

# The Flags of Time: Temporal Decoloniality in *Casa de areia* and *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*

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**Abstract:** In the films *Casa de areia* (2005) and *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias* (2006), time serves as an avatar of the larger colonial matrix. Though both films explore other expressions of coloniality, such as race, ethnicity, gender, assimilation, and politics, what sets them apart is that their disobedience against colonial forces takes place on a temporal plane. Both protagonists, Áurea and Mauro, find themselves on geographic or social islands, wrestling against the power of time. Áurea’s story highlights many of the scientific issues of time reckoning. Mauro’s involves rejecting the fusion of a political and temporal colonial project during the 1970 World Cup. In crucial instances of disorientation for each character, they “delink” from colonial paradigms of time, revealing that neither coloniality nor time itself is absolute.

**Keywords:** Brazilian cinema, *Cast Away*, delinking, soccer, time travel

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In the Robert Zemeckis film *Cast Away* (2000), FedEx supervisor Chuck Noland (Tom Hanks) berates employees for their failure to respect time: “Time rules over us without mercy,” he says, “because we live or die by the clock. We never turn our back on it and we never ever allow ourselves the sin of losing track of time.” Soon thereafter, Noland’s plane goes down in the ocean and he is marooned on an uninhabited island. In a place where networks of communication,

transportation, commerce, and power are meaningless, so are contemporary notions of timekeeping. For Noland, “In an empty space, where nothing happens, time has no function either” (Klein 237).

Both theoretically and practically, Noland has fallen outside of Universal Coordinated Time.<sup>1</sup> His antique railroader’s watch ceases to tick. Ruined FedEx packages, emblazoned with the corporate slogan “The World On Time,” wash up on the beach like detritus from a time-wreck. Noland’s former obsession with the frenetic pace of seconds and the imaginary borders of time zones is reduced to the sun, the tide, and marks scrawled on a cave wall. Because, as he says, we “die by the clock,” back home he is declared legally dead.

Two Brazilian films released a few years after *Cast Away* feature characters who commit the “sin of losing track of time” and experience similar disconnection from modern time systems. Like Noland, Áurea, in Andrucha Waddington’s *Casa de areia* (2005), and Mauro, in Cao Hamburger’s *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias* (2006), both find themselves on islands outside the reach of temporal manifest destiny. In other ways, they represent the inverse of Noland’s journey. For one thing, Áurea’s island is situated inland, amid a sea of sand, while Mauro’s is located in one of the most populous cities in the world.

More crucially, Noland serves as an avatar for prevailing systems of power. His temporal paradigm shift is forced upon him—he is literally *cast away* from time. Áurea and Mauro, on the other hand, each negotiate their relation with modern temporalities, marked by flags of coloniality, from a position of alterity. When they face constructs of time that seek to “rule over” others, they practice what Walter Mignolo has called “epistemic disobedience,” making the conscious choice to “delink” from them (“Geopolitics”). By deliberately sinning against time, they reveal that its tyranny is not limitless.

### ***Delinking from the Coloniality of Time***

Todd McGowan defines “atemporal cinema” as filmmaking that features the distortion of time in its discourse, allowing the viewer to participate in the experience rather than merely observe (9). Although this does occur in both *Casa*

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<sup>1</sup> Universal Coordinated Time, abbreviated UTC, is the modern successor to Greenwich Mean Time. Based on an atomic clock, it has been the standard for international timekeeping since the 1960s.

*de areia* and *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*,<sup>2</sup> their most prominent atemporal vector—which best reflects atemporal cinema’s desire for liberation “from all forms of mastery” (35)—is their protagonists’ decolonial attitude toward time’s relationship with systems of authority. To contextualize our analysis of these films, this section will briefly trace the connection between coloniality and time in frames of reference such as commerce, physics, politics, and even Amerindian perspectives in order to help us identify the ramifications of Mignolo’s delinking on a temporal plane.

As Noland’s association with FedEx suggests, one of the principal ways time exerts power is through its link with industry, global infrastructure, and consumer markets. To give one example of this in a Brazilian setting, in 1888, the North American-headquartered Pará Transportation and Trading Company gained authorization to build a railway across Northern Brazil to a silver mine in Goiás. The principal engineering consultant to the undertaking, as well as one of its investors, happened to be Sandford Fleming, father of the trans-Canadian railway (Barrows 47). As a railroad and telegraph man, Fleming envisioned a world united by schedules that adhered to a global, standardized method of timekeeping. His ideas had led to the adoption of time zones and Greenwich Mean Time as a worldwide touchstone a few years earlier at the International Meridian Conference in Washington.

Because Brazil had abstained on the question of recognizing GMT at the conference, the PTTC became a metaphor for the inevitable spread of Fleming’s new standard. It barreled through political and cultural differences, driven by almighty commercial interests.<sup>3</sup> However, in the end, newly elected Brazilian

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<sup>2</sup> To give one specific example, McGowan refers to the logic of Freud’s drive, in which desire gives way to embracing its own cyclical frustration over fulfillment (11). As a result, “the drive does not respect the forward movement of time but remains attached to repetition” (32). Like the subversion of desire and embrace of this traumatic déjà vu in films such as Christopher Nolan’s *Memento* (2000) or Michel Gondry’s *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), the viewer shares Áurea and Mauro’s perspectives as they pass through similar phases of recurring, failed encounters with their desires (a return to civilization and a return of the family, respectively), thus veering away from a future-oriented perspective of time.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Barrows sees symbolic significance in “one of the great architects of world standard time [being] involved in a scheme that employed the very transportation and communication technologies that necessitated standardization in order to draw resources” from a country that had not supported his reforms (48).

officials stood up to the “men who made no secret of their plans to tyrannize over them with rifles and resettlement programs” (50). The local government’s refusal to bend to the expansion of North American economic forces constitutes an interesting example of epistemic disobedience. Fleming’s involvement in this episode, like Noland and his railroader’s watch, serves as a concrete reminder that, first, our modern processes of reckoning time are wrapped up in colonial systems of power; and second, despite how it sometimes appears, neither these systems nor time itself is absolute.

Fleming’s efforts at standardization had been a long time coming. Despite the fact that frameworks similar to the twelve-month year and seven-day week of the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian calendars are as ancient as the Mesopotamians, the world has seen more ways of counting time than history preserves. For example, even the briefest of surveys of Amerindian cultures reveals a wide variety of approaches: The Mayans understood the mathematics underlying the trajectory of the moon and tracked time based on a hierarchical analysis of astronomy and planetary movements (Killsback 134-35). The Hopi conceived time as a “cycle of worlds,” which reset their worldview after catastrophic events (138). The Amazonian Amondawa tribe has no word for month, year, or abstract time itself, though they find meaning in the order that events fit into a sequence (Sinha et al.).

Yet significantly, the Amondawa language intuits something that scientists and philosophers took millennia to puzzle out. Not unlike Fleming,<sup>4</sup> Newton hypothesized that time was a constant, and that the accuracy of a man-made clock depended on how well it reproduced a universal cadence. Similarly, Kant speculated that universal time existed independent of how we perceive it. But of course, Newton, Kant, and therefore Fleming, were all wrong. Einstein later proved that only the speed of light was constant, not the flow of time itself. In physics, time is perspectival. Our linear, forward-looking, past-to-present-to-future “arrow of time” only functions because we are there to observe and interact with it, similar to how certain behaviors in particles do not exist until we measure them (Podolskiy and Lanza 675).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In his essay “Longitude and Time-Reckoning,” Fleming proposes to unify the world’s inhabitants by syncing world time with absolute time (10).

<sup>5</sup> Scientists have even shown through heat transfer in correlated quantum particles that reversing entropy—and by extension the arrow of time—is theoretically possible (Conover 10).

As Nick Stockton explains the idea, “It’s like a macro-scale version of Schrödinger’s cat. A faraway corner of the universe might be moving future to past. But the moment humans point a telescope in that direction, time conforms to the past–future flow.” In other words, the arrow of time is a poorly understood illusion. It only exists when we perceive the entropy of the universe or, more simply, as the Amondawa understand, we identify events in a sequence. Regnal years, monastic bells, sporting events like the Olympics—all these speak to the importance of sequential or recurring events in reckoning time.

The science notwithstanding, losing track of our universal, linear concept of time is a sin to the likes of FedEx or the PTTC because it is an affront to the corporatization of global commerce and authority. Thanks to Fleming, clocks around the world all take the rhythm of their seconds and minutes from the same imperial seat. But hours can also perform sovereignty: Occupied Paris under Nazi rule ran on Berlin time. Though China spans six longitudinal time zones, clocks across the country are all set to the same hour. For a few years, North Korea inhabited its own intermediate time zone, thirty minutes out of sync with the rest of the world (Gleick). Unlike the remainder of the continental United States, Arizona does not observe daylight saving time. However, the parts of the state under the jurisdiction of the Navajo Nation do, while the Hopi Reservation, which is fully contained by Navajo land, does not.

Since time is a manifestation of systems of power, it is a prominent thread within the fabric of coloniality’s capacity to otherize. Similar to notions of universal time, the inferiority of the colonial other is likewise a fiction “created to dominate” by whoever is “in a position of managing the discourse” (Mignolo, “Geopolitics”). Paul Ricoeur alludes to this when he writes that “time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative” (3). That is, to construct a narrative is to control human time because it defines the relationship between events. Therefore, if Mignolo’s concept of decoloniality can subvert the discourse of power, it can also subvert time.

Reminiscent of Amerindian undercurrents in decoloniality, there is a quasi-perspectivist element to the coloniality of time. As illustrated by the Amerindian perspectivism articulated by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, in what we call “multiculturalism,” biology (nature) is the universal or constant, while values or spiritual essence (culture) are particular. In Amerindian “multinaturalism,” however, the inverse is true: essence or values are universal, while nature is

particular (115-16). In the films *Casa de areia* and *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*, we can identify a similar relationship with time. In “Fleming time,” the flow of time is universal, which determines sequences of contingent events. On the other hand, in the decolonial time of Áurea and Mauro, events are universal, but their temporal flow—their relation to each other—is not.<sup>6</sup> It is on this epistemological foundation that these protagonists commit their act of disobedience, that they “delink” themselves from temporal coloniality.

As Mignolo describes it, “Delinking means that you do not accept the options that are available to you.” Rather, it requires “thinking in exteriority, in the spaces and *time* that the self-narrative of modernity invented as its outside to legitimize its own logic of coloniality” (“Geopolitics,” emphasis mine). It comes from a place of difference in response to, and as a rejection of, colonial epistemologies (*Local Histories* xxvi). Moreover, although of course decoloniality has deep roots in Amerindian perspectives, it naturally extends to “psychological racial barriers, borders of gender, sexuality, and racial classification, and so forth” (xvi). Like many Brazilian films from the first decade of the 2000s, *Casa de areia* and *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias* explore colonial themes such as these. But what sets them apart is how they feature epistemic disobedience against colonial forces in a temporal dimension.

In these two films, time becomes a manifestation of the larger colonial matrix. The political nature of timekeeping is a factor for both protagonists, but it is more pronounced for Mauro, given that the matches of the 1970 World Cup are the recurring events he utilizes for reckoning time. Áurea’s story instead focuses more on the scientific aspects of relativity. Regardless, in crucial instances of disorientation for each character, they delink from colonial paradigms of time and slip into their own temporalities of outsidedness. For Áurea, this moment transpires in literal isolation. For Mauro, it happens while feeling alone and apart in a crowd. Nonetheless, in both cases, the delinking is enacted through breaking a visual connection, like the gaze of a telescope or a television. Javier Sanjinés speaks of how Western paradigms of time “shatter”

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<sup>6</sup> Denis Villeneuve’s 2016 film *Arrival* provides a straightforward example of this idea: As the linguist Louise Banks (Amy Adams) learns the heptapod language, she continues to experience the same events as everyone else. However, she no longer perceives them in a past–future arrow. Instead, she begins to have memories of the future, which affect her behavior in the present, as understood by those around her.

when they come into contact with the decolonialized, much like the FedEx flotsam washing up on Noland's island (24). Though he is doubtless correct, *Áurea* and Mauro expose systems of time that are "managing the discourse" as arbitrary and contingent—not by coming *into* contact with them, but by getting *out* of it.

### ***Casa de areia***

*Casa de areia* chronicles the lives of three generations of women living a secluded life in the interior of Northeastern Brazil. The film opens in 1910 with a Portuguese man named Vasco (Ruy Guerra) leading his family—consisting of his pregnant wife, *Áurea* (Fernanda Torres), and her mother, Dona Maria (Fernanda Montenegro)—along with a support caravan in search of lands he has purchased. They arrive to find what appears to be a sandy, desert wasteland. Yet, they shortly discover that they are not alone, as a community descended from runaway slaves inhabits a nearby oasis known as "the Island." Over the course of the film, *Áurea*'s delinking from coloniality turns her into a kind of time traveler, whose house of sand lies outside the influence of the arrow of time.

The colonial markers are almost too on the nose—a Portuguese man named Vasco in search of territory and fortune, thinking himself an explorer, traveling over a sea of sand, and asserting rights over lands that are already inhabited. His dreams of empire soon turn on him, however, when the inhabitants of the Island do not recognize his claim on the area. Undeterred, he literally plants a flag in the earth and tries to impose his idea of civilization on it by building a house in the sand. Abandoned by his men and trying to finish the house by himself, he is crushed to death when a section of it collapses.

Left entirely alone, Dona Maria and *Áurea* make a series of attempts to return to what they would have considered civilization, although none are successful. To them, the desert becomes a horizontal labyrinth where, as *Áurea* remarks at one point, "o que não é terra é céu." As on Noland's island, the rules of society, tradition, and cultural referents are all meaningless in this place. In what is perhaps a testament to the sense of isolation that the film conveys, Jack A. Draper has called it "deregionalized" (251). Nevertheless, time still retains a presence early in the narrative. We see several motifs that conspicuously mark its passing: the encroachment of sand on the house that Vasco built, filling it like an

hourglass; interstitial shots of the changing phases of the moon; and the growth of a tree that Massu (Seu Jorge), a man from the Island, plants outside Áurea's house. Significantly, it replaces Vasco's imperial flag, which the sand has overtaken.

Though Áurea and Dona Maria had no control over the events that led to their difficult circumstances, eventually giving up the idea of returning and instead making a life amid the sand is a choice they assume on their own. Dona Maria is the first not only to resign herself to the situation, but to embrace it. She, who had, at times, encouraged her daughter to be more obedient to her violent husband, finally acknowledges, "Eu gosto daqui. Aqui homem nenhum manda em mim." As Mignolo points out, she doesn't need to know the word "coloniality" to develop an awareness of it ("Geopolitics"). When Áurea asks her mother if she has forgotten what it was like back home, she replies, "Não, não esqueci, mas não sinto mais falta." It takes Áurea longer to come to similar conclusions, but over the years she does, ultimately entering into what, in the early twentieth century, would have been a taboo interracial relationship with Massu.<sup>7</sup> By deciding to stay, in a sense the women participate in the Island's *quilombismo*. Their house of sand becomes a space of outsidedness where delinking from the patriarchal gender roles, class, and race restrictions of their era becomes possible for women.

Epistemologically speaking, there is little difference between the Iberian conquest of the Americas, the PTTC, and Vasco arriving at the Island with his scientifically plotted maps and a deed. He expects everyone to defer to them. When he shows his documentation to Massu and his father, what follows plays out as almost the inverse of a famous scene from Walter Lang's 1956 film adaptation of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*. When Anna Leonowens (Deborah Kerr), the British schoolteacher of the household of the king of Siam, supplants a map with Siam at the center of the world with the latest "scientific" map from England,<sup>8</sup> she is asked why, on the "real" map, Siam is so

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<sup>7</sup> Late in the film, Áurea's daughter, Maria, challenges the narrative that Áurea decided to stay, accusing Massu of manipulating events to keep them there. The film may not provide enough information to settle this question either way, and it could be a little of both. Regardless, in this scene, Áurea's calm reaction and wordless reassurance of Massu make it clear that, in the story she has adopted, she disagrees with her daughter.

<sup>8</sup> Ironically, the World War II-era map used in the film is anachronistic for the period. For more on the maps and orientalism in the film, see Houston.

small. In response, Anna points out that England is even smaller. What she fails to mention is that she has replaced their ethnocentric map with a colonial one. Claims of scientific objectivity notwithstanding, on her map, the Prime Meridian (zero degrees longitude) still passes through Greenwich. This makes Western Europe, by reference, the center of all maps—even Vasco’s. Santiago Castro-Gómez refers to this as “the hubris of zero degrees” (282). Unlike Anna’s students, however, Massu’s father refuses to acknowledge the authority of the implements of power that Vasco wields, seizing his deed and crumpling it. His family does not allow Vasco to manage the discourse. They remain outside his colonially centered notions of reckoning space. Like the traditional Siamese map, their concept of geography is Island-centric. Moreover, it is temporal as well, since distance is measured by how many days’ walk somewhere is from their home.

Yet because Greenwich’s colonial influence extends to time, Vasco’s map also includes a temporal aspect. In fact, determining one’s location in a space without points of reference, like an ocean or a sea of sand, depends on tracking time. Longitudinal calculation requires comparing the time where one is to the time at a known location. The eighteenth-century clockmaker John Harrison made this method of determining precise longitude viable for maritime navigation by developing a reliable chronometer. In essence, he pioneered space by way of time (Sobel 175). Therefore, before even arriving at the issue of the legitimacy of Vasco’s deed, the very act of acknowledging the location of the land that he claims is a temporally loaded colonial question.

*Casa de areia* goes further in its subversion of the scientific objectivity of time; in concrete terms, it adds the arrival of one of two expeditions organized by Sir Frank Dyson—director of the Royal Observatory in Greenwich—to photograph the solar eclipse of May 29, 1919, in hopes of corroborating Einstein’s theory of relativity. The idea behind the expedition was to show how the stars around the sun appear in slightly shifted positions during an eclipse as opposed to how they appear when photographed at night, thus proving that the sun’s gravitational field affects the path of the light. Sir Arthur Eddington and Edwin Cottingham led one group to the island of Príncipe, off the west coast of Africa. Andrew Crommelin and Charles R. Davidson led a simultaneous effort

to Sobral, in Ceará.<sup>9</sup> Áurea encounters their caravan's tracks, finds a telescope they dropped in the sand, and walks two days to overtake them and return it. While following these emissaries from Greenwich, she witnesses the eclipse, a nod to the fact that, by this point, Greenwich has already superseded the position of the sun as the international basis for official timekeeping.

Áurea catches up to the scientists and spends time with one of their Brazilian guides, a young soldier named Luís (Enrique Diaz), with whom she has a romantic interlude. He tells her about their mission and explains the concept of relativity by using the example of a pair of twins, one of whom travels at the speed of light and comes back younger than his brother because, for him, time has slowed down. He also shows her the stone obelisk the scientists have placed in the sand to mark the exact date and location of their achievement. Significantly, it is soon after this encounter with the expedition that Áurea decides to settle down with Massu, finally severing all ties in her mind with the society that raised her. It is as if Áurea and her family step outside of time, which becomes petrified like the date set in the obelisk, or blocked out like the eclipsed sun.

As previously explained, even the linear arrow of time as we experience it is not constant, and human involvement is intertwined with its past-to-present-to-future trajectory. I cited the example of how using a telescope to observe some remote corner of the universe makes the arrow of time there conform to our concept of it. So, in *Casa de areia*, Áurea's act of returning the telescope to the scientists symbolically averts their gaze or observation. This is significant because it is after the scientists' departure that Áurea delinks herself from time's direction, including its scientific reckoning as measured by, and centered on, Greenwich. Just as Vasco's map and flag have no power, time ceases to flow for her family and the inhabitants of the island. Their delinking moves beyond the spatial to the temporal.

From this point on, we see no more shots of the phases of the moon. Also, the new house that Massu helps Áurea to build does not allow the entropy represented by the sands of time to infiltrate its walls. In a sense, the arrow of

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<sup>9</sup> Many assume the Lençóis Maranhenses, near Santo Amaro do Maranhão, to be the film's actual setting merely because it was shot there. This is impossible, however, since Sobral is hundreds of miles from Santo Amaro. As is only fitting, the location of Áurea's fictional home lies outside both time and geography.

time stops. To recall our Amerindian perspectivist analogy, important historical events, like the world wars, are still real, but because *Áurea* refuses the colonial gaze, there is nothing to force them into her timeline. They have no sequential relationship to anything near the Island, so they have no temporal effect on it. *Áurea*'s daughter, Maria, born in the house of sand, has no notion of the hours of the day, nor even any concept of larger units like months. Massu's father, born on the Island to a runaway slave, cannot comprehend the idea that slavery has been abolished because the past and the future as society tracks them have no meaning for him.

But outside the Island, Greenwich time keeps on ticking, and twenty-three years later, by the soldier Luís's reckoning, he returns. Now a member of the Air Force, he has come to investigate a plane crash. He had last seen *Áurea* wearing the jacket of his army uniform. This time, he encounters Maria, her daughter. She is similar in age to *Áurea* when last he saw her, and she is wearing the uniform jacket of one of the dead Air Force pilots. For Luís, it is as if a faded recollection has sprung to full life and vividness before his eyes, collapsing time.

This effect is compounded by the fact that Fernanda Montenegro and Fernanda Torres, a mother-daughter pair, rotate in the roles of grandmother, mother, and daughter, depending on a character's age. If time is a sequence of events, of continuing entropy, the actors changing roles blunts the impression on both Luís and the viewer, making it feel as if no time has passed. When Luís sees Fernanda Torres with a military jacket around her shoulders so many years later, she steps out of the past like the twin in his own example of relativity. These visuals are symbolic of time standing still in this place for more than two decades, where *Áurea*, Maria, and the Island have existed delinked from it.

In the final scene of the film, Maria has come back to visit *Áurea* after decades of living away. Now we see Fernanda Montenegro playing both women, but this time in makeup and costumes that emphasize the age difference between them. This reverses the effect of the temporal stasis experienced by Luís. The markers of time—the sand and the moon—also make a return. Maria tells her mother that man has walked on the moon. *Áurea* asks what he found there, and Maria replies, “Nada. Dizem que areia.” *Áurea* wonders if he came back younger, and Maria answers that, no, “voltou até mais velho.” It is as if coloniality has reconquered time by literally planting an imperial flag in the sands of the moon, absorbing them back into its Greenwich-based, geo-temporal map. The effect of

relativity has come to an end. To emphasize this, Maria then plays Áurea a recording of a piano prelude by Chopin. This not only symbolizes Áurea's restored connection to "civilization," but it also recalls Noland's escape from his island in *Cast Away*. As he drifts away on a raft, the movie employs Alan Silvestri's instrumental score for the very first time. Both these scenes remind us that music, similar to the arrow of time, is not found in the tones themselves, but in their relationships to each other. It is the sequence that turns notes into music.

### ***O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias***

In a way, *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias* picks up where *Casa de areia* leaves off. Its opening text over black uses the Apollo 11 moon landing to contextualize the film in a shared temporal landscape: "Depois que o homem pisou na Lua e Pelé marcou seu milésimo gol, o ano de 1970 começou de cabeça para baixo. Guerra fria, regimes totalitários, democracias ameaçadas... No Brasil não foi diferente." Both a total solar eclipse and a person walking on the moon are events that simultaneously restore wonder to the universe while also demystifying it by confirming what science predicts. Moreover, planting a flag in the sand of one of our oldest methods of reckoning time has made that moment concrete, like the obelisk in *Casa de areia*. Consequently, *O ano* shares this temporal marker with several other films about Brazil under the military dictatorship—e.g. *Lamarca* (1994), *O que é isso, companheiro?* (1997), and *Batismo de sangue* (2007).

What is most curious about these title cards, however, is the linking of Pelé's one thousandth goal to the moon landing. "O Milésimo" occurred almost four months later and carries similar temporal significance to many. For example, it is also alluded to in *Batismo de sangue* as a time stamp for the death of Carlos Marighella.<sup>10</sup> This serves as a reminder of *futebol's* strong inherent connection to the concept of time. In Portuguese, we even go so far as to call its two halves the *primeiro tempo* and the *segundo tempo*, as though they were part of some larger creational myth. Thus, they set not merely a ball in motion, but a celestial sphere, around which life revolves. The *temporada*, in turn, not only functions as a calendar (by which many people live), but its undefined plural also implies that

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<sup>10</sup> Marighella was killed on November 4, while Pelé scored his goal on the November 19.

it encompasses not only time, but many *times*. It is no accident, then, that an imperial flag, the moon, and the beautiful game should come together in this way from the very beginning. For during Mauro's "vacation," it is soccer—emblazoned with the national flag—that represents both political and temporal forces, from which he, like Áurea, must ultimately delink himself.

Mauro (Michel Joelsas) is a ten-year-old boy from Belo Horizonte whose parents have been involved in the resistance against the military dictatorship.<sup>11</sup> Fearing imminent arrest, they take Mauro to stay with his grandfather, Mótél (Paulo Autran), in the São Paulo neighborhood of Bom Retiro. They are in such a hurry that they leave Mauro at the curb of the apartment building to wait for his grandfather, instructing him to say, if anyone asks, that they are "de férias."

Unbeknownst to Mauro's parents, however, Mótél died suddenly just before their arrival. As a result, his next-door neighbor, Shlomo (Germano Haiut), ends up keeping an eye on Mauro, who is afraid of leaving his grandfather's apartment in case his parents should call. When he becomes friends with Hanna (Daniela Piepszyk), a girl who lives in the building, he gradually begins to make forays outside the apartment to do things like go to the synagogue with Shlomo, take meals at the homes of members of the congregation, and play soccer.

Though Mauro's parents have not raised him to be Jewish (Shlomo is shocked to discover that Mauro is uncircumcised), he slowly becomes more integrated into the religious community where his father grew up. As in *Casa de areia*, coloniality-inflected themes like ethnicity, diaspora, and assimilation are prevalent in the film, especially given its Jewish context. For example, Shlomo refers to Mauro as "Moishale" (Yiddish for Moses) because, as the rabbi points out, God left him on his doorstep. Yet Mauro symbolizes, in some ways, the inverse of both Moses and the Jewish diaspora. Instead of a deliverer raised among captors, Mauro returns to live as a stranger among his own people.

Similar to Mauro, Bom Retiro itself embodies both in-betweenness and outsidership. Not unlike the Island in *Casa de areia*, it has become a capsule of time and culture despite its urban context. The use of Yiddish in the community demonstrates this, revealing a decolonial gesture that anchors its speakers to their

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<sup>11</sup> Mauro's age is never made explicit in the film. Different sources place it anywhere from ten to twelve. However, the shooting script fixes it at ten or eleven years old (Galperin et al. 25), and actor Michel Joelsas was ten during filming in late 2005.

religion, ethnicity, and past rather than to their nationality. On the other hand, knowledge of the language is waning in the younger generations, among whom assimilation runs high. Moreover, as Mauro learns to adapt to Shlomo's way of life, Shlomo finds himself interacting more and more with the outside world. He must leave his own personal, cultural, and political comfort zone in order to make inquiries about Mauro's parents, and he must do it in Portuguese. In addition, Bom Retiro is not totally immune to external influences, as seen at the bar mitzvah celebration that features dancing to the music of Roberto Carlos.<sup>12</sup>

The role of soccer in the film also works against the reclusive impulses of the Bom Retiro residents. As Mauro puts it, "São Paulo é tão grande que cabe gente de todos os tipos e de todas as torcidas do mundo." So, it comes as no surprise that, when the Jewish team plays its local "clássico" against the Italian team, the former's secret weapon is a Catholic, Afro-Brazilian goalie. Cross-cultural contamination is on display, quite literally, as Mauro, in imitation of the goalie he idolizes, crosses himself (much to the chagrin of the rabbi). Even the Bom Retiro elderly take interest in the neighborhood game and the World Cup matches, things with which neither age, ethnicity, nor politics can compete.

As Shawn Stein has observed, "O futebol, como esporte e espetáculo, serve para integrar povos, tanto nativos quanto imigrantes, às comunidades imaginadas. No Brasil, junto com o carnaval, a Copa é o evento que mais fabrica sentimentos de nacionalismo, o qual apresenta ambiguidades particulares em momentos de ditadura" (257). For example, when Ítalo (Caio Blat), a politically engaged student and friend of Mauro's father, gets together with like-minded comrades to watch Brazil play Czechoslovakia in Brazil's first game of the group stage, he exclaims that "se a Tchecoslováquia vencer, é uma vitória do socialismo!" When Czechoslovakia scores a goal, he and his friends put on a display of forced enthusiasm. Yet when Brazil scores, spontaneous, joyful pandemonium erupts. José Miguel Wisnik associates this scene with the game's link to time: "o tempo do jogo os devolvia a um lugar em que o time de futebol [...] não se confundia com o regime, mas se mostrava ligado a eles mesmos através de uma identificação inesperada e mais profunda" (12). Such is the power of the game that even those who are most aware of the value of the national

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<sup>12</sup> There is also a quick cut from the Roberto Carlos song to scenes of military force, a not-so-subtle nod to the perceived political association of *Jovem Guarda* music.

team's success to the military government—as the second element of *panem et circenses*, a source of nationalistic pride, or a facile symbol of racial democracy—cannot help but be swept away.

Moreover, the World Cup has another important colonial function as a manifestation of time. Mauro's father alludes to the impending temporal distortion in Mauro's world when he tells him that his grandfather “*não atrasa nem morto*.” The late Motel, a man who, like Noland, never turned his back on the clock, foreshadows the dearth of traditional, time-related reference points for Mauro while he is “on vacation.” More importantly, however, the last thing Mauro's father says to him before leaving is that they will come back “*na Copa*.” It is crucial to bear in mind that he says this while handing Mauro his soccer ball, as if giving him a new reference point, a celestial sphere by which to mark the time until their return. Shawn Stein also notes the importance of this moment, observing that this act “*marca temporalmente*” Mauro's new life in Bom Retiro, in which the World Cup “*é usada para demarcar um tempo baseado numa lógica de criança*” (257, emphasis mine).

Like Stein, Carolina Rocha also points out that Mauro's universe is still that of a child (92). Though we deliberately teach children how to tell time, we cannot teach them how to interpret “the passage of time,” an understanding of which they only form with experience and socialization (Flaherty 103). In general, data support the idea that the precision of this process does not develop fully until around ten or twelve, making it likely that Mauro's time-perception skills remain immature or on the cusp (Wearden 166). Furthermore, the younger one is, the more time measurement depends on recurring events (Klein 249). According to Deleuze, the social spaces we construct around children—school, home, work, play, etc.—generate rules that constitute a “stable” existence (Øksnes 157). Mauro has suddenly become disconnected from the usual ways that children mark and experience time, and the destruction of these routines shakes the foundations of his world. He has no predictable schedule: no school, no bedtime, no regular baths (Hanna tells him he smells), no consistent mealtimes or even a set place for them (since the Bom Retiro residents pass him around). Like the Hopi “cycle of worlds,” a catastrophic event has produced a new worldview for Mauro that includes a new system for understanding time.

It is common for people, when faced with confinement or isolation (like prisoners or those marooned on an island), to devise improvised schemes for

keeping time, such as marks on a bedpost or, in the case of Noland, on a cave wall. To someone as disoriented as Mauro, it is the “framework of consistency” that matters most, not any relation to institutionalized methods of official timekeeping (Lasane and O’Donnell 11).<sup>13</sup> In an interesting incarnation of *panem et circenses*, one might say that bread—Mauro’s old routines, such as mealtimes—finds itself replaced with the circus of *futebol*. In this situation, the national team’s progress in the World Cup, already of tremendous importance to a ten-year-old, takes on even greater significance. This is so because it is Mauro’s last remaining timeline on which he might hang his new life.

Calculating time by the World Cup simultaneously expands and collapses how Mauro experiences the former. The early scenes of the film find Mauro thrust into the frenetic pace of his parents’ growing unease. Yet once in Bom Retiro, the incessant boredom jolts him, as if time has lurched to a sudden halt. Before their departure, his parents invoke the word “vacation,” which also suspends the normal passage of time—hours and minutes slow down while days fly by. Nevertheless, as we already know, the most essential element of timekeeping from a psychological standpoint is not the duration or frequency of periodic events, but the sequence, “the association of one event with another” (Alexander 28). Accordingly, with each game, Mauro hopes for his parents’ return, which both stretches the duration between them and also makes them pass with terrifying speed.

This anxiety is evident in Mauro’s initial reluctance to leave M6tel’s apartment, especially during the broadcast of the games. He instead remains glued to the window, chanting “fusca azul, fusca azul,” as if he could will his parents’ blue Volkswagen Beetle to appear down the street. His first words in the film, in voice-over, are “Meu pai diz que, no futebol, todo mundo pode falhar menos o goleiro. Eles s6o jogadores diferentes, e que passam a vida ali, sozinhos, esperando o pior.” Mauro considers himself the goalie, who remains alert and in position, protecting the family space of his grandfather’s apartment—likewise waiting for the worst. The narrative voice in Chico Buarque and Gilberto Gil’s 1973 song “C6lice” echoes Mauro’s situation:

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<sup>13</sup> Mauro might well be sharing this experience with his parents, who have presumably been arrested by this point. At Guantanamo Bay, for example, devising deliberately irregular anti-routines produces anxiety in prisoners by making them feel untethered from time (Hammond 19).

Esse silêncio todo  
Me atordoa  
Atordoado  
Eu permaneço atento  
Na arquibancada  
Pra a qualquer momento  
Ver emergir  
O monstro da lagoa

Studies have shown that when we are looking forward to something, we perceive ourselves as going forward in time toward it. But when it is something we fear, we think of it as coming toward us (Hammond 141). The goalie Mauro allows time—the ball—to come toward him. He braces for the sudden arrival of the dreaded monster from the silent void: news that something has happened to his parents. Or, worse still, he could remain in limbo forever, tortured by the wait, with no resolution—much like Áurea in the earlier scenes of *Casa de areia*. In the words of Wisnik, the goalie is “um ser de exceção, e, nos momentos cruciais, um solitário” (137).

Similar to the Pará Transportation and Trading Company’s consolidation of colonial commerce, politics, and time, for Mauro, the nationalist World Cup / *panem et circenses* of the military government and temporal World Cup / *panem et circenses* of his time-telling system now intersect. As with Luís’s vision of Áurea and Maria, they collapse into one. They represent both the hope of his parents’ return as well as the reason they are gone. The circular, dissonant arrow of time this creates becomes an accordion-like torture chamber of temporal expansion and contraction. To survive, Mauro must, like Áurea, exercise epistemic disobedience and delink himself.

Like colonial time, soccer is also a performance of synchronization, compounding its temporal significance. As in Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s “presence,” which he describes in part as “getting lost in focused intensity,” there is a necessary physical and mental element to being present at a moment where space and time converge (39). As Marc Wittmann articulates this idea in terms of *futebol*, “The twenty-two soccer players on the field are not the only ones following the ball in a state of utmost concentration; when they’re in the world championship, hundreds of millions of human beings are simultaneously

spellbound by a decisive penalty kick” (56). Sandford Fleming would be proud. This matters because it is precisely at the moment of “presence” during the final match of the 1970 World Cup that Mauro turns his back on time. When everyone is riding the crest of the communal experience, when Jewish people, communists, Afro-Brazilians, military personnel, children, and the elderly are all brought together under the flag of nationalist and temporal unity, Mauro delinks himself from the whole enterprise. While Áurea diverted the gaze of the telescope, Mauro breaks the line of sight with the television—Brasília’s omnipresent “olhos grandes / Sobre mim” in Caetano Veloso’s song “Tropicália,”<sup>14</sup> which require a network as precisely coordinated as a railroad. Mauro literally removes his body from the situation. By severing the visual connection to the gaze of authority, he jogs the arrow of time out of sync. In circumstances in which a soccer-obsessed boy should be more caught up than anyone in what is happening, it is extraordinary that he does not hesitate to leave.<sup>15</sup>

Mauro, like Áurea’s mother, could never express what is going on in terms of coloniality, but he feels it all the same. The *presence* enveloping everyone else is contaminated. He rejects participating in a unity of time with the political system of coloniality that has taken away his parents. Though even people like Ítalo cannot break free from the thrall of the game, Mauro walks the deserted streets alone. As in Amerindian perspectivism, the match is real to all, but Mauro disconnects it, in his point of view, from its temporal function as the marker of a happy reunion with his parents. The World Cup ceases to be an avatar of time and hope and transforms instead into a manifestation of oppression and loss. By abandoning the victory of the Seleção, Mauro delinks from the national time-narrative and exposes the national game as the false *quilombo* that it is.<sup>16</sup> His

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<sup>14</sup> The DVD menu for the film even features a Gal Costa cover of “Tropicália.”

<sup>15</sup> This development is not as hasty as it appears, though it makes it no less extraordinary. Previously, when Mauro and Ítalo had been absorbed in a game of *futebol de botão*, the police interrupted them with a sudden knocking at the door. Ítalo hides, but it is Shlomo they have come for, and they take him away. Mauro internalizes this microcosm of the emergence of the “monstro da lagoa” when one is distracted by a game. So, come the day of the final match, his ritual of watching for the “fusca azul” is more somber, but no less intense. When asked if he is excited for the game, he responds with lukewarm enthusiasm. Finally, when Hanna tells him she has just seen Shlomo pass in a cab, he immediately becomes oblivious to the game and the euphoria building around him.

<sup>16</sup> As Wisnik explains, “Podemos dizer que a democracia racial do futebol brasileiro prescreve (no sentido médico, de indicar um remédio) mas não descreve o Brasil. Ou, ainda, que ela descreve

epistemic disobedience is vindicated when the “fusca azul” he encounters on the way back to his apartment also fails to symbolize a family made whole again. Instead, Shlomo has brought back Mauro’s mother broken and tortured.

The next day, Mauro and his mother depart in a *red* VW Beetle. Framed in the void between them in the back seat is a sticker of the Brazilian flag on the rear window, a reminder of whom they have to thank for the fact that their husband and father will never return. Just as the flag on the moon ushered Áurea back into world time, the entropy in Mauro’s family, wrought by the flag stamped with “ordem e progresso,” makes time flow again for him. Even the end credits move in an unexpected direction, scrolling from side to side instead of top to bottom, giving the impression that the arrow of time has resumed a more typical course, now that vacation has ended. In a way, coloniality is chauffeuring him into exile.

Before Mauro leaves, however, he takes a photograph with Shlomo, and the voice-over explicitly announces the year again (1970), as does the date the photographer places on Mauro’s shoulder. This return of the temporal reference point, which at the beginning was pronounced “upside down,” brings another Hopi world cycle to its close. This is evidenced by the fact that, though Mauro likely remains a soccer fan, he will not be ruled by it anymore. Before getting in the car with his mother, he gives his soccer ball to Hanna, no longer acknowledging its power over him, temporal or otherwise.

### ***Conclusion***

Most people, when asked to name Robert Zemeckis’s most famous film about time, will mention 1985’s *Back to the Future*. While that film does trace a line between time and coloniality, by way of Doc Brown’s manipulation of Cold War nuclear politics to obtain plutonium for his DeLorean time machine, its central conceit depends on science fiction. The same is true of 1997’s *Contact*, in which telescopes synchronize people and time across the galaxy. *Cast Away*, on the other hand, explores a kind of time travel that is all too real. When Noland makes his escape from his temporal island, as is the case with Áurea and Mauro, a flag

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possibilidades realizadas e significativas que não se completam como sistema. Em outras palavras, o país não coincide consigo mesmo” (240).

indicates when the wind conditions are right to set sail, signaling his reentry into “a world on time.” He returns home at the dawn of a new millennium, like a space traveler coming back from a faster-than-light voyage. While time as “civilization” tracks it has continued, Noland has remained frozen in place, outside its influence for four years.

Áurea experiences the same thing in *Casa de areia*, as seen when she tries to give Luís money that has long since passed out of circulation or when she speaks with Maria about the moon landing. Similarly, at the end of *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*, Mauro leaving the country is merely the spatial dimension catching up to a temporal exile. In their epistemic forays outside of time, Áurea and Mauro present what Homi Bhabha calls “minority discourses that speak betwixt and between times and places” (158). Their decolonial gesture exposes the weaknesses in imperial methods of time-telling. Be they science-based, like Áurea’s, socio-political, like Mauro and the World Cup, or commercial, like FedEx or the PTTC, no system is boundless. In the end, Mauro and Áurea do not need a DeLorean to step out of time because, unlike Noland, time does not rule over them. Instead, by controlling their own narratives, it is they who manage the discourse of time.

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