

## "Só um buraco perdido no oco do mundo". The Affective Subjects of the Wasteland in *Narradores de Javé* (2003)

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In Elianne Caffé's *Narradores de Javé (The Storytellers, 2003)* Antônio Bia, a cast-out fiction writer, fails to write a scientific history of the village of Javé that would, the citizenry hopes, make the small settlement worth of historical significance and allow it to escape it to be sunk by the construction of a dam. The angry inhabitants catch Bia as he tries to escape the community unnoticed in the night after his failure. The mob brings him to the town leaders who want him to explain why a book that should contain the stories of grandeur told by the townsfolk was delivered to them blank. Bia had, however, written a note that attached to the empty book,

Tenho a declarar que eu, Antônio Bia sou gente de cara dente e nariz pra frente, e mais, bunda corcunda e calcanhar pra atrás; me resolveram como escrivão. Estou ausente para manter a mente e o corpo são. Quanto às historias tá es melhor ficar na boca do povo porque no papel não há mão que lhe de razão.<sup>1</sup>

*I must declare that I, Antônio Bia, am a person with teeth in my face and with a nose at the front, and of, curved bottom and with heels in the back; and was chosen to be a scribe. I am absent to maintain my mind and body healthy. Regarding the stories, it is better that they stay in people's mouths because no hand can give reason to them as writing.*

Gathered on a corner, atop the blonde sand of the *sertão*, a yellow light opposite to the camera provides a theatrical stage. A high angle shot of the camera allows the audience to see but shadows. The single light in the back shines sepia on the dirt and outside its light, darkness. The entire town questions and curses the scrivener. After a call-and-response, Bia declares: "Vocês acham que escrever essas histórias vai parar a represa? Não vai não. E sabem porque? Porque Javé é só um buraco perdido no oco do mundo" (*you think that writing those stories is going to stop the dam? It's not going to. You know why? Because Javé is just a hole lost in the emptiness of the world*). Zaqueu, the elder of the town and narrator of the story answers: "Nas suas ideia, Javé pode não valer muito. O caso

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from the film carried out by the author.

é que sem Javé Antônio Bia vale menos ainda" (*in your head, Javé can be worth little to nothing. But the reality is that without Javé, Antônio Bia is worth even less*). In this final confrontation between two of the main characters in the film, the film presents what at first hand may seem competing points of view on the space occupied by the village. For Bia, Javé is worthless to the modern state; for Zaqueu, Javé is what gives each and all of them value, a sense of self. For Bia, Javé is a place forgotten by the state and by modernity where citizenship, a state-managed mode of empowerment and subjectification in subjugation to it is impossible. While, for Zaqueu, an alternative mode of subjectification exists in the affective relationship established to the social/lived space and is subjectification that does not require the state's approval or involvement.

In the following pages, I will explore how these *sertanejo* characters become subjects in a space ignored by the state—a *wasteland*, by analyzing how some the stories told in the film establish affective bonds to the valley and town through the singularities that appear in their stories. First, I expand on the relationship between the village and the state to focus on why the Valley of Javé must be understood as *wasteland*— as a stateless space, subjectification through citizenship, advocating to the state is pointless. In it, the characters appeal to the space of Javé itself through affectively relating themselves to the stories that bind them to the village. As a social space, Javé is both a product of their wild tales and produces them. Most importantly, however, this affective relationship turns upside-down the Brazilian *sertão* as mythical<sup>2</sup>. In other words, the film represents the process through which Javé becomes an anti-*sertão*, not a source for national myths but its inability to provide to the nation and instead act as a personal and everyday space whose stories have no place within the modern nation. Where the large desert space is traditionally the source of the Brazilian national myths, allowing the *sertão* to fulfill its mythical purpose to become the sea exposes that the modernity requires the *sertão* and the villagers of Javé to be disposed by burying them underwater for the achievement of Brazilian modernity (Nagib, 2007).

Writer and director Eliane Caffé, and co-writer Luis Alberto de Abreu approach though a dark satiric comedic tone what would otherwise be both the fulfillment of the myth that proclaims "o sertão vai virar mar e o mar vai virar sertão" as prophesized in Glauber Rocha's *Black God, White Devil* (1964)<sup>3</sup>. Seu Vado, explains during the town

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the myths of the *sertão* as seen in *Cinema Novo*, the revolutionary film period during the 1960's in Brazil, refer to Ismail Xavier's *Alegorias do Desenvolvimento: Cinema Novo, Tropicalismo e Cinema Marginal* (1993), *The New Brazilian Cinema* (2003) Ed. Lucia Nagib and her *Brazil On Screen* (2007), *Popular Cinema in Brazil 1930-2001* (2004) by Stephanie Dennison and Lisa Shaw

<sup>3</sup> Ismail Xavier's exploration of the trope and myth of the *sertão* turning into an ocean in *Sertão Mar: Glauber Rocha e a estética da fome* (1983) is a key analysis of this idea. My goal here is to explore the factors that frame

hall meeting with the help of Zaqueu that the construction of the barrage that will engulf the city: "Vão ter que sacrificar os tantos para beneficiar a maioria. A maioria eu não sei quem são, mais nós é que somos os tantos do sacrifício" (*they are going to sacrifice the few to benefit the majority. I don't know who the majority is, but we are the few of the sacrifice*). In this, Vado recognizes that Javé is a sacrifice to the advancement of modernity, for turning Brazil into a modern nation. Their sacrifice is logicized, as Vado explains that,

os engenheiro abreram os mapa na nossa frente e explicaram tudim nos pormenor. Tudo com os nome, as foto, um tantão delas e explicaram para a gente os ganhos progresso que a usina vai trazer.

*The engineers opened the maps in front of us and explained even the minor details. Everything with its name, with picture, a lot of them and explained to us what will be the benefits for progress that the dam is going to bring.*

By referring to the engineers, Vado alludes to the discourse of progress that is central to both the national myth of progress and to the discourses of modernity. Order and Progress, the phrase at the center of the Brazilian flag points to a nation that wants to be modern. But speaking about this in a generically northeastern and *sertanejo* accent, Vado exposes the contradictions of modernity through dark humor. Vado explains but also mocks the "engenheiro" 'engineer' by denying its "proper" plural but using it in the rest of the phrase. Ignoring the plural can be considered "improper" or "incorrect" speech and an example of Derrida's *Différance* (1967) where meaning is deferred and differed. By slightly changing the word Vado not only transmits the intended meaning (the engineers), but also pokes fun at the fact they function as a mob against the permanence of Javé. This wordplay turns around the entire discourse and the physical objects (maps, names, photos and all the details) into a mockery of the ideal of modernity. By singularizing the nouns "nome," "foto," "por menores," in that same so called "uneducated" way, Vado turns the discourse of modernity on its head. Understanding these linguistic mannerisms positions the characters against the correctness of modernity. This contrast between written and spoken language is how *Narradores* has been previously studied. The title *Narradores de Javé* itself invites this type of analysis and we're constantly guided towards it by Antônio Bia's inability to write down the many stories that are told to him. Caffé and Abreu allow for these

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the hunger and dryness of the *sertão* as it is (re)coded within neoliberal extractivism, privatization and Bauman's concept of design. Because my focus is on how the affective stories of the characters challenge the national framings of this space within a specific form of neoliberalism, the exploration of the allegorical dimension of the *sertão* within the national discourse, although foundational, expands beyond the limits of this article.

verbal pirouettes so masterfully by having Zaqueu also narrate the story also in this accent. Just as the scribe Bia is unable to trust any of his interlocutors, the audience is also allowed to question Zaqueu as a narrator. The interplay of oral language versus written word is, thus, central to characterizing the townspeople as challenging the laws of modernity. Antônio Bia, for example, writes that it is better for the villager's stories "ficar na boca do povo porque no papel não há mão que lhe de razão" (*to stay in the mouth of the people because there is no hand that can have them make sense on paper*). There is certainly no modern logic that can be given to their stories but, as we will explore ahead, these stories live as fictions that challenge the national discourse around the Brazilian *sertão* in a particular manner.

This impulse against the discourses of modernity and progress that permeates the film has been correctly read by many academics (Oliveira and Zanforlin n.d.; Cardoso 2008; Azevedo 2007). For example, analyzing the presence of non-actors, which, along with recognized Brazilian actors improvised many of the scenes, Carolina Asunção Alves notices that this open structure permitted Maria Dalva Ladeira to take the place of a previously written character "Alípo" in the character of Dona Maria (Assunção e Alves 2006, 67). Such open production allows for more representative and natural performances. Similarly, Luciana Amormino exposes the connections between narration, memory and the construction of selfhood, as does Paulo Sérgio Moreira da Silva who focuses on the dialectic treatment of lived and told lives (Amormino 2008; Da Silva 2009). Carlos Kleber Saraiva de Sousa and Valdênia Ma. L.L.Saraiva, however, analyze Antônio Bia as an ethnographer who is challenged by the very narration, memory and fiction of orality that that the inhabitants of Javé hope will save them. Overall, the story seems to challenge scientism and notions of historicity in the permitted discourse of modernity (Sousa and Saraiva n.d.). But modernity seems impossible for the character, as Norma Côrtes exposes noting that the historic narrative in the film depends on personal histories (Côrtes 2010). Marcelino Rodrigues da Silva focuses on the social construction of memory, while Josilene Batista da Silva, Evanete Lima, and Rita de Cássia M. Diogo attack the central tenants of the film in an article about the oral tradition and modernity in Brazilian culture (Batista da Silva, Lima, and de Cássia M. Diogo 2004; Da Silva 2009). It is important to highlight that all these articles drive their arguments home by pointing out Brazil's impulse towards modernity. However, most of these articles do not engage thoroughly with the Brazilian *sertão*, the dry backlands, as a site for the creation of the Brazilian national imaginary. As a further exploration in this line of inquiry I question the terms of inclusion in modernity; more specifically, how the characters question the spatial construct or the cartographies of modern knowledge and how the achievement of Brazilian modernity depends on disposing of these people and their space. In more other terms, previous articles conclude that this film provides us with characters that

are not modern but leave untouched the geographic expressions of non-modernity. The film incites an exploration of how the characters, their town and their stories as empowerment through both narration and other filmic discourses that point out social geographies as processes of subjectification, even if both the space and the characters are outside the confines of what is modern and denied a space within the national narrative. *Narradores de Javé* problematizes what it means to speak outside the parameters of accepted scientific value as it exposes neoliberal extractivism, the nation's processes of expulsion and the subject-object relationship as capitalist. Furthermore, it questions the relationship between the state and the inhabitants, their town, and nature in the Valley of Javé as spatial social interactions mediated through processes of wasting. Here, in the intersection of citizenship as subjectification to the power of the state, space as the geography of nation and the fulfillment of the myth of Brazilian modernity the film achieves mythical goal of turning the *sertão* into a sea.

To think of dams and massive public works in Brazil, is to think of two periods of massive increase in public works: first, the *Estado Novo* period during which Juscelino Kubitzchek's *Plano de Metas* proposed the growth of fifty years in five. Second, the more recent neoliberal period that expanded the role of international actors within Brazilian state property during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's presidency. As an example, we can look at the *Companhia do Vale do Rio Doce* (Vale for short). These two periods coincide with differing dogmas of the state and its relationship to "the people" and the story of the parallels the history of Vale. Created in 1942 by law of, then president, Getulio Vargas, the company is part owner of the now broken Fundão barrage in the Bento Rodrigues district, municipality of Mariana, state of Minas Gerais ("Criação Da Companhia Vale Do Rio Doce | CPDOC" n.d.). Built in 2008 by the company, the Fundão dam broke in 2015 to contaminate the entire Doce River with the waste of a large iron ore mine. The dam was directly owned by Samarco, of which the main holder is Vale. Although it was created in 1942, in 1997 it was included in president Fernando Henrique Cardoso's *Programa Nacional de Desestatização* (PND) or National Program for Destatalization originally established in 1990 by Law 8.031, a massive privatization scheme through Article 26 of Law 9.491 of 1997. This real-life tragedy, one of the worst environmental tragedies in the history of Brazil, is rooted in the same logic of developmentalism present in the construction of the dam in the valley of Javé in the film: The sacrifice of some for the modernization and capitalist gain of a few. In this real life case, however, the sacrifices are real ("Acidente Em Mariana É O Maior Da História Com Barragens de Rejeitos" 2015; Garcia et al. 2017). Much like those affected by the overflow of the Fundão dam, the inhabitants of Javé valley are *unintended* casualties that must be sacrificed in service of modernity.

In *Wasted Lives* (2007) Zygmunt Bauman, recalls an instance when Michelangelo synthesized the precept of modern creation as "separation [from] and destruction of waste" (Bauman 2003, 21). This view on sculptural artistry is rooted in modernity and as Bauman notes: "It is human design that conjures up disorder *together with* the vision of order, dirt together with the project of purity" (Bauman 2003, 19). Much like manufacturing and mining focuses on the removal of impurities from desired materials, to be truly modern is to be truly clean. Cleanliness and purity, Mary Douglass points out in her *Purity and Danger* (1966), is to remove excess and this is essential to a completeness that subjectifies within modernity. This is why Douglass notes that "holiness is exemplified by completeness," a completeness to oneself, a completeness of the state without waste or excess (Douglas 2002, 54). Completeness and self-sufficiency through disposing of waste, dirt and anything undesirable are guiding factors that apply to modern society as it is designed. To create Brazilian order and progress, as predicated on the Brazilian flag, these processes of disposing must be enacted. Bauman summarizes it neatly when saying that "waste is the wrapping that conceals that [modern] form" (Bauman 2003, 21). By seeing dams as objects designed through the logic of modernity, the lives to-be-lost, the inhabited spaces and the livelihoods that must be ended are but an afterthought. They are axiomatically marked as waste and as a sacrifice to the modern ideal. In the case of the Fundão Dam, building it needed the demarcation of the areas surrounding the Doce River as disposable. As the river and its banks became overflowed with deject, it became un-inhabitable land – a wasteland. Its moment of "becoming waste" was pending since the construction of the dam. Just like the municipality of Mariana, Javé, more than geographic space is a location where sacrifice, modernity, and undesired byproducts intersect. The intent to build a barrage near the Doce River and the dam in the fictitious Javé require enacting the terminology of modernity that will eventually frame certain spaces as wasted. In other words, "for something to be created, something else must be consigned to waste," and in this case, the something created is modern Brazil and the something discarded is a town, a people (Bauman 2003, 21).

The word *wasteland* recalls a dry, often-forgotten, lost place as the images of T.S. Eliot's famous text or the Mad Max film series but the term arises from the Latin term *vastus* which described a large space of nothing. In terms of Bauman's concept of design, it is a space to be designed, to be modernized. This is what Saskia Sassen traces in her book *Expulsions* (2014), noting that the implementation of modernization agendas in Developing States since the 1980s coincides with the arrival of neoliberal and extractive policies that have prompted accelerated migrations as dejections or expulsions from the state. As Sassen notes, neoliberalism accelerates the processes of throwing away or dejecting by privatizing; that is, by refusing to engage its citizens and setting the privatized entity as buffer under the disguise of freedom, the state is

effectively creating migrants. Migration as displacement discursively constructs these people as waste and the spaces they transit and where they exist as wastelands. Thus, by designing the geography of the state, modernity effectively delineates the spaces to be discarded as wastelands.

Since modernity and its cleansing assumes that the undesirable is casted aside, it is of no coincidence that the savior of Javé, Antônio Bia, is a cast-off. As this valley is coded as a necessary sacrifice, a blemish to be cleaned, discard awaiting its disposal, it is him— the one living as detritus— who best knows how to survive as waste. Bia, one of the few adults in Javé who knew how to write, was in charge of the post office in town. But in a town where no one knows how to write, there is not need for a post office. Seeing his job in checkmate, Bia began writing the stories of the town to people he knew and sending letters. Mail traffic increased and Bia kept his job. That is, until the villagers found out and cast him out of the town, "para nunca mais voltar. Antônio Bia ficou morando só retirando nas redondeza" (*to never return. Antônio Bia ended up living by himself in the periphery*) as Zaqueu narrates. When the village recurs to him to write the grand story of the Valley of Javé, they find him in his modest home. A crumbling structure, Bia's shack tells of his personal characteristics— dirty plates, and empty bottle of homemade alcohol and the buzzing of flies. The villagers open the door as a dirty Bia makes sausage by filling tripe with meat through a funnel cut from a two-liter soda bottle. Pigs roam in Bia's patio. Characterizing Bia as living discarded from society, in the periphery of the city points out geographic displacement. Living in such abjection means to live as discard, as waste, as trash, thrown out of the spaces of power.

Just as they once threw out Antônio Bia, the construction of the dam in Javé is throwing them out of the valley of Javé. The inhabitants recognize this. In the initial town hall meeting, Zaqueu explains that Javé can be saved if it becomes a heritage site. Seu Firmino in a defeated and sarcastic tone remarks: "Ih! Pois então danou-se. Esse lugar vai não vale o que o gato enterra" (*Oh! Well that was that. This place is not worth what the cat buries*). Vado immediately responds: "O que o gato enterra tem na sua cabeça!" (*What the cat buries is inside your head*). This comedic response, however, gets to the center of the problem. Value is a cultural construct. That is, modernity and capital create the difference between product (the iron ore, for example) and byproduct (contaminants that destroyed the Fundão dam) through cultural discourses. Edward Soja, in tandem, notes that space is also socially constructed (Soja 1996). That is, there are instances where certain spaces are produced because of cultural construction of value. And the value of the Valley of Javé is zero. Since its beginnings the construction of Javé speaks to this space as somewhere between desired/produced spaces and byproduct/object/waste spaces. This is most clearly associated with the larger theme

of narration when the concept of the "sung partitions" or *divisas cantadas*, a completely anti-modern way to relate to the physical space of Javé that is central to the cultural construction of Javé as part of Brazil. Zaqueu, as the narrator, explains, one would "sing," or "yell" the limits of one's lands. When one of the characters interrupts him to say he'd be rich if he could sing any property, he explains the caveat that "lá não agi moderna não, cada um só cantava a porção que conseguia cultivar" (*back there it isn't modern like that, each only claimed the land that they could cultivate*). *Divisas Cantadas*, he notes are not part of the modern way of thinking and points to the conflict that drives the plot: modernity versus the non-modern. Javé is constructed as a non-modern space by the same discourse that makes it a wasted space and its inhabitants wasted people. The villagers of Javé will be split from their histories, their spaces. Because this happens in exchange for a dam, the film exposes that "separation and destruction of waste was the trade secret of modern creation" (Bauman 2003, 21). In explaining the dismissal of Javé as a sacrifice to progress, the narrative reveals that Javé is a *vastus* a space of nothing, and that the neoliberal state will reconfigure such a space to frame itself as modern.

As the community of Javé gathers in the church to decide their course of action regarding the Brazilian State's plans to build a dam and drown the town, a disinterested character, Firmino, notes that Javé is worth nothing. Zaqueu and Vado, Zaqueu's right-hand man, counter such a notion by speaking of the great warriors and their stories of the history of Javé. In order to create a narrative that challenges the state's devaluing of the town, the villagers propose to tell these stories as part of the Brazilian foundational myths. They deconstruct and rebuild Javé as each tells their own story to Antônio Bia. Once given his assignment, Bia dresses and cleans himself, and visits the first narrator: Seu Vicentino, played by the actor Nelson Dantas. They enter a dining room, filled with boxes and old things. An old radio, a metal box, shelves and bookshelves filled with useless objects, antiquities. In this setting and their unkempt condition, they reflect the old ruined state of the house and its inhabitants. Seu Vicentino stands up and pulls out a gun from an old box, leaving an image of São Jorge a dragon-slaying, horse-riding saint of the catholic tradition standing up. "Já me ofereceram muito dinheiro por essa Garrucha," (*they've already offered me a lot of money for this gun*) Seu Vicentino exclaims, waving around the weapon. "Mas eu não troco por dinheiro nenhum nem por um favor," (*but I would not change it for a thing*) he adds as he continues to tell the story of Indalecio—the mythical father and founder of Javé. "Indalecio era um homem seco, duro, sistemático. Era um homem que nunca dizia sim quando queria dizer não..." (*Indalecio was a dry, hard and systematic man. He was a man that never said yes when he wanted to say no...*) he continues. Transported by his memory, Nelson Dantas as a fictional Indalecio dons the clothes of an old chief-of-war. Although without Sancho Panza to his side, Indalecio looks like a long lost relative of Don

Quixote as he rides a horse on the green grass of the characteristically eroded peaks of the Chapada Diamantina national park..

Seu Vicentino reveals details about the foundation of Javé. First, the people whom Indalecio lead had recently lost a war. Second, they moved because the King of Portugal wanted the gold of the lands in which they lived. And most importantly, as Indalecio looked for a place to settle, "ele queria ir mais longe, distante de braço de governo ou de rei. Andaram dias, meses mesmo" (*he wanted to go further away, distant from the handles of government or of king*). Javé is willfully distant from the government. It is far and distant from government and its gold-thirsty capitalist modernity. In *Disposable People* (1999), Kevin Bales calls this situation the "Wild West syndrome". Although Bales focuses around the sites where a new slavery arises, he notes that these spaces are transition zones— places where the government does not enforce its "monopoly over violence" observed in "civilized spaces" (Bales 1999, 29–31). He notes that this syndrome often arises in the frontier areas of Brazil, where local peoples cannot defend themselves and the state does not intervene. In these spaces the state is essentially absent— another quality of the *vastus*, a wasteland, there is no state monopoly over violence. This is visible when outsiders appear in Javé. A group of engineers show up one day accompanied by Seu Gavildo, a character who can only be described as a mercenary. These supposed emissaries of progress are but thugs. They are not direct agents of the state, but they enforce its will. They are privatized enactors of modernity. The initial disinterest on Javé by the state and the interest of privatized entities is in-tune with the 1990s' neo-liberalism. In neoliberalism, Paul Amar observes, the state transforms into a violence-enforcing machine and follows the human-security model (Amar 44-47). In such a model, some stories are silenced while the state brands itself as opening to others, thus the "sacrifice of some, for the benefit of others" becomes an accepted logic. The state's absence in Javé is clear, as there is not even a post-office in the town (it was closed after Bia's made-up letters stopped). Javé is essentially inexistent in the national geography as there is no state investment on it. The absence of the state is actually, the reason for the founding of Javé as Seu Vicentino notes that the King displaced them from their old home. The previously desired distance from power now dooms the people of Javé as the state extends its reach.

The Valley of Javé in the Brazilian *sertão* is a wasteland in the original meaning of *vastus* as an un-used space where the state enters to institute modernity and destroy Javé. But the grand dessert of Brazil was not always the site for the expansion of the modern state. Nísia Trindade Lima, points out that at the time of the first republic while the Brazilian coast, or *litoral*, was thought as embassy to European culture and people; the *sertão* was inhabited by *fronteiros*. These *sertanejos* were a people known as rough and retrograde but real people of the land, people of the new republic. In this

film, however, the characters point that the desert land of the *sertão* as a land without value. In her study, Lima highlights how from José de Alencar's *O Sertanejo* (1952), to Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões* (1902) this desert-space in northeastern Brazil was initially configured as lawless, abandoned but also anti-modern and against civilization. With the foundation of the first republic in 1889 the *litoral's* European symbolism came to be seen as unauthentic, foreign and the process of nation building found in the *sertão*, the antithesis of the *litoral*, the perfect response. Such an idea continued unto the period of the strong-state Estado Novo as the *sertão* continued to provide the symbolic imaginary place where discourses of authentic nationality were built. The reason this was possible, Lima acknowledges, is because of its ambiguous cartography. The imaginary geography of the *sertão* allows it to "estar em todo lugar em que se anuncie o desconhecido, o espaço social a conquistar" (*to be in every place where the unknown or the social space to be conquered is announced*) (Lima 1999, 44). This is precisely what permitted the space of the *sertão* to receive and embody the utopic nationalist ideas that Lucia Nagib also explores (Nagib 2007, 40–49).

*Narradores de Javé*, however, challenges these perspectives as it announces a change in the state's relationship with its large desert. In other words, the neoliberal state recreates the Wild West– a place where all must fend for themselves. Most characters seem to be aware of this. At different times, the outsider Seu Gavildo, Antônio Bia, and even Firmino seem keenly aware of the impending flooding of Javé– with or without the stories Bia is writing. This change in the national perception of the *sertão* is a trend that Ivana Bentes also notices. As she points out, from the 1960s to the 2000's the symbolic site of Braziliannes changed from the *sertão* to the Favela. Whether one agrees or disagrees with her conclusion with regards to her aesthetic judgment, she masterfully notes that "Dando um salto abrupto de 1964 para 2001, encontramos o sertão e a favela inseridos em um outro contexto e imaginário" (*making an abrupt jump from 1964 to 2001, we find the 'sertão' and the 'favela' inserted in different contexts and imaginaries*) (Bentes 2007, 244). Bentes situates the *sertão* in the past by pointing out that the desert of the northeast is a mental museum or a source for 'recovering' a Brazilian history. Since the article follows cinematic production from the desert to the city and into the favela, it shows that the present of the *sertão* is non-existent. It is only a historical place. That is, the *sertão* of the past is the utopia to which the first neoliberal cinema of Brazil returned– the 1990's *Cinema da Retomada* but its present is not a matter of national importance.

There are, however, films that return to the *sertão* to tell its present day stories and question how the its vast emptiness is perceived. Jens Andermann notes that Eduardo Coutinho's *Cabra Marcado para Morrer* (1984) is the forerunner of these films but he focuses on Karim Ainouz and Marcelo Gomes's *Viajo porque preciso, volto porque*

*te amo* (*I Travel Because I Have To, I Return Because I Love You*, 2009), and Andrea Tonacci's *Serras da Desordem* (*The Hills of Disorder*, 2006) to understand the aesthetic and spatial practices they mobilize to return, explore, and expose the *dessertão* as a landscape (Andermann 2014). This comeback, Andermann proposes is an attempt to explore the borders of their own world and the world at large as a way to urge the viewer to engage with space critically. Isis Sadek, too, returns us to the same space in her analysis of Andrucha Waddington's *Eu tu eles* (*Me you them*, 2000) and Karim Aïnouz' *O Céu de Suely* (translated as both *Suely in the Sky* and *Love for Sale*, 2007). In both films, she argues, a feminization of the space embeds them with affective energy that runs away from the stereotypical *sertão* of the national imaginary again as a criticism of the nation (Sadek 2011). *Narradores* goes in this same direction, by presenting us with objects imbued with affect and history these allow the characters to build a sense of community that makes them feel part of something simultaneously outside the state and larger than themselves, affectively empowering them. As Andermann and Sadek both point out in their chosen films, *Narradores* also paints the *sertão* as a dead land, what I have called a wasteland although not in the same contemplative method they suggest. There is only light engagement of the film with its landscape but there is a clear affective connection with the objects and the evicted villagers. The *sertão* in *Narradores*, thus, more closely approaches Sadek's notion of an affectively charged space. In representing the great dessert as a barren and affective land, *Narradores de Javé* challenges the utopic stereotype that has been characteristic of nationalist discourses and forces the audience to see the villagers with empathy.

Unlike the films previously described by Andermann and Sadek, the film in question is not a landscape film that can mobilize the gaze of the audience. Yet, in socially constructing the space through the character's speeches, it still is a film about space that mobilizes affectivity for Javé, its inhabitants and the *sertão* at large. The very waste in which they inhabit and the wasting into which they are unknowingly cast, provides a doorway to enact narration and attain subjectification. The scholars I have, so far, mentioned who engage *Narradores*: Armorim, Assunção da Silva, Côrtes, Da Silva and De Sousa and Saravia have addressed narration as the source and realization of the film's empowering anti-modern discourse. However, as I note ahead because these discourses always deal with space and self, they delineate a spatial path and object-directed method to become subject. Every time a character narrates a story that connects them to Javé, they first point to an object imbued with affect: a pencil, a gun, a birthmark, a picture, a map, another picture, and a shamanistic/spiritual vision. This is precisely where the film form shows its malleability as the social construction of the *sertanejo* environment unfolds through the visualization of the stories being told. In other words, these objects imply stories that produce an affective bond that ties the characters to the place by constructing a narrative about Javé that is personal and

affective. These objects point to narratives that are fluid, ever changing, always becoming<sup>4</sup> and that provide the characters a name, a history, a way to subjectify. These "things" and their accompanying stories point to an "actual instance of affective and material emergence" as Kathleen Stewart defines a *singularity* (Stewart 2007, 96). While Stewart derives the term from Deleuze and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus* (1987), these two note that an assemblage is a "constellation of singularities" and constellations may, in turn, "group themselves into extremely vast constellations constituting 'cultures,' or even 'ages'; within these constellations" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 406). That is, these objects are physical entrances to the affective world that creates the local culture that the film represents. When the characters narrate they are mobilizing an oral culture, a symbolic space and a sense of community built around the shared stories and space as the means to empowerment.

The first such object introduced as a singularity is a pencil. When Antônio Bia interviews Seu Vicentino, Bia takes out his pencil and sharpens it slowly, one turn at a time. Seu Vicentino looks at him in silence. Bia explains that the pencil is his preferred way of writing,

Eu não uso caneta. Eu não me acostumo. Eu não sei se Seu já viu que a caneta ela corre no papel sem freio. Então se a gente erra e quer arrumar, ai emborça ele tudo. Fica aquela disenteria de tinta. Não é. Agora, o lápis não. Ele agarra o papel. Ele aceita a borracha. Ele obedece a mão e ao pensamento da gente. Aliás, eu sou um homem que só consegue pensar lápis Seu Vicentino.

*I do not use pens. I cannot get used to them. I do not know if you have seen that the pen slides over the paper without breaks. So if one makes a mistake and wants to fix it, it is all ruined. It ends in a dysentery of ink. Does it not? Now, the pencil does not. He holds unto the paper. He accepts the eraser. He obeys the hand and the thoughts of the writer. Moreover, I am a man who can only think in pencil Seu Vicentino.*

The pencil is precisely the object that weaves Antônio Bia into the story of Javé. It was through the writing utensil that Bia wrote the letters that eventually got him thrown out of the town. In fact, as a still-silent Vicentino stands up and pulls his piece of history—Indalecio's gun, Bia explains himself: "Ô Seu Vicentino se por acaso escrevi naquelas cartas alguma coisa que lhe aborreceu, o senhor, o senhor fale" (*Oh Seu Vicentino if, by any chance I wrote in those old letter something that you disliked, please tell me*). With Seu Vicentino, Bia expects that those letters he wrote before define their

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<sup>4</sup> See Connolly, W. (2011). *A World of Becoming*. 1st ed. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

relationship. When Bia approaches other characters like Vado and Deodora the letters do in fact define their relationships. One could say that Bia is written into the story of Javé because of the pencil. Bia's current job as scribe of the town's (lack of) grandiose history is the epitome of this. Directly related to his having written the letters he once wrote, it also writes the future of Javé. The pencil then, speaks of Bia's relationship with Javé in the past, in the present as he writes (or does not) the stories being told to him, and in the future (as he begins writing the history of what we can imagine is a New Javé).

Seu Vicentino's object, as mentioned before, is the pistol that he says belonged to Indalecio, the founder of Javé. The Garrucha, a single shot pistol fabricated in southern Brazil, is a reminder of the *Cangaço*, the banditry of the first half of the twentieth century that was predominant in the area. The old man goes on to tell that Indalecio fed the villagers of Javé as they find a herd of cows roaming the land. He approached a cow and shot it. The hungry villagers finally ate after weeks of roaming and looking for the right place. Vicentino doesn't say a word to Bia until the Garrucha is in his hand. Only with the Garrucha in his hands, only while holding it, not like a weapon but cradling it in his hands like a child, Vicentino becomes Indalecio. With the pistol in his hand, Seu Vicentino's image is transported to the past, on top of a horse, looking like Don Quixote and aimlessly circling the hills of Chapada Diamantina, the national park that still holds some of the nearly disappeared flora of the *Mata Atlântica* that used to cover the *litoral*, or seaside in the time of the colony. The gun, Vicentino expects, carries the soul of Indalecio. Bia asks the old man his full name to end the interview. "Vicentino Indalecio da Rocha," he answers. They exchange looks, as if knowing that Indalecio is not his name. But he owns the weapon that once belonged to the founder of the town, and as such, he becomes part of the town and its history.

In the same fashion when the Bia approaches Deodora, she shows him a birthmark on her chest. The birthmark, she insists is a reminder that she is a descendant of the valiant Mariadina, the wife of Indalecio and the true valiant leader of the people of Javé. Deodora herself appears as Mariadina as she visualizes her story much like Vicentino imagines himself to be Indalecio. When Bia visits the twins, who fight over ownership of the land where Indalesio is buried, they show him a map and a picture of their mother with their fathers. When Bia visits Daniel, the stereotypical valiant macho of the *sertão*, he also shows Bia a gun and remembers his childhood and seeing his father die. These four stories center around material reminders or points of entry that allow each character to socially construct the Valley of Javé. When Firmino interrupts Deodora to tell his own version of why Indalecio died, all the villagers already know the stories of the twins and of Daniel. Even Daniel tells his story, Deodora interjects the end of the story "morreu desvairado pelo amor de Santinha" (*he*

died in a frenzy over Santinha's love), as if everyone shared in the stories and in the making of such the space.

The last person Bia visits is Pai Cariá. This old black spiritual and community leader sings in what seems to be an Afro-descendant dialect while Samuel translates. Sitting in a circle, Bia, Samuel and other members of the black community, distant from the rest of the town, listen to Pai Cariá's singing and story telling. Bia interrupts constantly, at one point asking his translator just for the facts, at another asking specific questions, but always mocking Cariá's language and singing. Pai Cariá, however, is always looking in the distance only looking to Samuel to bump him with an *aluquere* a religious object made out of horse mane attached to a stick, held together by a copper piece. "Indaleu" the tired old man corrects Samuel. Indaleu brought them to this part of Africa. When Samuel explains to Bia that Pai Cariá considers Brasil a part of Africa, an estranged Antônio Bia exclaims "dessas geografias a gente fala depois" (*about those geographies, we can talk about later*). Finally, Bia is confronted with a cartography that distances from his own notions of space, and a form of narration that challenges his notions of narrative. He dismisses both.

It is important that this is Bia's first reaction to Pai Cariá's contribution to the social construct of Javé. Bia discards the non-Euro-centric notion that 'Brazil is a big village within Africa.' Just as these Afro-Brazilians live in what could be considered a *quilombo*,<sup>5</sup> outside the town of Javé, they are even more vulnerable than the other already vulnerable villagers. Still, Cariá speaks of Indaleu and of Oxum, the goddess of fresh waters as they both led the run-away peoples into Javé. In this retelling of the story, neither Samuel nor Cariá appear reincarnated in the imaginary re-enactment of the story being told. Unlike the other villagers who transport themselves to these cinematic flashbacks, Pai Cariá's voice becomes louder as drums hit harder and faster and the audience is transported not as a standard narrative, in fact, his voice completely disappears as the sound of drums takes over and eventually other voices sing. In this approach to the Afro-Brazilian tradition, the audience is transported through the state of trance of the elder Shaman. When the characters of the story arrive at what would be Javé 'the place were Oxum lived', the oracular storyteller falls in complete trance. Samuel tries to sing to him and the old man frowns. "El vai passar três dias assim, ô, calado" (*he is going to spend three days like that, look, silent*), Samuel explains. Pai Cariá is unique in his approach to the affective construction of self in the space of Jave, when compared to the other villagers. A *quilombo*, afterall, has a different spatial story and a different tradition than the forgotten town. Even if they share similar goals of running away from the chastising power of the state, the history of

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<sup>5</sup> A community founded by free and runaway, maroon slaves.

black and white spaces in Brazil is different. In this case, the story does not become one with Pai Cariá but it becomes ingrained and woven into an entire tradition of *quilombola* and Afro-diasporic experiences and religious practices.

From the pencil of the main character of the story, to the entire tradition of African-diaspora cultural practices, each time a story about the Valley of Javé is told it becomes imbricated with the characters telling it. By establishing their own affective connections to the town and the valley they inhabit they speak for themselves and as the group of engineers get to the town, the people of Javé speak their mind into their cameras. But in the inhabitants of the wasteland are have already been rejected from the project of modernity and nation by not allowing them citizenship. In fact, the speech act, the discursive creation of the town cements them but also allows them to take the memories and enact the same methods to recreate themselves elsewhere. Precisely, this is why there is one main object that we've omitted through our text so far: the bell of the town. When the bell rings, everyone comes together. This bell is the singularity that formed and has accompanied Javé. The bell is in Seu Vicentino's, Deodora's, and eve in Firmino's version of Deodora's story. Although its missing in the more personal stories of Daniel, the twins, Gêmeo and Outro, and in Pai Cariá's, when the homeless nearly lunatic Cirilo plays the bell, the entire town gathers around him and listens to what he has to say.

"E um dia elas vieram" (*and one day they arrived*). The waters, slowly but surely sank the town. And with the last members of the town gathered, the audience is finally given time to focus on the landscape. The camera stops temporarily as the water moves in. The flat brown plains, threes cross the new lake and the water. The only thing that creeps higher than the water was the top of the white church building and the belfry; the bell already packed atop Zaqueu's car. As the villagers look in tears to the two protruding leftovers of the town, Antônio Bia walks slowly, his bag to his side and his semblance downtrodden. He grabs the bag and walks into the recently formed lake. He clutches the bag and cries. The leftover villagers finish safeguarding the bell on top of the car and Bia recognizes that this is the beginning of a new Javé. The singularities they had held unto; the space they had cherished; and most of the people they had known were now gone; yet, they were there, together. They had been cast out of their place by the state, by powers bigger than them. As he looks over, sitting on a wooden boat at the side of the lake, Antônio Bia opens the book again and begins to write. Vado tells him its pointless, but Bia only explains that they are part of old Javé. In this new part, there are still many things to come.

Zaqueu on top of his old blue car as if guiding an old caravan rides with the large bell. A procession behind him, carries sticks, bags, and walks under umbrellas.

At the end, Antônio Bia is surrounded by Vado, Firmino, Deodora, dona Maria, and a few other villagers. Finding no reason to appeal to the grand stories or the old Brazilian myths of the *sertão*, Bia is now writing the new story of Javé— a story of its people, small, everyday, a folksy bunch that fights constantly. "Everyday life is a life lived on the level of surging affects, impacts suffered or barely avoided" reminds us Stewart (Stewart 2007, 6). This affectively charged, busy and tiring life "takes everything we have. But it also spawns a series of little somethings dreamed up in the course of things" (Stewart 2007, 6). It is these little somethings that the bell symbolizes for the entire town but that we find in every object through which a story is told that maintains our characters moving forward. It is true that the situation in which they exist is troubling and exhausting, and as some would say, neoliberal modern society is one of constant crises. As Javé faces its destruction, its complete devaluation in a society where even leisure has to provide a measurable outcome and undesired outcomes and waste are a shameful secret. Still, our characters survive and continue their lives, telling their stories much as Zaqueu tells the story of Javé to the people now gathered at a small, dusty store next to the stop of a ferry in the middle of Brazil.

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