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Argentine Cinema and Immigrant Filmmakers: The Use of Subversion in Mario Soffici's *Viento Norte*

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Abstract

Even from the world of film's early inception, themes of country, nation, and national identity appeared in Argentine movies shown in elite theaters and impoverished barrios. One of the first films in Argentina, *La Bandera argentina* (1897), for example, by the French-Argentine director Eugene Py, showcased images of the Argentine flag as well as scenes from the city center, Buenos Aires. Although the cinematography was rather simplistic, at the same time, this film explored the country, setting the stage for future filmmakers to do the same. While films like Py's provided an accessible entry point into Argentine life and cultural identity, outside of the movie houses, not all citizens felt welcomed.

The 1930s, known as the Infamous Decade, because of José Félix Uriburu and Agustín Justo's military regimes, affected film content while placing minority filmmakers in precarious positions offscreen. The preoccupations of working class and minority audiences guided which movies they watched, at the same time, the conservative governments attempted to censor what they considered to be "lowbrow" culture. This content, like the tango and melodramas, drew immigrants and the working class to movie theaters. To combat the difficulties posed by politicians like Uriburu and Justo during the Infamous

Decade, Soffici turned to mainstream genres, such as the gauchesque. His film, *Viento norte* (1937), a gauchesque loosely based on Lucio Mansilla's *Una Excursión a los indios ranqueles* (1870), was one of his most successful productions. In *Viento norte*, Soffici uses Mansilla's gauchesque narrative to reach both mainstream and marginalized audiences.

Although scholars have looked at Soffici's later films or casually mentioned his early movies in brief analyses, to date, Soffici's *Viento norte* has remained largely ignored. *Viento norte* holds an important position in film history because of Soffici's subversion of the gauchesque, a genre associated with nationalism and national identity formation in the twentieth century. In addition to this, analyzing Soffici's contribution to film in this era helps further illuminate the difficulties that immigrant filmmakers faced during the Infamous Decade.

Keywords: Latin American film, Infamous Decade, Mario Soffici, Viento norte

Arjantin Sineması ve Göçmen Yönetmenler:

Mario Soffici'nin *Viento Norte*'sinde Geleneği Yıkma

Öz

Arjantin'de film türünün ortaya çıkan ilk örneklerinden bu yana, elit tiyatrolarda ve yoksul mahallelerde gösterilen filmlerde ülke, ulus ve ulusal kimlik temalarına rastlanır. Ülkede çekilen ilk filmlerden biri olan Fransız-Arjantinli yönetmen Eugene Py'nin *La Bandera argentina* (1897) filmi, Buenos Aires şehir merkezinden görüntülerin yanı sıra Arjantin bayrağına da yer verir. Film basit bir sinematografi sunmasına rağmen, geleceğin yönetmenlerine yol gösterecek şekilde ülkeyi tanıtır. Py'nin filmi gibi filmler izleyiciye Arjantin'de hayat ve kültürel kimlik konularında bir pencere açmış olsa da, ülkede göçmenler her zaman iyi karşılanmamıştır.

José Félix Uriburu ve Agustín Justo'nun askeri rejimleri yüzünden "Kötü Şöhretli On Yıl" olarak bilinen 1930larda azınlık gruplardan çıkan yönetmenler sahneden uzak, güvencesiz pozisyonlara yerleştiri-

lirken, durumdan film içerikleri de etkilendi. İşçi sınıfından ve azınlık gruplardan seyircilerin film tercihlerini endişeleri belirlerken, muhafazakar hükümetler "sığ sanat" olarak nitelendirdikleri kültürü sansürleme çabasındaydı. Bu içerik, tango ve melodramlar gibi, göçmenleri ve işçi sınıfı sinema salonlarına çekiyordu. Mario Soffici, "Kötü Şöhretli On Yıl"da Uriburu ve Justo gibi politikacıların dayattıkları zorluklarla mücadele edebilmek adına, gauchesque gibi anaakım türlere yöneldi. Kısmen Lucio Mansilla'nın *Una Excursión a los indios ranqueles* (1870) eserine dayanan 1937 filmi *Viento norte,* Soffici'nin en başarılı filmlerinden biri oldu. Bu eserinde Mansilla'nın gauchesque anlatısını anaakım ve dışlanmış seyircilere ulaşmak için kullandı.

Bugüne kadar araştırmacılar Soffici'nin erken dönem filmlerini kısa analizler üzerinden gelişigüzel bir şekilde ele almışlardır ve *Viento norte* büyük oranda göz ardı edilmiştir. *Viento norte*'nin film tarihinde önemli bir yere sahip olmasının sebebi, yirminci yüzyılda milliyetçilik ve ulusal kimlik oluşumu ile ilişkilendirilen gauchesque geleneğini yıkması ve onu kendi amaçları doğrultusunda kullanmasıdır. Soffici'nin, yaşadığı dönemin film anlayışına katkısını incelemek göçmen yönetmenlerin "Kötü Şöhretli On Yıl" süresince yaşadıkları zorluklara ışık tutması açısından da faydalı olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Latin Amerikalı filmi, Kötü Şöhretli On Yıl, Mario Soffici, *Viento norte*

Even from the world of film's early inception, themes of country, nation, and national identity appeared in Argentine movies shown in elite theaters and impoverished barrios. One of the first films in Argentina, *La Bandera argentina* (1897), for example, by the French-Argentine director Eugene Py, showcased images of the Argentine flag as well as scenes from the city center, Buenos Aires. Although the cinematography was rather simplistic, at the same time, this film explored the country, setting the stage for future filmmakers to do the same. While films like Py's provided an accessible entry point into Argentine life and cultural identity, outside of the movie houses, not all citizens felt welcomed. When immigration numbers were high, immigrants, in particular, often received the blame for unwanted changes in city centers, an increase in worker strikes, and changing demographics. In the early twentieth century, for example, the number of immigrants enter-

ing Argentina was 37,000 to 45,000 (Solberg 85). By 1910, they rose to 208,870 (85). An increase in immigration numbers led to increased anti-immigrant sentiment, particularly in the form of exclusionary laws, such as the Social Defense Law of 1910. Despite their precarious social and political positions dating back to the 1910s, many of Argentina's early filmmakers, such as Py, Mario Gallo, Max Glucksmann, and later, in the 1930s, Mario Soffici, were immigrants. These filmmakers helped launch truly national productions that became a part of film historiography in Argentina.

The history of nationalism in 1930s Argentine cinema is complicated, to say the least. Despite nationalist tendencies in the early decades of film, the country's government rarely intervened to help bolster national productions or limit Hollywood's domination of film distribution in Argentina, that is, until the 1930s. Rather than focusing on economic recovery during the Great Depression like the rest of the world, Argentines focused on political concerns, namely military coup leader José Félix Uriburu's (1930-1932), and later, Agustín P. Justo's (1932-1938) right-wing regimes. Guided by an extreme nationalist rhetoric, Uriburu and Justo's fascism sought to increase national productions, including films, as part of its ideological project. Characterized by political unrest, the 1930s came to be called the Infamous Decade, a thirteen-year period of military and fraudulently elected governments (Hedges 46).

The turbulent situation with the federal government did not create a shortage of movie-goers; however, Argentina saw the demographic profile of moviegoers change in the 1930s. The preoccupations of working class and minority audiences guided which movies they watched. Immigrants and the working-class, who were also among film's avid consumers, wanted to see more relevant and realistic portrayals of their lives when they went to the cinema. Argentine studios complied. Eager to reap profits from previously untapped markets, minority filmmakers and screenwriters, such as Mario Soffici, developed movies with diverse audiences in mind.

Although Soffici, an Italian immigrant, gained access to filmmaking, he still had to comply with Argentine legal and social norms. Despite the fact that Uriburu wanted an increase in national productions, at the same time, he censored "low brow" culture, mainly in the form of working-class popular music. His censorship of "low brow"

culture did not help filmmakers create more national productions, simply because audiences gravitated towards the very thing being censored, such as the tango. Guidelines like Uriburu's continued to affect Soffici's filmmaking throughout the 1930s, especially given the fact that Justo continued where Uriburu left off, emphasizing nationalism as well. Paul A. Schroeder Rodríguez argues that the "political and economic context in Argentina was not favorable for the development of a cinematic industry" (92). To combat the difficulties posed by politicians like Uriburu and Justo during the Infamous Decade, Soffici turned to mainstream genres, such as the gauchesque. His film, *Viento norte* (1937), a gauchesque loosely based on Lucio Mansilla's *Una Excursión a los indios ranqueles* (1870), was one of his most sucessful productions. In *Viento norte*, Soffici uses Mansilla's gauchesque narrative to reach both mainstream and marginalized audiences. In doing so, however, Soffici changes Mansilla's ending in order to eliminate the gaucho outlaw trope, typically seen in nineteenth-century gauchesque narratives. The gauchesque is a frontier narrative featuring the gaucho, the Argentine version of the American cowboy. While nineteenth-century gauchesque narratives portrayed the gaucho as a symbol of the past, hence his outlaw status in epic poems like José Hernández's *Martín Fierro* (1872), by the twentieth century, the gaucho became a symbol of *argentinidad*, or what it means to be Argentine. This is evident in Soffici's film as well as famous gauchesque novels like Leopoldo Lugones's *La Guerra gaucha* (1905) and Ricardo Gúiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926). At the same time, Soffici replaces this ending with one that emphasizes the unrealistic expectations regarding class difference in Argentina. By adopting popular frontier genres, Soffici was able to bring a minority perspective, such as the working class, to the silver screen during a period when these perspectives were often met with hostility by the federal government.

Although scholars such as Matt Losada and César Maranghello have looked at Soffici's later films or casually mentioned his early movies in brief analyses, to date, Soffici's *Viento norte* has remained largely ignored. *Viento norte* holds an important position in film history because of Soffici's subversion of the gauchesque, a genre associated with nationalism and national identity formation in the twentieth century. In addition to this, analyzing Soffici's contribution to film in this era helps further illuminate the difficulties that immigrant filmmakers faced during the Infamous Decade.

In the 1910s and 1920s, inadequate funding for the creation and distribution of movies in Argentina made national productions sporadic. Aware of these financial problems, Hollywood companies made efforts to monopolize the international film market through profits garnered from foreign sales. This was easy to do, because Hollywood films tended to pay for themselves prior to being exported. Since they had already reaped a profit from domestic sales, the export of American films was a low-risk venture. Up until 1931, seven large North American companies dominated Argentina's film market. According to Roy Armes, often "80-90 percent of local screentime was devoted to Hollywood films, which were supported in their impact by an increasing U.S. involvement in the other new media of mass communication, newspapers, magazines, and later, radio" (166). Aside from Hollywood productions, Argentines eagerly consumed American stories and cartoons such as Laurel and Hardy and Popeye (Sheinin 60). Yet, the federal government in countries like Argentina missed an opportunity to bolster national productions by limiting exports from countries like the United States. Rather, governments like Uriburu and Justo's focused more on censorship which put a stranglehold on national productions, while failing to curtail the encroachment of American movies. It would not be until 1942 that the Argentine government under Juan Perón would sacrifice Hollywood films in favor of a steadier supply of national productions (Sheinin 66). Unable to compete with Hollywood budgets, Argentine filmmakers found it difficult to launch their projects, as a result. In 1931, for instance, only four Argentine productions were released (Karush 73).

While the Great Depression slowed the export of American films in Argentina (Sheinin 66), it was the advent of sound that helped increase Argentine film productions after 1931. In the silent era, more "authentic national productions[s] were made" (Armes 167) like the enormously popular *La Nobleza gaucha* (1915). Silent films created more work and expense for Argentine distributors because of the translations needed for title cards. When an American film was exported to Argentina, distributors had to splice the films in order to replace the English title cards with Spanish ones. Hollywood production companies did not pay for this, nor did they translate text prior to exporting the films. Sound permitted easy utilization of different languages in order to appease ethnic and minority audiences who were a large portion of film viewers in this era. Once this happened, according to David M.K.

Sheinin, "American films were marketed in Argentina as successfully as cars and tractors" (65) Sound helped to make translation work unnecessary, and film distributors like Luis José Moglia Barth and Angel Mentasi, among others, recognized a financial opportunity. Sound allowed Moglia Barth and Mentasi to incorporate Argentine culture. Eventually, the two filmmakers began Argentina Sono Film in 1933 in order to promote Argentine popular culture, particularly the tango. Mentasi led the "concentration on studio filming, aiming its productions particularly at the masses increasingly drawn by industrialization to the urban centers" (Armes 170). Throughout the 1930s, the number of Argentine productions steadily grew (Sheinin 74). Thirteen films were released in 1935, twenty-eight in 1937, forty-one in 1938, and an average of fifty films per year over the following four years (74). In the 1930s, the advent of sound offered new film opportunities for countries like Argentina (Armes 168).

Sound helped create distinctively Argentine productions, which also capitalized on the longstanding tensions between the working class and the elite of the nation. Argentina's economy did not completely collapse during the decade as it did in the United States or Europe; however, exports fell 34 percent in 1930 due to the Great Depression, and "overall production fell by 14 percent during the period of 1929-1932" (Hedges 48). Within Argentina, economic barriers still prevented working-class people access to higher end movie houses frequented by the elite (Bergquist 95). In general, the price of admission to well-respected movie houses – and by extension to the Hollywood films that would play in them – was higher than the prices in theaters located in working-class barrios. These theaters and films, as a result, were typically out of reach for working-class audiences. More importantly, working-class moviegoers were already accustomed to Argentine productions, and largely preferred them to subtitled American films, particularly because undereducated viewers were unable or reluctant to read them (95). With sound, working-class enjoyment of national productions was possible, evidenced by Mentasi's attempt to reach and capitalize on the masses in urban centers.

In the 1930s, Argentine working-class people were important consumers of popular culture. Rural unemployment and state-supported industrialization forced many immigrants and working-class people into urban centers. In turn, the demand for entertainment increased in these sites (Schnitman 29-30). Argentina Sono Film's productions like

Tango (1933) appealed to working-class audiences because they relied upon the familiarity of vaudeville. Coupled with tango music, working-class moviegoers readily consumed accessible elements of folk culture.

Upper-class Argentines preferred American films because they associated them with the glamour and glitz of Hollywood show business. Argentine productions, particularly those involving the tango, were considered low-brow entertainment. Despite Uriburu's attempt to censor low brow culture, the most popular Argentine films, for example, centered on working-class characters and sensationalized melodrama, and these failed to impress the wealthy. For them, tango represented lower-class tendencies toward sensuality and lasciviousness. Many critics, such as Carlos Alberto Pessano, a Catholic intellectual and editor of the film magazine *Cinegraf*, called for government censorship of such content (Karush 78). Others hoped that filmmakers would quit pandering to popular tastes so that film could serve as a vehicle for educating and improving the masses (81).

For working-class audiences, popular culture like the tango was appealing, and it produced a sense of belonging. Melodrama also spoke to working-class experiences. Films like José Agustín Ferreyra's *Calles de Buenos Aires* (1934) and *Ayúdame a vivir* (1936) serve as examples: in one, a naive country woman journeys to the city in the hope of bettering herself, only to find her reputation and dignity ruined through the pernicious effects of urban life; in the other, a humble servant raises the lovechild of a wealthy family's spoiled daughter. Immigrant and working-class audiences could relate to these dynamics in the 1930s because the rights they had begun to accrue under President Hipólito Yrigoyen were being quashed by José Félix Uriburu. Once Agustín Justo took control in 1932, the disparity between the working class and elite grew even starker, and upward mobility seemed an impossible dream to many working-class people. Film spoke to these class anxieties.

Argentine nationals created many of these films, however, immigrant filmmakers like Angel Mentasi and Mario Soffici had a profound influence on the film industry because of their engagement with working-class popular culture. Nicolas Poppe argues that in this period, "film style is inextricably enmeshed with cinematic, economic, experiential, ideological, and technological issues confronting new studios"

(220). While challenges certainly existed in this era, at the same time, filmmakers experimented with a focus on specific demographics like the working class. This focus helps explain Argentina's domination of the Latin American film market in the 1930s (Trajtenberg 34). Soffici, an Italian immigrant hailed for his prolific productions (Poppe 226), was one of the most successful contributors to the growing film industry. Ernesto Babino calls Soffici "uno de los directores más importantes" (one of the most important directors) of his era (125). From the beginning of his career, Soffici depicted problems associated with the working class. Soffici's first film, *Alma de bandoneón* (1934) describes the love affair of a wealthy young man and a beautiful tango singer. Their eventual marriage only brings them suffering when their daughter dies. In *Alma de bandoneón*, Soffici demonstrates the impossibility of upward mobility for the working class. In *Viento norte*, Soffici's gauchesque film, he counters this perspective. *Viento norte* was the beginning of Soffici's attempts to foster social change through subversive films, seen in his subsequent works like *Prisioneros de la tierra* (1939), *El Pecado de Julia* (1947), and *La Indeseable* (1951).

Uriburu's conservative regime curtailed some of Soffici's attempts to create cinema that centered upon working-class concerns in the early 1930s. In 1928, Uriburu had told a Spanish-American diplomat that Argentine president "Yrigoyen will rise into the government, but he will not last because I will throw him out" (Biddle 89). As Uriburu predicted, by September 6, 1930, he had ousted Yrigoyen from the president's second term via a military coup. Uriburu and his supporters' use of non-violence during the coup was an anomaly for his regime (89), mainly because the coup was a long time in coming (Hedges 46). During his brief presidency (1930-32), Uriburu managed to reverse Yrigoyen's liberal laws: he dispensed with the secret ballot; he shut down unsympathetic newspapers; he obstructed habeas corpus; he restored the death penalty; and he repressed worker strikes (Dolkart 67). It is important to note that while Yrigoyen espoused more liberal views, at the same time, he promoted his political favorites, oftentimes skipping over senior officials (Mani 87), thus suggesting that elements of corruption existed in Yrigoyen's government as well. When Agustín Justo, an *antipersonalista* who opposed Uriburu (Hedges 47), seized power in 1932, little changed. In fact, he defeated Uriburu in the 1932 election through voter fraud and he later retained power through rigged elections, fraud, and force under the guise of a constitutional, represen-

tative form of government (Deutsch 204). Justo forged an alliance between the three governing parties in Argentina—the *antipersonalistas*, the Independent Socialists, and the National Democratic Party—thus creating what was known as the *Concordancia*, an entity synonymous with electoral fraud, political opportunism, and a mixed economic record (Hedges 47). Uriburu died shortly after Justo gained power. Yet, Justo, like Uriburu, repressed any hint of opposition by closing down entire newspapers. According to Jill Hedges, Justo's relative economic success emboldened him to take a more "high-handed line politically, bolstering censorship and engaging in corrupt practices" (50). Besides instituting oppressive tactics like censorship, after 1930, military power was "consolidated and used in more overt and violent fashion and political initiatives came to count on the armed forces to provide with force what was lacking in majoritarian support" (Kalmanowiecki 36). Soffici's film emerged in the context of Justo's regime. As César Maranghello argues "*Viento norte* continues to reflect on honor in a decade plagued by corruption, fraudulent elections and scams within the state" (75). By extension, the tumultuous state of Argentina's government exacerbated the precarious position of immigrant filmmakers who tended to offer an alternative to political corruption.

The rise in anti-foreign sentiment during this period created further problems for the emergence of subversive films. From Justo's right-wing perspective, Yrigoyenism was associated with "noxious social agitators" and "undesirable immigrants" (Deutsch and Dolkart 80-82), primarily in the form of trade unionism and working-class aspirations (Hedges 50). As in the 1910s and 1920s, immigrants and communists became virtually interchangeable. Jews experienced the brunt of anti-foreign sentiment through the repeated appearance of newspaper cartoons caricaturing Jewish attempts to set up businesses. *Clarinada* published grotesque caricatures of Jews as devils in a piece titled "Who is this Jew?," and Jews were described as setting up "giant Jewish trusts" in order to control Argentina's economy. Conservatives stormed movie theaters showing Jewish or anti-Nazi films (Deutsch 229). Movies that appeared "philosemitic" like *The House of the Rothschilds* incited violence within theaters. Argentine conservative thought greatly dovetailed with fascism's rise in Europe (Deutsch 231). Justo diligently worked to keep democracy from the masses through the dissemination of anti-Semitic and anti-foreign propaganda. Ironically, the First World War and then the Great Depression had "slowed immigra-

tion to a slow trickle," meaning that the majority of workers were native Argentines (Hedges 56), not immigrants as Argentine newspapers and film would suggest. In addition to the conservative regimes' dishonest and repressive tactics, the working classes were "weakened further in the first half of the decade by a rise in unemployment resulting from the Depression, and a by a rise in urban labour due to unemployment in the interior of the country" (Hedges 58). After 1930, deportations of "foreigners and torture of anarchists and communists became widespread" (Kalmanowiecki 38). While Uriburu was considered nationalist and Justo more liberal in comparison, at the same time, Justo's reliance on surveillance demonstrates anything but liberalism. Uriburu and Justo's fascist tactics not only dismantled Yrigoyen's democratic gestures from the 1920s, but they also left immigrants and working-class people in vulnerable positions politically, socially, and economically.

Filmmakers like Soffici sought to subvert the *Década Infame*'s rhetoric. Julianne Burton argues that "Latin American filmmakers have variously perceived their medium as a tool for consciousness-raising, as an instrument for research and social analysis, and as a catalyst to political action and social transformation" (50-51). One way in which Soffici countered a repressive regime was by returning to a mythical frontier past in order to make sense of and to contextualize the present, a direct contrast to his previous films like *La Barra Mendocina* (1935) and *Cadetes de San Martín* (1937). When Soffici turned to the gauchesque, he used as his inspiration Lucio V. Mansilla's frontier chronicles *Una Excursión a los indios ranqueles*, a text not only about, but also published during an allegedly simpler past. Mansilla had written *Una Excursión a los indios ranqueles* before the Conquest of the Desert as part of a process of "imagining an independent nationhood within those overlapping zones of contact [between indigenous people and Argentines]."[1] By choosing Mansilla's chronicles as the basis for his film, Soffici provided a non-threatening and familiar genre to Argentine audiences, even while he used it as a forum for political critique. In an era of censorship, Mansilla's text avoided scrutiny because it seemingly fostered a nationalist rhetoric. Furthermore, according to Julia Rodriguez, the figure of the gaucho was the best candidate for a mythical, albeit unrealistic hero that, in turn, could be used to define *argentinidad*, or what it means to be Argentine (222). In this era, *argentinidad* represented national origins, albeit mythical ones. Myth, according to Richard W. Slatta, underpins "much of what many people

assume they know about history. Nations and peoples need myths to bind them together. Myth offers a "useful" collective past" (175). Soffici draws upon this collective past by both utilizing the gauchesque and Mansilla's narrative. By drawing on both, Soffici hails to immigrant marginalization without overtly addressing it. He does, however, directly focus on working-class marginalization and social norms.

In his film, Soffici relied on Mansilla's character Miguelito (Angel Magaña), a noble gaucho, yet he modified Mansilla's story in order to enable subversive content to emerge. Although Nancy Hanway argues that Mansilla's attempt to understand the Ranquels is "highly unusual" (125), at the same time, Mansilla supports the condescending and patriarchal attitudes of his nineteenth-century peers (125). Yet, it seems more logical to suggest that Mansilla wanted to capture Ranquel culture before it disappeared after the Conquest of the Desert. After all, in the Patagonian and Andean campaigns of 1881-85, entire communities were massacred or deported to the sugar plantations of Tucumán and Entre Ríos (Andermann 161). Soffici leaves behind these troublesome elements of Mansilla's text, focusing instead on the marginalized, such as working-class people and the gaucho over upper-class native Argentines. Although Soffici avoids references to race, he features a love plot between working-class Miguelito and an elite woman, Dolores (Malisa Zini). Miguelito and Dolores both realize that transgressing normative class boundaries in their relationship will result in their social ostracism. Despite Miguelito's noble and hard-working characteristics, Dolores's circle would never accept him. Both characters repeatedly attempt to convince their families that class is inadequate for defining character. To reinforce this, Soffici also flashes back to the relationship between María (Camila Quiroga), Miguelito's mother, and her former lover, El Comandante. Although the Comandante had pursued Miguelito's mother romantically, she married Miguelito's father, Tata (Enrique Muiño), a gaucho, and conformed to societal expectations. When she married Tata, however, she married an alcoholic plagued by bouts of jealousy. Their ill-fated marriage suggests to Miguelito and Dolores that holding onto old-fashioned beliefs regarding class is neither wise nor desirable.

Soffici uses the gauchesque to make his film appear as though it endorses nationalism. César Maranghello states that the film is one about honor (75), seen mainly in the gaucho characters. By the 1930s, the fact that the gaucho was considered a symbol of national identity

helped Soffici's cause. In his film, Soffici continued to bridge the gap between the nineteenth and twentieth century versions of the gaucho, a tradition started by Argentine writers such as Leopoldo Lugones and Ricardo Güiraldes. Nineteenth-century gauchesque works like Domingo Sarmiento's *Facundo* divided gaucho culture into four archetypes – pathfinder, tracker, troubadour, and outlaw – despite the fact that Sarmiento had never actually engaged with gauchos or even visited the frontier (Slatta 182). For thinkers like Sarmiento, and later, Esteban Echeverría, the gaucho represented all that was wrong with Argentina because these intellectuals mistakenly linked the gaucho with feudalism and caudillos (183). Towards the end of the nineteenth century with *Martín Fierro*, José Hernández portrayed the gaucho as a symbol of New World origins that could be used to combat foreign influences (185). In the twentieth century, writers like Leopoldo Lugones and Ricardo Güiraldes took up Hernández's depiction of the gaucho by depicting him as a symbol of *argentinidad*. Soffici follows this literary trend in his film by portraying the gaucho as a noble surrogate for working-class people. Hanway argues that in Mansilla's text, the author seems to "want to express what he perceives to be the ultimately unstable nature of the lower classes" 127). Soffici then utilizes elements like this from Mansilla's text in order to fit into the nationalist ideology created by first, Uriburu and later Justo, but also to explore working-class themes touched upon by Mansilla. This is especially true when he incorporates gaucho songs and their lyrics into his film, once during a cattle drive that Miguelito and Dolores watch, and a second time, while profiling the Comandante's anguish as he thinks about María's rejection. Working-class audiences enjoyed hearing music associated with their lives, such as rural or tango songs. By including gaucho songs in these two instances, Soffici appeases his working-class audience. Being that the gaucho came to represent Argentine origins in the twentieth century, Soffici's emphasis on gaucho culture echoes the right wing's emphasis on nationalism, thus escaping censure.

Yet, the gaucho songs used by Soffici both reinforce and subvert Argentine class norms. Elena Castedo-Ellerman argues that many gauchos songs, or *payadas*, examine the gaucho's attitude towards race and nationality, a direct contrast from the homogeneous gaucho portrayed in most gauchesque works (13). Many of these songs involved the tango, with *payadores* traveling around Argentina singing from their thirty-two page long songbooks in small theaters, clubs, and

music halls (Bockelman 583). Although usually portrayed as solely inhabiting the frontier, *payadores* clearly traveled throughout Argentina at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. While Soffici does not use gaucho songs to begin a discussion on race or nationality as Castedo-Ellerman suggests or focus on urban life as Bockelman argues, Soffici does utilize gaucho songs to broach the topic of class in an era with a deep class divide. The very first song that Miguelito and Dolores hear, for example, simultaneously describes the love of hard work and the isolation of cow herders who drive cattle across the desolate pampas. As they pass by, Miguelito and Dolores appear together for the first time and the two lovers discuss their feelings for one another. Their class status, rather than a lack of affection, separates them. They stop their conversation in order to listen to the cow herders' lyrics. After the cow herders move out of sight, Miguelito exclaims, " Que lindo!" (How pretty!) (Soffici) because the music is so familiar and beautiful to him. The loneliness expressed by the lyrics mirrors the helplessness that the two lovers feel as they discuss the class-based obstacles their relationship faces. This *payada* is typical of the genre in which the singers describe the "life of a popular gaucho hero" (Bockelman 583). Although gaucho music functions as a symbol of national identity, a strict class hierarchy outside of the song positions Miguelito as Dolores's inferior. By juxtaposing the *argentinidad* of the song, or what it means to be Argentine, with the class stratification of his characters, Soffici suggests that existing schemes of understanding the nation can seemingly bring divergent communities together.

Soffici uses the second musical interlude to guide his audience toward the conclusion that class hierarchies are dangerous. In early forms of the gauchesque, gaucho narratives were utilized by the upper classes as parodies of rural life (Shumway 68). It was only later that the gaucho evidenced populist themes, becoming the "true symbol of an emerging nation" (68). This change occurred in order to draw attention to how this symbol of authentic Argentina "had been violated, betrayed, and pillaged by a rapacious, pro-European, anti-Argentine upper class and its foreign allies" (70). By Soffici's time, applying the gauchesque to the examination of class hierarchies became a natural evolution within the genre. In this scene, a group of soldiers sit outside the Comandante's tent, drinking and singing. The Comandante listens to them as he is plagued by his memories of María from "otros tiempos." The soldiers' jovial attitudes contrast sharply with the Comandante's an-

guish. The Comandante's life up to this point has been directed by his military service, which has caused him to migrate from place to place, never managing to form long-lasting personal relationships. Although the Comandante has been rewarded with promotions, he has sacrificed María's love in order to achieve upward mobility. At the same time, the nostalgia for the past functions as one of the most common tropes used in the gauchesque – what Nicolas Shumway refers to as an "idyllic existence" (267). As the Comandante reckons with his decisions, his face contorts into an expression of horror, which Soffici exacerbates by contrasting light and shadows in the scene. When the Comandante's troops resume singing and playing guitar, the lyrics describe lost love, thus mirroring the Comandante's thoughts. While singing this gaucho song provides the soldiers with amusement, for the Comandante, the song is a reminder of crucial mistakes in his past. Through music, Soffici illustrates the dangers of blindly following social norms, thus calling into question the parameters of class (Nevitski 45).

Soffici incorporates familiar, stereotypical gauchesque roles into his film, yet he deviates from this tradition by using this trope to make an argument about class difference. In his analysis of 1930s cinema and beyond, Matt Losada refers to these roles as the "gaucho cliche" (25). Julia Rodriguez draws attention to the fact that after the gaucho was deemed "eliminated" by the federal government, he became a romanticized symbol of nationalism (18). Soffici draws upon this trope in his film. In *Viento norte*, Miguelito is the quintessential gaucho: noble, honest, and hardworking. In Soffici's film, some members of the upper class, like Dolores, advocate for working-class people like Miguelito. When Dolores tells her father about her feelings for Miguelito, for example, she appeals to his strong work ethic to convince him that Miguelito's class status is irrelevant. Other characters like the Comandante and the Captain further substantiate Dolores's claims by giving Miguelito the opportunity to voice his good intentions in front of Dolores's father. The men uniformly come to the consensus that Miguelito's gaucho nobility is far more important than his working-class status. By using the familiar gauchesque and its tropes during the *Década Infame*, Soffici appeared to appeal to the nationalistic rhetoric of the right by emphasizing national identity. He avoids, however, the right's demonization of the working class.

When upper-class characters eventually advocate for Miguelito, they model an alternative for a nation struggling to define its

cultural identity, one based in solidarity across difference rather than the marginalization of it. Indeed, Miguelito provides hope for working-class audiences. This is particularly evident when one examines Soffici's choice to reverse Mansilla's ending to Miguelito's story. In Mansilla's text, troops force Miguelito into exile. This is a fate that befalls so many gauchesque heroes, such as in Jose Hernández's *Martín Fierro* and in Rafael Obligado's *Santos Vega*. Soffici, however, permits Miguelito to live a life free of persecution at the film's resolution mimicking previous gauchesque films like *La Nobleza gaucha*. After the Comandante's murder, the investigating troops blame Miguelito for the crime, just as they do in Mansilla's text. In the film, however, the truth about the Comandante's death eventually emerges when Tata confesses to killing him in a drunken rage. The military subsequently releases Miguelito from imprisonment and forces Tata to go into exile instead. After Miguel is reunited with Dolores, the couple stands together, watching the military escort his father away. Subtly, Soffici reverses the tragic ending of so many precursors in the gauchesque by granting his lower-class hero his freedom from both legal persecution and the limits imposed by class stratification. This ending therefore provided hope that positive characteristics like Miguelito's honesty and hard work could triumph over prejudice, and that a decent future for the impoverished was possible.

Although Soffici does rely on the "gaucho cliche," he also creates unique gaucho characters by providing a context for their behavior. His original characters, like Tata, exhibit both stereotypical and original gaucho behavior, but they also describe issues embedded in class difference. Ignoble gauchos had been a crucial element of Domingo Sarmiento's *Facundo*: *Civilización y barbarie*, and began to sporadically reemerge in the 1920s in Ricardo Güiraldes's minor characters in *Don Segundo Sombra*. Soffici's character Tata draws upon these prior portraits. In contrast to his son, Tata obsesses over his own dark thoughts and painful past. Despite his wife's religiosity, Tata jealously focuses on her youthful indiscretions with the Comandante and seeks to escape his dark emotions by indulging in all the vices lamented by Sarmiento, such as drinking and gambling. In the majority of Tata's scenes, he stands in a bar, entertaining other gauchos or drinking alone. Tata harks back to nineteenth-century gauchos like Sarmiento's, but also speaks to 1930s social concerns. Alcoholism had long been a concern in Argentina, but by the 1930s, the Departamento Nacion-

al de Higiene associated alcohol with tuberculosis, "moral decay, and poverty" (Armus 199). Tata's alcoholism poses a threat to the stability of his family, and at the same time creates a chain of events that make possible Miguelito's and Dolores's marriage at the film's conclusion. Tata therefore deviates from both Sarmiento's ignoble gaucho and the romanticized figures seen in gauchesque literature in that his demons are contextualized rather than generalized. He is neither an inherently noble gaucho nor a barbarian, and through rich characters like him, Soffici forces his audience to question gross generalizations about class and identity.

Soffici uses repeated visual motifs to critique the class-based marginalization of his gaucho characters, no matter whether they are noble or barbaric. In a scene where Miguelito visits Dolores, for example, a barred window separates them which visually reinforces their class division. Furthermore, in another scene when Tata is in a bar, he sits alone on a stool, drinking profusely while the bartender stands behind a barred window. The repetition of barred windows indicates that Tata is as marginalized as Miguelito. It is this marginalization that motivates him to seek out the Comandante, who embodies all of the power that Tata lacks. While Tata's powerlessness is real, his solution to his marginalization exacerbates it, rather than resolving it.

Soffici resolves the problem of Miguelito's false imprisonment by using traditions of the gauchesque. In *Viento norte*, however, Tata's confession leads him to embrace gaucho nobility, thus promising his son a future via his own sacrifice. As a result, for working-class audiences powerless beneath first Uriburu and later, Justo's regimes, Miguelito's change in fortune could provide hope that class stratification could be transcended.

Conclusion

Until the 1930s, few minority filmmakers created the gauchesque. When Soffici turns to this genre that evidences *argentinidad*, he does so by both deploying and disrupting the genre's familiar characteristics. In doing so, Soffici focuses on class hierarchies and the danger of them in Argentina. Due to his precarious position off-screen, Soffici used popular, mainstream, and often nationalist genres to introduce these conversations, yet he also maintained his commitment to

social critique by subtly modifying them. In some of his other films, for example, like *Prisioneros de la Tierra* (1939), Soffici explores the exploitation of workers farming yerba mate. In *El Curandero* (1955), Soffici focuses on a doctor who runs afoul of the medical establishment. Although these two films are not gauchesque, they represent Soffici's commitment to advocating for the type of social change evident in *Viento norte*.

Notes

[1] Mansilla's text is considered one of the most accomplished frontier writings of the latter part of the nineteenth century. Aside from the pervasiveness of this text within Argentine culture, it was also a subversive one. According to David William Foster, *Una Excursión* was "an appeal for a measure of awareness by the urban elite toward[s] the realities of the frontier." See David William Foster, "Knowledge in Mansilla's 'Una Excursión a los indios ranqueles.'"

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