

LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES

## *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia*, Brazilian (Film) Industry, and World War I in the *Sertão*

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In the film *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia* (1978), Brazilian director Geraldo Sarno uses historical fiction about “the *coronel* of *coronéis*” to negotiate the limits of government censorship and discuss the domestic and international policies of the military dictatorship, including its relationship to the state cinema enterprise Embrafilme, through a portrayal of a progressive but authoritarian businessman of the *sertão* who died in Brazil’s first global war of the twentieth century. The film is one of the few Brazilian films about the country’s oft-overlooked role in World War I. Close analysis of the work reveals Sarno’s deft use of allegory for social commentary on class conflict and the film industry.

No filme *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia* (1978), o diretor brasileiro Geraldo Sarno usa a ficção histórica sobre “o Coronel dos Coronéis” para negociar com os limites da censura do governamental e discutir a política doméstica e internacional da ditadura militar, inclusive sua relação com a empresa estatal cinematográfica Embrafilme, através da representação de um homem de negócios do sertão que era tanto progressista como autoritário. Ele morreu na primeira guerra global do Brasil no século XX. O filme é um dos poucos que trata do papel do Brasil na Primeira Guerra Mundial, um fato pouco estudado. Um análise cauteloso da obra revela o uso destro de Sarno da alegoria para comentar sobre o conflito de classes e a indústria conematográfica.

*under Valenti’s non-Brazilian shoes  
the red carpets of hospitality  
will roll  
and no one will see the cinematic crimes in the air  
nor the remains of our poor dead minds,  
no one will see the wounds  
since there will be no corpse*  
—Arnaldo Jabor, “Jack Valenti’s Brazilian Agenda” ([1977] 1988)

These verses are from Cinema Novo director Arnaldo Jabor’s caustic response to the Motion Pictures Association of America President Jack Valenti’s 1977 arrival in Brazil to lobby the military government to prevent legal quotas for Brazilian national films. Jabor’s expression of disgust with US imperialism—cultural, political, and economic—illustrates the environment that helped create one of the few Brazilian films about the country’s oft-overlooked role in World War I (1914–1918), which is now being commemorated on its centenary. The following essay argues that, in the feature-length film *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia* (1978), director Geraldo Sarno (b. Poções, Bahia, 1938) uses historical fiction about Gouveia to negotiate the limits of government censorship and discuss the domestic and international policies of the 1964–1985 military dictatorship, including its relationship to the state cinema enterprise Embrafilme (1969–1993), through a portrayal of a progressive but authoritarian businessman of the *sertão* who died in Brazil’s first global war of the twentieth century.

To appreciate Embrafilme’s impact on *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia*, one must consider the history of Brazilian cinema. The Lumière Brothers brought the cinematograph to Rio de Janeiro in 1896, but after a Belle Époque

of cinema (1908–1912), World War I altered Brazilian history (Johnson 1987; Johnson and Stam 1988). Already in 1911, US cinema was an organized industry, and when the destruction of World War I shocked the European market, Hollywood established a near monopoly over a profitable and welcoming Brazil and became the aesthetic standard, unhindered by European imports (Johnson 1987). This was part of a greater export economy (as opposed to national development through industrialization), which filmmakers, not unlike the industrialist Gouveia, would attempt to change (Johnson 1987, 22). Critic Randal Johnson (1987, 7), however, cautions viewers not to interpret this unequal relationship in Manichaean terms: Brazilian exhibitors have profited from lower-cost US films, and most viewers are drawn to Hollywood blockbusters. Brazil's own ephemeral "Hollywood," São Paulo's Companhia Cinematográfica Vera Cruz (1949–1954), attempted to break out with expensive, glossy productions that followed the US standard, but they neglected the local market, usually ignored Brazilian social reality, and entrusted their international distribution to foreign companies, which had no financial incentive to see them succeed (King 2000, 59). Vera Cruz created one of the most enduring and internationally successful Brazilian film tropes, the *cangaceiro* (gunslinger), which debuted in Lima Barreto's 1953 film *O cangaceiro*, to compete with Hollywood (King 2000, 59). This local outlaw of the semiarid *sertão* region of the Northeast can be seen as a parallel to US cowboys, and he lived on in Cinema Novo and Sarno's film. Vera Cruz's new focus on Brazilian content came too late to save the company financially. Its rise and fall is an example of Hollywood's near monopoly in Brazil, which Sarno allegorizes, as I will show.

Cinema Novo reacted to the Hollywood monopoly by attempting to create an "authentically" Brazilian cinema, and Sarno was part of this phenomenon. Despite their local aesthetic, political, and economic concerns, Cinema Novo directors adapted techniques from Italian neorealism—such as nonprofessional actors and location shooting—and French New Wave's emphasis on low-budget auteur films (Johnson and Stam 1988, 33). The economic realities of the impoverished Brazilian *povo* (people) that the films depicted and those of gifted but underfunded directors combined to form what director Glauber Rocha theorized in 1965 as the minimalist, revolutionary "aesthetic of hunger" (1981).<sup>1</sup> This politics/aesthetics came to define films about the *sertão* during the late 1960s and 1970s.

Sarno was among the nationalist, Marxist directors of Cinema Novo, who drew on Brazilian literary tropes to analyze the *sertão* as an egregious example of Brazil's uneven, unjust economic development and a font of cultural *brasilidade* through folk art and local customs. *Gouveia* is no exception. Already in *Os sertões* (1902), journalist and sociologist Euclides da Cunha brought the *sertões* (backlands) to national attention in his exhaustive, positivist sociological/journalistic report on the religious commune of Canudos, bringing the region into the national consciousness (Xavier 1997, 12). There, the followers of a charismatic prophet named Antônio Conselheiro (1830–1897) fought to protect themselves from four military sieges sent by Brazil's first republican government (Cunha 1997, 440).

The themes of underdevelopment, invasion, potential uprising, outlaws, violence, and fanaticism would become Cinema Novo commonplaces, which Sarno's film would revisit. Rocha's *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (1964) is a clear example. Its images of poverty, backwardness, *coronelismo* (like a nonmilitary version of Hispanic *caudillismo*), and hopes for drastic economic change would resurface in *Gouveia*. The truck driver Gaúcho, who disobeys the coronel's wishes to feed the starving in Ruy Guerra's film *Os fuzis* (1964), continues the coronel-peasant divide as a dramatization of class conflict, which Sarno takes up again. Director Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Vidas secas* (1963) depicts the seemingly endless cycle of poverty faced by *sertanejos* (*sertão* dwellers), who face an unpredictable and fatalist reality: drought comes and goes, as do their homes, employment, and wages. The protagonist of *Gouveia* attempts to provide stability in a similar context, and his death parallels Gaúcho's in its continuation of the cyclic injustice of the Northeast. Elements of the previous films continue in Rocha's *Antônio das Mortes* (1969), a vivid bloodbath that overthrows a coronel. It is a Technicolor departure from the low-tech black and white of Rocha's previous work and an example of hunger cineastes' incorporation of new technology, as Sarno's color feature shows. The coronel figure would reemerge in Leon Hirszman's *São Bernardo* (1971), on the self-made and self-centered coronel of the Alagoas *sertão* Paulo Honório. Honório meets Madalena, a socialist teacher, on a train, brings her to his ranch, and marries her. She encourages his workers to speak up for their rights, infuriating Paulo. Unable to escape Paulo's oppression, Madalena resorts to suicide. As in *Gouveia*, a coronel's egocentrism and a major character's death communicate the extreme barriers to economic progress and reform in the Northeast—and, by extension, Brazil. Like *Gouveia*, Hirszman's film was produced and distributed by Embrafilme in 1973, though the government had censored it in 1972, representing the paradoxes of state support and

<sup>1</sup> See Christopher Dunn (2001, 37) on the politics of the *povo* (potentially revolutionary masses) versus *público* (consumers).

control of cinema (Johnson 1987, 156). Hirszman claims that the oppression in the film could have occurred in 1927 or 1977, and he uses history to criticize the then-current regime (King 2000, 118).

Sarno's career embodies the evolution of the Brazilian film industry, Cinema Novo, and the filmic representation of the sertão. Sarno is known as a documentarian, so *Gouveia* was a departure from his previous works (Avellar 1988, 332; Sobrinho 2013, 87). He studied law at the Universidade Federal da Bahia, which was founded in 1946 as a cultural and economic motor for modernizing Bahia (Dunn 2001, 50). Sarno was part of the Centro Popular de Cultura or CPC (1962–1964), which provided Freirian-Marxist cultural production that depicted workers' struggles and supported progressive politics (Dunn 2001, 40). Alongside Orlando Senna, who co-wrote *Gouveia* with him, he produced a neorealist adaptation of the Nelson Xavier and Augusto Boal play *Multirão em Novo Sol* called *Rebelião em Novo Sol* (Toledo and Neiva 2015, 73). Supported by the progressive, government-sponsored União Nacional de Estudantes (UNE), Sarno spent 1963 at the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos studying with Santiago Álvarez, who filmed black-and-white documentaries on the lives of workers (Sobrinho 2013, 88) that Sarno called "documentários de combate" (combat documentaries) for their anti-imperialism (Sarno 2010). The Cuban Revolution had established its Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos in 1959, and Sarno considers it a point of reference for the time (Sarno 2010).

Class issues were central to Sarno's career from its beginnings to *Gouveia*. The 1964 coup ended the CPC and UNE, so Sarno went to São Paulo and joined what would be known as the Farkas Caravan (Sobrinho 2013, 86). Producer and photographer Thomaz Farkas (1928–2011), producer of one hundred documentaries (Rocha [1970] 1988, 88), helped finance most of Sarno's work, including *Gouveia* and his breakthrough documentary *Viramundo* (1965). This was the first depiction of the Brazilian working class in the nation's film history (King 2000, 111), and the sparse aesthetics, low technology, and social critique make it in many ways exemplary of the aesthetics of hunger.<sup>2</sup> The Farkas Caravan stemmed in part from the recent invention of the noiseless sixteen-millimeter portable camera, which allowed filmmakers like Sarno, Hirszman, and Jabor to visit the far reaches of the sertão, where many people had never seen a camera (Ribeiro 2015), paralleling *Gouveia*'s voyage to the sertão. The caravan made two journeys to catalogue the Northeast in 1967 and 1969 (Sobrinho 2013, 90). This led Sarno to create ten short documentaries on folk culture and the povo's lives in the context of the military dictatorship's abandonment of populist economics in favor of industrialization that primarily benefited the urban upper middle class (Dunn 2001, 45).

It was during the 1967 foray that he discovered the largely unknown history of Coronel Delmiro Gouveia (1863–1917) and was inspired to make the film (Castellotti 2013). While traveling the Northeast with the Farkas Caravan, Sarno encountered Gouveia's name on a bust at an abandoned hydroelectric dam (Castellotti 2013). He visited the ruins of the Usina de Angiquinho (shown in the film), Gouveia's home (recreated for the film), and the Pedra Factory. Many of the structures of the town where he filmed no longer exist, such as the workers' quarters (Sarno 2010).

Sarno discovered ruins of a factory in the contemporary town called Delmiro Gouveia, once Pedra. These structures live again in the film as he uses 1970s Brazil to show that the fleeting modernization projects of the past—his dam, his factory—can return to the sertão. During the ten years he was researching and preparing the film, he read Tadeu Rocha's (1963) biography of Gouveia, but he also gathered oral histories through interviews published in the *Cadernos do Sertão* (Castellotti 2013). He filmed in Delmiro Gouveia, Paulo Afonso, and the sertão, where cotton and leather were being sold, to lend documentary-like authenticity to the film (Castellotti 2013).

Sarno no doubt saw the parallels between the industrialist's striving and Brazil's greater struggle for progress. Johnson views the film as dramatizing a Juscelino Kubitschek–like form of populist, nationalist-bourgeois development (Burton, Johnson, and Stam 1980). This was personally important to the director, since his career dramatizes the financial ebbs and flows of the Brazilian film industry. When progressive presidents Kubitschek, Jânio da Silva Quadros, Ranieri Mazzilli, and João Goulart were in power (1960–1964), the government supported his films, but the dictatorship left him dependent on private capital and in negotiation with government censors. *Multirão em Novo Sol* was destroyed by the military government due to its subversive content (Sobrinho 2013, 87). In 1968, Institutional Act Five (AI-5) forced filmmakers to change their form and content to avoid censorship, prison, or exile.

An example of this negotiation is that the state-run Embrafilme, along with Sarno's production company, Saruê Filmes, and Farkas Films, produced *Gouveia* (Sobrinho 2013, 90). The dictatorship experienced reform due to the 1973 oil crisis, which brought an end to the "economic miracle." Throughout this time, economics

<sup>2</sup> Dos Santos claimed the documentarists were more radical than other Cinema Novo directors (King 2000, 135).

and politics were dominated by the Right, while the cultural Left continued to have much sway over the Brazilian people. A compromise—of sorts—was reached in 1974 when Cinema Novo director Roberto Farias was placed in charge of Embrafilme (est. 1969) (Johnson 1987, 151). The Brazilian government owned 99.9 percent of Embrafilme. Its budget was increased from \$6 million to \$8 million *cruzeiros* in 1975 (Johnson 1987, 138), making the Brazilian dictatorship the primary benefactor of the largest film market in Latin America (Johnson and Stam 1988, 44). By 1980, the Brazilian viewing public doubled, bringing the *público* to national cinema (King 2000, 115).

At last, through Embrafilme, Brazilian filmmakers were provided with substantial government support to do their work and have its distribution protected by law (Johnson 1987, 15). But at what cost? Clearly, the government's goal was ideological hegemony in the popular sectors (Pinto 2013b, 70). It offered research funds for eighteen historical film scripts in 1977 (Pinto 2013b, 67). Minister of Education and Culture Jarbas Passarinho, who lauds the historical Gouveia as a “grande herói nacional” (great national hero) (Pinto 2013a), explicitly promoted Brazilian “épicos clássicos” (classic epics), starting in 1971, and most of the directors (Guerra, Jabor, Dos Santos, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, Carlos Diegues) were from the Cinema Novo years (Pinto 2013b, 68, 80).<sup>3</sup> This was reiterated in the 1975 Política Nacional de Cultura (Silva 2002), which Johnson calls “attempts to efface class conflict and support class harmony” (1987, 154). In opposition to official history, Dos Santos claims that he rejects uncritical praise of “historical founding fathers” (Burton 1987, 134), and so does Sarno in *Gouveia*.

Embrafilme's expansion reignited a long-standing debate between filmmakers and critics regarding the state's role in cinema. In pre-coup 1962, director Carlos Estevam ([1962] 1988) argued that popular revolutionary art must be part of a greater political project of national liberation (Dunn 2001, 41), but he claims that the people's art without such a consciousness was not quality art (1988, 42). Christopher Dunn (2001, 42) counterargues that this view is paternalistic. Joaquim Pedro de Andrade claimed in 1966 that “if a cinema is to be revolutionary, it must first communicate with its public,” which can be difficult to accomplish for a filmmaker using complex aesthetics and negotiating censorship (Johnson and Stam 1988, 73). In 1967, Rocha called for a kind of guerilla “Tricontinental Filmmaker” who would resist Hollywood in the Third World (Rocha [1967] 1988, 77). The “Luz e Ação Manifesto” of 1973 ([1973] 1988) cries out against government censorship and points to the commercial success of *Macunaíma* (1969) and *Como era gostoso o meu francês* (1971) as aesthetically and intellectually uncompromising films that were box office successes (1988, 91). By 1978, the 1974 expansion of Embrafilme under Farias had led to the first Congress on the Commercialization of Films in Portuguese and Spanish. There, Farias ([1977] 1988, 94) proposed a Cinematographic Common Market of Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries to “neutralize the one-way flow of information” via Hollywood to the Third World. To do so, Farias proposed to open 20 percent of the Brazilian market to seven Spanish American countries, Angola, Portugal, and Spain. He argued that 50 percent of Brazil's marketplace should be for non-Common Market films and 50 percent should be for those of the market to even the playing field (96, 97). Diegues ([1977] 1988, 100) argued that Embrafilme “is the only enterprise with sufficient economic and political power to confront the devastating voracity of the multinational corporations in Brazil... As citizen-filmmakers, we have the right to use the state as one uses commuter trains or the Bank of Brazil. But this right does not imply a commitment to a specific government.” Guerra ([1977] 1988, 102) was more critical of Embrafilme: “Our cinema is supported by a vehicle for capitalism, a state enterprise. The contradiction is obvious. Imagine going to Cuba and defending capitalism with the help of ICAIC! But that is precisely the situation of the Brazilian filmmaker who has no other source of capital and who tries to justify certain films, allegorical, elitist, and almost masturbatory in their forms of expression, in an attempt to reconcile this contradiction.” But in 1978, head of distribution Gustavo Dahl resigned due to disagreements with Farias, and in 1979, the regime replaced Farias with a career diplomat (Dahl [1978] 1988, 104). Dahl claimed that Embrafilme's bond with Cinema Novo was a “total neutralization of debate” (105). On the other hand, he felt that private capital or socialist totalitarianism were not better options (106). He despaired that Cinema Novo's utopian impetus to “build the country” had been lost but maintained that Embrafilme was not an endorsement of the military regime (107).

In the context of Embrafilme, historical fiction had been used to affirm a uniquely Brazilian culture and subtly criticize social injustice before *Gouveia*. Andrade's *Os inconfidentes* (1972) subtly criticizes contemporary popular apathy and amnesia in the face of government oppression. Julianne Burton, Randal Johnson, and Robert Stam (1980) interpret the disintegration of a plantation family in Diegues's *Joana Francesa* (1973) and Eduardo Escorel's *Lição de amor* (1975) about a landowning, industrialist family (an allegory for Brazil) in similar ways.<sup>4</sup> Dos Santos's *Como era gostoso o meu francês* (1971) repeats the Brazilian

<sup>3</sup> See Jarbas Passarinho's speech in *Filme Cultura* 4 (19) (1971), cited in Pinto 2013a and 2013b.

<sup>4</sup> See Xavier (1997, 246) for more on cinematic family “allegories of underdevelopment” in 1970s Brazil.



trope of cannibalism, a metaphor for the reinterpretation of cultural imports since Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto antropófago" (1990), first published in 1928. Dos Santos depicts the origin of Brazilian economic dependence on Europe: trading for weapons and internal warfare continues colonizing violence (Peña 1988, 195). The tribe's—and the Frenchman's—choices to revolt against the Western mercantilist economy are models of resistance to the kind of heroic, pro-capitalist ideals of the Brazilian dictatorship. Dos Santos's film, like Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1969), also links Brazilian cinema to the origins of the revolutionary *modernistas* of the 1920s, so historical distance is not neutrality.

To illuminate Sarno's choice of making a film on this specific coronel, an understanding of the historical Delmiro Gouveia's life (1863–1917) will be useful. Born in Ceará, he is known as the "Coronel dos Coronéis" for his powerful leadership and how he modernized the Northeast. At fourteen he was orphaned and working for the British Brazilian Street Railways Company, but he soon left to become a traveling salesman and, by 1896, a leather producer, whose Delmiro e Companhia was the first Northeastern exporter to the rapidly rising United States (Maynard 2014).<sup>5</sup> He traveled to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, which inspired him to build the first department store and electrified structure in Pernambuco, the Derby (Maynard 2014). In Alagoas, he built the first hydroelectric dam in Brazil, the Angiquinho, which harnessed the Rio São Francisco to power the textile factory of Pedra (Maynard 2014). Thread produced at his factory (**Figure 1**) was less expensive than the British imports, and by 1916 he had dominated the Brazilian market and was making inroads into Spanish America (Lage 1981, 7), as the film shows. Britain's Machine Cottons wanted its monopoly back, and so it attempted to buy the company from Gouveia, but he consistently refused. By 1917, the English company had become more desperate due to the German U-boat blockades that were making it impossible to do business with the rest of the world. But Gouveia was mysteriously shot to death on October 17, 1917 (Maynard 2014). Two men were convicted, likely under forced confession, but were later absolved (Fundação Delmiro Gouveia 2008). The mystery surrounding his death has led to conflicting testimonies, but some still suspect Machine Cottons (Fundação Delmiro Gouveia 2008). The Scottish company shut the factory down.

Pedra's similarities to the 1970s Brazilian film market are striking. Alberto Gonçalves (2013, 14) argues that Pedra fell victim to the Brazilian government's refusal to use import tariffs, quotas, and federal taxes to protect fledgling local businesses. Likewise, Johnson and Stam (1988, 22) show that Brazil's leaders welcomed Hollywood producers, who could cover their production costs at home and turn an easy profit in Brazil by undercutting any national films. Gouveia, with his thread, can be seen as a meditation on centralized national power like the relationship between Embrafilme and the dictatorship. Gouveia is remembered as the most powerful local governor of the sertão. The spools of thread that bear Pedra's name can be seen as a metaphor for the reels of film that Embrafilme was producing under Farias. Like Gouveia, Embrafilme was making economic inroads into the Latin American market. If these spools of thread, printed in Portuguese and Spanish for the Latin American market, represent reels of film, then the violent return of



**Figure 1:** Spool of thread from Gouveia's factory in *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia* (dir. Geraldo Sarno, São Paulo: Embrafilme; Saruê; Farkas, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> See also Maynard (2006, 2009) and Correia (2013).

British commercial interests cannot be a positive omen. Perhaps Sarno feared Hollywood was too powerful for Farias and Embrafilme to hold at bay.

Gouveia's historical reality was that of the First Brazilian Republic and World War I in Latin America. Critic Mariano Siskind (2016, 237) argues that, despite the region's general lack of official participation in the war, World War I was a Latin American event discursively, particularly for Hispanic *modernista* authors like Rubén Darío, Enríque Gómez Carrillo, and Alejandro Sux.<sup>6</sup> The latter two were war correspondents in France. They focused on the threat Germany posed to Paris, in their minds the center of world culture. I will now elucidate some of the peculiarities of Brazil's role in the war, including alliances with Great Britain and Germany, that resurface in the 1978 film.

Gouveia's historical context exemplifies Brazil's complex economic, political, and cultural relationship with Europe, which was influenced by France but not limited to this relationship. Joining the war against Germany on August 3, 1918, was a momentous decision for the Brazilian military. Already many of the weapons used by the army at Canudos were imported German Krupp rifles and canons (McCann 2004, 14). The conflict decimated the military in terms of casualties and resources. Brazil attempted to reform its troops by sending officers to train in Germany and continuing to import their arms until 1910 (McCann 2004, 22, 93). But France had a close relationship with São Paulo politicians, trained their police force, and eventually won the diplomatic and propaganda struggle to enlist Brazil in the Allied cause against Germany. World War I was one reason Brazil reformed and expanded its national army (McCann 2004, 102–103, 177). Before then, the army was secondary to the local *capangas* or gunslingers that propped up local bosses like Gouveia (McCann 2004, 107, 112–113). Both Canudos and World War I, key moments in developing the Brazilian military, also encouraged Brazilians to look inward to develop a unified national identity and to debate their role on the world stage.<sup>7</sup>

One of the main factors behind Brazil's involvement in the Great War was economics. Previously, Brazil's economy had been based on exporting crops—sugar and coffee—and importing virtually all manufactured goods. Its declaration of war was the result of the failure of the government's neutrality policy and the pressures of an economy that remained dependent on Europe's. At first, the Republican government attempted to remain neutral in the war, like its powerful US allies, but the German navy began a series of attacks on all transatlantic shipping, regardless of neutral or Allied status (Scheina 2003, 40). On October 26, 1917, German U-boat attacks on Brazilian shipping vessels pushed President Venceslau Brás to declare war on the Central Powers. Brazil's meager participation was limited to the navy (McCann 2004, 176). Brazilian troops missed most of the war, but Brazilian diplomats were at the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and were among the founding members of the League of Nations (Scheina 2003, 40). The war convinced Brazilian leaders to become less economically dependent on Europe (McCann 2004, 178–179), something that Gouveia was already doing by focusing on the national and Latin American markets.

The trade interruptions and unreliable European markets caused by the conflict resulted in Brazilian import substitution and fleeting internal development (Singer 1974, 558).<sup>8</sup> The Brazilian army's initial function at the end of the nineteenth century was nation building: constructing infrastructure and providing a police force that supported the federal government, not national defense, which drastically changed with the Great War (McCann 2004, 12). In this context, Gouveia's industrial development of the Northeast made him similar to the army's actual *coronéis*.

Sarno is blending historical reality with cinematic fiction, and he is very concerned with bringing progress to the sertão. But *Gouveia* is a special reflection on international capital and its often hypocritical role in Brazil's domestic violence, captured by this relatively obscure anecdote from World War I: "The film's objective, says Sarno, in addition to recuperating the forgotten history of the industrialist, was to show that Delmiro's murder directly benefited the English, whose industry, Machine Cottons, took over Pedra twelve years after the industrialist's death, in 1929" (Castellotti 2013).<sup>9</sup> The international market that disallowed Brazilian economic independence in 1917 paralleled the international market that Sarno and other Cinema Novo directors struggled against. The genre of historical fiction aids Sarno in this project, since he gains authority through research, but he is not constantly bound by truth claims in his storytelling. For example, the "ingleses" to whom Sarno refers are not English, since Machine Cottons was located in Paisley, Scotland

<sup>6</sup> This movement predates and is independent from Brazilian *modernismo*.

<sup>7</sup> For more on Brazil in World War I, see Scheina (2003, 35–40).

<sup>8</sup> There was also nineteenth-century growth in the Brazilian cotton market until US plantations undercut the market with cheap, slave-produced cotton (Singer 1974, 552).

<sup>9</sup> All translations from Portuguese sources are by the author unless otherwise noted.

(Gonçalves 2013, 11). Nonetheless, as an allegory, they can represent the hypocritical practices of another Anglophone economic behemoth—Hollywood’s monopoly, bolstered by claims of the free market. In the film, Machine Cottons negotiator Mr. Harlem comments on market capitalism: “This is a free world, sir [Gouveia]. We all have the same chances. After all, we are fighting this war to guarantee that freedom.” Sarno’s depiction of international capitalism’s hypocrisy is itself subversive to the dictatorship, since, as José Carlos Avellar (1988, 332) puts it, “in the context of censorship, seeing reality was itself revolutionary.”

Allegory also has a revolutionary function in the film. The character and voice-over narrator Eulina represents the Brazilian povo in a new era of governance. In 1890, the coronel’s political rivals burned the Derby shopping center in Recife. The building prominently displayed a clock on the town square to give structure to the area now known as the Derby *bairro* (Correia 2013, 4). The market’s destruction is one of several symbolic ruptures with the past in the film that characterize the modernization of the sertão: a clock strikes midnight as the twentieth century dawns. The director has the Derby’s destruction occur a day early and ignores Gouveia’s tour of Europe to focus on Brazil. On New Year’s Eve (not years later, as actually was the case), Gouveia abandons his wife (Maynard 2014). He also abandons the home he named for her, Vila Anunciada, tying their failed marriage to the end of a tired era and a failed model of progress focused only on the elite of regional capitals. Instead of having Gouveia kidnap Eulina, Sarno has his new wife’s mother, the governor’s wife, hand the girl away:

Gouveia: Let’s go, Eulina, we cannot get behind.

Mother [to Eulina]: Go, dear—Coronel Delmiro will be a good man for you. Don’t cry.

[To Gouveia]: I am handing my entire future over to you.... Coronel, take care of her. She is just a little girl.

Eulina’s handoff can be seen as representing the centralizing of power over a still young Brazil to a forward-thinking oligarch. Perhaps ironically, her flashback presents the country’s renewed youth when the Derby was opened. She asks, “What else could a woman like me want?” Then, the film cuts to a woman of the povo filtering manioc flour to Afro-Brazilian drums at the Derby, representing Gouveia’s accessibly priced goods. But gradually, Eulina literally and figuratively loses her voice in the film, devolving from voice-over narrator into expressing herself through piano music, to the jouissance of calling him “paiinho” (daddy) during sex. Upon arriving in Água Branca, one of her voice-overs is a lament over her isolation from the negligent coronel and her lost dreams. Her dress becomes plain, her body stagnant, and the new technology of a gramophone is juxtaposed with a black nurse who cares for the elite couple’s children as in the preindustrial past. Gouveia attempts to buy his wife back with dresses and perfume from Paris, but she refuses to be bought with cheap gifts from Europe. She dramatically runs out of their house and ruins the finery by rolling in a pigsty. The sound track, however, is Walter Goulart’s (composer of *Antônio das Mortes*) choice of dramatic violins, which bleed seamlessly into the screeching of metal on metal, like the wheels of a machine braking. This is a foreshadowing of the protagonist’s death and a continuation of the cinema of hunger’s trademark cacophony (Johnson and Stam 1988, 35). Eulina’s collapse can be seen as Brazil’s economic and political progress being halted because its government does not listen to the povo’s needs. She is sent back to Recife but separated from her children, who are never heard from again in the film. Her disappearance evokes the *desaparecidos* of the military regime, the extreme of government not listening to its people. In the next scene of the film, the Gouveias’ partnership seems to vanish into the sertão in a wide shot as the couple walks into the horizon to the sound of tinkling piano music. Eulina’s breakdown evokes Margarida’s suicide in *São Bernardo*. Gouveia’s business partner Iona claims that women only got in the way of his vision of progress. One can see parallels with the dictatorship’s real-life abandonment of economic populism and ignoring the povo, personified here by the coronel’s wife.

Later in the film, Sarno replaces Eulina with a new woman in Gouveia’s life who represents a vacuous economic relationship. The bond seems illegitimate, since Gouveia is still married, and based on sex, since the woman remains anonymous, lives at his smaller house, and is first seen in a nightgown hugging and kissing him lasciviously as he discusses business with Iona. If Gouveia’s sexual partners represent Brazil, it seems the new relationship is closer to prostitution than to harmonious marriage. Gouveia’s last affair can be seen as an indictment of governments and business interests that do not serve the needs of the people of Brazil in a sustainable manner like a healthy marriage. The illegitimate lover, Brazil, helplessly watches the fall of Gouveia at the hands of his murderers (**Figure 2**).

To appreciate the importance of Sarno’s depiction of the patriarch’s death, let us turn to Siskind’s theory of affective cosmopolitanism, which he uses to interpret World War I as discursively linked to Latin America. Through their writing, Hispanic modernistas Gómez Carrillo and Sux both attempted to bridge the distance,



**Figure 2:** Gouveia is shot on his porch while unarmed. His mistress runs to his side.

geographic and cultural, between Latin America and those dying in France. They did so because they wanted access to Latin American representation in “universal,” “cosmopolitan” culture, a gap Brazilian modernistas had attempted to paradoxically bridge through a nationalism that was simultaneously cosmopolitan in outlook (Santiago 2011, 161). The Hispanic modernistas discursively bind Latin America and Europe through the notion of war as an unbelievable spectacle of death; beholding it binds the Americas to Paris, and enlightened humanity, through “affective condensation” or bringing the reader emotionally closer to images of war’s human toll (Siskind 2016, 250–251).

In the film, Gouveia’s death scene lasts over a minute and grows from silent, motionless anticipation to frenetic, loud destruction, manipulating the viewer’s affect. It is a long shot of Gouveia’s white, well-lit house, showing that he was unarmed, alone, and reading the newspaper when he was gunned down. This scene is interspersed with close-ups of pickaxes destroying the machinery of the unlit *Fábrica da Pedra*. The sound track of the coronel’s murder is not the sounds of gunshots but the clanging of pickaxes that substitutes for the gunshots, and the gradually intensifying keyboard, clarinet, and violin. These replace the lament of Gouveia’s mistress, who arrives too late to intervene in his death. Like the deaths that Gómez Carrillo and Sux reported, this scene binds the spectator of 1978 (and today) with the events of October 10, 1917. This death scene shows that Brazil had a key casualty in the war, a man who embarked on a quixotic quest to challenge foreign hegemony in business for the good of the povo, as is shown in the previous scene when he tells Iona, the personified market, that he will not sell the factory: “the dam, the factory can have an independent future from me.... You know, Iona? I am the owner of people and things, not just today, right now. I can’t determine their future. The future belongs to everyone. The povo. The factory is not for sale.” Though Gouveia loses himself as a selfish and myopic businessman, he comes to his senses and attempts to protect the povo from foreign invaders who wish to exploit it. It shows Britain’s hypocrisy in claiming to protect a worldwide free market. It shows World War I as a European conflict into which Brazil was dragged, much like the Cold War. The oppressive military regime of 1978 claimed to protect democracy and the free market but benefited only the middle class and its foreign allies.

Gouveia’s death is visually tied to the ruins of the hydroelectric dam and the *Pedra* Factory in the film. Siskind (2016, 248) reads the ruins of World War I Europe as temporally liminal reminders of the past in the present, which paradoxically can symbolize hope for the future. In this sense, these horrific images—bombed-out buildings, destroyed homes—of failures of the past can serve as the basis for building a better future. In the film, Gouveia’s murder is juxtaposed with the destruction of *Pedra*’s cotton-threading machinery. The actors behind the pickaxes are revealed in a later scene to be a British overseer and Brazilian workers. While historically the Scots bought out *Pedra* twelve years after Gouveia’s death, the film depicts the workers obediently destroying the machinery that had been their source of income and modernization at the “English” Mr. Harlem’s request in 1917 (**Figure 3**). Factory worker Zé Pó is returned to the oxcarts, whose primitive machinery and well-known whine had come to symbolize the endless cycle of poverty and underdevelopment in the Northeast with Dos Santos’s *Vidas Secas* (1963).

The ruins of the dam and the *Pedra* Factory are symbols of popular modernization projects that began and failed but that can begin again. Co-writer Senna quotes his Northeastern grandfather as believing that





**Figure 3:** Mr. Harlem orders Zé Pó to throw the Pedra factory's machinery into the São Francisco River next to the Angiquinho Dam Gouveia had built.

“experience is the sum of failures” (Senna 2013). The same can be said of history. Marxist philosopher Walter Benjamin (1988, 263) views the voices of the defeated, oppressed people of history as a counternarrative to triumphant national histories. A Benjaminian interpretation shows this film as a historical constellation. It tells of the common struggle of the sertanejo masses ignored by Europe and, frequently, by Coronel Gouveia in 1917, and the plight of the impoverished sertanejos, exploited or ignored by those in alliance with the US- and Europe-supported dictatorship in 1978. This constellation includes codes from other uprisings in the backlands, such as gunslingers in the tradition of the *cangaço*, and rebellions against authority like Canudos, the spirit of which is seen in this uniquely progressive commune of workers around a charismatic figure.

The povo's evaluation of the strongman opens the film, harkening back to the Farkas Caravan. *Gouveia* begins with a documentary-style interview in which only an elderly, nameless former worker at the Fábrica da Pedra, not a professional actor, speaks, fondly recalling his time there. He praises Gouveia for providing means for the sertanejos to work and for not killing anyone. This foreshadows Gouveia's death. The interview is a glance back to the “aesthetic of hunger.” The informant describes how there was no food, clothing, or work before the factory. The stripped-down footage, likely from his 1967 or 1969 travels through the Northeast, shot on grainy sixteen-millimeter film, stands in stark contrast to the comparatively big-budget production of the rest of the film, which could be called an Embrafilme “super-production” (Johnson and Stam 1988, 45).<sup>10</sup> The work was shot on high-quality thirty-five-millimeter film, and the main actors are professionals (Cinemateca 2016). For example, Gouveia is played by the celebrated actor Rubens de Falco (1931–2008), the slaveholding patriarch of the *telenovela* *A Escrava Isaura* (1976), who would act in thirty films by 2009 (G1, 2008).

The nameless, passive worker in *Gouveia* necessitates the outspoken, staged worker Zé Pó in this work if it is to directly call for reform.<sup>11</sup> Gouveia discovers Zé building a shack to house his family on the coronel's land, evoking the land reforms called for in *Rebelião em Novo Sol* and the struggle between peasant and coronel in *Deus e o diabo*. Reflecting his class, Gouveia orders the worker off the land much like a rich landowner had ordered the upstart Gouveia off of his a few moments earlier in the film. Zé's argument for being a squatter is the urgency of need. He expresses a common theme of the cinema of hunger and ICAIC documentaries: “we can't just go without a house.”<sup>12</sup> Zé inspires Gouveia's dream sequence of building a hydroelectric dam on the São Francisco and beholding it nude; Zé returns the aloof Gouveia to contact with the land and with the nakedness of the poor described earlier in the film. It is a moment of “descolonização do sonho” (decolonization of dreams) through cinema (Avellar 1995). Zé is a noble father working to care for his family, a foil for Gouveia, and an allegory of a just Brazilian community. Zé is able to rise through the ranks at the factory by speaking up to Gouveia, but he is also forced to destroy the factory. He is the final of

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, in Burton, Johnson, and Stam (1980), claims that “The film's high level of production values as well as its political questioning make ... [it] one of the most important films of the recent years.”

<sup>11</sup> The character is played by José Dumont, who acted as a worker in four films starting with this one, including the classics *Tudo bem* (1978), *O homem que virou suco* (1982), and *A hora da estrela* (1985) (Silva 2002, 22).

<sup>12</sup> Sarno mentions the “urgência” of representing poverty (Sobrinho 2013, 89).

the film's five narrators (Worker, Eulina, Coronel Ulisses, Iona, Zé) and the one who declares that Gouveia should have listened to the workers. Sarno's clear postcolonial, Marxist message may have been overlooked by censors due to the nationalistic phrasing and the distant setting of 1917. But Zé's eloquence shows Sarno and Senna's ideal of a class-conscious worker, in communication with his comrades and superiors, focused on a collectivist and egalitarian reform of Brazilian politics, a commonplace in Cinema Novo. In brief, Zé is the writers' mouthpiece for revolution, a project Senna would continue through his teaching and film collaborations in Cuba (Senna 2013).

On the other hand, in Zé, Sarno falls into the trap of a paternalistic act of speaking "for" the people instead of listening to them, as was the case of fellow CPC director Carlos Estevam. Sarno told Jean-Claude Bernadet that the silent cries of *Iaô* (1976) are the silenced voices of the povo, a continuation of showing silences beginning with *Viramundo* (Bernadet 2004, 72). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988, 275) takes Marxists to task for being unable to "speak for" the subaltern. To put it another way, the documentarian's reaction to and presentation of the events define the documentary, making it not an objective, univocal, or transparent representation of the subaltern (Sobrinho 2013, 99). Spivak (1988, 308) concludes that the subaltern cannot speak in Western discourse but that she or he should not be abandoned. Sarno and Senna, as middle-class Marxist intellectuals, are in the problematic space of holding power over the film and the voices of the povo, like artistic "coronéis." Their struggle to represent and aid the oppressed in their film runs parallel to Gouveia's reform of the sertão, which often ignores or misunderstands the needs of the povo.

Analyzing not only the voices but also the silences of *Gouveia* includes noting elements of the coronel's progressivism that ran afoul of Brazilian censors during the dictatorship.<sup>13</sup> Gonçalves notes that Gouveia respected workers' rights in a way that was quite uncommon in the sertão: workers had an eight-hour workday, Sundays off, free personal and family medical treatment, weekly pay, low-cost or free housing, sanitation services, electricity, a skating rink, movie theater, telephones, and eight schoolrooms where children and adults were taught to read (Gonçalves 2013, 18). In these ways, the factory community sounds like the early days of the Cuban Revolution (De la Fuente 2001, 138), a key inspiration for Sarno at the time (Sarno 2010). These socialist reforms would surely rub anti-Marxist censors the wrong way.

Commercially, 1978 was the apex of Embrafilme's production, representing 37.98 percent of the Brazilian film market. If Gouveia's downfall at the hands of the British can be interpreted as the downfall of centralized power in the form of dictatorship and Embrafilme, what became of the government enterprise after the film was released that year? The film was an immediate international success. It won Honorable Mention in 1978 at the Festival de Cannes (Festival de Cannes 2016) and the Premio Coral in Havana in 1979 (*EnCaribe* 2016). The transition away from military government in 1985 coincided with a deathblow to the government entity. The national quotas were dissolved in 1991 (Gatti 2008, 67). Brazil occupied only 1 percent of its own film market in the 1990s (Turner 2016, 101), though Globo Filmes has continued to produce national cinema (Rêgo 2005, 88). The Audio-Visual Law of 1993 allowed producers to float projects on the stock market and allowed foreign distributors to invest in Brazilian cinema up to 70 percent of their income tax on profits (Rêgo 2005, 88). This attracted Hollywood companies, Sarno's declared enemy in 1978, to invest in the production of Brazilian cinema, which helped finance a new generation of commercial and artistic successes like Walter Salles's *Central do Brasil* (Rêgo 2005, 88, 91), though Hollywood continues to dominate the Brazil movie market. Nonetheless, Sarno has expressed his continued dedication to departing from Hollywood aesthetics and challenging capitalism and inequality (Reale 2012).

Today Brazil is newly faced with political and economic crises, and *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia's* questioning of centralized national power and its relationship to the international market are particularly pertinent. As Zé Pó states, "The coronel's weakness was that he was alone.... It occurred to me that he was an example for me and for all of us.... There is no force greater than the workers that function like machines but think like people." If watching Gouveia's death is a lesson in what could have been, looking into the eyes of the character Zé Pó—the artistic eyes of Sarno—and hearing him speak is a difficult lesson in what may still come for Brazil: a just nation for all, rich and poor.

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<sup>13</sup> Spivak's alternative to "representing" the subaltern, here the sertanejo peasantry, is to "measure silences," which is to say what a text cannot say (1988, 286).

Tapia y Rivera's *La Cuarterona* (1867) as *Juliet of the Tropics* (Cambria Press, 2016). His essays have been featured in such publications as *Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies*, *Hispania*, and *CR: The New Centennial Review*.

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