

Brazilian Dystopian Futures: Worlding Brazil through SF Movies

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Abstract: Relying on the so-called IR aesthetic turn and taking advantage of the critical and epistemic qualities of cinema, this article explores how some Brazilian science fiction (SF) films offer a sensitive and reflective interpretation of Brazil and its place in the world, which should be valued in the study of international politics. Within this proposal, the article analyses four emblematic movies from the scarce historiography of Brazilian SF cinema – *O Quinto Poder* (1962), *Os Cosmonautas* (1962), *Brasil Ano 2000* (1969), and ‘*Bacurau*’ (2019) – in order to identify to what extent they resulted in the reproduction or reinforcement of more conventional understandings and consensual representations of international politics, or conversely exposed, questioned and/or criticised dominant representations of Brazil and its place in the world. The analytical category of ‘worlding’ is borrowed from post-colonial thinking to designate the process by which filmmakers construct or deconstruct the imaginaries that make Brazilian reality intelligible, locally and globally. As the article aims to show, the way Brazil is worlded in these SF films contributes to amplify important debates and encourage critical thinking on issues that inform the way Brazil and its place in the world is interpreted by its own cultural agents and artists. The article also shows that the epistemological move suggested by the IR aesthetic turn and the concept of worlding provide a more nuanced lens that provides interpretations of Brazil and to some extent of international politics that are more locally rooted and therefore richer than those that distant and western-centred orthodox IR theories can allow.

Keywords: aesthetics; science fiction; international politics; dystopias; worlding Brazil.

Introduction¹

In the last two decades, scholars of international relations (IR) have increasingly defended the relevance of films for the analysis of peace, security and politics within the critical movement that has led to an aesthetic turn in the IR field. Coined in the early 2000s by Roland Bleiker (2001), the expression ‘aesthetic turn’ has been used to designate efforts to value aesthetic representations as valid sources of knowledge in the study of international politics. Although this epistemological move tends to be marginalised within the dominant spheres of the IR discipline – committed, in general, to an objective and

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positivistic approach to knowledge production, and consequently averse to ‘provocations of the critical genre’ and to ‘fictional representations of human experience’ (Shapiro 2009: 5) – an increasing number of authors have resorted to music, photography, architecture, visual arts, theatre, literature and cinema as alternative sources of knowledge, and these initiatives have been welcomed by important publications dedicated to the debate on international politics.¹

This IR aesthetic turn, however, does not seek to establish grand theories or a foundational standpoint to address the relationship between aesthetics and international politics, which would be contradictory with the post-positivist and critical influences that have shaped this debate (poststructuralism, feminism, postcolonialism, and critical theory). Thus, if there is a *leitmotif* in this whole debate, it is perhaps the dissatisfaction with the mimetic approach that dominates IR orthodox theories – not only realism and liberalism, but also the conventional constructivism that has been consolidated as a new orthodoxy in the American academy – and their ambition to portray the essence of international politics and systematise it as a universal theory of international politics. From an alternative aesthetic view, the possibilities that artistic expressions offer for post-mimetic, post-representational, non-objective approaches to politics – that is, to perspectives that ‘provoke thinking outside of any narrative determination’ (Shapiro 2009: 11) and recognise ‘that the inevitable difference between the represented and its representation is the very location of politics’ (Bleiker 2001: 510) – indicate promising paths to be explored in IR critical inquiry.

Within this aesthetic turn, cinema has occupied a central position. Michael Shapiro (1999, 2009) has regularly used films and images to criticise the dominant modes of representation of the world in the IR field. Likewise, Marcus Power and Andrew Crampton (2007) explored, together with a group of collaborators, different cinematic narratives to show how films have been used to address threats and dangers that shape the geopolitical construction of the contemporary world. Van Munster and Casper Sylvest’s edited book (2015) also recognised the epistemological relevance of cinema by drawing attention to documentary movies as important visual resources in mediating understandings of world politics. A more ambitious step within this cinematic approach has been the direct involvement of IR researchers in film production. Drawing on one of the core characteristics of IR feminist approaches – the premise that the personal is international – Cynthia Weber and Sophie Harman, for example, have engaged not only in the reading and interpretation of films (Weber 2001, 2006), but, more importantly, in the filmmaking process itself as a visual method to give visibility to people and micro-social spaces that have been systematically neglected by dominant IR theories (Weber 2011; Harman 2019). From a post-structuralist position, James Der Derian is another IR scholar who has engaged not only in film reading (2010a, 2021), but also in filmmaking as a research method to document and critically investigate the domain of security and international politics (2010b, 2015).

This article positions itself within this broad cinematic approach to IR, taking as its subject science fiction (SF) movies, more specifically Brazilian SF movies. SF as a particular genre of aesthetic production has presented to a broad public some pressing

social, political, economic and environmental concerns, as well as important existential and ethical dilemmas, which call into question the promises and the very limits of modernity. The utopias of modernity and their degeneration into dystopias constitute one of the main *leitmotifs* of SF narratives. Thus, in the way some SF writers and filmmakers mobilise aesthetic elements to articulate these themes and concerns, their stories and tales, despite their intrinsic entertainment intentions, have the ability to amplify and popularise complex debates that otherwise would often be restricted to the circles of intellectuals in their closed academic exchanges.

By examining some Brazilian SF films produced since the 1960s, this article aims to show how these films construct dystopias that contribute to reinforce, contest and/or reshape political, development, environment and security imaginaries that make Brazilian reality intelligible, locally and globally. In this discussion, the analytical category of ‘worlding’ is borrowed from Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver (2009) to designate, through anti-colonial lenses, the ways in which knowledge on international politics can vary in different geo-cultural settings outside the disciplinary core of IR, that is, in non-dominant and non-privileged parts of the world, as is the case of Brazil. By combining this anti-colonial epistemology with the counter-space of popular culture provided by cinema, this article explores the process by which several Brazilian filmmakers constructed or deconstructed narratives that contribute to worlding Brazil beyond the common sense and dominant perceptions about the country and its place in the world.

Before moving forward, it is important to emphasise that the limited length of this article does not allow an analysis of all Brazilian films that could be identified as SF cinema. Due to this limitation, I chose four movies based on elements that contribute to my main purpose of discussing how SF cinema has contributed to worlding Brazil: *O Quinto Poder* (*The Fifth Power*), *Os Cosmonautas* (*The Cosmonauts*), *Brasil Ano 2000* (*Brazil Year 2000*), and *Bacurau*. As this article will show, while on the one hand the first wave of Brazilian SF films in the early 1960s was still produced according to the big studios’ model, trying to aesthetically imitate Hollywood films and reproduce global anxieties – *O Quinto Poder* (1962) and *Os Cosmonautas* (1962) are typical representatives of this trend –, subsequent Brazilian SF movies, such as *Brasil Ano 2000* (1969) and *Bacurau* (2019), mark a stylistic rupture and a shift of focus to locally contextualised issues, anxieties and concerns. This selective choice allows, therefore, a confrontation between a first wave of Brazilian SF movies that reproduce external concerns and reinforce a Brazilian caricature, not assuming greater critical pretensions, and a second trend of films that incorporate SF elements with the clear intention of worlding Brazil from a locally rooted critical perspective.²

Based on this analysis, the article shows that Brazilian SF movies, especially from the second wave of films identified above, resort to inventive aesthetic solutions that are outside the formal and economic standards of the SF genre produced in the North – usually marked by sophisticated special effects and high production costs –, offering an anti-colonial critique of Brazilian geo-cultural traits that subverts essentialised and homogenised identities, deconstructs dominant narratives on modernization, challenges orthodox views about security, stimulates reflection on Brazil’s peripheral place, and

rejects Global North imperialism. The article also notes that these SF movies, as formal experiments, put their aesthetic choices, often imposed by the scarcity of resources available to filmmakers, in service to the critical purpose of exposing dominant representations and of constructing non-consensual realities about Brazil and the way the country relates to the world.

My analysis begins with a brief examination of the issue of critique and reflexivity, seeking to show that the introduction of the concept of worlding in IR analysis, the critical-aesthetic roots of this concept in Martin Heidegger's philosophy, and the Brazilian modernists notion of anthropophagy can be combined in a pluralist critical approach to coloniality that contributes to guide the discussion proposed in this article. The three subsequent sections analyse four Brazilian SF films produced at different historical moments – *O Quinto Poder* and *Os Cosmonautas* (section two), *Brasil Ano 2000* (section three), and *Bacurau* (section four) –, trying to identify elements that show how Brazil is 'worlded' in each one. A concluding section summarises the discussion.

Brazilian modernist Anthropophagy as an anti-colonial critique

The question of critique has been articulated in the IR field as a response to an increasing dissatisfaction with the rigidity and limitations of the positivist structural approaches that took shape mainly with neorealism and neoliberalism, and the naturalization of the international order that these orthodox IR theories brought to the field. Against this dominant background, IR critical approaches, broadly conceived,³ emerged as a claim for contextualised and historically situated analyses, and as a reminder of the reflexive abilities of social and political subjects and their crucial role in questioning, rejecting, and denaturalising the power structures that sustain established orders. The analysis of international politics, within this critical movement, rediscovered its human face, allowing the IR field to incorporate in its knowledge production the social conditions that shape researchers' own situation and the broader situation of their societies.

Within this critical move, knowledge about international politics is internal to practical involvements of researchers within the context where they are embedded, so that the theories they produce cannot be considered without taking into account the diverse and complex range of social arrangements marked by power, race, class, gender, coloniality and other forms of hierarchical stratification and identity distinction that inform their worldviews (Jackson 2011: 157). As Patrick T. Jackson notes in his methodological typology for conducting inquiry in IR (2011: 157), these critical-reflexive engagements show that knowledge formation becomes perspectivist – i.e. it becomes informed by specific living conditions and the way these conditions affect researchers' value-commitments and thematic concerns, as well as the broader social organizational context of the activity of research itself. Although the recognition of the implications of an ontology of multiple-world realities allows Jackson to defend a broader understanding of science that is capable of encompassing critical-reflexivity in the production of knowledge in IR, it is important to note the limitations of his methodological typology.

Christine Sylvester's position in this regard is a good illustration of the dissatisfaction with the way Jackson frames reflexivity. While acknowledging the extraordinary effort the author devotes to dismantling the view that certain interpretations of social science are better or truer than others, she highlights the fact that Jackson completely ignores poststructuralism, as well as a large part of the feminist agenda and, especially, the potential of artistic expressions in the production of knowledge in the IR field (Sylvester 2013). As she argues, IR is a camp already structured in a way that no longer admits thematic and methodological barriers, where new doors open every day to 'enable the world to enter and provide knowledge on its own multiple terms' (Sylvester 2013: 325). Thus, the emphasis on the status of science, although receptive to critical reflexivity and committed to methodological diversity and the multiple ways researchers 'hook up' the world, ends up working as a selective device that blocks the entry of anything that cannot be designated as science – arts-based research being one of the most notable exclusions. From this perspective, Jackson's pluralism cannot escape the 'practice of a colonial science' (Blaney and Tickner 2017: 11) that preserves an understanding that IR must fit within the scientific claim assumed by the founders of the discipline.

An important consequence of this brief discussion is that, rather than merely broadening the reach of our 'wagers' to encompass a selective perspective of reflexivity compatible with the scientific status of IR, as Jackson advocates, a seriously committed approach to reflexivity should, firstly, go beyond the Western boundaries of the discipline and, secondly, take into account different research practices and methodologies, including artistic manifestations, as legitimate ways of producing IR knowledge. For this purpose, a crucial step is to consider that the social process through which our reality becomes intelligible and through which we position ourselves in relation to the world affects how international politics is defined in specific contexts, eventually failing to fit the disciplinary boundaries and contours defined by the Western core of IR knowledge production. As Tickner and Wæver emphasise, 'we are all engaged in imagining and creating *worlds*'; thus, if a particular global order or status quo may seem natural in specific contexts, it is important to note that 'the world *is not* this one version' and can be challenged by alternative modes of 'worlding' – i.e. by alternative modes to 'determine who we are in relation to "others"' (2009: 9, emphasis in the original). Worlding, from this view, emerges as a useable conceptual category to be considered when adopting a reflexivist perspective in IR analysis.

But what exactly does the term 'worlding' mean? Derived from Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, this way of articulating the term world through the addition of the suffix 'ing' – leading, consequently, to a shift from a substantive to a verb in its gerundive form – suggests a generative process, giving performativity to the noun, which indicates the idea of the setting up of the world, that is, the idea that the world is not an objective and universal category or merely a material container of a set of things (Palmer and Hunter 2018). Rather than this materialistic and static view, worlding refers to how the world is held together by the force of time, giving rise to the existence in the completeness of its material and spiritual dimensions (Cheah 2016: 8). Simply stated, one could say that worlding, in the Heideggerian sense, is a

creative process that reveals the condition of being in the world. From this perspective, worlding includes descriptions, interpretations, imagination, metaphors, allegories, temporalisation, and theoretically informed perspectives that go beyond a set of physical and situational conditions. Given its creative potential, there is an aesthetic force underlying the concept of worlding that evokes a non-objectifying thinking generally associated with artistic expressions. This thinking is not based on the pretence of correctly representing the truth as if it were an objective and accurate image of the entity represented, but instead it is creative, inventive, imaginative, pointing out the world as intelligible in multiple ways, 'full of possibilities, and embedded in a referential context of significance' (Robiadek 2016: 388-389).

As some of Heidegger's interpreters highlight (Cheah 2016; Robiadek 2016), the notion of worlding arose in his thinking as part of a larger critique of dominant categories of Western philosophy, such as positivism, modern metaphysics, and representational theories of reality, whose result was the separation between subject and object and the universalisation of a belief in a progressive movement of history detached from existence and from particular ways of being in the world. Against this perspective, worlding refers to a world that is never ready, that has no point of arrival, but is always in the process of becoming. Worlding differs from worldview, given that its conceptual core is defined by movement, difference, contingency, and inconstancy, rendering useless the idea that there is something like a fixed vision of the world that can be universalised as a model (Robiadek 2016).

It was primarily this critical perspective that led to the introduction of the term worlding into postcolonial theorising, seminally in the work of Gayatri Spivak (1985), to describe how Western imperialist cultural representations, literature, and theoretical constructs tried to establish universalising worldviews that shaped not only the way Europeans legitimised the subjugation of colonies, but also the way colonised subjects came to see themselves. According to Spivak (1985: 243), this Westerncentrism continued to prevail in the worlding of the so-called Third World even after the historical processes of decolonisation. It is from a similar postcolonial reading that Tickner and Wæver (2009) and Blaney and Tickner (2017) have introduced the concept of worlding in the IR field, not only to describe how dominant perspectives engage in worlding's processes to legitimise dominant worldviews, but also how subaltern subjects can engage in alternative forms of worlding to resist these dominant constructions. According to these IR scholars, if we intend to reflect on international politics through lenses that go beyond the parameters outlined in the Western core of the IR discipline, the analytical category of worlding is useful to explore how political representations in specific geo-cultural contexts are offered by local intellectuals to their own society and to the world. In other words, worlding constitutes an important analytical resource for examining the critical engagement of intellectuals with the way international politics is locally thought, represented, and interpreted. It is important to keep in mind, however, that this dynamic of localization is not a one-way route, but rather should be seen as a result of complex 'intersecting practices of colonizing, resisting, and reshaping,' from which local and global perceptions are both changed (Tickner and Wæver

2009: 9). This is an important observation because it draws attention to the pitfall of adopting an anti-colonial epistemology that romanticises or essentialises the ‘local’ or, conversely, filters the ‘local’ through external lenses.

In order to escape the pitfall mentioned above, a discussion on ‘worlding Brazil,’ as intended in this article, should take into consideration how local narratives meet, absorb, reinterpret, mix, or reject global ones, producing something similar to what Brazilian modernist artists and poets, in the 1920s, metaphorically called ‘anthropophagy’ (Andrade 2017) – i.e. an intellectual and aesthetic process of assimilation of foreign qualities to merge them with Brazilian ones, without thereby annulling local singularity and originality. As a metaphor for the intercultural encounter, anthropophagy can be understood as a typically Brazilian perspective on the ‘complex and paradoxical process of cultural appropriation of the “South”’ that ‘recognizes local cultural roots, but avoids essentialisms, and embraces cultural mixing, but avoids colonial cat-echism’ (Islam 2011: 160).

Underlying the anthropophagy metaphor, therefore, a process exists of acceptance and rejection, of ‘admiration and aggression’ through which intellectuals and artists, in historically situated processes of confrontation with everything that comes from outside, attempt ‘to affirm indigenous roots while appropriating the foreign’ (Islam 2011: 160). This is a discussion to which I will return at various points of this article. At this moment, two crucial points should be highlighted. First, anthropophagy expresses a reflexivist attitude *par excellence*, deeply embedded in Brazilian social reality and in the process of forming what Brazilian intellectuals and artists have constructed as modernity. Second, anthropophagy suggests a critical, anti-colonial epistemology that anticipates some concerns of postcolonial studies broadly understood. In this regard, I follow Gazi Islam (2011) by arguing that, despite the close connection of anthropophagy with the Brazilian context, it addresses themes of hybridity and cultural mixture that codify North-South encounters more broadly. From this perspective, anthropophagy can be understood as an allegorical category that touches many of the anti-colonialist concerns of subaltern studies, orientalism (post-colonialism), and decolonialism. Although it is important to recognise the particularities and connections of these perspectives, respectively, to the specific thinking of South Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin American intellectuals – a discussion I avoid here due to the limited length of this article – I consider, following Islam (2011), that anthropophagy can dialogue with and complement these anti-colonialist perspectives without replacing or subsuming them.

In short, instead of considering a narrow post-colonialist perspective, I adopt a more fluid and pluralist critical stance that one could designate, following Paulo Martins (2019), as ‘critical theory of coloniality,’ which encompasses the anti-colonialist debate broadly speaking. This stance is based on the premise that there is ‘a continuum in the organization of social theory in the time and space of modernity’ (Martins 2019: 9), which allows stablishing, despite the different meta-theoretical perspectives informing each current of the contemporary global critical debate, a deeper and more productive dialogue between the tradition of European critical theory, with its emphasis on an emancipatory and anti-utilitarian normativity, and the social-critical thought of the

South, based on a strong anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, and anti-dependency normativity, which emerges mainly in South America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and in peripheral areas of Europe itself (Martins 2019).

In view of the objective of analysing how Brazil has been ‘worlded’ through SF films – and considering the anthropophagic metaphor as a guide for an anti-colonialist epistemology that rejects hegemonic narratives while at the same time does not fall in an epistemological illusion that essentialises the local – this article’s great challenge is to understand how these movies critically articulate local voices, knowledge and practices, by assuming their originality and uniqueness, without failing to integrate them in a wider critical dialogue developed in the porous borders between European critical theory and the various critical theories of coloniality that have emerged in the peripheral spaces of the world.

***O Quinto Poder* and *Os Cosmonautas*: worlding Brazil in the Cold War era**

O Quinto Poder is a rare example of a Brazilian SF cinema. Released in 1962, this movie remained unknown to the wider public for more than 40 years due to the destruction of its negatives, except for a single copy – sent for exhibition in Berlin in 1963 – which was re-discovered and exhibited at the Brasilia Film Festival in 2006 (Eduardo 2006). Produced by Vera Cruz, a large Brazilian film studio that tried to give its films a Hollywood sheen, *O Quinto Poder* involves an international plot, with Hitchcockian overtones, located in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

In this film, agents from a foreign country, supposedly Germany, infiltrate Brazil to implement a secret brainwashing project through subliminal messaging technology, clandestinely installed in radio and TV antennas. The intended effect of these subliminal messages is the incitement to hatred and the shift to aggressive behaviour of all consumers of radio and TV programs, thus leading to a state of widespread chaos aiming to affect the public’s confidence in Brazilian governmental institutions and the ability to maintain law and order. The ultimate goal was to incite the angry population to a revolution that would pave the way for the establishment of a new government dominated by foreign invaders, and from there the unrestrained extraction of Brazil’s natural resources.

The story develops with the impacts of subliminal messages emitted by a technological paraphernalia of radio and TV signals, creating in Brazilian cities a kind of Hobbesian state of ‘war of all against all,’ marked by slogans calling for a ‘revolution.’ This situation of widespread chaos worsens until, in Rio, the foreign agents and their subversive plans are discovered by a young chemist named Laura Leal and her boyfriend, a journalist named Carlos. After memorable and electrifying scenes on the Sugar Loaf cable car and the statue of Christ the Redeemer on Corcovado Mountain, in the most genuine 007 movie style, these two characters thwart the plans of the foreign agents, who are finally captured by the army soldiers.

The second SF movie, *Os Cosmonautas*, was also released in 1962 and follows a ludic-carnavalesque line, in the style of Brazilian ‘*chanchadas*.’ Produced by Herbert Richers, another major Brazilian film studio that also sought to give a Hollywood face

to its films, *Os Cosmonautas* is a satiric SF movie that jokes about the Brazilian dream of greatness. In the film, Professor Inacius Isidorius, after successfully placing the space rocket Nationalist 1, manned by a chimpanzee, into orbit, sets off the second stage of Brazil's aerospace project, seeking to randomly recruit two astronauts from the Brazilian population to crew the Nationalist 2 in a mission to the moon. The objective of Professor Isidorius and his team of scientists was to make the Nationalist 2 reach the moon before the Americans and Soviets managed to accomplish the feat. Professor Isidorius is also presented in the story as leader of the Brazilian nuclear project and creator of a cobalt bomb, which remains locked in the vault of his secret laboratory, whose destructive power, according to Congressman Veloso, a supporter of the Brazilian space and arms race in Congress, was so great that it would place Brazil among the global superpowers.

The plot unfolds with the recruitment and training of the two cosmonaut candidates at the Brazilian Space Research Centre in Cape Carnival (a parody of the American base at Cape Canaveral). After the accidental launch of the Nationalist 2, caused by one of the cosmonaut candidates, the clumsy Gagarino (a parody of Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin), the film continues with the preparations for the launch of the mission of Nationalist 3. Parallel to these events, a key female character appears in the story, the pacifist alien Krina Iris, inhabitant of a planet similar to Earth outside the solar system, where wars have been abolished. The alien's mission, in her own words, was to convince the Earth's population 'to stop spending money on wars, weapons, bombs and space exploration in favour of improving the living conditions of the people.'

In the final part of the film, the Nationalist 3 is finally launched into space with two cosmonauts aboard, Zenóbio and Gagarino. What the cosmonauts, the ground team and the politicians supporting the Brazilian space-atomic project didn't know was that the cobalt bomb had been secretly placed on the spacecraft by the alien Krina Iris, who finally reveals her plan: use the two cosmonauts as spokesmen to convince, under threat of dropping the cobalt bomb on Earth, Brazilian politicians of negotiating with the USA, Soviet Union, Cuba and the United Nations a general treaty for nuclear disarmament and the abolition of wars.

When considering these two seminal examples of Brazilian SF cinema, a crucial point to highlight is their reading of the Cold War. In *O Quinto Poder*, emphasis is on depicting the psychological atmosphere of fear provoked by the threat of an external invader with subversive objectives involving brainwashing and foreign ideological domination, typical of that moment of the Cold War. The fear of neo-colonial usurpation of Brazil's natural wealth, deeply rooted in Brazilian political-ideological discourse, is also present in the film. Faced with these concerns, the film makes a conservative and reactionary reading of the ideological dispute of the Cold War, reproducing the imagery of fear of a popular revolution ideologically manipulated by external actors, seen as a threat to national security, whose final solution is the restoration of law and order through the mobilization of the armed forces. As Suppia (2013: 93) notes, *O Quinto Poder*, when watched in retrospect, seems premonitory of the social and political climate that led to the military coup of 1964.'

In the case of *Os Cosmonautas*, a mocking reading of the Cold War prevails, with clear satirical references to the leaders of the USA, Soviet Union and Cuba and the arms race undertaken by their countries. Released shortly after the Cuban Missile Crisis, the film clearly reflects this episode, especially in its final scenes, when the Brazilian president, pressured by the cosmonauts and under the threat of a nuclear Armageddon, calls the American president, who in turn uses the 'red phone' to talk to the Soviet and Cuban presidents about the imminent threat and the need for a global treaty on disarmament and the abolition of wars, which is finally brokered by the United Nations.

Throughout the film, the Brazilian '*malandragem*' (trickery), cordiality, sensuality, carnivalesque nature, modernizing optimism, and pacifism are stereotypes of national identity that are reinforced, which supposedly justify Krina Iris's decision to choose Brazil and the two cosmonauts, as ordinary representatives of the Brazilian pacifist people, to play a leading role in the implementation of her anti-war utopia. The last scene, however, brings the film back to a realist view of international relations: while the cosmonaut Gagarino after returning to Earth has fun on the beach with the two female characters (the young scientist Alice, who becomes his girlfriend, and the alien Krina Iris, seduced by his flirtations and promises of kisses), the news on the radio announces the return to the previous state of affairs. From Moscow comes the news that 'the Soviet Union has just mobilised its armies and announced the resumption of their atomic experiments while demanding an immediate solution to the Berlin problem'; from Washington comes the news that the 'USA declared that it will defend Berlin at any cost and, for this purpose, it is reinforcing its military forces in Western Europe, including with atomic weapons'; and from Brasília comes the news that 'Congress has decided to cancel its decision to allocate more money to solve the problems of the slums, public health and food.'

It is worth noting, in short, that these two SF films from the early 1960s reproduce, from a thematic and aesthetic viewpoint, the kind of films produced in Brazilian studios inspired by Hollywood, without incorporating the rupture that was occurring at that moment through the thematic and aesthetic renewal of Brazilian cinema by the movement called '*Cinema Novo*' ('New Cinema'). It is also important to note that both films reproduce, in a 'serious-dramatic' way in the case of *O Quinto Poder* and satirically in the case of *Os Cosmonautas*, a set of external concerns and anxieties, shaped by the strategic dynamics of the Cold War, without expressing a particular way of worlding Brazil that goes beyond the exhibition of stereotypes of a peaceful, cordial, sensual and tropical national identity.

Brasil Ano 2000: worlding Brazil through the anthropophagic lenses of 'Tropicalism'

If one can say that *Os Cosmonautas* mixes '*chanchada*' and SF to satirise the myth of Brazil's promise of a bright future, it can be said that *Brasil Ano 2000*, released in 1969 during the hardest period of the Brazilian military dictatorship, also resorts to SF to give this process of self-mockery a more complex, sophisticated, and radical critical treatment. *Brasil Ano 2000* was written and directed by Walter Lima Junior, a director forged

in the early moments of *Cinema Novo*, but who became critical of this movement's programmatic rigour and embraced the anthropophagic rupture inaugurated in the late 1960s by the Tropicalist movement – I will return to this aspect later.

Having participated in several international festivals, including the Berlin Film Festival, where it was awarded the Silver Bear (second place) in 1969, *Brasil Ano 2000* is an outstanding film in the history of Brazilian *cinéma d'auteur*. Deeply reflexive and aesthetically subversive, the film exposes the contradictions of the Brazilian modernisation project and deconstructs the slogan 'Brazil, country of the future' on which the nationalist imaginary of that moment was based. Since the early moments of the military regime imposed in 1964, a political-technocratic modernisation project began to take shape, trying to combine, as observes Roberto Schwarz (1978: 72), the most advanced modernising face of the industrial-militarist complex of international imperialism with the most archaic face of bourgeois ideology and its forms of authority centred on the individual, the unity of patriarchal family and its moral-religious traditions. Although resorting to SF to situate its narrative in a dystopian future, *Brasil Ano 2000* builds an allegory of the present, taking a deep dive into the contradictions of this military modernisation project. In this sense, *Brasil Ano 2000* seeks to show, as revealed by Walter Lima Junior's own impressions in a recent debate about his film (2019), how the chronic condition of dependency, the techno-bureaucratic incompetence of the authorities and elites that formed the military-civil pact of the dictatorship, and the ideological archaism and provincialism of that moment revealed the absurdity of every slogan that tried to project Brazil as a great power of the future.

Following a complex and allegorical narrative, open to layers of reading and interpretation that cannot be captured in all its angles by any attempt at synopsis, *Brasil Ano 2000* in general is an apocalyptic dystopia that takes place in the future, specifically in the year 2000, after the Great Nuclear War of 1989 that wiped out the developed countries. In a Brazil partially destroyed by war, still governed by a military dictatorship, the story takes place in a small town called 'Me Esqueci' ('I Forgot'), a kind of microcosm of the country, where a central event unfolds: the inauguration of a space rocket base, symbol of the intention of the Brazilian elites to make the country a 'modern power,' involving 'the time of scientific adventure,' integrated to 'the race for the universe' and prepared to 'assume the leadership of the 21st century.' These words, expressed in the declarations of a military authority, a general chosen for the presidential succession who arrives at Me Esqueci to supervise the launch of the first Brazilian space rocket, summarise his national project: to make Brazil occupy the vacuum of world leadership left by the nuclear hecatomb that destroyed the industrialised powers of the North.

Against this background, the plot unfolds around a central core of characters: an elderly mother and her pair of adult children, Ana and Fernando, members of a ruined middle class, who after having lost everything in the war (except a cupboard that they drag around like symbol and memory of the golden times), leave the capital Brasília and hitchhike along the roads in their migratory movement to the north to occupy land offered by the government (ironically reversing the traditional direction of migratory flows

in the country). Along the way, the mother, Ana, and Fernando arrive in Me Esqueci, where they encounter an anthropologist, head of a public department called the Indian Education Service. Lonely, without a single Indigenous people in the region who could justify maintaining the bureaucracy headed by him, the indigenist spends his days cleaning up his files and stamping useless documents. Pressured by the general's imminent arrival and with 'nothing to present' as a result of his service, the anthropologist offers housing, food and a small salary to the migrant family so they can pretend to be Indigenous people and thus justify the usefulness of the bureaucratic agency he directs. After being painted and adorned, the mother and her offspring are taken by the anthropologist to be integrated into the community and presented to the local authorities (the mayor and a priest) and the recently arrived general. These characters are joined by a young journalist who also arrives in town to cover the general's visit and launch of the space rocket.

Facing the dilemma of joining the system or rebelling against the farce, the family trio comes into conflict and disintegrates throughout the film. The mother – authoritarian, moralist, and defender of ancient traditions – assumes a conformist and collaborationist position. Ana and Fernando, restless and rebellious, do not adjust to the farce of pretending to be Indigenous people and spend most of the film trying to free themselves from the absurd situation. It is through the nonconformist attitudes of Ana and Fernando that *Brasil Ano 2000* expresses its Tropicalist features, reaching its greatest expression in the musical numbers inserted throughout the film. With songs composed by artists who later became known for the album 'Tropicália,' including Gilberto Gil, Rogério Duprat and Caetano Veloso, *Brasil Ano 2000* subversively mixes two cinematographic genres, SF and musical film, producing something unusual that incorporates and at the same time rejects the conventional canons of these two genres. As science fiction, *Brasil Ano 2000* is an anti-science fiction in the sense that the special effects shown in the Brazilian space program, especially at the moment of the rocket launch, are rudimentary improvisations. As a musical, the film is an anti-musical in the sense that the dance numbers are clumsy and improvised, lacking any choreographic rigour, and the songs are sung by the characters without much concern for vocal technique.

This rudimentary approach, however, is not gratuitous. It is an integral and fundamental part of the discussion proposed in the film. Walter Lima Junior (2019) is categorical in this regard, stating that the crude appearance of the space rocket (in fact the scrap metal of an American rocket) and the improvised and clumsy choreography of the musical numbers were intentionally conceived and were deeply in line with the reflection that his film sought to provoke: If the Brazilian modernisation project and all the mythology surrounding the idea of a country of the future were undermined by its chronic situation of dependence, by the patrimonialism of the ruling elites and by the archaic customs of a conniving middle class, to what extent would it be possible to make SF movies that imitate the production of the great cinematographic industry of the North without falling into this same contradiction?

Brasil Ano 2000 provides aesthetic significance to precariousness, making the rudimentary conditions of film production an instrument to provoke critical reflection

on the stereotypical images of Brazil and its chronic condition of underdevelopment. This is a crucial question in *Brasil Ano 2000* that reflects, to a large extent, one of the concerns of the Brazilian Tropicalist movement, which tried in the late 1960s and early 1970s to reformulate not only artistic production, but also cultural, social, and political critique, facing the conditions posed by dependency, provincialism, inequality, social misery, political authoritarianism, and the peripheral insertion of Brazil in the world. As a 'Brazilian complex variant of Pop,' expressed in music, visual arts, theatre, and cinema, Tropicalism sought to expose how aberrant the backwardness of the country and its economic assumptions were when looked at from the viewpoint of the international *avant-garde* (Schwarz 1978: 71, 77).

In line with Tropicalism, *Brasil Ano 2000* made a more complex reading of reality and its historical forces at the end of the 1960s and reflected a certain disenchantment with the revolutionary promises of the beginning of the decade, with the social and political setbacks brought about by the military coup of 1964 and with the purisms and programmatic rigour of the politically engaged art prevailing in certain segments of Brazilian popular music and Cinema Novo. By attempting to make an immanent critique of Brazilian reality, of the very conditions of possibility of its modernisation project, and on the filmic level, of the very conditions of possibility of a national cinematographic industry, *Brasil Ano 2000* incorporates, without masks, the kitsch, the mixture of styles, the precariousness, and the conflict of generations, without rejecting the commitment to entertainment, which according to the director constitutes an important dimension of the cultural industry, especially cinema (Lima Junior 2019). Not by chance, *Brasil Ano 2000* has become, due to its thematic and aesthetic aspects, one of the central and obligatory references of all intellectual analyses that reflect on the origins of the Brazilian Tropicalist movement (Xavier 2013: 339; Lima Junior 2019).

In this tropicalist self-criticism of Brazilian technological underdevelopment and the archaism of its elites, the use of SF in *Brasil Ano 2000* is instrumental and plays an important allegorical role. Ismail Xavier reflected on this point in an exemplary way in his book *Allegories of Underdevelopment* (2013). According to Xavier (2013: 352), *Brasil Ano 2000* brings into question a particular trait of national identity: the supposed aptitude for progress, the myth of the 'country of the future,' the pride around the idea of 'Greater Brazil.' Given the allegorical situation that establishes the initial premise of the film – the disappearance of the imperialist powers, mutually destroyed by the nuclear apocalypse caused by the confrontation of their industrial-military complexes – the particular trait of Brazilian identity exposed in the film must be discussed in a specific way, immanent to its own national condition of chronic underdevelopment, without an 'Other' to whom one can attribute the obstacles to its development. That is, the problems involved in the project of Brazil's modernization and its chronic situation of dependence now must be faced from its own mirror (Xavier 2013: 354).

It is there, in the difficulty of recognizing the reflection of oneself, where the main problem critiqued in *Brasil Ano 2000* is found. By placing at the centre of the public arena of Me Esqueci the false Indigenous trio and their dilemma of seeing themselves as primitive or civilised, a conservative and complacent population, a power arrangement

formed by military, political and religious elites, and a journalist who, although enlightened, plays according to the rules dictated by this arrangement, the central question presented in the film is then revealed: how to mediate the aspirations for modernisation and the archaism rooted in the country's ruling elites.

The exercise of self-criticism of *Brasil Ano 2000*, therefore, starts from the premise that Brazilian underdevelopment is not the result of a deterministic and unilateral relationship of exploitation of the centre in relation to the periphery – even though this is obviously an essential dimension of dependency – but is also due to the way in which domestic elites seek to reinforce and perpetuate the dependency relations in order to benefit themselves, maintain their privileges and achieve their own interests. By allegorically inverting the global polarity – the developed North was weakened due to the nuclear hecatomb that gives the general context of SF presented in the film, paving the way for Brazil to advance its aspirations for greatness – the question of dependency, modernisation and the dream of a great Brazil now have to be questioned from within, from the country's internal features.

It is against the backdrop of this reflected image of itself that *Brasil Ano 2000* problematises Brazil's condition of underdevelopment, and it is precisely from this angle that one can observe a key aspect of the way Brazil is worlded in the film. Echoing – albeit selectively and allegorically – some of the questions posed by the intellectual developments on dependency, which marked the political-economic debate in Latin America in general and in Brazil in particular at that time, the film tries to put together a complex, ambiguous and dynamic puzzle of questions that should be raised in order to understand the reasons of underdevelopment and interrogate the modernisation project conceived by the civil-military pact installed in Brazil in 1964. In this puzzle, the film emphasises the role of local elites in the reproduction of relations of dependency and adds to the economic base, usually privileged in the debate on dependency, other elements situated at the political, bureaucratic and cultural levels. *Brasil Ano 2000* suggests that only by acknowledging and taking a stand on this puzzle is it possible to problematise the issue of underdevelopment and modernisation within a more complex framework.

In the dystopia presented in *Brasil Ano 2000*, this critical stance takes the form of a debauched comedy that highlights the complete incompetence of the country to assume the place of leadership left empty by the weakening of the great powers of the North. Despite the speeches by the general and the authorities of Me Esqueci on the great role to be assumed by Brazil and the high expectations regarding the Brazilian space project – translated into slogans and watchwords such as Brazil is creating 'a new civilization turned to space and infinity' and 'once again, the moon honours Brazil' – each fragment of the film is a reminder of the profound gap between this utopia of 'Greater Brazil' and its concrete possibilities of realization.

The film's choice of stressing the domestic dimension of underdevelopment does not negate, however, that the centre and the periphery, the local and the global mutually constitute each other in this process. This global dimension is suggested in the movie through some indicators that show that development and underdevelopment are produced through this relational process, which do not end with the allegorical situation

that gives rise to the plot. Indeed, even in the face of the decline of the developed nations of the North, the Brazilian official effort to modernise the country continues to be punctuated by a strong influence of the USA, which is symbolically shown through the cacophony of recorded English courses that underline much of the film, mingling with the authorities' speeches as a form of acculturation, and the reuse of US aerospace scrap, such as the rocket that symbolises the Brazilian modernisation project. Thus, *Brasil Ano 2000* shows not only the persistence of economic and technological dependence, but also adds an ideological and cultural dimension to the problem that anticipates, in some way, the decolonial critique that decades later will draw attention to the dependentist underestimation of culture and to the fact that, even after the decline of formal relations of colonial exploitation, certain privileged elites will continue to exercise economic, political and cultural control over the structures of society (Grosfoguel 2018).

In summary, the satire on the Brazilian developmentalist project of *Brasil Ano 2000* makes a diagnosis of generalised incompetence, where the caricature of the Brazilian elites and the institutions they represent reveal the complete impossibility of mediating between underdevelopment and hope for a developed future. As a metaphor of national forgetfulness, the town of Me Esqueci hides a reality that needs to be revealed and remembered: the modernisation project of the military dictatorship did not go further than a 'cosmetic modernity,' and it was from this objective condition of precariousness that the 'compensatory myths of great destiny' were constructed and experienced (Xavier 2013: 342). At the end of the film, only Ana breaks with this state of affairs. Her mother and brother are completely assimilated by the power pact established in Me Esqueci: while Fernando is designated a cosmonaut by the general and ends the film repeating in front of the mirror the expression 'I am civilised... I am civilised... I am civilised,' the mother is appointed by the mayor to replace the anthropologist in the Indian Education Service. Sworn into office, she finishes the film stamping documents, while the bureaucratic anthropologist becomes part of the general's staff.

Ana, unlike her mother and brother, forges her own destiny. Designated by the priest to become a nun and integrate the church choir, she escapes the catechism and becomes the protagonist of the final scene: walking alone on a deserted road, Ana is presented through a general shot seen from above, while the song 'Não Identificado' ('Unidentified') by Caetano Veloso punctuates the scene. After breaking with tradition, authoritarianism and civilising catechesis, under the sound of the Tropicalist mosaic of 'Não Identificado,' Ana follows the road in a straight line towards the horizon, leaving Me Esqueci behind, and seeking a positive way out of the paradox reflected in the mirror of *Brasil Ano 2000*.

Bacurau: worlding Brazil through the decolonial lenses of 'Sertãopunk'

Bacurau, written and directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, premiered in 2019 to great acclaim from audiences and critics in Brazil and abroad, including international recognition at the Cannes Film Festival, where it received the Jury Award. The film begins with an image of outer space under the sound of the song 'Não

Identificado,' by Caetano Veloso, in the psychedelic version of the late 1960s sung by Gal Costa – the same one that accompanies the final scene of *Brasil Ano 2000*. After showing a satellite orbiting in space, the image moves to the Earth's surface, descending in the direction of Northeast Brazil until revealing, after crossing the clouds, a road in the landscape of the Sertão (semi-arid region in the north-eastern Brazil's hinterland). The road seen from above in a general plan, advancing straight to a horizon with mountains, also harks to the final scene of *Brasil Ano 2000*. On a road full of potholes, a water truck appears, while a legend superimposed on the scene announces: 'West of Pernambuco, a few years from now....'

The association between the two films is not accidental. To some extent, *Bacurau* follows the anthropophagic-tropicalist legacy of *Brasil Ano 2000*. Although their aesthetic and thematic features and historical contexts are not the same – *Bacurau* is a 2019 film, therefore half a century from *Brasil Ano 2000* – several influences from Tropicalism are present in *Bacurau*, such as the opening song; the mix between Brazilian cultural roots and the influence of international Pop; the clash between advanced technology and the backward, confronting the productive forces of modernity and maintenance of underdevelopment and social misery; as well as a critical view of stereotypical images of Brazil as a tropical paradise. *Bacurau* also incorporates influences from *Cinema Novo* that are revealed not only through myths and traits of Brazilian north-eastern popular culture, but also through the vision of the people as revolutionary agents, which is shown not only in the movie's plot, but also in the song by Geraldo Vandré, one of the emblematic representatives of the politically engaged music of the 1960s, which punctuates the scenes of struggle and resistance of the population of Bacurau. Even though these influences are recognised, it is also important to note that *Bacurau* reflects more recent cultural developments that allow the film to be situated, as will be described later, within a framework close to what has been called 'Afrofuturism' and 'Cyberpunk.'

Within this collage of influences, the film mixes the genres of SF, western and action films to tell the story of a small rural village in the countryside of Pernambuco, called Bacurau,⁴ whose population unites to resist a wave of murders committed by mysterious invaders. The film takes place in the near future, undefined as the opening caption suggests, when the village of Bacurau is devastated by a strange and inexplicable event: it literally disappears from satellite images. At the same time geolocation apps stop showing Bacurau, cell phone and internet signals suddenly disappear. Other events that deviate from the local routine begin to occur: a drone resembling a flying saucer appears flying over the countryside; strange people appear in the region; the tank truck that supplies water to the population every day appears riddled with bullets without the driver realising what happened; and inexplicably, residents of the community are brutally murdered. The inhabitants of Bacurau, who are highly technologically connected – smartphones, tablets, computers, drones and large TV monitors are part of the village's daily life – are deeply affected by the strange events. Realising that the technological blackout, the presence of a strange drone in the village, the arrival of outsiders and the unexplained deaths could all be interconnected, the inhabitants of Bacurau organise themselves to investigate the events.

The plot begins at the funeral of Dona Carmelita, an elderly black woman who for years was a kind of matriarch and local leader, responsible for maintaining the social cohesion and solidarity of the community. This community, which in the film functions as a microcosm of the dispossessed and marginalised people of Brazil, includes black and Indigenous people, homosexuals, transsexuals, vigilantes and killers wanted by the police, whores, an alcoholic lesbian doctor, a kind of ‘*xamã*’ (shaman) who cultivates a psychotropic seed capable of raising people’s state of consciousness, in addition to the direct descendants of Dona Carmelita – the teacher at the community school and her two daughters – all united by bonds of belonging and solidarity largely built by the informal authority of the deceased matriarch.

This informal and parallel authority contrasts with the official authority of the distant, negligent and corrupt mayor Tony Junior, who only visits Bacurau to make empty promises and donations of expired products in exchange for votes on the eve of the election. It is notable in his characterisation the monopoly he has of the supply of one of the scarcest and fundamental elements for the survival of the population of Bacurau: water. Right at the beginning of the film, the dam in the vicinity of Bacurau is shown under the armed vigilance of the mayor’s militia, who fire shots at everyone who approach the site. In the ecosystem portrayed in the film, where water is a scarce commodity, a situation that historically feeds the corruption of local political elites and keeps the population dependent on the benefits of the powerful, the patrimonial control of the dam by the mayor reproduces the dynamics of exploitation by an elite that is not only one of the causes of the structural violence that subjects the residents of Bacurau to social injustice, but is also the factor that justifies to the community the role of Lunga, a killer inspired by the traditional figure of ‘*cangaceiro*,’⁵ who is re-signified through his queer characterization. Lunga, who became an outlaw by violently confronting the mayor’s militia, is a key figure that allows the community of Bacurau to have access to water. Faced with the absence of government, and even more serious, the patrimonial use of the government to keep the population in a condition of misery, Bacurau is essentially self-governed, creating local instances of authority and protection and its own mechanisms for development and conflict resolution – the access to water and food, education, health and safety is ensured through local solidarity and the sense of community that binds residents together.

Within this context, the inhabitants of Bacurau realise they can only count on themselves to investigate the strange events and resist the invaders, who in the course of the film are identified as a group of foreign white supremacist tourists under the supervision of Michael, a representative of an American corporation who bribed Mayor Tony Junior to isolate Bacurau from the rest of the world and transform the place, for a few days, into a kind of ‘park’ for the practice of a sinister game: a safari, using powerful weapons and equipment, in which the inhabitants of Bacurau, under surveillance of the futuristic drone, are hunted and killed by white supremacist foreign tourists.

In its general narrative plan, therefore, *Bacurau* resorts to SF elements to build a dystopia about the near future, in which the neoliberal complex formed by the fusion of interests between international and national corporations and the interests of local

political elites converge to a policy of extermination of marginalised populations – a necropolitics as Achille Mbembe refers (2019) – that assumes in the movie its most sinister and radical dimension in the form of violence as pure leisure. Within this project, violence is racialised and everyone who does not fit into the white supremacist pattern, not only from an ethnic point of view, but also culturally, becomes disposable.

Completely ‘objectified,’ made invisible, erased in their right to exist, and transformed into mere targets pursued by sadistic tourists wanting to have fun in a game of persecution and death, the inhabitants of Bacurau see no alternative but to resort to violent insurgency against the invaders. With that objective in mind, they turn to Lunga, who returns to Bacurau together with his two companions to join the community and coordinate the fight against the invaders. In its general plan, therefore, *Bacurau* constructs an insurrection filled with regional references, which refers to some extent to the ‘*cangaço*’ and the ‘*quilombos*,’ through which a population treated as pariahs not only by the foreigners, but also by the local political elites, emblematically represented by the mayor, resolve to assume their collective agency and resort to violence to resist their oppressors.

An important element of this insurrection, re-contextualised in the near future in the middle of the Pernambuco hinterland, is the inclusion of a technological dimension. The dystopia of *Bacurau* reinforces cultural roots and local popular mythologies without, however, showing nostalgia for the past or for a return to a pre-modern state. Quite the contrary, the marginalised people of Bacurau are technologically connected via smartphones, computers, LED screens and drones, which means that the film mobilises SF elements to build an ambiguous metaphor about globalisation and coloniality, where technological artifacts function as instruments of domination and oppression (surveillance and blockage of connectivity caused by invaders), but at the same time as instruments of emancipation (enabling inclusion, communication and interaction between members of the Sertão community and their relatives residing in cities and even in foreign countries).

With these characteristics, *Bacurau* builds an anthropophagic version of SF that fuses elements of Afrofuturism – broadly understood as a critical metaphysical, aesthetic, theoretical and political project that addresses the intersections between race and technology (Anderson and Jones 2016: ix-xi) – and American Cyberpunk – broadly understood as a wide range of fictions that explore the technological dimensions of experience within the post-industrial capitalism of media-saturated societies (Hollinger 1990: 30). *Bacurau* digests all these influences, merging them with Brazilian regional popular culture, resulting in an original soft version of SF, located in a poor and underdeveloped peripheral geo-cultural context in the Brazilian Northeast. With these features, *Bacurau* is close to the SF subgenre that some Brazilian analysts have called ‘Tupinipunk’ (Causo 2013), or more precisely ‘Sertãopunk’ or ‘Cybergreste,’ using the terms created by Alan de Sá, Gabriele Diniz and Alec Silva (2020) to refer to the representativeness of the Sertão and its population in north-eastern speculative fiction.

It is from this mix of influences that, in the most authentic anthropophagic spirit, *Bacurau* grounds the question of resistance and agency. As the movie shows, the popular resistance to the alliance between the corporate interests of foreign invaders and local

political and economic elites emerges immanently in the material and cultural conditions rooted in the community itself. It is Bacurau's cultural museum (preserving regional mythologies and old weapons of popular resistance), the local instances of authority and protection, as well as the close connection between human beings and nature (symbolised by the community's *xamã*, who, in addition to talking to the plants, harvests the seeds that raise the residents' state of consciousness in moments of tension) that form the foundation on which the process of local empowerment is built. It can be said, therefore, that the awareness of the neo-colonial practices of exploitation and oppression by the international-local neoliberal complex and, conversely, the emergence of anti-colonial counter-narratives to this complex of power are what allow the marginalised and dispossessed people of *Bacurau* to regain their self-esteem and agency and organise themselves for popular resistance.

In short, Brazil is worlded in *Bacurau* from an eclectic critical perspective that merges the emancipatory and revolutionary legacy of European critical theory, the postcolonial and decolonial influences of Latin American, African, and Asian intellectuals, as well as elements of Brazilian popular culture and traditional indigenous knowledge. This comprehensive mix of influences allows the movie to unveil Western colonising practices (European and American) and the forms of domination underlying the hegemonic neoliberal model that organises the international hierarchy of late capitalism. In this respect, the film adopts a clearly anti-colonial stance that appeals to the need of taking an attitude of resistance against the current unequal, weaponised, patriarchal, racist, and anti-environmental neo-colonial world order. Thus, instead of passively accepting the neoliberal worldview that economy is as a natural force which structurally determines contemporary social relations, the way Brazil is worlded in *Bacurau* sounds as a plea for the recovery of human agency and local potential for resistance by reasserting what Sankaran Krishna defines as the core element of the political: 'the capacity of humans to collectively alter their present as well as their future through thought and action' (2009: 6).

Final remarks: seeing politics through Brazilian lenses of SF movies

Relying on the so-called IR aesthetic turn and taking advantage of the critical and epistemic qualities of cinema, this article explored how some Brazilian SF films have contributed to a more sensitive and reflective interpretation of Brazil and its place in the world. Within this proposal, the article analysed four key films from the scarce historiography of Brazilian SF movies in order to identify to what extent they resulted in the reproduction or reinforcement of more conventional understandings and consensual representations of international politics, or conversely exposed, questioned and/or criticised dominant representations of Brazil and its place in the world. Based on this analysis, the key point is that the way Brazil is worlded in these films reflects different historical moments, in which concerns about politics, modernisation, development, dependency, security, and identity have significantly changed.

In the early 1960s, in a context marked by the absence of a specific body of thinking about IR in Brazil, the two films examined (*O Quinto Poder* and *Os Cosmonautas*)

merely reflect Cold War security concerns, basically reproducing global anxieties and fears. Furthermore, these films reinforced, without questioning, a series of universalizing stereotypes of Brazilian identity, such as its peaceful, cordial, sensual and tropical character. At the end of the 1960s, faced with an increase in the self-perception of Brazilian society on the question of underdevelopment and modernisation, *Brasil Ano 2000* articulated a complex puzzle of questions that stimulated a discussion on the deep roots of underdevelopment, inequality and authoritarianism, and made a corrosive anti-elitist and anti-establishment critique of the civil-military pact that forged the mythical national identity of 'Brazil as a great power of the future.' While in the social sciences these questions were reflected in the debate on development and dependency, in the domain of cultural production these questions were expressed mainly via the Tropicalist movement. *Brasil Ano 2000* was a product of this context and not only reflected these cultural and intellectual developments of the late 1960s, but also anticipated some decolonial concerns that would only emerge in the public and academic debate many years later.

Bacurau, the most recent film among those examined (released in 2019), builds an allegory of late capitalism and proposes an anti-colonial critique of the neoliberal complex that sustains Western imperialism. In line with contemporary currents involved in the critique of coloniality, the movie not only makes a diagnosis of racialised and neo-colonial forms of violence as necropolitics, but also addresses how the attempt to erase and destroy marginalised populations can lead to forms of insurgency inspired in the history of local resistance movements. From this perspective, it can be said that *Bacurau* is deeply involved in an effort to think about the extent to which it is possible to recover the voice of subaltern, and to what extent it is possible for these subaltern voices to engage in emancipatory practices of struggle and resistance against structures of power and domination. From this standpoint, which echoes the postcolonial thinking of Spivak (1994) and other variants of global South anti-colonial thinking, merged with elements of the emancipatory legacy of European critical theory, Brazil is worlded in a way that claims not only that historical structures and cultures of production of hierarchies and domination are theoretically problematised, but are also resisted strategically through the empowerment of the dominated and their involvement in resistance through the construction of solidarities among classes, genders and races. A close look at everyday social and political practices of marginality and resistance, as '*Bacurau*' shows, is fundamental within this practical-reflexive exercise of anti-colonial criticism.

Worlding Brazil, from this cinematic perspective, has to do with the way the directors of these movies, as creators of visual culture, engaged in different forms of aesthetic experimentation with images and narratives to reinforce or contest the political imaginaries that make Brazilian reality intelligible, locally and globally. Given the mass appeal of this visual medium, the SF movies analysed in this article have the potential to broaden and popularise complex discussions and stimulate reflection on issues that would

otherwise be restricted to the agendas of professionals and researchers dedicated to the academic theorisation of international politics.

What is important to highlight, in short, is that the way Brazil is worlded in these SF films contributes to amplify important debates and encourage critical thinking on issues that inform the way Brazil and its place in the world is interpreted by its own cultural agents and artists. In this respect, it is worth noting that the questions raised in these films obviously do not attempt to theorise or formally engage with grand academic debates. As artistic creations, these films capture certain political trends and perceptions of the moment, treating them creatively, aesthetically and allegorically, without the aim of positioning themselves as theoretical political knowledge. The questions and anxieties raised in these films are more relevant than the attempts to answer them precisely and rationally. As artworks, these films first and foremost create the world, rather than merely offering representations of it, which suggests that the way Brazil and its place in the world is shown in these films doesn't necessarily fit into preconceived theories, but instead requires new creative lenses that are better suited to its interpretation.

It is in line with the effort to find one of the possible options for such a creative lens that the critical exercise carried out in this article should be understood. In this sense, I think that the epistemological move suggested by the IR aesthetic turn and the concept of worlding provide a more pluralistic and eclectic perspective that allows combining global theoretical influences with local perceptions and intellectual concerns, offering as a result a more sophisticated way of interpreting the peripheral place of Brazil. Taking the metaphor of anthropophagy as a type of anti-colonial epistemology, the assemblage of influences resulting from this intercultural encounter offers a more nuanced lens that provides interpretations of Brazil and to some extent of international politics that are more locally rooted and therefore richer than those that distant and western-centred orthodox IR theories can allow. Just as talking about Brazilian SF cinema only makes sense under local material and cultural conditions that differ from those prevailing in the North's large cinematographic studios and commercial exhibition circuits, a discussion about Brazil and its place in the world assumes greater significance when informed by locally rooted conditions and concerns that also differ from those in the core.

Notes

- 1 See, for instance, the thematic editions of the following publications: *Alternatives* 25, no. 3 (2000); *Social Alternatives* 20, no. 4 (2001); *Peace Review* 13, no. 2 (2001); *Millennium* 30, no. 3 (2001); *Millennium* 34, no. 3 (2006); *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 2 (2007); and *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 4 (2009).
- 2 Due to this selective choice, some films were left out, such as *'Parada 88'* (1978), *'Abrigo Nuclear'* (1981) and *'Branco Sai, Preto Fica'* (2014), and should be mentioned here due to their importance in the historiography of Brazilian SF cinema. While *'Parada 88'* and *'Abrigo Nuclear'* build eco-dystopias that resort to the environmentalist theme, at the same time that they criticise totalitarianism and the Brazilian military dictatorship in force at that time, *'Branco Sai, Preto Fica'* resorts to the formula of traveling in the time to make a social critique of the racialised use of the state police apparatus to repress populations on the outskirts of Brasília. A more complete inventory of Brazilian SF films can be found, for example, in the extensive work of classification carried out by Alfredo Suppia (2006, 2013, 2017).

- 3 I refer here to the several strands of IR critical theorizing, including critical theory (in line with the Frankfurt School tradition), feminism, post-colonialism and post-structuralism.
- 4 In this article, I use 'Bacurau' (between quotation marks) to designate the title of the film and Bacurau (without quotation marks) to designate the name of the village where the action takes place.
- 5 Outlaws involved in acts of banditry, crime and violence, with strong social connotations, typical of the northeastern Brazilian hinterland, which occurred between the 19th century and the mid-20th century.

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Futuros distópicos brasileiros: Mundializando o Brasil através de filmes de ficção científica

Resumo: Com base na chamada virada estética das RI e aproveitando as qualidades críticas e epistêmicas do cinema, este artigo explora como alguns filmes brasileiros de ficção científica (FC) oferecem uma interpretação sensível e reflexiva do Brasil e de seu lugar no mundo, que deve ser valorizada no estudo da política internacional. Dentro dessa proposta, o artigo analisa quatro filmes emblemáticos da escassa historiografia do cinema brasileiro de ficção científica - *O Quinto Poder* (1962), *Os Cosmonautas* (1962), *Brasil Ano 2000* (1969) e *Bacurau* (2019) - a fim de identificar em que medida eles resultaram na reprodução ou no reforço de entendimentos mais convencionais e representações consensuais da política internacional ou, ao contrário, expuseram, questionaram e/ou criticaram as representações dominantes do Brasil e seu lugar no mundo. A categoria analítica de ‘mundialização’ é emprestada do pensamento pós-colonial para designar o processo pelo qual os cineastas constroem ou desconstruem os imaginários que tornam a realidade brasileira inteligível, local e globalmente. Como o artigo pretende mostrar, a maneira como o Brasil é visto no mundo nesses filmes de ficção científica contribui para ampliar debates importantes e incentivar o pensamento crítico sobre questões que informam a maneira como o Brasil e seu lugar no mundo são interpretados por seus próprios agentes culturais e artistas. O artigo também mostra que o movimento epistemológico sugerido pela virada estética das RI e o conceito de mundialização proporcionam uma lente mais matizada que fornece interpretações do Brasil e, até certo ponto, da política internacional que são mais enraizadas localmente e, portanto, mais ricas do que aquelas que as teorias ortodoxas de RI distantes e centradas no Ocidente podem permitir.

Palavras-chave: estética; ficção científica; política internacional; distopias; mundialização do Brasil.

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