veiled capitalism we know today. Loomba connects capitalism and colonialism in *Situating Colonial and Postcolonial Studies*, explaining

> …modern colonialism was established alongside capitalism in Western Europe. Modern colonialism did more than exact tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered – it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human natural resources between colonised and colonial countries… In whichever direction human beings and materials travelled, the profits always flowed back into the so-called 'mother-country.'[77]

[75] Jocimar Dias, "*Bacurau* as Science-Fiction Revenge Fantasy," *Film Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (December 8, 2020): 84, https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2020.74.2.84. "[*Bacurau*] was intended not as propaganda for armed struggle but to provoke reflection, through genre, on contemporary political challenges."
[76] Glauber Rocha, "The Aesthetics of Hunger," *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures* ed. Scott Mackenzie (2014), 219.
[77] Loomba, "Situating Colonial and Postcolonial Studies," 2011, 20.

The term parasitic here is quite literal in the film. Characters representing imperial powers (members of the hunting team like Michael and Terry) in the film cut off access to water, extracting the lifeblood of any community, as well as attempting to poison its citizens with addictive drugs. The townspeople of Bacurau are nothing more than "resources" to these colonial invaders, objects to be utilized and discarded.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will use Stam and Shohat's definition of neocolonialism to ground my analysis:

> …*[N]eocolonialism*; that is, a conjuncture in which direct political and military control has given way to abstract, semi-indirect, largely economic forms of control whose linchpin is a close alliance between foreign capital and the indigenous elite. Partly as a result of colonialism, the contemporary global scene is now dominated by a coterie of powerful nation-states, consisting basically of Western Europe, the US, and Japan… The corollaries of neocolonialism have been: widespread poverty (even in countries rich in natural resources); burgeoning famine (even in countries that once fed themselves); the paralyzing "debt trap"; the opening up of resources for foreign interests; and, not infrequently, internal political oppression.[78]

While *Bacurau*'s villains adhere closely to the nation-states listed by Stam and Shohat (American and German accents fill out the hunting team), their methods are not so indirect, possibly in an effort by the directors to draw attention to the ever-bolder military intervention and economic actions taken by foreign powers. The Europeans and Euro-Americans in the film establish the town of Bacurau as their version of a violent personal playground, using what can only be interpreted as war tactics to cut off access to essential resources, surveil, and terrorize the villagers. The contours between the native Bacurenhos and the invaders, those of foreigner/native, colonizer/colonized, master/enslaved, fester out of the wound of inherently Eurocentric late-stage capitalism and neoliberalism. As explained by Loomba above, capitalism is Eurocentric by its very nature since it requires a subsection of the population to be subjugated in order to

[78] Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (Routledge, 2014), 17.

function. One of the subsections capitalism takes advantage of is race. In *Black Marxism*, Robinson explains:

> The bourgeoisie that led the development of capitalism were drawn from particular ethnic and cultural groups; the European proletariats and the mercenaries of the leading states from others; its peasants from still other cultures; and its slaves from entirely different worlds. The tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate—to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into "racial" ones…so at the systemic interlocking of capitalism in the sixteenth century, the peoples of the Third World began to fill this expanding category of a civilization produced by capitalism. [79]

Despite the somber tone of the theoretical framework thus far, this is not a film in which those being colonized are erased from the narrative; instead, it is a powerful dialogue about resistance and the staying power of native peoples on their own land. While the peoples of the Third World that Robinson references (the Bacurenhos) are repeatedly oppressed, their oppressors (the hunting team) never successfully exploit them. Ironically, European accounts usually portray natives as the perpetrators of random violence, but *Bacurau* forces viewers to grapple with the idea that such a narrative is false, and realize that instead colonizers were likely terrorizing peoples of the New World.[80]

The film opens with a shot of the entire planet that slowly zooms in on Brazil, and then finally settles on Bacurau, hinting at the ability of colonializing forces to extend their influence to far-away places and the global implications of neocolonialism and neoliberalism. As viewers ride into the town with two of the film's protagonists, Teresa (Bárbara Colen) and Erivaldo (Rubens Santos), they witness the film's first reference to

[79] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism* (University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 24.

[80] "Early tales of the 'savagery' among indigenous peoples in colonized lands relied on specific tropes about violence and how it was carried out by native peoples in faraway lands. A key component of that myth that served colonial ends was the perceived randomness and brutality of the violence." Tiffiny A. Tung, "Making and Marking Maleness and Valorizing Violence: A Bioarchaeological Analysis of Embodiment in the Andean Past," *Current Anthropology* 62, no. S23 (February 1, 2021): S130, https://doi.org/10.1086/712305.

Bacurau's constant struggle for viability: its battle to secure water. Erivaldo frequently transports water into town due to bickering between local politicians (who are involved in the town's suffering in ways outside of the viewers' understanding until the film's finale). On this occasion, Teresa also brings in medicine. Both scarcities highlight the feeling of remoteness; Bacurau is cut off from the rest of the country and, in the eyes of the local and national governments, it is out of sight and out of mind. The distrust of the Brazilian government and politicians is reinforced in the same scene as (beloved) fugitive Lunga (Silvero Pereira) appears on a news broadcast, prompting both Teresa and Erivaldo to comment how they would never turn him in to the authorities. The opening scene of the world and the town's remote location are referenced later on, when the teacher of a local school is unable to find Bacurau on any map, alluding to the impending invasion that intends to erase it. The fierce distrust of the ruling class reminds viewers of the origins of Brazil's stratified society, in which *peninsulares,* people born on the Iberian Peninsula with a direct line to European blood, formed the upper-class with little solidarity for their fellow countrymen. It may be important to note that one of the "outsider" Brazilians is in fact a government official (which the audience discovers upon his death when his identification card is revealed), implicating not only the inept local politician but the larger, federal government as well, in the oppression and exclusion facing Brazil's marginalized people.

It is not long before Bacurau shows how close-knit it can be, perhaps bonds made stronger due to outside pressures. As Teresa enters her childhood home to see the matriarch of her family that has recently passed, the townspeople gathered around the

doorway lift her suitcase (full of medication for the townspeople) into the house – without instruction; a seamless habit that has been formed through many years of cohabitating. The directors continually place emphasis on the power of having a nurturing community. This sense of community may be foreign to American audiences, especially upper-class ones, who have come to believe in the nuclear family as the only valid source of kinship and bonding. Author bell hooks describes the inherent anti-capitalist nature of a true community and its benefits:

> The willingness to sacrifice is a necessary dimension of loving practice and living in community. None of us can have things our way all the time. Giving up something is one way we sustain a commitment to the collective well-being. Our willingness to make sacrifices reflects our awareness of interdependency. Writing about the need to bridge the gulf between rich and poor, Martin Luther Kings Jr., preached: "All men [and women] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly." This gulf is bridged by the sharing of resources. Every day, individuals who are not rich but who are materially privileged make the choice to share with others. Some of us share through conscious tithing (regularly giving a portion of one's income), and others through a daily practice of loving kindness, giving to those in need whom we randomly encounter. Mutual giving strengthens community.[81]

The film reminds us not only of the value of community, but also the inability of outsiders to properly understand the needs of Bacurau. One of the film's three *peninsulares,* Tony Jr., a local politician running for mayoral reelection, is a caricature of the modern politician. He is utterly disconnected from his constituents, ignoring their clear need for drinking water and instead 'gifting' them rotting books (which he dumps onto the street in a show of blatant disrespect), expired food, and addictive mood-inhibitors. Tony Jr. is incapable of understanding the community he pretends to serve because his allegiance lies with a different class; he believes himself to be fundamentally different than the townspeople. Moreover, he attempts to scale a social and economic

[81] bell hooks, *All about Love: New Visions / Bell Hooks.*, 1st Perennial ed. (New York: Perennial, 2001), 142-143.

ladder where the people of Bacurau exist at the very bottom and foreign capital is perched at its peak.

Bacurau's other two *peninsulares* are a part of the imperial hunting squad and hail from São Paulo, a region of the country known for being well-off in comparison to the Northeast region where fictional Bacurau exists. This declaration is made to garner respect from the colonizers they are working with, claiming "we're like you guys" (meaning of European origin, socioeconomically affluent, and educated). Despite this desperate olive branch, the hunters in the film establish a clear border between themselves and these locals, retorting "They're not white, are they? How could you be like us?" demonstrating the blanket othering that the First World shrouds the Global South in. This is the first time in the film viewers are introduced to what this article has been referring to as the hunters. They are a group of white, Euro-American and European invaders who are heavily armed with modern weaponry and surveillance technology in order to eliminate the citizens of Bacurau. Their motivations for murder can only be interpreted as for sport. There is a dehumanization of the Bacurenhos, an othering so intense that the hunters can murder them without viewing it either as sinful or illegal.

The setting of the film, the Brazilian backlands, is meant to conjure the height of Portuguese colonization in the minds of viewers, the "capitalism of the sixteenth century": white conquistadors traveling to far-away lands to consume its people. Bacurau is not an industrious village, it does not produce any*thing* that can be quantified for consumption. In the eyes of capitalism's elevated class members (played by the foreign hunters in this film), the town of Bacurau is empty of value, and therefore completely

expendable. In short, the film exemplifies capitalism's rhetoric: if the working class is not working, they can be murdered.

Foucault elucidates the thinking behind the murder of non-workers in his lectures compiled in *The Punitive Society:*

> The hunt and mass conscription. The text proposes a utopian procedure: that of an entire society at work with the right to kill on sight anyone who moves. […] Le Trosne's dream was this great confinement to the place of work, in which he saw only this kind of great massacre where one could kill anyone who basically refused to be settled, this feudal, but already capitalist hunt.[82]

Here, Foucault is commenting on the penal system, which converts "labor-power into productive force." The hunting squad in the film are authorized to kill the townspeople because they are not willingly forming this "force" and therefore defy capitalism's mandates of production. Strikingly, the only time a hunter does not murder an unarmed Bacurenho is an interaction between Michael and Dominga, who, unlike her fellow community members, holds a job as the local doctor, a career that is held in high esteem around the world. Dominga therefore occupies a slightly different rung on the social ladder than the other townspeople in the hunters', and by extension, capitalism's viewpoint: she is a worker, and as such may be kept alive to fulfill her duties.

Murdered by whom? Robinson's aforementioned construction of capitalism's hierarchical categories provides an answer to this phenomenon in *Bacuarau's* cosmology. Referencing Halevy, Robinson explains that during colonialism's frantic height (the 1500 and 1500s), European states employed "foreign mercenaries" to carry out "the suppression of rebellious subjects," subjects who, in all likelihood, were people very similar to our tale's fictional Bacurenhos: "unproductive" members of the oppressed

[82] Arnold I. Davidson, Graham Burchell, and Michel Foucault, *The Punitive Society: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1972-1973* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/vand/detail.action?docID=4720622, 51.

class. The use of the word "mercenaries by Halvey could not be a better fit for the film's foreign murderers—the First World has sent its soldiers to eliminate the "useless (read: not an active cog in the capitalist machine) people of the Third World.

Bacurau's isolated, country-backlands setting also calls back to Rocha's 1964 film *Black God, White Devil. Bacurau's* genre is situated somewhere between Western (the film even includes a classic shoot-out scene set on the main road of the town at the climax) and harsh political analysis of the dystopian society created by neoliberalism, two seemingly very different types of films that *Black God, White Devil* also straddles. The 1964 storyline documents what seems to be unending hardship for the protagonist Manoel, who jumps from shadowing one leader/savior to the next; a follower unsure of how to properly craft his own future. The film features clear allusions to the Catholic Portuguese Crown and failed revolutionary movements in Brazil's history, grounding it as a critique of colonialism and its remaining ghosts. However, in *Bacurau,* the characters do not require a leader to follow, they have instead formed a community in which the people can depend on each other; the peasant class has answered the call to lead themselves. Unlike *Black God, White Devil,* whose protagonist wildly flings himself into the sea at the finale in what appears to be desperation, Bacurau's citizens have established a firm idea of what they desire from their comrades and are not looking for a false prophet (politician) to guide them.

Figure 17: Lunga imprisons Michael in Bacurau (2019)

The film uses the physical space on screen to establish social hierarchy. While this is more overt in *Que Horas Ela Volta?* (2015), *Bacurau* also implements architecture as a tool for creating barriers around class. A viewer might expect the citizens of the remote village to be demoted in this hierarchy, and during the climax of the violence they often are. Michael, the hunting squad's frightening (neo)Nazi and ringleader, is seen atop a hill at the border of the town, pointing his rifle down to haphazardly murder anyone who stumbles into his scope. This establishes the colonizer as above the colonized, which as seen with *Que Horas Ela Volta?* translates to access to economic opportunities. Metaphorically this physical hierarchy could even be seen as being closer to God, again hinting at Brazil's past with the Catholic Crown, alluding to the idea that Europeans were designated by a divine being to "civilize" the New World. One of the hunters even goes as far as to say "God has given me the opportunity (to hunt people)." This hierarchy appears again when Lunga is pictured under the floor of the town's ominous history museum, completing the assumed dynamic of colonizer > colonized. However, the film subverts this expectation in the finale, when Michael is incarcerated in an underground prison (which has been there for an unknown amount of time – possibly since the original colonizers ventured into Brazil). The Bacurenhos grow out of the earth when they emerge

from under the floor of the museum, but in contrast the foreigners' decay when they are interred underground. This display shows the townspeople reclaim their right to rule themselves and invert expectations about the capabilities of native peoples and where they fall in this binary.

Lunga occupies an interesting niche in the film's storyline. As noted previously, *Bacurau* skirts around "revolutionary" and settles on "resistance" as its main thesis. Despite this, Lunga may be seen as Bacurau's very own revolutionary hero, and even references Che Guevara in dialogue. He does not live in the town (possibly alluding to guerrillas fighting in the countryside), for reasons not entirely clear, but possibly due to his status as a wanted man. Unlike the rest of his community, Lunga is armed, seemingly primed for revolutionary action. Nevertheless, when Lunga speaks of Che, he does not praise him, instead he claims he is starving because of his lifestyle, "like Che," critiquing the flaws of 1960s revolutionary rhetoric that may be interpreted as failing the citizens of Bacurau and marginalized Brazilians like them.

This reference may be an allusion that crosses national borders into Argentina, referencing Fernando Solanas' famous example of Third Cinema, *La Hora de los Hornos* (1968), which features Che Guevara's dead body as the final image of the first film in the series, an ode to the revolutionary. Director Solanas collaborated on a manifesto titled "Towards a Third Cinema" with Octavio Getino that grounds its theoretical roots in dependency theory and Marxism. *La Hora* is a cry for the peasant classes to overthrow their oppressors, both the international corporations and First World nations that extract resources from Argentina, and the national bourgeoisie. However, many decades have elapsed since the clandestine debut of the film, Solanas' new creations, many of them

documentaries as well, lack the far-left politics and call to arms from his most well-known work. Mariano Paz theorizes that Solanas' break from left-wing militancy may be due to his career as a politician and Argentina's emergence as a stable democracy, and proposes that Solanas now views the government as a legitimate way to make social progress. Bacurau's directors may be expressing disappointment in Solanas' turn towards government acceptance and push back against this to an extent, displaying the villagers arm themselves in preparation for the invasion of outsiders, an action they have had to implement time and time again. However, they also realize the shortcomings of the revolutionary framework of the 1960s and 70s implemented by Che.

Figure 18: Domingas offers food and drink to Michael in Bacurau (2019)

Around the same time as the hunters creep into the village during the height of the film's shoot-off, Domingas (Sônia Braga), Bacurau's local doctor, offers Michael a table full of food and drink on the outskirts of the town. She tastes the stew and milk (to prove they aren't poisoned) and plays American music. Possibly as a peace-offering, but more likely a strategic move to gain information from the foreigners about their motives, this moment might be seen as an allusion to the peaceful, friendship fable of the first Thanksgiving: Native Americans feeding newcomers before the long winter. The reality

of this tale and of the town's current predicament sets in when Michael pulls out a hunting knife to threaten Domingas and interrogate her about two of his squad's members who have gone missing. In a fit of rage at discovering his fellow hunters' deaths (an exchange in which he uses broken Spanish to communicate instead of Portuguese), Michael flips the table holding up Domingas' peace-treaty. This incident sheds light on the blind spots written into colonial history, our cultural belief in a fairytale that attempts to cover up a past of genocide due to contact between Europeans and Native Americans. While this tale may be largely popular in the United States, Brazil and the US parallel each other in terms of racial histories in a way that other countries in Latin America do not. A passing shot of a rusty cotton gin at the hunters' basecamp alludes to the connection to both nations' history as slave societies.

The image of the cotton gin, possibly the pop icon of slavery in the United States, creates space for the connection between *Bacurau* and another form of violence in modern society: bureaucracy. While the process of colonization in the United States and Brazil differed in many aspects, including the way each perceived indigenous sovereignty, a comparison is applicable in this context because the two nations would become the most prolific slave societies of the modern era.[85] The cotton gin allowed for maximum output from a natural resource, ensuring maximum profits for plantation owners.[86] In *Bacurau,* drones (which look like a small UFO from a 1980s alien movie – so jarring they are impossible to ignore), parallel the cotton gin and modern inventions for ensuring maximum productivity. These drones record deaths for some unknown,

[85] Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, *Race in Translation: Culture Wars around the Postcolonial Atlantic* (NYU Press, 2012), 27-28 https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814798379.001.0001.
[86] Matthew Desmond, "In order to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation," *New York Times,* August 14, 2019.

omnipresent scorekeeper, who, shockingly, then awards points (another reference to videogames) to the corresponding killer. Matthew Desmond's 1619 article in the *New York Times* titled "In order to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation," offers a framework from which to interpret this need for tracking production. Desmond explains that American society's obsession with record-keeping and surveillance (both of which are embodied by the drones) is born from the need to record profits made from slave labor. It is so engrained in the cultural mind of Americans that its modern reincarnations often go unnoticed: companies that keep track of their workers' keystrokes and CCV recording in the workplace. Workers' productivity is tracked for evaluation on a monetary scale, just as slaves' value (and deprecation) was calculated in Brazil and the United States based on the amount of cotton or sugar harvested. In this iteration of productivity documentation, the drones record the productivity of the "foreign mercenaries," sending information back to the metropole for analysis and the awarding of prizes, just as conquistadors would have written to the royalty of their corresponding empire to tell of their exploits. This horrific incarnation of bureaucracy could even be seen by the foreigners as a marker of modernity and civility. Author Irene Silverblatt explains, "Bureaucracy, then, became a line in the social sand, dividing societies into the modern and the not modern, the progressive and the backward."[87] In *Bacurau's* filmic universe, the invading imperialist forces employ bureaucracy and Bacurenhos do not, and by distancing themselves from it, the townspeople reinforce their stance as anti-colonial.

[87] Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquistions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. https://hdl-handle-net.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/2027/heb.03521.EPUB , 9.

In a similar vein, Silverblatt may illuminate the use of earpieces by the hunting team in the film as a feature of, or a privilege flexed, by the bureaucratic elite: "Bourdieu called bureaucrats a "state nobility, the state-era equivalent of an aristocracy. They formed a charmed circle, he argued, for they enjoyed a monopoly over the productive means—now knowledge, rather than land."[88] The hunters in the film have access to knowledge others do not (excluding both the audience and the Bacurenhos), via an earpiece that keeps them updated on each other's whereabouts and murders they have committed. The privileged information may work to legitimize the hunters' actions in their respective cosmological framework as it ties them back to the colonial metropole.

The film highlights the similarities in racial inequity between these two societies when a young member of Bacurau's community, a child no older than ten, is shot by one of the hunters. Police violence against black and brown people in Brazil and the United States experienced heightened attention around the time of *Bacurau's* release. The hunter claims the child was armed, and that "he could've been sixteen." However, in an all too familiar turn of events, the child was only holding a flashlight. This sequence of events brings to mind the death of Trayvon Martin, age 17, by a police officer who claimed to fear for his life because Martin was holding skittles, in 2014 in the United States, and the murder of João Pedro Matos Pinto, age 14, shot in the back by a police officer in 2020.[89] Pinto's murder is frequently spoken about in tandem with the killing of George Floyd earlier that same year.

[88] Ibid., Silverblatt, 10.
[89] Tom Phillips, "Black lives shattered: outrage as boy, 14, is Brazil police's latest victim," *The Guardian,* June 2, 2020.

It is critical to note that this parallel example of police violence in Brazil and the United States is not a one-time coincidence. According to the non-profit Brazilian Public Security Forum, 6,416 people were murdered by police in Brazil in 2020, the overwhelming majority of whom, almost 80%, were Black.[90] In a period with an overwhelming amount of numerical statistics thrown at us due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I will try to ground this statistic in order to humanize the numbers: 6,416 is nearly half of all students at Vanderbilt University, it would have been more than a fourth of my high school graduating class every week (123 people per week), and it is more than a basketball team every day of the year (17 per day).[91]

Among them, João Alberto Silveira Freitas was murdered in November of 2020 by two white men, one of them belonging to Brazil's military police force.[92] Like the murder of George Floyd, it was captured on video (in this case by a security camera), allowing for the evidence to be disseminated to the general public and prompting protests. The recording of these deaths is particularly notable in relation to the film as the hunting team employs surveillance drones, as mentioned above, to document their murders, and keep tabs on the Bacurenhos, in what could also be interpreted as a metaphor for police body cameras, which *Bacurau* is blatantly interpreting as a failed facet of the project of police reform. These drones record deaths for some unknown, omnipresent scorekeeper, who then awards points to the corresponding killer (again

[90] "Essa concentraçao de víctimas negras é em muito superior á composição racial da populaçao brasileria, o que demonstra uma sobrerrepresentaçao de negros entre as vítimas da letalidade policial. Enquanto quase 79% das vítimas de MDIP são Negras, a os negros correspondem a 56,3% do total da população brasileira." Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, "Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública," https://forumseguranca.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/anuario-2021-completo-v6-bx.pdf ISSN 1983-7364 (2021), 58, 67.
[91] Vanderbilt University, "Quick Facts," (2021) https://www.vanderbilt.edu/about/quick-facts/
[92] Rio Grande Do Sul, "Homem negro é espancado até a morte em supermercado do grupo Carrefour em Porto Alegre," Nov. 20, 2020 https://g1.globo.com/rs/rio-grande-do-sul/noticia/2020/11/20/homem-negro-e-espancado-ate-a-morte-em-supermercado-do-grupo-carrefour-em-porto-alegre.ghtml

alluding to the film's similarities to video games). This obsession with security and surveillance is all too common in neoliberal societies, and Brazil's cities are known for their physical implementation of class division.

Michael's choice to stumble around a few Spanglish words in a half-hearted attempt to communicate with Domingas brings Derrida's theory of *écriture* to mind. While this traditionally applies to the binary between spoken word and written word, I would assert that it could also be applied to speaking with the *correct* words, in the correct language. Neo/colonial powers had/have an obsession with imposing the Latin alphabet, and its corresponding languages, as a benchmark towards fully colonizing a land and its people, an important box to check on an empires path towards total domination. In this specific situation, the original colonial language (Portuguese) was ingrained centuries ago, and English has taken its place atop the colonial language pyramid via the United States' militaristic, economic, and cultural prowess, and constant intervention in the political life of Latin American countries. It is not difficult to imagine the American that believes that everyone south of the Texas border speaks Spanish. Michael's language choices can be seen as the luxury of being familiar with the 'chosen' variety. To be unaware or to insult another language is, in itself, an action that can only originate from a place of privilege in the "masters/slaves" system described by Clastres, who also tells us "[t]o take power is to win speech."[93]

[93] "Of course, the above remarks refer first and foremost to the societies based on the division: masters/slaves, lords/subjects, leaders/citizens, etc. The hallmark of this division, its privileged locus of proliferation, is the solid, irreducible, perhaps irreversible fact of a power detached from society as a whole since it is held by only a few members." Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*, New York: Zone Books, 1987, 151-152.

Chapter 4: *Relatos Salvajes* (2015), directed by Damián Szifron

Argentine filmmaker Damián Szifron brings us the 2014 anthology film *Relatos Salvajes* (Trans: Wild Tales) on the tail ends of the Peronist Néstor Kirchner administration (2003-2007), and his wife and former vice-president's administration, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015). This era followed the Argentine economic crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s, given treatment in the introduction of the chapter covering *La Ciénaga*. To summarize, the Argentine people shouldered the burden of intense inflation and unemployment at the beginning of the 21st century. Néstor Kirchner's time in office saw the economy recuperate immensely from the depression, with "unemployment and poverty rates […] halved: Unemployment fell from 20 percent in 2002 to 9 percent in 2007, and the poverty rate fell from nearly 50 percent to 27 percent."[94] The first Kirchner experienced unprecedented popularity as a result of this economic transformation, and when he left office he "enjoyed an 80 percent approval rating, the highest of any president since Argentina returned to democracy in 1983."[95] Endorsed by her husband, Cristina Kirchner took office as the first woman elected president in Argentina in 2007.

Despite the success and popularity the couple experienced, many scholars warn of the corruption and inequality that ran rampant during the Kirchner era. Manzetti suggests that, based on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index and the World Bank's governance indicators, "respondents perceive government corruption under the Kirchners to be as bad if not worse than under Menem," (Menem being the president in office during Argentina's

[94] Steven Levitsky and María Victoria Murillo, "Argentina: From Kirchner to Kirchner," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 2 (2008): 16–30, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2008.0030.
[95] Luigi Manzetti, "Accountability and Corruption in Argentina during the Kirchners' Era," *Latin American Research Review* 49, no. 2 (March 22, 2014): 173–97.

economic nosedive).[96] Additionally, even though the economy was clearly recovering, the same could not be said for the widening wealth gap in the country. Stagnating wages and inflation put the working class in an economically precarious situation. Scholar Castorina notes in relation to the Kirchner period that "food prices rose almost 120 percent, while wages only rose 50 percent" and that by the end of Néstor Kirchner's time in office "only a small number of formal workers in the private sector had a real income that was higher than in the pre-crisis period; the rest of the working class had a significantly lower income."[97] Combined, these realities (of shocking economic recovery joined with the sustained oppression of the working class) shed light on the chaos unearthed and documented in Szifron's *Relatos Salvajes*. Disparities clearly present in Brazil's *Bacurau* also come into play in this Argentine film, influenced by the rising economic discrepancies, and viewers witness the devolution of societal norms as characters take on an "every man for himself" mentality. The film became the Argentine biggest box-office success of all time, alluding to Argentinians' ability to see themselves in the episodes of class warfare and institutional chaos.[98]

The dark comedy is composed of six short stories, each its own rollercoaster of unpredictable choices that begin with normalcy and civility only to delve into something altogether *salvaje*. In Szifron's Kafka-esque version of events, both the mundane and the unusual are transformed into unreasonable circumstances, forcing audiences to reckon with the irony and cruelty of 21st century existence. Viewers reflect on the laws and systems that protect us from

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[96] Ibid., Manzetti.

[97] Emilia Castorina, *Chapter 4: The Reproduction of Democratic Neoliberalism in Argentina: Kirchner's 'Solution' to the Crisis*, "Crisis and Contradiction : Marxist Perspectives on Latin America in the Global Political Economy," accessed January 31, 2022, https://web-p-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=4b61130d-01bb-4841-a05e-7407042c15f5%40redis&vid=0&format=EB. 90.

[98] Gonzalo Aguilar, "Sobre Relatos salvajes de Damián Szifrón," n.d., 9.

each other, but at the same time restrict our ability to reach the fullest expression of our humanity. As a complement to the 2019 film *Bacurau, Relatos Salvajes* does not provide an itinerary for existence outside of a capitalist society, but rather calls that existence into question, prominently displaying the problematic nature of modern Argentina. *Relatos Salvajes* could be said to capture inciting incidents that *Bacurau* then provides an answer to. Would a life outside of class-based systems be chaos or do we create chaos by adhering so closely to the rules and walls around us? Violence around class, gender, and race categories feature prominently in Szifron's stories. The director draws clear contours so that he may question the logic that drives these divisions.

The opening tale is the shortest of the six; short and to the point, and is one of the absurdities of patriarchal power. A woman boards a plane for a modeling job (a nod to the way consumerism and capitalism harness women's bodies to brand and commercialize them), and a man across the aisle from her starts a conversation. He flirts with her, and the audience initially prepares themselves for the various romantic-comedy tropes that will inevitably follow. However, what comes next is something entirely different. Soon, they realize they both have a connection to a man by the name of Gabriel Pasternak. The model used to date him, and her conversational companion gave him a scathing review of his thesis presentation during music school. Slowly, more and more passengers chime in, and soon everyone on the plane realizes that they know Gabriel, many of them offering their own version of the absent protagonist, which taken together, form a complete picture of a deeply unbalanced man. The flight attendant reveals that she too is acquainted with him, and that he is piloting the plane they are all aboard. She also reveals that she declined his offer to go on a date prior to their departure and he became angry, and soon the audience pieces together that everyone aboard the flight has wronged Gabriel in

some way: the model cheated on him (the best friend she cheated on him with), a teacher who held him back a year, the therapist that raised the price of his sessions. The passengers panic as the plane nosedives into what the audience can assume are Gabriel's parents, who were drinking coffee and reading the newspaper in their backyard shortly before impact. While the abbreviated duration of this sequence only allows for momentary reflection, the audience wonders how, if so many people throughout every part of Gabriel's life had witnessed his troublesome behavior, did he manage to become a commercial pilot, a job in which others' safety is top priority (as an American, it is difficult not to draw parallels with background checks for firearms). Gabriel, enraged by those who did not bow to him or recognize his skills or potential, has taken advantage of a system that was designed to uplift him. Those who did not bow, whether their decisions were immoral or not (none of them crimes deserving capital punishment), were undermining the power structure that Gabriel expected to be in place in the world around him, forcing him to come to terms with his genuine worth. This realization was a trial audiences can assume he was incapable of because of the flight's current situation. Critically, the incidents described by the passengers are not unfamiliar traumas – they are experiences the audience will most likely be familiar with themselves, and while they are definitely uncomfortable situations, they are all pitfalls people learn to deal with and eventually overcome. However, the pilot fails to see a scenario in which he has not been singled out to be victimized (despite the universality of his upsetting experiences) and decides to exact revenge. Gabriel's ability to take advantage of the well-traveled paths of patriarchy in his world allows him to exert violence upon those around him. The patriarchy particular to Argentina begins long before this article's scope, however, Scholar Noelia Diaz connects the nation's renewed preoccupation with gendered violence with

the staggering unemployment that began under the Menem administration.[99] Argentine men, newly unable to provide for themselves and their families, emasculated by the state, must seek to establish their masculinity by other means. Pasternak's outburst may illustrate a newly empowered man due to economic recovery under Kirchner, but one who has yet to process the marginalization by the past governments. This opening episode may also serve to question how it is possible for profoundly unstable and incapable men to become leaders. Does this model of man (Trump in the United States, Bolsonaro in Brazil) feed off their nation's emasculated demographic to ascend to power?

Following Gabriel Pasternak's tale and the opening credits, audiences are transplanted to an isolated road-side restaurant, staffed only by a single waitress and cook. A middle-aged man enters the restaurant, escaping the rain outside, and immediately establishes his identity as the worst kind of customer when he answers the waitress' assumption about the size of his party being one (he has entered by himself) with "I can see you're good at math." Anyone who has worked in a restaurant immediately shivers with memories of rude customers, but unfortunately, his character is not unusual. The creation of the dynamic between server and customer, with the hierarchical elevation of the customer, engenders a connection to the waitress from working class viewers.

The waitress hurries back to the kitchen to confide in the cook that the customer is an especially heinous loan shark from her hometown, a man so vile and unrelenting that he caused her father to commit suicide and hit on her mother only two weeks after the funeral. The kitchen in this short story creates a haven for the two members of the working class in the film, a symbol

[99] Noelia Diaz, "Gendered Violence and Neoliberal Desaparecidos in Luis Cano's Socavón," *Modern Drama* 64, no. 4 (2021): 458–77.

and space of class solidarity, where they may converse about the outside world without customers interfering. Lighting and architecture create a border between the two spaces in a structure that is almost identical to that seen in *Que Horas Ela Volta?* (where working class characters are sequestered to the kitchen while the upper-class family is served in the dining room).

In this chapter of *Relatos Salvajes,* the kitchen gives off a cold, pale blue-green light, while the dining room is filled by a redder shade that evokes danger, aggression, and dominance. Once again, the audience may relate to this division if they have worked in a restaurant; the kitchen is a safe place where you can take a deep breath before facing the chaos of the dining room. While this physical separation is associated with class, as it is in the other films given treatment in this work, the kitchen and dining room here are also associated with emotions. Most prominently, the kitchen provides a sense of security and camaraderie. The architectural divisions may also be interpreted as inverting expectations surrounding gender due to the lighting's influence on emotion. While the dining room's red provides connotations of the feminine and unchecked emotion (the hysteria so often associated with out-of-control women, a red associated with the blood of a woman's menstrual cycle), the kitchen's cool tones suggest a sense of control and evenness (the kind of objectivity likened to men). Despite the long history of hysterics associated with women, from ancient societies to Freud, the loan shark fits readily into the hysterical mold; his past actions characterizing him as an off-the-handle character who is easily prompted into action without considering repercussions or morality. Szifron reverses gender roles in this chapter by enclosing the male characters within the emotional constraints usually used to inhibit women.

The waitress' confession to the cook forces this story to take its absurd turn: the cook suggests that they put rat poison in the loan shark's *papas fritas al caballo* (french fries with fried eggs on top). It'll be simple, the cook assures her, the coroner will suspect the man's cholesterol got the better of him. The waitress is shocked and brushes off the suggestion of murder as a ridiculous idea. When she returns to the dining room to bring him his *Coca Lite*, he asks for her opinion on his mayoral campaign posters, immediately broadening the implications of his actions and hers. Unsurprisingly, he is running on a platform advocating for security, despite his obviously corrupt employment history. Anxiety caused by widespread looting due to the economic disasters in the country's past may have caused Argentinians to reach for law-and-order candidates in local elections, and this character is capitalizing on this trend. In 1989, fourteen people died in lootings prompted by inflation of food prices, and in 2001, eighteen more died under the same circumstances.[100] The bright red of the mayoral poster reinvigorates importance of color to this chapter of the film during this interaction. There is no patriotism in the poster's color scheme (red is not part of the Argentine flag like it is in so many other countries); here it simply to create the feeling of domination and unbridled aggression. Szifron uses the blood red to reassert the hysterical fearmongering on the part of the customer.

When the waitress returns to the kitchen, the cook reinforces the possibility that the loan shark and his campaign run threaten the well-being of society at large, and asks the waitress if they "shall we do the community a favor?" Again, the waitress declines, to which the cook defiantly asserts "That's our country, everyone wants these guys to get what they deserve but no one is willing to lift a finger." As seen in the other Argentine film in this thesis, *La Ciénaga*, the

[100] Javier Auyero. *Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina: The Gray Zone of State Power*. Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 73-74. https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=194299&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

emptiness felt by the country's people due to the lack of inspiring political movement is revisited here. While in Martel's 2001 work it is the bourgeoisie who fail to create note-worthy socio-political changes and allows the audience to infer about the possibility of Isabel's departing message, Szifron's film shifts the camera towards of the working-classes in this specific episode. By doing so, the director prompts his audience to reflect on how the working class may be the impetus for political change, as seen in the Brazilian film *Bacurau*.

Figure 19: Division between Kitchen and Dining Room in Relatos Salvajes (2014)

After the waitress brings the customer his food, it is revealed by the cook that she poisoned the meal herself. The waitress becomes highly distressed when she sees another customer join the loan-shark-turned-politician; the new guest is a young man outfitted with a much more polite demeanor. Anticipating the double-murder that will be on her hands when she sees the young man eating from the same plate, she scurries out to his table and throws French fries in the first customer's face, who retaliates by choking her (an outburst that is unnecessary harsh and emotional based on the information available to him). The overzealous response that seemed so out of place based on his knowledge of events is met with an equally surprising one: the cook emerges from the kitchen to stab him, several times, ensuring his demise. The extreme violence may seem out of place, but taking *Bacurau* as its complement, the brutality of this

chapter of *Relatos Salvajes* takes on the same tone as Glauber Rocha's call to action in *Aesthetics of Hunger*. Franz Fanon provides a similar rhetoric in *The Wretched of The Earth*, asserting that "[f]rom birth it is clear to him [the native] that this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence."[101] Rocha and Fanon both advocate that violence creates the necessary environment for the oppressed to cultivate decolonization, and while Szifron refrains from uplifting the cook who murdered the loan-shark to the status of hero, he also ensures that she is not the story's villain.

While the film lacks a documentary quality to it, the seemingly necessary violence recalls the Italian neo-realist film *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), directed by Vittorio de Sica. In it, a father and husband attempt to lead a righteous existence despite the hardships that befall him and his country. However, this becomes nearly impossible when his only mode of transportation to work is stolen, and the audience witnesses his unavoidable descent from the high road. While from different eras and continents, both films portray morality as gradients of gray instead of black and white. We are made fully aware of the crime of the protagonist in *Bicycle Thieves*, as well as those of the cook in this chapter of *Relatos Salvajes*, however, they appear to be necessary and warranted, given the context. In a more recent example, the South Korean film *Parasite* (2019) contains crimes that the audience may interpret as unavoidable, either to maintain a certain standard of living or to avenge a murdered family member as seen in the final scenes of the film. The cook even admits that she has spent time in jail, but her punishment seems misplaced against the backdrop of the loan-shark's numerous misdeeds. By creating this contrast, Szifron successfully poses the question: "who should be behind bars, the criminal turned cook, or the

[101] "Frantz Fanon, 'Concerning Violence,' From THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH," accessed March 1, 2022, http://hyle.mobi/Reading_Groups/Concerning%20Violence,%20Frantz%20Fanon/.
http://hyle.mobi/Reading_Groups/Concerning%20Violence,%20Frantz%20Fanon/

criminal turned politician?" Known to be one of the most corrupt countries in Latin America, Argentina saw "forty-four national corruption scandals" from 1989-2007.[102] Szifron's acknowledgement of political corruption will be all too familiar to Argentine audiences.

Chapter three of *Relatos Salvajes* begins with a disgruntled driver named Diego (played by Leonardo Sbaraglia): a man operating a new black Audi who attempts to overtake a battered and rusted car on an Argentine countryside highway. The older car swerves back and forth to prevent Diego from passing, and in response our protagonist calls the other driver a redneck and speeds past him, establishing his superior wealth and class by flaunting his car's capabilities. The name-calling demonstrates a casual acknowledgement on Diego's part of the class structure that divides the two characters. Further down the road, Diego gets a flat tire, and his lack of blue-collar know-how prevents him from putting on the spare. When he realizes no one is available to assist him, he exits the vehicle and attempts to change the tire anyway. A shaky camera shot from behind a nearby bush alerts viewers that there is danger closing in, someone is coming. Moments later, the so-called redneck's car becomes visible in the distance. Diego haphazardly replaces the tire and jumps back in his car just in time for the other driver to pull in front of him and back directly into Diego's front bumper. This action causes a chaotic and aggressive back and forth to ensue; Diego's windows are smashed and insults fly. When his opponent climbs on top of his car and pulls down his pants to defecate on the windshield, Diego calls the police. However, he quickly realizes that outside of the city, in the wilderness of the countryside, there are no rules in place to ensure his protection.

[102] Manuel Balán, "Competition by Denunciation: The Political Dynamics of Corruption Scandals in Argentina and Chile," *Comparative Politics* 43, no. 4 (July 1, 2011): 459–78, 464 https://doi.org/10.5129/001041511796301597.

The mechanisms Diego has become accustomed to, those in place to preserve the upper-class, have no authority in this man versus man duel. While this power structure is unfortunate and dangerous, Diego is correct: societal institutions, like the police he calls for help, do function to protect him and his wealth. Foucault acknowledges this reality in his set of lectures titled *The Punitive Society*, theorizing the creation of private police as an invention to "protect bourgeois wealth in the new forms in which it is exposed at the height of a period of economic development."[103] Argentina's history with dictatorship causes a fluctuation in who exactly warrants protection by the police. Despite these political changes, protection always remains with members of the elite. Scholar Michelle Bonner recounts the effects of these changes:

> [W]hen Juan Domingo Perón was president in the 1950s, the police defended Peronist unions and his supporters. After the 1955 military coup, police repression reversed to target Peronist unions and supporters. In this way, state actors have played an important role in defining the targets of police violence.[104]

The backlands setting also brings *Bacurau* to mind once again. In the Brazilian film, this unregulated part of the country provides respite for those who choose not to adhere to modern society's norms surrounding the hoarding of wealth and forced-productivity. However, it is unfortunately also an environment where danger can come knocking, as illustrated by the foreigners who come to terrorize the town and its community members. While *Relatos Salvajes* does not provide quite the same level of anti-capitalist discourse, the unpoliced state of nature creates a space where social classes may confront each other in a completely unrestricted fashion, untethered by societal practices. In both films, nature functions as a place where revolution may take shape. The men engage in an all-out war; they attempt to run the other over, they punch and use fire-extinguishers and crowbars to bludgeon each other, resulting in grave

[103] Michel Foucault. *The Punitive Society: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1972-1973.* London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015. 104.
[104] Michelle D. Bonner, "State Discourses, Police Violence and Democratisation in Argentina," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 28, no. 2 (April 2009): 227–45, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-9856.2008.00270.x.

injuries. In the end, Diego is murdered, hung from his own car's seatbelt; the symbol of his wealth becoming his demise. The irony of this is compounded by the fact that the firemen and police (the institutions designed to protect the bourgeois) arrive only after Diego's vehicle has exploded and the fiasco has been observed by a truck driver passing by. The police's tardiness conveys the inability of this institution to properly address a genuine crisis, calling for a reassessment of how interpersonal violence is dealt with today.

Figure 20: Diego hangs from his car in Relatos Salvajes (2015)

The next chapter introduces famed actor Ricardo Darín as Simon Fisher, an architect plagued by the small inconveniences of modern life (not unlike Gabriel Pasternak from the opening sequence). Everything seems to burden Simon, from the price of pastries to rush hour traffic. Interactions throughout the film establish a worker versus owner dynamic, and this chapter is no different. This dynamic is first spotted in this episode at the bakery where Simon picks up a birthday cake for his daughter. He comments on the cake's price, which he interprets to be too high. Simon comments to the baker, a young woman obviously unamused by the jab, "What? Is it imported?" Clearly, he does not believe the labor of baking is worth the ticket price. This worker-owner dichotomy is re-established when Simon exists the bakery and sees his car has been towed. When he makes his way to the DMV, he gets into an argument with the clerk

while attempting to explain that he was not parked illegally and has been towed by mistake. The clerk, who is completely unphased by Simon's complaints, informs him that he must pay the fine anyway. Enraged, he lashes out, calling the worker "a miserable slave of a corrupt system." As a member of the middle-upper class, he is ironically devaluing the work of the clerk in this scenario, while at the same time demonstrating his knowledge that the worker is not to blame, rather it is the larger structures in place that cause them both harm. Certainly, the trials of bureaucracy befall all of us, as they befall Simon in the DMV, and viewers everywhere will relate to Simon in this interaction. The bureaucracy showcased here is one of modernity's greatest drawbacks, while at the same time, one of its biggest crutches. It allows for large amounts of people to be addressed in an "orderly" manner, like at the DMV. However, it prevents human connection, critical thinking, and the expression of morality on any level, driving Simon into madness. This may seem like no more than a routine part of modern life – the line at the DMV – however, author David Graeber would define the "experience of bureaucratic incompetence, confusion, and its ability to cause otherwise intelligent people to behave outright foolishly," like the interaction Simon has here, as "structural violence."[105]

The initial interaction at the DMV highlights another dark facet of Argentine society: its colonial past. By calling the clerk a "slave," Szifron uses Simon's character to comment on how little Argentine society has evolved from the early contact era between Spaniards and the people who originally inhabited what is now the nation's territory. Argentina continues to struggle with the equality of wealth distribution, which has its origins in colonial expansion. As the "conquest and control of other people's land and goods," evidence of the colonization process continues to

[105] David Graeber, "Dead Zones of the Imagination: On Violence, Bureaucracy, and Interpretive Labor: The Malinowski Memorial Lecture, 2006," *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 2 (2012): 105, https://doi.org/10.14318/hau2.2.007.

be apparent in the Argentine Great Depression of the late 20th and early 21st century, when banks used the nation's money to bail themselves out of their foreign debt.[106] By doing this, Argentine banks mimicked the colonization process, commandeering the resources of the nation for their own benefit in a shocking display of neocolonialism.

Figure 21: Simon attempts to break glass barrier in Relatos Salvajes (2015)

When Simon arrives at home after the situation at the DMV, he enters to witness the final moments of his daughter's birthday party, which he has totally missed due to his outburst. This causes Simon and his wife to get into an argument, where she claims he is always making excuses about coming up short in their marriage. She gives him an ultimatum, telling him he must change because society will not, hinting at Argentina's political stagnation given treatment in the chapter on *La Ciénaga.* Simon, despite this, does not heed his wife's advice, and when his car is towed once again, he explodes even more violently at the DMV clerk, ripping a fire extinguisher (a reference back to Diego's fire-y demise from the previous chapter?) from a nearby wall and ramming it into the glass that separates the worker from the protagonist. As the reader may recall from the physical borders established in the chapters analyzing *La Ciénaga* and

[106] Ania Loomba, *Situating Colonial and Postcolonial Studies*, 20.

Que Horas Ela Volta?, the architecture in this scene once again plays a prominent part by physically separating the two classes that are communicating, or attempting to communicate, with each other (*Que Horas Ela Volta?* and *Relatos Salvajes* even share that the patriarchs in both films are architects). Unlike the previous chapter where the wildness of the countryside provides no regulation and Diego and his opponent may lash out at one another unabated, the glass here works to separate the characters and prevents them from truly understanding one another. Simon desperately tries to break down this barrier (urgently yearning for the human connection bureaucracy is preventing) with the fire extinguisher but fails, and security guards escort him off the premises. Notably, while this shocking display takes place, the crowd that fills the DMV both boo and cheer, underlining the polarity of Argentine politics. The violence of this incident causes Simon to get fired, and along with his continuous complaints about the world around him, results in his wife asking for a divorce. In a scene where husband and wife battle over the terms of their divorce, the struggle to communicate in modern society presents itself once again. Instead of glass, lawyers prevent the couple from properly communing with one another. Graeber correctly predicts this incident as well, another way bureaucracy oversteps its bounds into our personal lives, stating "state bureaucracies end up shaping the parameters of human existence."[107] The incident at the DMV has bleed into every section of Simon's life, indeed, bureaucracy is shaping his existence even in the most private of ways: his home life.

This sparks something in Simon. The audience sees his car get towed yet again. However, it becomes clear that this time it was intentional. Simon set up his car to be towed so that he could seek revenge. When his vehicle arrives at the impound lot, it explodes, resulting in

[107] David Graeber, "Dead Zones of the Imagination: On Violence, Bureaucracy, and Interpretive Labor: The Malinowski Memorial Lecture, 2006," *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 2 (2012): 111, https://doi.org/10.14318/hau2.2.007.

Simon's imprisonment. Surprisingly, the act of terrorism is not met with anger or disappointment from his family, and in a scene following the explosion, his wife and daughter come to the prison where he is incarcerated to celebrate his birthday (circling back from his daughter's party at the beginning of the chapter). The family appears content, exchanging hugs and eating cake together. Even the other prisoners are delighted to be at Simon's party. Once again, director Szifron asks his audience to question society's version of morality and criminality: is Simon a hero? A revolutionary and the anecdote for Argentina's immobile and lifeless political climate?

Figure 22: Black figure emerges from the back wall in Relatos Salvajes (2015)

Chapter six is Szifron's darkest story. A teenager named Santiago (played by Alan Daicz) who comes from a wealthy family, hits a woman with his car while driving drunk, tragically causing both her and her unborn child to die. The family immediately hires a lawyer, and together they conspire to create a cover-up in which the family's groundskeeper is framed for the son's deeds. The father of the wealthy family, named Mauricio (played by Oscar Martínez), offers the groundskeeper 500,000 pesos, an amount he claims is more than the worker could "earn in a lifetime." Mauricio is, unfortunately, not far off. The average income for a domestic worker in Argentina in 2015, when the film was released, was a fraction more than $5 USD (49

Argentine pesos) per hour, or $663 USD (6,107 Argentine pesos) per month.[108] Even if the groundskeeper saved 100% of his monthly income, it would still take him over 6 years to save 500,000 pesos (that is, if Mauricio is paying him at least the minimum wage). The groundskeeper agrees to the terms, in hopes that he can set up a comfortable life for his wife and children. In scenes that follow, a prosecutor comes to the house to investigate, and the groundskeeper gives testimony in accordance with the conspiracy, as if he had in fact committed the crimes. To the family's dismay, the prosecutor catches on. However, the family's plans have not been foiled because instead of reporting the crime, as the audience might expect, the prosecutor demands to be cut in on the deal, and viewers are once again reminded of the corruption that plagues the country's politics.

Soon, Mauricio is cutting in not only the groundskeeper (who, it must be noted, is the only one who will be doing the difficult and life-altering work of physically serving time in prison), but also the prosecutor and the family's lawyer, for a total of 1.5 million pesos. The mounting ticket price of the cover-up makes it clear that any crime may be committed if one is equipped with the wealth to assuage the correct parties. When it is revealed that the lawyer (played by Osmar Núnez) attempted to take more of the money than was his share, Mauricio becomes enraged and calls off the entire deal, telling his son to confess. In a turn of events that may come as a shock to the audience, this anger was entirely an act, a bargaining chip on Mauricio's part to spend less money on his son's freedom. His son's future and entire life has

[108] "Minimum Wages in Argentina with Effect from 01-01-2015 to 31-08-2015," WageIndicator subsite collection, accessed March 1, 2022, https://wageindicator.org/salary/minimum-wage/argentina/archive-before-2019/minimum-wages-in-argentina-with-effect-from-01-01-2015-to-31-08-2015.
https://wageindicator.org/salary/minimum-wage/argentina/archive-before-2019/minimum-wages-in-argentina-with-effect-from-01-01-2015-to-31-08-2015

been reduced to just another business deal, just as Argentina's people and their wealth became pawns in a business deal with foreign capital during the economic crisis.

Mauricio and his groundskeeper are divided by both class and race. Emphasizing this difference is an art piece in the upper-class home, pictured in Figure 20. A dark figure appears to be frozen, or trapped, in the living room wall. This piece occupies the periphery of the room, but becomes recentered to the audience by the camera. African-style art also fills the space opposite the figure in the living room, denoting a sort of cultural appropriation by this family. This appropriation could be interpreted as an extension of ownership: Mauricio owns this art, despite the lack of personal connection, just as he owns the life of his groundskeeper. Both can be purchased. It would prove difficult to refrain from connecting this to the slavery metaphors seen in *Que Horas Ela Volta?* and in *La Ciénaga.* All three of the domestic workers in these films are played by indigenous characters. While Val (the live-in maid from *Que Horas Ela Volta?*) does not literally become imprisoned, she is often visually confined, either in her small bedroom with barred windows or to designated spaces. The art piece on/in the wall provides a reminder of this confinement. *Relatos Salvajes* takes this a step further, threatening the working-class character with jail time, building on Foucault's theorization of the vagabond as inherently criminal in the eyes of capitalist society. This structure is working to incarcerate the family's groundskeeper. Despite his innocence, he is forced into a situation in which he is so desperate for money he is willing to sacrifice his life and familial relationships to make ends meet. On the other hand, the elite characters may purchase their freedom, even in the face of crimes as severe as murder. The violence that follows reflects this demographic's reality: the groundskeeper is shot as he exists the home.

Figure 23: Ariel wields knife in Relatos Salvajes (2015)

Szifron's final chapter takes place at a young couple's wedding. Szifron seems to be inclined to bookend his film with tales of patriarchal violence. As seen in the opening chapter about Gabriel Pasternak, this episode also tells the story of the barbarity that takes place along gendered lines. Shortly after the ceremony ends and the reception begins, it is revealed that the husband, Ariel (played by Diego Gentile), has cheated on his new wife with a coworker, who he invited to the wedding. Chaos ensues. The wife, Romina (played by Érica Rivas), leaves, hysterical, and climbs flights of stairs to the roof. There, the audience is led to believe she may jump from the rooftop, ending the embarrassment and shame she experienced in the ballroom. However, on the rooftop, a waiter finds her crying and consoles her. In her confusion and heartbreak, she initiates sex with him in the moment. Ariel then bursts through the nearby door, and he and his wife exchange insults, leaving him vomiting on his knees. This sets off the endless flow of whining from Ariel, who reclaims the status of victim away from his wife, to receive the sympathy of the crowd, thereby converting Romina into the stereotype of the hysterical woman.

While this dynamic may be subtle at first, it is reinforced as the night progresses, each jab the couple takes at each other becoming more and more aggressive. Mirrors are shattered and the

paramedics are called. As a symbol of his prowess, Ariel grabs a cake knife and slowly makes his way towards Romina. The audience, both the diegetic and the real-world one, brace for a bloody murder, as has been the norm throughout every chapter of the film. However, Ariel simply cuts himself a piece of cake and walks over to his wife, holding out his hand as a peace offering. Romina takes it, and they embrace each other. Their reunion poses questions about Romina's agency and her ability to induce change that adheres to her wishes. Ariel can exert his will onto his surroundings without questioning from his family or wedding guests. The couple's obviously poisonous relationship is indicative not only of the issues of patriarchal power, but symbolic of Argentina's frequent flirtation with dictatorship. This flirtation demonstrates the complicity of the upper classes in the nation's struggle with neocolonialism, breeding authoritarianism, corruption, and inequity.

Conclusion

Blooming from the tradition of Third Cinema, the films given treatment in the preceding chapters contextualize the implications of neocolonization on race and class in Argentina and Brazil. The revolutionary films of the 1960s and 1970s, such as *La Hora de Los Hornos* and *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, laid the rhetorical groundwork for these 21st century works. Tense relationships between classes in nations of the Third World, and the cultural, political, and economic effects of imperialism that began in the second half of the 20th century continue to harm the people of these two countries, demonizing their lower classes through the mechanics of capitalism and systematically incarcerating the brown and Black people who live there. The four films presented in this thesis, *Que Horas Ela Volta?* (2015), *La Ciénaga* (2001), *Bacurau* (2019), and *Relatos Salvajes* (2015), provide documentation of that process and shed light on how the people of Argentina and Brazil interpret their on-going struggle against imperial powers.

In the case of Brazil, director Anna Muylaert's 2015 story is one of class division and racism originating from the country's long colonial history and inflamed by contemporary neoliberal policies. Using color, lighting, set design, and camera angles, the *Que Horas Ela Volta?* filmmaker expertly crafts a sense of confinement that establishes the seeming impossibility of movement between socioeconomic classes. This immobility creates a type of caste system, where a person's opportunities are pre-determined by your social class. Architectural structures, like the family swimming pool and the hierarchical division of the floors of the house, demonstrate spatial segregation of economic classes, and connect criminality and slavery to the lower class. Jéssica, the protagonist's daughter, is a force of progress throughout the film, crossing these architectural boundaries with the head-strong fervor characteristic of a teenager. Jéssica endeavors to defy the caste system that holds her and her family hostage in

Brazil's lower class. Through education, Jéssica succeeds in breaking free of the restrictions imposed on herself and inspires her mother to follow in her footsteps during the film's conclusion. Val crosses the architectural boundaries Jéssica has been pushing against throughout the narrative by stepping into the family's swimming pool, displaying both her willingness to believe in social progress and her newfound economic freedom.

A theme that runs throughout all four films, gendered violence, is given especially thorough treatment in *Que Horas Ela Volta?* The family's breadwinner and patriarch, José Carlos, becomes obsessed with Jéssica. In an attempt to nullify the social changes her character is known for bringing about, José Carlos views her as an object to be purchased and possessed, offering her marriage despite being a married man himself. Not only do his romantic ideas surrounding Jéssica overstep traditional moral bounds, as a member of the rentier class, his overindulgence of land and resources is matched only by his inclination to accumulate humans, giving his intentions a sinister overtone. While José Carlos initially appears to be emasculated by his wife Bárbara, his power becomes clear when he overrules her judgement and reveals his status as the main income-earner of his household, solidifying the dangers of the inextricable relationship between patriarchy and capitalism.

Despite the forces against them, Muylaert's working class protagonists can escape their pre-ordained shackles due to the influence of President Lula's social programs, embodied by Jéssica's push towards equality. While viewers can assume that economic barriers and racism will continue to color their lives, these two characters exist within this work's only hopeful film, asserting that important social change in Brazil may be possible through government-funded social programs.

However, if we are to fast-forward a few years in the same country, political change via socially accepted routes proves to be insufficient to the filmmakers behind the genre bending *Bacurau*. This sci-fi meets western emerges out of the shadow of Jair Bolsonaro's election in 2019. *Bacurau* can be interpreted as a response to *Que Horas Ela Volta?,* critiquing the older film's more tempered politics. Following the Lula era, Bolsonaro's election came as the culmination of the leftist *Patrido dos Trabalhadores* downfall and consequential rise of the far-right in Brazilian politics. The country struggled with economic inequality and the impeachment of PT member, President Dilma Rousseff. The *Jornadas de Junho* protests demonstrated Brazilian's disappointment in their government and the state of their nation. Filmmakers Kleber Mendoça Filho and Juliano Dornelles harness Brazilian's frustrations with their country and its political shift to the right, working to unearth the colonial dynamic that breathes life into these politics and inequities.

Like its national counterpart in this work, Filho and Dornelles use slavery-related imagery and on-screen physical space to establish social hierarchy. Shots of the cotton gin give insight into the film's central themes of capitalism as an extension of enslavement, and underground bunkers lower the working class into (economically and socially) restrictive spaces. However, as a departure from *Que Horas Ela Volta?* this film takes the imprisonment metaphors created by these divisions, makes them concrete, and inverts them, concluding the film with the imprisonment of the community's would-be colonizers. *Bacurau* declares the sanctioned avenues that are traditionally employed in Brazilian society – the niceties of orderly and polite political movement – to be lacking the necessary urgency for change and being generally incapable of reflecting the suffering of marginalized social groups. These avenues have not provided justice for those victimized by the power structures of colonialism. *Bacurau* is full of characters who

exist in defiance of capitalist production and the lifestyle associated with Brazil's elite class. They are a community who does not function as a facet of late-stage capitalism, but instead find purpose outside of production, leading humble lives together until they are violently interrupted by neocolonial military intervention. Building on the rhetoric of resistance that became popular in the 1980s, *Bacurau* chronicles a community that refuses to be extinguished, repeatedly fending off outside invaders. The community asserts that it will not be snuffed out despite holding out against the economic and political structures of modern colonialism. While the community defeats the invaders who threaten their way of life, the film does not provide the hopeful conclusion found in *Que Horas Ela Volta?* While both *Que Horas Ela Volta?* and *Bacurau* provide critiques of the racial capitalism in Brazil, the filmmakers of the 2019 work are not satisfied with the progress made up until this point. Too many colonial relics hang on to modern Brazilian life. The most radical work of the four films, *Bacurau* calls us to not only face the realities of neocolonialism, but asks us to act against them, prompting swift political action.

The Brazilian 2022 Presidential election, this coming October, could not be better timed for the application of this work. While the field is crowded with several candidates, two are drawing the most attention. The first is Jair Bolsonaro, the far-right incumbent, who faces heavy criticism after his failures with the coronavirus pandemic and his severe downsizing of popular social programs. The other, is two-time president Lula da Silva, the head of the very administration that instituted many of the social programs now under fire. Recently released from prison on corruption charges, Lula is attempting to return to the country's presidential office for a third term after being banned from the 2018 race due to his conviction.[109] Notably,

[109] "Lula: Brazil Ex-President's Corruption Convictions Annulled," *BBC News*, March 9, 2021, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-56326389.

these criminal charges were brought under federal judge Sérgio Moro, who would go on to become head of the justice ministry for Bolsonaro's administration.[110] With discourse that may sound familiar to an American audience, Bolsonaro is beginning to make claims about the high probability of voter fraud in Brazil.[111] While the election is still months away, Lula's polling numbers seem the most promising, based on data from the Council of the Americas.[112] Will the social policies Lula has become famous for propel him to victory during such a politically polarized era? Do the socioeconomic lessons learned in *Que Horas Ela Volta?* carry over some seven years later or will Brazilians want change that is more radical, like that found in the more recent *Bacurau*?

Panning to Argentina, Martel's 2001 film *La Ciénaga* emerges from a dark period in Argentine history following a crippling economic disaster under President Carlos Menem. In a narrative with a very similar structure to that found in *Que Horas Ela Volta?*, viewers find themselves surrounded by an upper-class family with a live-in maid named Isabél (paralleling Val from *Que Horas Ela Volta?*) vacationing in the relentless heat of the Argentine countryside. The storyline's landscape also contains a swimming pool, like that of Muylaert's later work. However, this film's *pileta* does not represent access to the lifestyle of the upper-class, instead it spoils and rots in the heat, showcasing the family's (and by extension the Argentine upper class') decaying social status. The critique of the film's upper-class family is representative of the

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[110] Tom Phillips, "Bolsonaro Appoints Judge Who Helped Jail Lula to Lead Justice Ministry," *The Guardian*, November 1, 2018, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/01/bolsonaro-sergio-moro-brazil-justice-ministry-anti-corruption.

[111] "The Stakes Are High in 2022 for Brazil's Democracy," Time, accessed March 21, 2022, https://time.com/6130308/bolsonaro-brazil-2022-election/.

[112] "Poll Tracker: Brazil's 2022 Presidential Election," AS/COA, accessed March 21, 2022, https://www.as-coa.org/articles/poll-tracker-brazils-2022-presidential-election.

complicity of Argentina's rentier class in the devastating economic crisis that took place from 1998-2002. Screeching background noises and fractured shots of bodies give the audience a window into the mental state of the country's rural bourgeoisie during the Argentine Great Depression. While their urban counterparts may have solidified their position in the neo-liberal world order, the plantation owners must come to terms with their out-of-date lifestyle. Indigenous characters create the neocolonial racial and class dynamic central to the film's thesis.

In both Brazilian films, the upper-class attempts to imprison the working class, both metaphorically and literally. *La Ciénaga* uses animalization to enforce the same class divisions. The elite family members, especially the matriarch, Mecha, insult the indigenous characters with frequency, recycling colonial phrenology to belittle Isábel and Perro. Despite this, the filmmaker ensures that it is Mecha's family who comes across to the audience as truly animalistic. They lack table manners, but they are also animalistic in a much more sinister way. Racism, bestiality, and incest inhabit the family dynamic, putrefying their ability to have healthy relationships and showcasing the disturbing indulgences of the upper class. Martel confronts her audience with the reality that this class was not destined for the power they've held onto since contact, but instead has been drunkenly reveling in stolen spoils for centuries, thoroughly unfit to consider what is best for their fellow countrymen.

Women play prominent roles in all the films in this work, but their positions are especially critical in *La Ciénaga* and *Que Horas Ela Volta?* Both feature matriarchs who seem to emasculate their husbands; Mecha and Bárbara are brazen women who appear to dominate their domestic space. However, both have patriarchs that undermine their wife's authority and disrespect them throughout the film. In *Que Horas Ela Volta?* Val is the character that truly encompasses the meaning of the word matriarch, Bárbara being blinded by her search for

material success, and while Mecha is the head of her family, she lacks the ability to form the meaningful relationships required in a healthy family. *La Ciénaga* takes on feminist discourse in a fascinating way, pushing away the commercialization of the female figure by showcasing fragmented shots of middle-aged bodies, instead of sexualizing women's bodies. Both films display the interconnectedness of patriarchy and capitalism. As a new wave of women's rights movements sweep over Latin America with several countries, including Argentina and Colombia within the last year, legalizing abortion (either entirely or at a later stage of pregnancy), lessons about the patriarchy and its ability to confine women to their domestic roles learned from these films become especially poignant.[113]

Finally, Damián Szifron's 2015 *Relatos Salvajes* chronicles a variety of battlefields. Six chapters tell of direct, and often aggressive, confrontations between opposing class interests. Szifron's work broke box-office records in Argentina, demonstrating the nation's ability to relate to the conflicts presented in the film. *Que Horas Ela Volta* and *La Ciénaga* both come from middle-class directors, and these filmmakers contain most of their narrative to their respective class. Both films tell stories of well-to-do families who must navigate interactions with their lower-class employees. In contrast, Szifron shifts the camera towards the working class in many chapters of his film, like that of the waitress and the loan shark, prompting his audience to reflect on how they themselves might be the impetus for political change, as seen in *Bacurau.*

Relatos Salvajes focuses on how societal institutions, like the police and government workers, have failed to protect the general population, instead functioning to protect upper-class

[113] Human Rights Watch, "Argentina: Events of 2021," in *World Report 2022*, 2021, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/argentina , and "Colombia Decriminalizes Abortion, Bolstering Trend Across Region - The New York Times," accessed March 21, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/22/world/americas/colombia-abortion.html.

characters like Diego and Mauricio. Interestingly, Argentina's government has recently voted to postpone economic turmoil by refinancing their loan with the International Monetary Fund.[114] Several left-wing politicians, including Vice President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, criticized the move, saying "It [the IMF] always acted as a promoter and vehicle of policies that provoked poverty and pain in Argentine society."[115] Here we see a real-life example of how societal institutions continue to fail the majority of Argentinians. This decision prompted large protests in Buenos Aires. The choice to continue to lean on the IMF will sound startlingly familiar to those who recall the Argentine Great Depression, the effects of which continue to be felt today. The IMF has provided 22 bailouts for Argentina.[116] Interest payments and additional fees provide a huge boost in income for the IMF and has recently received critiques from the United States Congress, and over 24 other countries, including Argentina and Brazil, who claim these fees are dangerous and "perverse."[117] The systematic dependency created by this cycle, in which a Third World nation, but most seriously, its working-class demographic, are continually indebted to a foreign bank is one of the clearer examples of neocolonialism of our time.

The four films analyzed in these chapters, *Que Horas Ela Volta?*, *La Ciénaga*, *Bacurau*, and *Relatos Salvajes* offer insight into the neocolonial implications surrounding race and class in modern Brazil and Argentina. Despite the temporal distance between today and the initial contact

[114] Natalie Alcoba, "Argentina's Senate Approves IMF Deal, Avoiding Default," accessed March 21, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/18/argentinas-senate-approves-imf-deal-avoiding-default.

[115] Ibid., Natalie Alcoba, "Argentina's Senate Approves IMF Deal, Avoiding Default," accessed March 21, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/18/argentinas-senate-approves-imf-deal-avoiding-default.

[116] Walter Bianchi, "Explainer: Argentina's New IMF Deal Pushes Default Fears down the Road," *Reuters*, March 4, 2022, sec. Finance, https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/argentinas-new-imf-deal-pushes-default-fears-down-road-2022-03-04/.

[117] Patricia Cohen, "Critics Say I.M.F. Loan Fees Are Hurting Nations in Desperate Need," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2022, sec. Business, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/14/business/economy/imf-surcharges.html.

between the native peoples of the Americas and European colonizers, the systems that were planted at that time continue to produce fruit today. Not only do these filmmakers emphasize these structures, they provide commentary, and at times propose solutions, to complicated questions like police violence and the exploitation of the working class. The violence carried out through the well-traveled pathways of colonialism, enslavement, and oppression, is not that of centuries past. These films and their success demonstrate the relevance of colonization to the Latin American public today. Rules and contours we take for granted are saturated with Eurocentric influence. However, the current cinematic movements taking place in Argentina and Brazil push back against these systems, creating a post/colonial space in contemporary film.

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