

2003

Latin American Cinema

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Latin American Cinema

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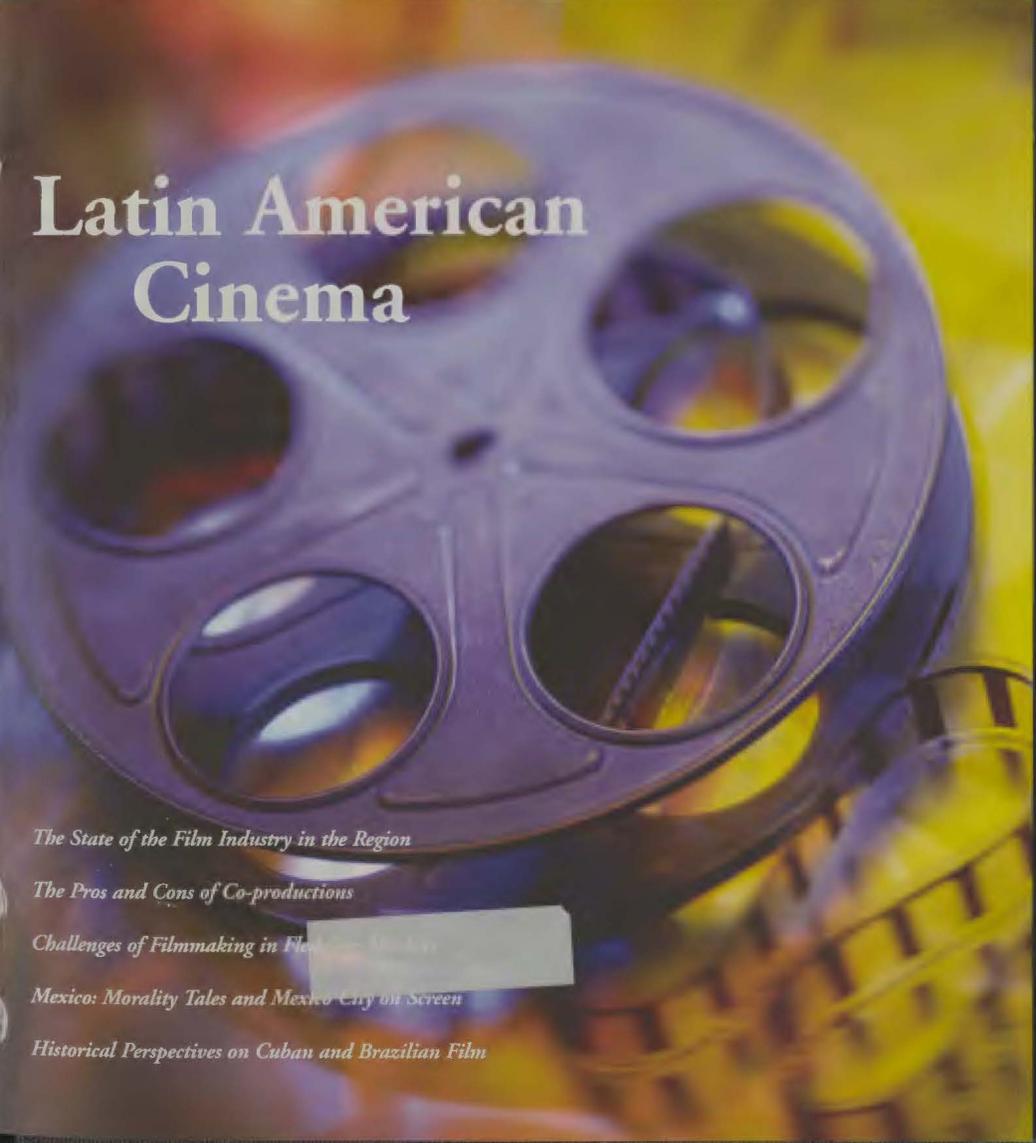
Hemisphere

A MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAS

VOLUME 12 • SPRING 2003 •

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Latin American Cinema



- The State of the Film Industry in the Region*
- The Pros and Cons of Co-productions*
- Challenges of Filmmaking in Florida* — *Monkey*
- Mexico: Morality Tales and Mexico City on Screen*
- Historical Perspectives on Cuban and Brazilian Film*

Hemisphere



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This issue of *Hemisphere* coincides with the 20th anniversary of the Miami International Film Festival, presented by Florida International University. This year's festival features a special focus on Ibero-American cinema, including a new program, Encuentros de Cine Iberoamericano en Miami (Iberoamerican Cinema Encounters in Miami) to further the work of creative filmmakers from Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries throughout Latin America and Europe. In support of this project, we have devoted this issue of the magazine to Latin American film.

Nicole Guillemet, the director of the Miami International Film Festival, lent us her invaluable assistance in obtaining the country reports in this issue. This section includes a review of the state of the film industry in six Latin American countries—Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela—by officials of their national cinema programs. Their reports hint at the largely untapped potential for creative production in countries where economic factors have played a role in restricting the film sector. An important insight that emerges from these summaries is the trend toward co-productions as a way of stimulating cinematic output when national resources are lacking.

Another country whose films are unfamiliar to most international audiences is Bolivia. Patricio Crooker touches on some of the milestones in Bolivian film and discusses the constraints to developing a more active national film industry. Cristian Salazar takes a similar approach to Chile, analyzing the factors that complicate the various stages of the process of making, financing and distributing movies there.

Alejandro Ríos's article on Cuba emphasizes the flourishing of the cinematic arts before the 1959 revolution and the film industry's response to the ideological requirements of communism. He provides an interesting critique of co-productions in the Cuban context and acknowledges the accomplishments of exile filmmakers.

The advantages and drawbacks of co-productions are also the subject of Tamara Falicov's article on Argentina. She looks at the B-movies of US director Roger Corman, who produced a series of low-budget films in Argentina during the economic crisis affecting much of Latin America in the 1980s. Her discussion has important implications for the future of co-productions in Argentina and other countries in the region.

Perhaps the Latin American country best known for its movies is Mexico. In this issue, Eduardo Guízar writes about what he refers to as Mexico's "cinema of denunciation." In response to a new spirit of openness in Mexican politics and society, such films condemn corruption at the institutional level, with special venom reserved for church and state. Guízar discusses two box office sensations, *El crimen del Padre Amaro* and *La ley de Herodes*.

Mexico, specifically Mexico City, is also the topic of this issue's book review. Eduardo Santa Cruz reviews David William Foster's *Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema*, which explores the capital's evolving representation in Mexican film.

No discussion of Latin American film would be complete without Brazil, and Stephen Berg provides us with an analysis of a largely forgotten chapter in Brazilian cinema: the so-called *chanchadas* of the 1950s and '60s. These black comedies were designed, in Berg's words, "to induce discomfort and reflect the growing alienation of the middle class and the dire consequences of the military regime's political repression."

This issue also includes an article on a Hollywood film about Latin America—Roman Polanski's 1995 *Death and the Maiden*, based on the play by Ariel Dorfman. Ana Roca discusses the film's handling of the issue of accountability for human rights abuses, a topic that applies to all societies struggling to come to terms with authoritarian or military pasts.

Finally, Marian Goslinga gives a new twist to her Publications Update, a regular feature of *Hemisphere*, with a selected videography of recent titles on Latin America and the Caribbean.

We hope that the articles in this issue will spark a new curiosity among our readers about the fascinating films being produced in Latin America and the Caribbean, often against tremendous odds.

Eduardo A. Guízar

Brazil's "Chanchadas"

by Stephen Berg

Film scholars only recently have begun to explore the connections between the Brazilian *chanchada* genre of the 1950s and the dark comedies that characterized the output of the post-Cinema Novo movement which came to be known as *cinema marginal*. This essay proposes some thoughts for the further investigation of these connections, with a special focus on the films of the Belair production company.

At the end of the 1960s, just as the Cinema Novo movement (launched in the early sixties and most broadly identified with the films and writings of Glauber Rocha) began to run out of ideological and creative steam, Brazilian filmmakers Julio Bressane and Rogério Sganzerla directed five of the most corrosive, innovative and politically prescient films of the period. In order of their production, these were Bressane's *Cara a Cara* ("Face to Face," 1967); Sganzerla's *O Bandido da Luz Vermelha* ("The Red Light Bandit," 1968) and *A Mulher de Todos* ("Everybody's Woman," 1969); and Bressane's *Matou a Família e Foi ao Cinema* ("Killed the Family and Went to the Movies," 1969) and *O Anjo Nasceu* ("The Angel is Born," 1969).

The term *chanchada* appears to have come from the Spanish *chancha*, meaning "pig" or "dirty." Ostensibly, these were films or plays of negligible intellectual value, intended to produce laughter. Arguably more finely attuned to the zeitgeist than the folklore-laden, regionalist and/or populist dramas

of the Cinema Novo directors, the "difficult" nature and formal complexities of the Bressane-Sganzerla films (nonlinear narrative, discontinuous editing and jump-cut photography redolent of Godard), along with a dark, urban, nightmarish look, were deemed problematic even then, as were the alternative methods of distribution, extremely limited public runs and total lack of interest in box office returns that were to characterize the directors' next features. At a time when the politics of the state-controlled Embrafilme were so perverse as to deny financing or distribution to the new cinema being created by "marginal" filmmakers in Rio and São Paulo, such differences eventually brought about an acrimonious and public split between exponents of the Cinema Novo (Glauber Rocha first and foremost among them) and directors such as Bressane, Sganzerla, Andrea Tonacci, Álvaro Guimarães, Neville de Almeida, José Mojica Marins (known in the US for his "Coffin Joe" films), Ivan Cardoso, Ouzaldo Candeias, Luis Rosemberg Filho and a host of others. Both sides of the controversy are widely documented in print, the two camps perhaps most notably represented by the always prolix Rocha himself, poet, songwriter and cultural agitator Torquato Neto in his remarkable "Geléia Geral" column in the newspaper *Última Hora*; and, most stirring, the 20 or so pages of a highly combustible 1972 interview granted by Rogério Sganzerla and Helena Ignez to the ground-breaking antigovernment cultural weekly *O Pasquim*.

Less well known, though by no means less important (and, to this day, commercially unreleased) were seven extremely low-budget, feature-length films made back to back at breakneck pace during the first three months of 1970, in the teeth of the military dictatorship that had overthrown the government in 1964. Personally financed by Bressane and by the box office returns from Sganzerla's two (relatively) commercially successful features, Bressane and Sganzerla set up a production company called Belair to produce these extraordinary films, half of which were presented in 2002 at a Bressane retrospective at Rio de Janeiro's Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (CCBB). The Bressane films were *Barão Olavo, o Horrível* ("The Horrible Baron Olaf"), *Cuidado Madame* ("Lady Beware") and *A Família do Barulho* ("An Extraordinary Family"); Sganzerla's were *Betty Bomba, a Exibicionista* ("Betty Bomb, the Exhibitionist," later retitled *Carnaval na Lama*, or "Carnival in the Mud"), *Copacabana mon Amour* and *Sem Essa Aranha* ("Give Me a Break, Spider"). The seventh film was *A Miss e o Dinossauro* ("The Beauty Queen and the Dinosaur"), a feature-length, super 8mm record of the making of the preceding six that has since been lost.

Starring what amounted to a Bressane/Sganzerla stock company, the core members of which were Sganzerla's then-wife Helena Ignez (formerly married to both Glauber Rocha and Julio Bressane), Guará Rodrigues and Maria Glady's, the films include turns by a number of

Belair and the laughter of mockery and despair

other actors, including Renata Sorrah and the late Lillian Lemmertz. Also making appearances were such countercultural luminaries as author/singer/songwriter Jorge Mautner, playwright Antonio Bivar, film director Suzana de Moraes and the great Grande Otelo, whose iconic presence further served to reinforce links between the *chanchada* (of which he and comedian Oscarito had been the undisputed kings) and *cinema marginal*. Censored and denied commercial distribution, these films have been seen only rarely after a series of initial screenings at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio in early 1972. Their obstacle-ridden public trajectories notwithstanding, the Belair films have been the object of critical reflection by a number of important Brazilian theorists and historians (notably, Fernão Ramos and, most recently, Claudio da Costa).

Finally, although not technically a Belair production (having been filmed in 1973, three years after the company dissolved and quite some time after Bressane, Sganzerla, Ignez and Guará had returned to Brazil after fleeing the country at the height of the Medici régime in April 1970), *O Rei do Baralho* ("King of the Cards") may be the easiest to read in terms of its visual associations with the *chanchada* genre than all the Belair films put together. A meta-*chanchada* of sorts, filmed on the sound stages of the old Cinédia studios in Jacarepaguá, the film stars Grande Otelo in a noir-ish non-plot of card games (among the players is Wilson Grey, another *chanchada* veteran) and amorous encounters

with a sexy blonde played by Marta Anderson.

Appropriation and Reinvention

In the 1972 interview with *O Pasquim*, Sganzerla openly acknowledged his debt to the *chanchadas*: "When I watch the Atlântida films [a studio in Rio where many *chanchadas* were shot], I think how neat it is that you can see in them this atmosphere of aesthetic perversion. Look how they take enormously successful American films like *High Noon* or even *Samson and Delilah* and transform them into adventures with Oscarito and José Lewgoy. This is exactly what I'm interested in."

Bressane also commented on the films' aesthetics in a rare interview granted in August/September 2002 for the catalogue that accompanied the CCBB retrospective. "Belair contains much of a Brazilian sign, the cinema of experimentation, *Limite* [the most famous of all Brazilian avant-garde films, directed by Mário Peixoto in 1930], a tradition of cinema made in Brazil. A humor, a mixture of spirit, of elements of composition, of resurrecting certain colors, a certain literature, a certain poetry, a certain music. All of it resituated, re-edited. All told, a delirium organized according to these strong indexes: humor and laughter," he explained. "Belair upholds the principle that films provoke a sensation, strong laughter takes you places (or a place) where reason won't go, where thought doesn't take you.... Laughter is a trope of philosophy that thrives in the whirlwind

of Belair. It's very powerful but it hasn't yet been evaluated conceptually. It was a gut intuition and may well have been Belair's strongest contribution. Not just the humor of a traditional streak of the Brazilian Portuguese language but also a new mixture at that moment, one which may have been tolerable or comprehensible at that time only through laughter, which emerges there as a stage of observation, of perception. This is tremendously powerful, it may have been the most terrifying thing, because this laughter was destructive—and still is, to this day. Laughter as it affects not just our ears, but as it relates to a whole situation of *mise-en-scène*, of image creation, of constitution of the image, that comes out of laughter and reaches the screen and materializes in laughter."

It is important, too, to mention the genre's debt to Brazilian literary giant Oswald de Andrade, a poet, writer and essayist of lasting originality much admired by the "marginals." His own work makes exceptionally creative, uniquely Brazilian use of humor and laughter, and it is instructive that the *chanchada* functions very much in accordance with the *modus operandi* of his theory of the "politics of cannibalism." *Chanchada* directors watched Hollywood movies with awe and wonderment before "swallowing and digesting" them to perform their own critical readings through parody. In this sense, scholar Lucia Helena defines *antropofagia* (or cannibalism) as "an aesthetic project which sought to digest European poetic-ideological

influences by incorporating them critically to the national [i.e., Brazilian] matrix through parody in order to construct a literary discourse of autonomously Brazilian diction, immune to sectarianism and flag-waving patriotism."

In their program notes for the "Brazil on Screen" series of the Brazil: Body and Soul exhibition last year at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, Robert Stam, Ismail Xavier and João Luiz Vieira wrote, "Many of the *chanchadas* parodied famous Hollywood films or figures. Carlos Manga's *Matar ou Correr* ("To Kill or to Run," 1954) parodies Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* (1952), the Portuguese title of which was *Matar ou Morrer* ("To Kill or to Die"). The sheriff played by Gary Cooper becomes Kid Bolha [Kid Boring] and the sidekick becomes Cisco Ciscocada [an amalgam of Cisco Kid and *cocada*, a traditional Brazilian coconut candy]. [Another famous *chanchada*] makes fun of both the grandiose epic entertainments of Cecil B. de Mille and of São Paulo's pretentious Vera Cruz studios—José Carlos Burlé's *Carnaval Atlântida* (1953) is a hilariously reflexive film in which a Brazilian director symptomatically named Cecilio B. de Milho (Cecil B. of the Corn) wants to direct a Hollywood-style blockbuster based on the Helen of Troy story. The rather pompous director is mocked by popular characters of the lower class who prefer a more carnivalesque approach. Here the classic symmetries of the Hollywood epic, clarity and decorum, are undone by carnivalesque fantasy and samba pageant extravagance." Not mentioned in these notes but considered elsewhere by both Vieira and Bernadet is Carlos Manga's *Nem Sansão nem Dalila* ("Neither Samson nor Delilah," 1954), perhaps the most politically astute of all the

chanchadas, containing, as it does, a sharp satire of populist coups and counter-coups that includes a hilarious send-up of Getúlio Vargas.

For a full grasp of the principal elements of the Belair variety of *chanchada*-esque humor, an understanding of the Portuguese terms *avacalhação*, *deboche* and *esculhambação* is essential. In their verb forms, the first could be translated as "to demoralize, depress, lower, or cause confusion," the second as "to mock" and the third as "to shatter, decompose, destroy, demoralize, ridicule, deride, reprimand or scold." This humor of mockery and derision is typically *carioca* (a term used to refer to natives of Rio de Janeiro) and central to the outlook of such great Brazilian comics as Dercy Gonçalves, Oscarito and Costinha, among countless other *chanchada* stars. In its *cinema marginal* incarnation, Helena Ignez, Maria Gladys and Guarã make use of *humor debochado* almost to the exclusion of any other affect or emotion.

Laughter as Weapon

In a recent paper on "The Brazilian Chanchada of the 1950s: Parodies of Hollywood from the Periphery," Lisa Shaw describes how "the low-budget Brazilian musical comedies of the Kubitschek era (1956-1961) reflected the impact of modernization and capitalist expansion on the masses—helping the marginalized, particularly alienated migrants, to adapt to urban life." According to Shaw, "these commercially successful films articulated the socio-cultural transformations witnessed by ordinary people during a decade that was characterized by dramatic economic growth and the intensification of the processes of industrialization, urbanization and internal migration, [offering] comfort to those on the fringes of consumer society by poking fun at rep-

resentatives of authority, the pretentious elite and society's other misfits, by exposing the bourgeois pleasure-oriented lifestyle as perilous and shallow, and yet also familiarizing the spectators with elegant, modern cityscapes, thereby affording hope of social advancement and a brief flirtation with the high life and the capitalist dream." In contrast, the *meta-chanchadas* of *cinema marginal* offered no such comfort, designed as they were to induce discomfort and reflect the growing alienation of the middle class and the dire consequences of the military regime's political repression. The never quite innocent mockery of the *chanchadas* grows increasingly hysterical in tone as the Belair films fragment narrative to the point of stasis, producing strange and powerful images that are, by turns, innocent, abject, horrifying, grotesque and aggressive.

In his authoritative study of *cinema marginal*, Fernão Ramos has written: "A child of its time, there can be no doubt that *cinema marginal* laid roots in Brazilian cinema which continue to bear fruit to this day. Its specificity, however, consisted in having found, to use the words of a German thinker, 'a violent style to measure up to the violence of historical events.' It is precisely this violent stylistic that is attractive in *cinema marginal*, a trope par excellence for those moments in which, whether in life or in history, the ground seems to fall away and the hole that can be glimpsed is, at once, too terrifying and too deep to be taken seriously."

Stephen Berg holds a master's degree in Luso-Brazilian language and literatures from the University of California, Los Angeles. He is a consultant to Rio de Janeiro's Instituto Brasil-Estados Unidos on academic and cultural affairs.

Madness or Divine Sense?

by Ana Roca

Torture, disappearances, murder: In the twentieth century, repressive regimes in Latin America have committed a mind-boggling array of human rights abuses against their own citizens. What marks do the survivors of such horrific experiences bear, and how can the victims who escaped death survive in a society where they must live side by side with their oppressors?

Death and the Maiden, a film directed by Roman Polanski, is a haunting and well-executed adaptation of the play by Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman, who also wrote the script for this cinematic version. The Hollywood interpretation of the film is a psychological and political thriller that takes place in a purposely unnamed Latin American country that bears many resemblances to Chile. It is a film that deals with universal tragedies not confined to Latin America: blatant human rights violations through torture, rape, unlawful incarceration, repression, kidnapping and disappearance. It is a powerful movie about justice and vengeance, about questioning lies and searching for the truth. It is a film about power and corruption, and the preservation of human dignity in spite of unspeakable inhumanity.

Reckoning with the Past

The action of the film occurs during one thunder-filled night in a country struggling with democracy after the fall of a long dictatorship. As the film starts, Paulina (Sigourney Weaver) waits over a

Revisiting Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*

cold dinner for her husband to come home. A car approaches. A stranger (Ben Kingsley) has gone out of his way to bring Paulina's husband, Gerardo (Stuart Wilson) home, after Gerardo discovers his car has a flat tire. The couple's beach house is isolated, far from the city and other neighboring houses. The bad weather has knocked out the electricity and the phone. When the two men arrive and Paulina hears the stranger's voice from the darkness of her bedroom, she is terrified. She believes that she recognizes the voice as that of her doctor/torturer 15 years before, when she was a "disappeared" prisoner of the now-ousted military junta.

Is this stranger, a doctor named Roberto Miranda, really the man who tortured her? Paulina's tormentor kept her blindfolded as he repeatedly tortured and raped her, so his voice became imprinted in her memory. Now she recognizes not only his voice but also certain phrases that he used. The man who tortured her would play Franz Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" while he raped her. Later, she finds a cassette of this music in Miranda's car. She even claims to recognize the smell of his skin. Is this proof enough that he is the same man? As the film develops, the viewer is confronted with the search for the truth and with the horrors committed

against this woman. Paulina is just one of thousands who were abused or murdered by Latin America's dictatorships. Miranda stands in for all of the guilty, and Gerardo for those who want their societies to move forward, even if it means glossing over the horrors and abuses of the past.

Ironically, Gerardo has just been named by the new democratic government to be the head of a national human rights commission charged with investigating and prosecuting the crimes of the dictatorship. His job will be to prosecute those guilty of exactly the kinds of political atrocities that Paulina endured. But will men like Gerardo and commissions like the one he has been asked to lead be effective in bringing to justice those responsible? If Gerardo's timid and timorous behavior over the course of the evening is any indication, we can only imagine how ineffectual he and his commission will be. In real life, all we have to do is look at Latin America today. In spite of numerous court proceedings, rulings and legal maneuvering, Chile's Augusto Pinochet has enjoyed a pretty nice life, and he, like so many others, remains free.

It has been said that one of Latin America's main problems is the lack of confidence or trust in its governments, institutions and elected leaders. Paulina does not trust the effec-

tiveness of the government, the basis of the system, or even her husband as soon-to-be head of the new truth commission, not to mention the commission itself. Believing that she has in front of her the monster who hurt her, she decides to put Miranda “on trial.” After pushing his car over a cliff, she hits him over the head, binds and gags him. She then proceeds to conduct a trial-like interrogation, with her horrified husband as “defense attorney.” The tables are turned now and it is Paulina who plays Schubert’s piece as she interrogates her former torturer.

Madness and Power

Death and the Maiden was performed for the first time on stage without much success in Chile, in 1991. Perhaps the topic was too difficult to confront, too close to the hearts and minds of Chileans, and too controversial to revisit so soon. It wasn’t until 1992 that the play, performed in English, became a success on Broadway, starring such well-known Hollywood stars as Glenn Close, Richard Dreyfuss and Gene Hackman. More success followed on the London stage and, later, with the Polanski film adaptation. Today, the play has been performed worldwide and Ariel Dorfman, also a poet, novelist and essayist who teaches at Duke University, has received more of the recognition he deserves for his work.

In addition to the many issues we encounter in the film version of *Death and the Maiden*—the effectiveness of the government truth commission, the difficulty in applying the law, concern for the disappeared and the dead, as well as the survivors who endured inhuman treatment—we also find the theme of women and madness.

Here is a woman who ties a man to a chair at gunpoint, gags him

At the end of the film one is left with nothing but questions: How many of those guilty of crimes against humanity actually go to jail? And how many are pardoned and smirk in the faces of those they held captive?

with her underwear, beats him on the head, and threatens to kill him. Paulina wants revenge for what she went through, for the pain and trauma that Miranda has caused her and others—in years past and, in the form of their memories, for many years afterward. As viewers we cannot help but identify with the different characters at different times. Is it so “mad” for a woman who was raped and tortured to want justice and even revenge? But even if we all agree that there must be justice and that Miranda must pay for his crimes, how should this be carried out? We sit at the edge of our seats for more than 100 minutes, witnessing Paulina’s pain as well as the doctor’s as he insists upon his own innocence. It is this tension, the tension of not knowing whom to trust, that makes the film so successful.

It is not until the final scene, when it appears that Paulina is going to end the doctor’s life by pushing him off the cliff in the early hours of dawn, that the truth comes out. Miranda not only confesses, he goes further and tells Paulina how much he enjoyed the complete power that he had over her. It is this idea of power that we must not forget amid the many difficult themes in this film. For example, Paulina’s possession of a gun throughout the night’s ordeal gives her the power to control the situation. When Gerardo tells her to put down the gun, telling her she

is “mad” for hurting the “kind” Samaritan who helped him on the road, Paulina responds: “The minute I give you the gun all discussion will end.” She is right. They are two men and she is a woman. Without a weapon, she would be at the mercy of her disbelieving husband and the man she has identified as her torturer.

When Paulina first takes Miranda prisoner, Gerardo tells her that she is “ill,” and the film refers to her several times as “crazy” or “insane.” It’s true, if we didn’t know Paulina’s story we too would think that she is a madwoman, based on her behavior. But were not the torture and rape inflicted upon her also abnormal, requiring a reaction of at least similar magnitude? Although both Miranda and Gerardo perceive Paulina as insane, another view is to see her as a brave woman reacting to her experiences at the hands of two men: the man who tortured her, and the husband who is protecting him.

At one point there is an altercation and the gun falls to the floor. After Gerardo freezes and does nothing to try to grab it, Miranda angrily expresses disbelief that he just stood there. Upon hearing that, Paulina responds: “Of course he just stood there. He’s the law.” The legal system, the commission and men like Gerardo lack the courage of their convictions. It is the “mad” woman, the victim, who must take the reins in her own hands in her

search for justice. As Emily Dickinson observed, "Much madness is divinest sense/To a discerning eye;/Much sense the starkest madness./'T is the majority/In this, as all, prevails./Assent, you are sane;/Demur, —you're straightway dangerous,/And handled with a chain.

At another level, this work is about testing the faithfulness of one's spouse. Paulina protected Gerardo by refusing to give his name to her torturers. During her imprisonment, we learn, Gerardo was unfaithful to her. His muted response to Paulina's suffering is far more troubling than is his wife's reaction at finding herself in the same room with her persecutor. Gerardo confesses to her that if he had been the one being tortured, he would have given her name to save his own skin.

A crucial element holding the work together is the tension that pervades it until the very end. The viewer is kept in suspense: Is Paulina's memory reliable, or is this a case of mistaken identity? Throughout the course of the mock trial, we as jury shift back and forth in our beliefs. The doctor's confession comes only as he stands at the edge of the cliff, certain that Paulina is about to push him over. It is then and only then that Miranda is convinced that Paulina is about to kill him, and a true confession is the final card he has left to play. So the truth is told and heard. And even after hearing how Miranda enjoyed raping his wife, Gerardo doesn't have the stomach to kill him. The failure of the "law"—Gerardo, the head of the new truth commission—is at once personal and political.

The Aftermath of Brutality

But the film does not end there. We jump ahead in time and see

Gerardo and Paulina sitting in an auditorium listening to a live performance of Schubert's "Death and the Maiden." Paulina has claimed the piece for her own. The camera shows Miranda in the balcony area with his family, staring at Paulina as they experience the music that binds them both to their pasts. He turns and pats his child, glancing back at Paulina defiantly. The horror in this ending is the thought that this "family man" is the same monster who tortured Paulina. Free, he lives unpunished for his crimes alongside those who suffered at his hands. There is nothing they can do. This ending is true to life in many ways. Once the truth is told, what if there is still no justice? In fact, how can there ever be justice? Nothing can bring back those who disappeared and died. The survivors will never forget what they went through, and they should not be asked to forgive the unforgivable.

At the end of the film one is left with nothing but questions: How many of those who are guilty of crimes against humanity actually go to jail, compared to the number who never even get indicted, questioned or named? And how many are pardoned and smirk in the faces of those they held captive or say publicly that they would do it all over again if they had an opportunity?

A final disturbing thought is the possibility of trivializing the subject of torture and disappearance by portraying it in a commercial Hollywood thriller. There is something disturbing in the way the film manipulates viewers' allegiances, making us doubt the victim herself to make the evening's entertainment more suspenseful and exciting. Only at the end is the *real* truth unveiled. It is always problematic when the mass media, how-

ever noble the motive, co-opt tragedies to "edutain" us.

Dorfman says of his work: "I found the characters trying to figure out the sort of questions that so many Chileans were asking themselves privately, but that hardly anyone seemed to be interested in posing in public. How can those who tortured and those who were tortured coexist in the same land?...And how do you reach the truth if lying has become a habit?"

One possible answer to his question is a quote from Argentine writer and human rights activist Alicia Partnoy: "The victim's truth must be told by the victim." Dorfman and Polanski can only approximate that truth. Only inasmuch as the film interests us in seeking out the victim's truth, the *real* truth, does it do justice to this dark side of human history.

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Making Movies in Latin America

CHILE

Ignacio Aliaga

Director, Cinema and Audiovisual Arts Area, Cultural Division, Ministry of Education

Film production in Chile is essentially private, with state support through government policies and funding. In the last three years, Chile has produced an average of 10 feature films per year, as well as a good number of documentaries and short and animated features. These have found growing distribution in theaters, cultural venues and television, and have had an important presence at international film festivals and in the Latin American market. In addition, several recent titles—*Coronación* (Silvio Caiozzi, 2001), *Taxi para tres* (Orlando Lubbert, 2001; winner, Concha de Oro, San Sebastián Film Festival), and *La fiebre del loco* (Andrés Wood, 2001)—and upcoming productions have been screened in Spain, a sign of growing interest in the Chilean film industry.

But despite these achievements, film production in Chile is difficult and risky. The domestic market is small: The last census recorded the national population as 15 million. While the film audience has been growing in the last five years, in 2001 it reached the modest total of 11.2 million, in a little over 200 theaters charging the equivalent of about \$4 per head. The capital, Santiago, home to one-third of Chileans, accounts for 70% of this audience. Production costs average \$400,000 per film, of which up to 30% may be subsidized by the gov-

ernment. The rest of the capital comes from ticket sales, television rights (the main buyer is the state-owned TV station), home video and, in some cases, cable television.

Public funding is supplied mostly by the Ministry of Economics' development office (CORFO). Competitive financing of up to \$15,000 is awarded for script and pre-production costs. In addition, direct subsidies help fund distribution, a way to promote films and reduce risks for new releases. Most production support comes through the Fund for Development of the Arts (FONDART) at the Ministry of Education, which holds contests for the approximately \$100,000 in film funding it makes available. FONDART also earmarks resources for short films and documentaries, covering almost all of their production costs. Other public offices that develop policies or actively facilitate audiovisual production include Pro-Chile and the Ministry of Foreign Relations' Department of Cultural Affairs, which support commercial distribution and cultural promotion abroad, and the Cinema and Audiovisual Arts Area of the Ministry of Education's Cultural Division. This is the official entity that coordinates the rest of the public offices involved and represents Chile at the Ibero-American Conference of Cinematographic Authorities (CACI) and the Ibermedia program. It also designs educational and regional audiovisual development policies.

The Chilean congress has finally approved a new law governing audiovisual promotion. This legisla-

tion, a product of consultation between the government and audiovisual organizations, will create a National Council for Audiovisual Arts and Industries. This new body will be public, autonomous, and funded by the national budget. It will be in charge of implementing national policies and programs to encourage and develop all stages in the cinematographic process: production, distribution, and creation and preservation of works. The council will administer a development fund that will grant competitive and direct aid to producers, distributors, and educational and cultural agents. The new audiovisual law will be further supported by the National Cultural Council, another new body.

Current Chilean film production is characterized by a diverse range of plots and subject matters. Recent and upcoming titles include Miguel Littrín's *La última luna* and Sebastián Alarcón's *El fotógrafo* (Spanish co-productions funded by the Ibermedia program); Andrés Rac's *Tendida mirando las estrellas*; Jorge López's *El tren del desierto*; Gonzalo Justiniano's *El Leyton* and *Punto de partida* (an Ibermedia-funded co-production with Spain and Venezuela); Ricardo Carrasco's *Negocio redondo*; Boris Quercia's *Sexo con amor*; and a new film by Silvio Caiozzi. The younger generation tends to produce more genre pictures, albeit with local subjects, such as the thriller *Paraiso B* by Nicolás Acuña or *Sangre eterna*, a horror flick by Jorge Olguín. A new batch of animated films (*Mampato y Ogu*, by Alejandro Rojas, and *Cesante*, by

Reports from the region

Ricardo Amunátegui) and documentaries (*Una villa alegre*, by Ignacio Agüero; *Nema problema*, by Christian Leighton, and *Un hombre aparte*, by Iván Osnovikoff and Bertina Perut) round out this encouraging picture.

COLOMBIA

Claudia Aguilera Neiva

Director of Cinematography,
Ministry of Culture

The process of film production in Colombia changed radically after the Cinematographic Development Company (FOCINE) closed in 1993, shifting from a primarily state-controlled system to one almost entirely in private hands. Between 1980 and 1993, few Colombian films were produced without FOCINE as producer or co-producer. For a few years afterward, the only state aid available was through the National Cinema Awards given out by the Awards and Fellowships Program at the Colombian Cultural Institute (COLCULTURA) and the occasional acquisition of copies and rights for Ministry of Foreign Affairs activities.

In 1997, Congress approved the creation of a Ministry of Culture with a Film Division. The responsibility of this office is to promote project development based on four basic principles: attracting and educating audiences; circulating and promoting films; providing production incentives through an annual film competition; and supporting the preservation and conservation of audiovisual material.

The most important activity of the Film Division for feature film production has been the economic stimulus of the awards handed out each year at the national film competition. These help fund different aspects of production, including script writing, project development, seed capital for beginning the production process, post-production, reproduction costs, and promotional and advertising expenses.

These resources come from the Ministry of Culture budget, which is determined each year by the federal authorities. Due to the difficult economic conditions in Colombia in recent years, these funds have experienced a gradual decline. In spite of the crisis, however, the ministry has kept the project alive as one of its flagship programs. Almost all films produced in Colombia since 1998 have benefited from its funding.

Although the money made available through the competitions is not sufficient on its own to fund million-dollar productions, international funds (Ibermedia, Fonds-Sud Cinéma, Hubert Bals) and private investors have helped complete funding for about a dozen films. Other producers and filmmakers involved in lower-budget productions have succeeded in covering all of their expenses through successive application for the different categories of awards. Obviously, this prolongs the production cycle, and three years can easily go by between receiving financing for the script, the seed capital and, finally, the production itself.

In addition, the Mixed-Fund Corporation for Cinematographic Production "Pro-Images in

Movement," a non-profit public-private venture, works in cooperation with the Film Division to promote film production. It serves as a forum for the many different components of the cinematographic sector (creation, implementation, exhibition, distribution and preservation) to debate and agree on policies. The Fund and the Film Division are backing the passage of a new Film Law, which is being considered by the Colombian Congress, to make available more resources for film production.

CUBA

Camilo Vives

Director, Audiovisual Production
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Cinematic Art and Industry

In the last decade, the Cuban Institute of Cinematic Art and Industry (ICAIC), with state backing, has concentrated all of its efforts on preserving the existence of Cuban cinema by implementing employment options that guarantee its continuity. This effort has come in response to the important socioeconomic changes brought by the revolution in the communications industry, which has obliged the Cuban film sector to put into place the necessary infrastructure to compete, even if only modestly. When combined with distribution channels and television networks owned by a few large companies, this has made the panorama for film production exceedingly difficult.

Like many other sectors in the country, ICAIC has had to adapt,

The development of the market for film in countries such as Cuba and the rest of Latin America has become more difficult in recent years. With few exceptions, even the region's strongest film industries have yet to achieve a solid position in their home bases. The key problem is an exhibition circuit for their products that remains marginalized in practice and extremely limited.

diversify and internationalize its traditional production and service modes to maintain its protective infrastructure. And all of this has had to be accomplished within a framework in keeping with the institute's sociocultural ends.

The development of the market for film in countries such as Cuba and the rest of Latin America has become more difficult in recent years. With few exceptions, even the region's strongest film industries have yet to achieve a solid position in their home bases. The key problem is an exhibition circuit for their products that remains marginalized in practice and extremely limited.

Just as in many other Latin American countries, in Cuba co-productions have become one of the most common formulas for sustaining the national film industry. Funding schemes involving other countries has made it possible to sustain original productions. Experience has shown that with the sufficient artistic and cultural will, this "marriage of convenience," while risky, need not result in adulterated products.

Some examples of co-productions from 1999-2000 are: *Lista de espera* (Juan Carlos Tabío, Cuba-Spain-

Mexico-France); *Un paraiso bajo las estrellas* (Gerardo Chijona, Cuba-Spain); *Las profecias de Amanda* (Pastor Vega, Cuba-Spain-Venezuela); and *Hacerse el sueco* (Daniel Díaz Torres, Cuba-Germany-Spain). All of these were co-productions with Cuba exerting majority control. Other films in this period featuring significant national input were *Operación Fingio* (Alberto Lecchi, Argentina-Cuba); *Cuba* (Pedro Carvajal, Spain-Cuba); and *Pata Negra* (Luis Oliveros, Spain-Cuba).

In 2001, new releases included *Miel para Oshún* (Humberto Solás), *Miradas* (Enrique Alvarez) and *Las noches de Constantinopla* (Orlando Rojas), all Spanish co-productions, the latter with support from Ibermedia. Cuba also was involved in a co-production with France: *Nada +* (Juan Carlos Cremata).

Beginning last year, ICAIC has sought to stabilize production at an average of four films per year. The four films in 2002 were *Entre ciclones*, the first feature-length film by critic and director Enrique Colina; *Roble de olor* (with support from Ibermedia), the first work of fiction by Rigoberto López, the creator of the successful documentary

Yo soy del son a la salsa (1998); *Aunque estés lejos*, the seventh feature-length film by Juan Carlos Tabío; and the sequel to *Vampiros en La Habana*, an animated Spanish co-production directed by Juan Padrón.

Films planned for 2003 include Manuel Herrera's *Bailando el cha chá*, with support from the Spanish company Filmax; *Benny Moré: el Bárbaro del Ritmo*, by Jorge Luis Sánchez; and *Perfecto amor equivocado*, by Gerardo Chijona in collaboration with Spain's Wanda Films.

This is the course being followed by new Cuban film projects in today's climate to boost local production. "Globalization" does not have to mean erasing the identities of different peoples. Instead, it can represent diversity and autochthonous expression by each nation.

PERU

Christian Wiener Fresco

Vice President, CONACINE-Peru

The state of Peruvian film changed substantially after December 1992, when Law 19327 governing film promotion was overturned. For 20 years, this legislation had stimulated production and benefited domestic producers by guaranteeing mandatory commercial runs in the nation's theaters and funneling a portion of municipal taxes to subsidize ticket prices.

After a difficult interim period, in 1994 the film industry succeeded in winning approval of new cinema legislation (Law 26370). Its main provision is an annual competition for feature-length films and shorts, with nonrefundable state awards administered by the National Council on Cinematography (CONACINE).

The contests were supposed to be funded with close to \$1.5 million

from the Ministry of Education budget. But in the seven years since the law was passed, no more than 10% to 15% of this amount has come through. This has made it possible to hold only four competitions each for feature films and shorts (instead of the 14 and 28 originally envisioned in each category). For the entire period, 12 features have received the state awards (so far, six of these projects have been completed), along with about 40 shorts. This figure is well below the average for Peruvian film production in the 1970s and '80s.

Another problem with the new law is CONACINE's lack of economic, financial and administrative autonomy. This affects the schedule for distributing funds and makes it impossible to monitor results effectively or support other activities related to film production. CONACINE has also been unable to focus on making channels of film distribution and exhibition more accessible, especially for short films, formerly a leading area of national production.

For all these reasons, CONACINE and filmmakers are urging the government to develop a new legal framework to provide effective and viable support for the Peruvian film industry. Taking into account the country's economic difficulties, the proposal recommends giving CONACINE real economic and administrative autonomy through creation of a fund to promote film production. Besides its official budget, this fund would receive additional financing through a ticket tax and a 1% increase in monthly subscriber fees for cable television. Peru would be following the example set in other countries, where the film industry itself funds the development of local production.

This system would keep the annual film competitions but also would

add other channels to fund the various stages of the production process, such as project development, production, post-production and distribution. It would seek to attract more private sector involvement and encourage commercial theaters to screen domestic films.

Peru joined the Ibermedia program in 2000, after a long effort by filmmakers and CONACINE to convince the authorities of the economic and cultural benefits of becoming part of this intergovernmental accord. At around the time of the summit of Latin American leaders held in Lima in 2001, Ibermedia distributed its first awards for Peruvian projects: one for co-productions, five for project development, one for distribution, and five training fellowships.

At the same time, some experienced filmmakers have continued to work as much as possible on the margins of state subsidies and support programs. One example is Francisco Lombardi, who has had two successful projects with the backing of a Peruvian television network and whose most recent production is financed through cooperative arrangements and mixed international support. Another is Federico García, who succeeded in making a feature film practically on his own, with minimal support from the Cuban Institute of Cinematic Art and Industry (ICAIC). His latest feature is a Spanish co-production.

URUGUAY

Sergio Miranda

Director, Uruguayan Film School

In circumstances as difficult as Uruguay's these days, the current state of film production in the country can be viewed in a positive light. Before, every time a new movie

came out it was hailed as "the first Uruguayan film." But now, despite one of the worst economic and political crises in the country's history, film and audiovisual production have been adopted as a source of cultural renewal. More films are being produced, and for three years in a row it has been possible to achieve something unprecedented: to have three Uruguayan films in the theaters at the same time. This year saw the release of *Mala racha* (Daniela Speranza), *Corazón de fuego* (Diego Arzuaga) and *A pesar de Treblinka* (Gerardo Stawsky). In 2001, Uruguay even competed for the Oscar for Best Foreign Film with *En la puta vida* (Beatriz Flores). Both this film and *25 watts* (Pablo Stoll/Juan Pablo Rebella) received important recognition at international film festivals.

So how are films produced in Uruguay? The only competition for financing is through the Fund for Audiovisual Support (FONA), which awards funding for two works of fiction and one documentary per year. The money for these awards comes from private sources, the city of Montevideo and the Ministry of Education and Culture. The National Audiovisual Institute, which is part of the Ministry, used to have contests to help fund script writing, production and project launching, but they have long since ceased and there is no prospect of bringing them back. It's also worth mentioning that as part of its policy to support audiovisual production, the Montevideo municipal government has a program for co-producing films. In addition, the Office of the President of Uruguay has formed a support unit for developing the industry's potential to produce films for export. So far, its work has focused on facilitating and speeding up production in the stages that depend on state cooperation, and

strategies are being pursued to develop the sector.

But the most important force in Uruguayan film production continues to be filmmakers themselves. Professional executive producers are working to develop and complete projects, several at once in some cases. International co-productions have opened the door to new possibilities unimaginable just a short time ago. Uruguay co-produces films with Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Venezuela, Spain, France, Germany and Japan and is eager for more opportunities in this area. A series of agreements is already in effect with other Latin American countries, Canada and Europe to promote the co-production of feature and animated films.

The Uruguayan Film School, the only educational institution in the country dedicated purely and exclusively to all areas relating to film and video, and the nation's universities are graduating new filmmakers, producers, scriptwriters, cameramen and other film professionals. Every year, this pool of qualified personnel increases the country's audiovisual production. Short films are also being professionalized and some 35-millimeter productions have been featured in and won awards at film festivals abroad. Production of digital, art and dance videos has also increased and has attracted international attention.

In sum, Uruguay's film sector is experiencing an unprecedented professionalization and organization oriented toward alternatives and solutions for promoting, producing, developing and conserving the country's audiovisual industry. The field is fertile and promising, and the seeds that have been sown augur well for the continued generation of high-quality products. All of us in the private and public sectors are working to make this happen.

VENEZUELA

Mario Crespo

Director and producer

The first thing that stands out in the Venezuelan film industry is filmmakers' vocation and dedication to their craft, despite the country's economic crisis. At the time of this writing, inflation had reached 26% and the national currency, the *bolívar*, had experienced a sharp devaluation. This has made it harder for both public and private institutions to participate in film production. Support now comes almost solely from the state, which can provide only meager funding through the National Autonomous Center for Cinematography (CNAC). Venezuelan film production has suffered from a scarcity of resources for production, distribution and exhibition, which is confined to marginal outlets. Adding to the problem is weak legislation in support of the film industry.

Despite state funding of only about \$1.18 million, in 2002 Venezuela managed to produce 11 feature-length films, 10 shorts, two television films, one documentary and one mid-length feature. In 2001, close to 98% of CNAC financing was channeled into projects. Of the 11 feature-length films produced that year, three were in post-production in 2002, four were completed, three were being shown in theaters and one was in contract for post-production. Of 10 short films, one was completed, four were in post-production and five were being exhibited, as were two documentaries. In addition, one television film was being made and one was in post-production. In 2002, the industry expected to premier 12 feature films, 12 shorts and six chapters of a television series.

The CNAC considers co-production to be one of the best ways to

overcome the serious financial problems of the Venezuelan film industry, and to that end it is working to attract foreign producers. Two co-productions were started in 2002, with the participation of Spain, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

Distribution and marketing limitations have not stopped Venezuelan films from finding audiences abroad, however. In 2001, 53 shows, retrospectives or series of Venezuelan films were held in cities around the world. In addition, Venezuelan films, directors and actors won 14 awards at international festivals.

An important step forward in 2002 was the approval of reforms to the national Film Law, and other proposed changes to this legislation. Among the most important reforms passed were the introduction of screening quotas, mandatory screenings of non-promotional shorts in all theaters, the creation of a National Film Registry, and the production of copies for domestic use.

Aware of the importance of film for historic and cultural memory, as well as the creative potential of the sector, Venezuelan filmmakers and the CNAC are working to improve the nation's film law and their industry, and to collaborate on productions with other countries.

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For more information about the FIU Film Studies Certificate Program, contact:

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FIU

Tales of Corruption

by Eduardo Guizar

Some of the biggest box office hits in Mexican cinema in the past two decades offer a denunciation of corruption in the highest spheres of power. Typically, they tell the tale of characters who initially resist temptation, but later learn to use and abuse power in their favor. Particularly since the late 1990s, an open critique of state and church in Mexico has attracted large audiences eager to open spaces of discussion in the public arena. The denunciation films explicitly depict the complicity of the church and state in illegal commerce, crime and immoral activities. In doing so, they take on a sociopolitical problematic that has long been a topic of private discussion in Mexico but only rarely addressed directly in public, in books and on film.

This study analyzes the narrative of denunciation in contemporary Mexican cinema, taking as examples two recently released films condemned by church or state and applauded by audiences: *El crimen del Padre Amaro* ("The Crime of Father Amaro," 2002), an adaptation of José María Eça de Queiroz's novel of the same name; and Luis Estrada's *La ley de Herodes* ("Herod's Law," 1999). The films tell tales of corruption but do not suggest solutions to the problems presented. Instead, they limit themselves to revealing hopelessly repetitive cycles of corruption that appear to have no end.

Both narratives begin a new story, but are themselves preceded by another tale of corruption. They open with the arrival in a small town of a character who is at the begin-

ning of a saga that will lead him into a world of corruption with which he is little acquainted and in which survival depends on the skill to adapt. In addition, the two movies make reference in their titles to judicial processes and incorporate tales of state or church misdeeds into love stories. Love and corruption exist side by side in each film, forming part of the everyday lives of the characters.

Cycles of Corruption

Denunciation films employ a series of strategies, first presenting a negative portrayal of the centers of power to reinforce the idea of an overwhelmingly corrupt government. Similar to the paintings of Diego Rivera, with their stark contrast between rich and poor, the camera dwells at length on those in positions of power, while shots of impoverished peasants and urban dwellers are usually very brief. The action that follows conveys a sense of disillusionment with a sociopolitical reality from which there appears to be no escape and in which corruption pervades every part of the system. In this dead-end world, the characters are forced either to follow the rules of the corrupt or get out of the game. As a gangster film imprisons characters in a labyrinth with no way out except death, the denunciation film includes the murder of those who decide not to follow the rules, and the reward of those who do.

El crimen del Padre Amaro shows how a young, inexperienced priest (Gael García Bernal) succumbs to the temptations of power and forbidden sexuality when he is sent to a

church in a rural community. The local priest, Father Benito (Sancho Gracia), confesses that he has broken his vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Father Amaro ends up following a similar path. He maintains an active sex life with a teenaged catechism teacher, Amelia (Ana Claudia Talancón), who is the daughter of La Sanjuanera (Angélica Aragón), the mistress of Father Benito, and, most likely, Father Benito's daughter, as well. When Amelia becomes pregnant as a result of her affair with Father Amaro, she is forced to have an abortion and dies. *El crimen del Padre Amaro* presents a forbidden love between a priest and a townswoman and, at the same time, the crime of a priest who destroys the lives of his own child and lover.

The film magnifies Father Amaro's crime by portraying the ease with which he adapts to a corrupt system. He blindly obeys instructions from his bishop because he realizes they are to his benefit, and he learns to lie and take advantage of the power conferred on him. The spectator witnesses Father Amaro's evolution into a character who satisfies all personal desires and is lacking in feelings or shame, a kind of immoral monster with a double standard of morality for himself and for his parishioners. At one point, he is almost swayed by the words of a virtuous priest who lives in the jungle with the peasants, but in the end he decides to continue on in his corrupt ways.

La ley de Herodes portrays a circular path of corruption similar to the cycle depicted in *El crimen del padre Amaro*. Each new arrival in San Pedro de los Sagueros, the small

Mexico's cinema of denunciation



Recent Mexican films take on corruption at the church and state levels.

town shown in the film, starts off with good intentions but soon falls into the prevailing net of corruption. The fatalistic destiny of the protagonists is found in the very title of the film, which makes reference to an irreverent Mexican saying. Invoking *la ley de Herodes*, the law of Herod, is shorthand for saying “*o te chingas o te jodes*”—“you’re damned if you do, damned if you don’t.” In the film’s parlance, there is no exit from the labyrinth of corruption.

La ley de Herodes opens with a flashback showing the mayor of San Pedro de los Sagueros carrying a gun

and a copy of the Mexican Constitution. He is in the house of man he appears to have just killed, looking for secret hiding places for money: inside the constitution, in a safe, behind a picture of President Miguel Alemán, in a clock. Stuffing the money in a bag and stealing the belongings off the dead man’s body, he runs outside. The spectator next sees the townspeople decapitate him, as the title of the film appears on the screen in black and white.

The following scenes portray the dealings of López (Pedro Armendáriz), a candidate for gover-

nor. To be elected, he needs to present a peaceful atmosphere in San Pedro de los Sagueros and decides to send Juan Vargas (Damián Alcázar) to the town. Vargas’s meekness and obedience to the party make him the perfect candidate to act as interim mayor. López tells him that he is being sent to represent the ideals of President Alemán, modernity and social justice. He recommends that Vargas fight corruption, engage in social service, avoid becoming one of those who gain great wealth at the cost of the people, and end the current climate of disorder.

When Vargas arrives in the community, he finds its buildings in ruins, including the school built during the Cárdenas period. He does not understand the language of the indigenous Mixtec inhabitants, who, he soon learns, killed the last three mayors sent to govern them. The local physician, Doctor Morales, recommends that Vargas close the town brothel, run by Doña Lupe (Isela Vega). Lupe offers him some money as a *mordida*, or bribe, to let her continue to run her business. Vargas refuses and goes to talk with the town priest, who tells him that he should have accepted the money, for Lupe provides a social service to the community. Vargas soon goes to see the priest again after Doctor Morales threatens to denounce his performance as mayor to the politician López. To help Vargas off the hook, the priest tells him (for a fee) about the doctor's sexual abuse of his adolescent maid.

In the meantime, Morales goes to see López but is unable to overcome the bureaucratic hurdles to meet with him. When he returns to town, he learns that he is accused of rape and sexual misconduct. It is recommended to him that he leave town with his wife, and Vargas decides that his maid should work in the brothel. However, since Vargas himself has already killed Lupe, the girls escape from prostitution, taking the maid with them. By then, Vargas has learned to rule by repression, using a gun López gave him and a constitution that he himself has created, which includes a new law allowing re-election of the mayor for up to three successive 20-year terms. His corrupt practices include forcing the townspeople to pay excessive taxes. When López visits San Pedro de los Saguaros to investigate complaints, he stands up to Vargas. In a fight between the two, Vargas kills López, who also has a dirty secret—after los-

ing the election for governor, he ordered the assassination of the governor-elect. Before Vargas himself is lynched by the townspeople, he is saved by a passing car.

In the film's last scene, we see Vargas giving a speech before the Senate. He has become the leader of the party in power, a party whose goal is to win the elections at any cost. Vargas accepts that he has committed crimes, but argues that his actions were politically necessary. The film ends with a round of applause from all present in the Senate Chamber.

Demands for Accountability

In both *El crimen del Padre Amaro* and *La ley de Herodes*, the arrival of an outsider has sociopolitical implications, driving home the point that power in the community derives from an outside source. This reflects the centralization of power in Mexico, where orders originate from superiors who reside in Mexico City. At times, the turmoil in the films' story lines is no less surreal than the events reported in the national newspaper headlines: financial scandals (FOBAPROA, Pemexgate); mind-boggling crimes committed by individuals close to the sources of power (Raúl Salinas de Gortari, brother of former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari); or the mysterious deaths of important personages (Guadalajara Archbishop Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo, presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio). Faced with events such as these, Mexicans wait to see what will happen next in what is popularly referred to as the *selenovela nacional*, or national soap opera.

Denunciation films appear to fill the need for a dialogue between the public and the text, a need that is even stronger when one factors in the demand for information about the disappearances of workers, peasants,

teachers and students during the "dirty war" of the 1970s. These crimes have only recently begun to be investigated. The films' emphasis on the authoritarian nature of the state carries special weight in the context of the growing pressure to seek the truth about past events. For decades, the media kept quiet about the direct participation of the Mexican army in the massacre of student demonstrators in the Plaza de Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968. The first film to deal openly with this reality was Jorge Fons's *Rojo amanecer* (1989).

The denunciation of corruption and abuse of power in Mexican cinema reflects public distrust of state and church discourses and practices. The gap that exists between these institutions and the public has been evident since the late 1960s and 1970s. The first signs of dissatisfaction with the ruling order came from students, the mothers of the disappeared, gays and lesbians, indigenous groups, peasants and workers, who protested corruption and inequality in public demonstrations. Now, Mexican cinematography has taken on the task of dramatizing the charges made earlier in the literary chronicles of such writers as Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis. *El crimen del Padre Amaro*, *La ley de Herodes* and other films of their genre indict a judicial system that functions on the side of corruption. Their critiques take on new meaning in light of current events in Mexico, a country that only recently saw the end of 71 years of one-party rule. Denunciation films address the necessity for a confrontation with the buried memories of the crimes of the past.

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Cine a lo Chileno

by Cristian Salazar

Hasn't anyone told you that the Chilean film industry doesn't exist?" Daniel Henríquez, president of the Chilean Association of Short Film Producers (ACORCH), asked me when I explained to him that I was researching the "renovation" of the Chilean film industry in the 1990s.

We were standing in a classroom of ARCIS University, the openly left-wing private higher-education institution in Santiago de Chile that also serves as one of the main loci of film production in the country. Henríquez looked like many of the students: His hair was long and unkempt, his T-shirt emblazoned with the punk group The Clash, and he spoke so intensely that he might as well have been talking about political agitation instead of cinema.

I asked Henríquez how it could be that a film industry didn't exist in the country if film production did? After all, Chile had produced exactly zero feature films in the 1980s, but in the period 1998-2000 alone, 20 had been released nationally. Several of these films had even gone on to win international film festival awards and many had reaped substantial profits at the Chilean box office. Henríquez began to explain the dizzying array of private, governmental and transnational mechanisms that exist for financing national films in Chile. But I prefer the answer that Jorge Olguín, director of *Ángel negro*, Chile's first horror film, gave me when I asked him how he had gotten his movie made and distributed to theatres national-

The challenges of production in a fledgling market

ly: "A lo chileno"---Chilean-style.

So what is the Chilean style of making films? And how did the country manage to increase film production in the 1990s without the aid of any formal institution, either something like Hollywood or a state-funded organization, as in many other Latin American countries?

Chilean Cinema in the Age of Globalization

Several historical events transformed Chilean cinema in the 1990s and brought it from a moribund state to outright revitalization. In 1990, Patricio Aylwin took office as the first democratically elected president since the Pinochet-led military junta toppled the Allende administration in 1973. During the Pinochet dictatorship, only one film was produced nationally. The most important cinematic work was done clandestinely by networks of activists documenting the regime's human rights abuses. The democratic transition allowed for increased freedom of expression in the arts as well as politically, setting the stage for a revival of Chilean culture and artistic expression.

With these changes, two generations of Chilean filmmakers came together for the first time. Exiled filmmakers with experience gained abroad began trickling back into the country. They brought with them

much needed experience and professionalism, as well as the desire to produce films locally. And a younger generation of filmmakers began telling stories that reflected the everyday lives of Chileans, as in the case of *El chacotero sentimental* (1999), based on a popular radio talk show. "This gave impetus for many people who hadn't ever watched national films to go out and see them and to get interested in them," asserts Alejandra Cillero, of the Cultural Affairs Division of the Ministry of Foreign Relations.

Perhaps more important, Latin American governments in the 1990s began to see cinema as a means to rebrand and revitalize the way that the world and their own citizens perceived their nations. A widespread sense that an inundation of cultural products from the United States was, if not deleterious, then certainly disconcerting, helped foment public policies to nurture national film production: According to a March 2001 issue of *Pulso latinoamericano*, the average Latin American teenager might watch 12 movies over the span of one month in a theatre, on television or on cable. Nine or 10 of the 12 would undoubtedly have originated in the United States.

The problem, according to Silvio Caiozzi, director of the internationally acclaimed Chilean film *Coronación* (1999), is the way Latin

Americans perceive the role of film in their culture, in contrast to the United States. Caiozzi asserts that the US has always perceived its cinema as simply another "way to sell—not only film but also American culture, products, and the American way of life. And the world has devoured it, it has bought that ... way of life." Latin Americans, in turn, have always viewed the seventh art as more of a hobby, something fun or "cultural," but never as a product to sell the image or identity of the country portrayed in the film.

"In this world, there are countries that make film and there are those that don't," argues Roberto Trejo, director of the Program for the Development of Feature Length Films at CORFO, the national development corporation. Trejo, whose office is located in central Santiago, is the closest thing to a Hollywood mogul in Chile. He talks about film in varying tones, sometimes like an MBA grad and sometimes like a member of the 1960s New Latin American Cinema Movement, whose members unabashedly aligned themselves with the radical cultural politics of the day.

CORFO is one of the main sources of funding for a great majority of Chilean films and Trejo okays every film in Chile before it goes into production. I asked him why the state was so interested in funding national cinema, especially at a time of increased neoliberal globalization. "In the global market, Chile was a nobody," he asserted. "An unknown. And the fundamental reason was that countries gain an identity through the audiovisual market when they produce film." To Trejo, if a country has an identity intimately linked to a recognizable film history, then "clearly it has a cultural identity."

A young Chilean put the situation in more concrete terms: "Someone

"The greatest problem for Latin American films is that they have no means of distribution and, for this reason, they can't reimburse themselves for even the minimum cost of production," argues Eugenio Llona, former director of the International Film Festival in Viña del Mar.

I used to know would put a flag of the US on his jacket. He did it because, just like in that film *Top Gun*, with Tom Cruise, the pilots wore flags on their uniforms." His point? Because of the power of the moving image to disseminate the US "way of life," Chileans are more likely to associate themselves with the American nation-brand than with their own. "There was absolutely no way he was going to put a flag of Chile on his jacket," the young man added. Cinema for Chile, then, has become a pivotal means for constructing an "imaginary nationhood" for a domestic as well as global audience.

Producing films in Chile, however, remains a daunting prospect.

"Filmmaking in Chile Is Suicide"

"The way in which we've been producing films is not very orthodox," says Jorge Olguín, who, in his mid-twenties, is one of Chile's youngest film directors. We spoke at his house in a suburb of Santiago de Chile, which doubles as the headquarters of his film production company.

A graduate of the ARCIS University Film School, Olguín made national headlines in 2000 with *Angel negro*. The low-budget film exploits the "slasher" sub-genre with all of its Hollywood conventions intact. One might even con-

sider it Olguín's undergraduate thesis, since he produced it while still a student, and it shows a remarkable knowledge and internalization of Hollywood modes of narrative production. The film doesn't have many cultural markers that would specify its origin as Chilean, save that the characters speak a distinctly Chilean Spanish. Otherwise, it is conventional to the point of banality.

Olguín represents one facet of the younger generation of Chilean filmmakers who grew up on Hollywood fare. This group has a more tenuous connection to the radical politics of the New Latin American Cinema movement of the 1960s and embraces the "universalizing" aspects of globalization. As Olguín said to me, "I don't like to go around saying I make Chilean films... I would like to think I make universal films, with universal themes, that just happen to be Chilean."

Angel negro was a surprise hit nationally and brought a largely youthful audience into theaters to see a Chilean film for the first time. Olguín himself wouldn't look out of place at a concert by Marilyn Manson or Korn. The day I met him he wore black and his hair was spiked in classic Goth rocker fashion. "Terror is universal," Jorge Olguín replied when I asked whether he considers himself a

Chilean or horror filmmaker.

"Maybe the way... I show it, or I would like to show it, is distinct from other terrors [in other cultures], but it's essentially the same."

Despite the success of *Angel negro*, Olgún had to navigate a sinuous path to finance and produce his second feature, the vampire picture *Sangre eterna*, released in 2002 to largely negative reviews in Chile. The film treads the same B-movie horror conventions as *Angel negro*, although it ups the gore ante considerably. At a cost of \$300,000, *Sangre eterna* is one of the more expensive Chilean features, due to the amount of special effects used in the production. To obtain financing, Olgún first applied for government grants, then sought out co-producers and money from private sources. Ultimately, he expected to fund part of the film from his own pocket.

"Filmmaking in Chile is suicide," Daniel Pantoja, a producer of several Chilean films, told me in his office in Santiago. We had been sketching the general "topography" of how films are financed in Chile and the exercise was driving us both crazy. "You know, no one has this documented," he said, referring to Chile's film production process. He described the avenues for filmmakers to compete for funds offered by the Ministry of Education, the Foundation for Art (FONDART), CORFO and ProChile, the commercial arm of the Ministry of Foreign Relations. He also elucidated a farrago of ways that local producers can tap into private investor funds and transnational co-producers. Looking at the diagram Pantoja sketched for me, I realized it is a miracle that films get produced in Chile at all.

"There is no place to form a film industry," says Carlos Flores, director of the Film School in Santiago.

We were sitting in his office on the top floor of the somewhat decrepit film school administration building. A bowl of cigarette butts sat between me and Flores on his desk and he held a lit cigarette in one hand. Flores had been involved in film production prior to the 1973 coup and his insights into the state of Chilean cinema were invaluable.

To Flores, as well as many other film producers, the only recourse to rationalizing film production in Chile is through the creation of a Film Law, one that would create various government-funded organizations dedicated to fomenting national cinema, thereby centralizing film production. The process of accessing funds to produce movies would become a more thorough and structured process. But whereas a Film Law would resolve many problems with legislation and consolidation of production processes, it wouldn't address other challenges: financing, distribution, creation of professionals, new markets to sustain film production, etc.

"The greatest problem for Latin American films is that they have no means of distribution and, for this reason, they can't reimburse themselves for even the minimum cost of production," argues Eugenio Llona, former director of the International Film Festival in Viña del Mar. The Chilean government has negotiated some mechanisms for transnational co-production and bilateral distribution, but obviously a good deal of work remains to be done in this area.

Filmmakers have their own qualms about the current state of film production in Chile. Orlando Lübbert, whose black comedy *Taxi para tres* was released nationally in 2001, says, "There is a great mass of students who have studied in film schools who know a little about everything but who know very little

about any one thing in depth." For Lübbert the problem is that national film schools don't teach specialties and anyone who wants to get into the schools can, no matter what their qualifications. "The schools don't produce...the midlevel people," he continues. "There's simply no relation between the development of cinema and the production of good scripts."

Recent Developments

At the writing of this article, the Chilean National Congress was in the process of debating whether to pass a Film Law that will effectively centralize film production. On October 30, 2002, the National Congress approved a new Cinema Ratings Law that ends official censorship of films and implements a new ratings scale based on the US system (PG, R, etc.). ProChile, the commercial export section of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, launched a portal devoted to Chilean Cinema on the Web at <http://www.chilecine.cl>. And Chile continues to expand film and audiovisual production in the country: This year, besides *Sangre eterna*, more than a dozen Chilean films in various genres will be released nationally and internationally, providing further evidence that the country is quickly becoming a major producer of cinema.

This is good news for everyone. As one Chilean film producer told me, if Latin American countries don't produce cinema, as well as other cultural products for global consumption, then "the whole world will turn into the United States."

Cristian Salazar has written for The Bloomsbury Review, Connections to the Americas and The Denver Business Journal.

The Sleepless Screen

by Alejandro Ríos

The Cuban passion for film traces back to the nineteenth century, specifically, Havana in 1897. That year brought the visit of Gabriel Veyre, a representative of the French studio Lumière, who traveled to Cuba from Mexico to demonstrate the invention of the cinematograph. Havana then was a cosmopolitan city, enjoying the newest trends in modern life and entertainment, but surrounded on all sides by the fierce battle for Cuban independence.

Many circumstances have affected the development of the art of film in Cuba since. Somewhat artificially, historians have divided the evolution of Cuban cinema into three periods: silent, republican and revolutionary. The latter periods, the most important for this discussion, are characterized by paradox.

The revolutionary phase, which began in 1959 under the aegis of the Cuban Institute of Cinematic Art and Industry (ICAIC), sought a definitive break with the narrative forms that preceded it. ICAIC attempted to move away from the successful US model in favor of the experimental approach of the European vanguard. Pointedly left out was anything to do with the country's own past and traditions. No more rumbas, Virgins of Charity, or old-fashioned films like *Casta de robles* or *Siete muertas a plazo fijo*: It was time to wipe the slate clean and start all over again. The new films retold history in a different way and in support of a

Earlier films are characterized by the simple pleasure and adventure of filmmaking, in contrast to the ponderous motives of the later works, preoccupied as they are with posterity and serving as models for the new Cuban culture.

predetermined thesis. The nationalism of Martí was usurped by a Marxist internationalism. The Socialist bloc had added the pearl of the Antilles, an oasis of green in a gray system, annexed by force to Eastern Europe thanks to an enormous war effort by the new mother country.

But epic and experimental fervor was soon replaced by institutional caution. The ideological requirement was a heavy burden for films to bear. The first act of censorship, involving a documentary about Havana nightlife, cut short the honeymoon between artists and the powers that supplied them with their plots and a space for production.

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, these same artists never dreamed that part of the rubble would fall on their heads. They have had to learn how to compete in a wider market through co-productions, mostly pedestrian comedies about local scamps and clueless foreigners and unredeemed by aesthetics or any deeper philosophy.

This could count as the revenge of the earlier protagonists of Cuban

cinema. It wasn't until the 1980s that the late Héctor García Mesa, director of Cuba's Cinemateca, had the courage to host a program of Cuban movies from before 1959 at a film archives congress in Havana. And in 1990, the Pompidou Center in Paris presented the largest retrospective of Cuban films ever shown outside the island. Organized by Brazilian researcher Paulo Antônio Paranagua, the program featured 16 pre-revolutionary productions.

Early Cuban Cinema

Scholarly interest has focused on salvaging this fragment of Cuban culture. *El cine silente en Cuba*, by Raúl Rodríguez; *La tienda negra. El cine en Cuba (1897-1990)*, by María Eulalia Douglas; and *Gula crítica del cine cubano de ficción*, by Juan Antonio García Borrero, all owe a debt to Arturo Agramonte's earlier work, *Cronología del cine cubano*, published in 1966.

Not much is known about the formative period of Cuban cinema. For the most part, only bits and pieces of silent films have survived, along with two complete works, including Ramón Peón's *La Virgen*

A brief history of Cuban cinema

de la Caridad. Numerous commentaries in the press of the time show that Cubans were very interested in the emerging art of film and the quest for balance between commercial and artistic considerations.

The first Cuban filmmakers, of whom the most original included Peón and Enrique Díaz Quesada, must have faced many challenges in beginning their careers in an entirely new field, with no established traditions or infrastructure. Why then is it so easy to criticize the films of the republican period, with their stereotypes, naiveties and rambling dialogue, while turning a blind eye to the kitsch, pretentiousness, dogmatism, paternalism and pedantry of so many ICAIC projects?

Personally, if I had to choose between *La mesera del café del puerto* (1955), *La única* (1952) and *Mi ta de América* (1939), on the one hand, and *No hay sábado sin sol* (1979), *Los refugiados de la Cueva del Muerto* (1983) and *En el aire* (1988), on the other, I would prefer the first group. These earlier films are characterized by the simple pleasure and adventure of filmmaking, in contrast to the ponderous motives of the later works, pre-occupied as they are with posterity and serving as models for the new Cuban culture.

The Arrival of Sound

Max Tosquella's short film *Maracas y bongó* (1932) was the first real "talking" film made in Cuba. Tosquella himself had produced an earlier effort that same

year, the short documentary *Un rollo Movietone*, but with less successful results. *Maracas y bongó* was set in an empty lot in Havana. Feature-length talking films would have to wait until 1937 and Ernesto Caparrós's *La serpiente roja*. This story was based on the successful radio series by Félix B. Cagnet, which featured one of the most popular protagonists in Cuban popular culture, the Chinese detective Chan Li Po.

María Eulalia Douglas's exhaustive study of Cuban film, *La tienda negra*, contains abundant data and information about pre-revolutionary productions. According to her research, approximately 714 feature films and 357 documentaries were released in Cuba between 1897 and 1960.

Early filmmakers worked hard to consolidate a national film industry. Gradually, they established associations, unions, leftist and rightist cells, paragonmental institutions, societies, companies, commissions, distributors, producers, legislative proposals, studios—all part of a dynamic and fluid social structure with its own demands and competitive spirit and determined to make its opinions heard.

The Revolutionary Lens

This democratic system collapsed in 1959, when properties were "nationalized" and expropriated from their legitimate owners. Any semblance of independence came to an end with the creation of ICAIC in March of the same year. The irreverent dialogue, the

rumba, the passionate melodramas, much of popular music, the *negrito* and *gallego*, the stars, the cabarets, the clubs, the drunks, the double entendres, the corner bar and café, the magazines and newspapers, political humor, the national passion for trivia, the lively local speech and the middle class packed their bags and left in search of a better life.

The camera surveyed the euphoric streets of the revolution like Stendhal's mirror. The national mood became serious and responsible, artistic, intellectual and profound in solidarity with Eastern Europe, which had already had years of experience on the same doomed path toward a future without social classes or inequality. The course was already well marked and dictated into the ear of the artist who feigned freedom within the confines of his situation.

History molds the keys to interpretation. Problems such as social marginalization and racism officially ended in 1959. According to the new, official view, blacks were slaves, runaways or *mambises* (rebels), and did not exist in contemporary society. The *asere*, or regular Joe, was educated and recalled only as a bad memory, an obstacle to progress. There were no more cabaret singers, prostitutes, ruffians, peanut vendors, bolero singers, bandits, pot-smoking musicians, bourgeois patients on the therapist's couch, storeowners or bus drivers. All were transformed into proletarians of the vanguard, committed intellectuals, soldiers, literacy workers, security

As long as the success and even the failures of the past are branded as suspect and trivial in comparison to so-called revolutionary cinematic art, it will be impossible to look objectively at Cuban film.

agents, Soviet-style teachers, or other victims of the new man and woman.

Finally, Cuba had the national cinema it longed for, with an indelible ideological branding.

Exile and Co-productions

In the meantime, Cuban film in exile—a subject that has not received much attention—produced such gems as *El Super* (1979), by León Ichaso and Orlando Jiménez Leal, a conceptual and aesthetic masterpiece. Based on a play by Iván Acosta, this small but powerful film is an unpretentious glimpse into the experience of exile and alienation in a foreign land.

The creators of this project have had an important impact on Cuban American culture. Acosta continued his successful career as a playwright. Jiménez Leal went on to produce documentaries along with Jorge Ulla, Néstor Amendros and Ichaso. The latter made the film *Azúcar amarga* (1996) and has been involved in many other aspects of Latino and popular culture.

Even more than feature films, Cuban filmmakers living abroad have made numerous documentaries about the island and its people as they have scattered throughout the world. Some day, undoubtedly, all of these works will be considered part of Cuba's cultural patrimony.

Four decades after the revolution, those filmmakers who faithfully adhered to the requirements of the

socialist project are, for the most part, working elsewhere. Actors, directors, editors and cameramen are collaborating on soap operas and made-for-TV movies in other Latin American countries. For the most part, their work makes the films of Peón, Díaz Quesada and Alonso look like masterpieces in comparison. Those who stayed in Cuba despite the obstacles desperately curry the favor of foreign sponsors who almost always condition their support on picturesque storylines, full of characters who make do through prostitution as they wait for the change that never comes.

Cuba still has a long way to go when a documentary like *23, el Broadway habanero* (1958), a profile of the famous thoroughfare in El

Vedado, is banned as subversive because it shows the lively commerce, transit, entertainment, street life and architecture that characterized the city before the revolution. As long as the successes and even the failures of the past are branded as suspect and trivial in comparison to so-called revolutionary cinematic art, it will be impossible to look objectively at Cuban film.

Despite the US, French, German, Italian, Soviet and other influences that have shaped the most representative examples of socialist films (Alea, Solás, Rojas, Pérez, Tablo, Díaz Torres, García Espinosa), the ghosts of the republican cinema, the heretical forefathers of the Cuban family, haunt their pretensions of intellectualism for its own sake. The subversive melodies of the past animate more than a few scenes in films that, someday, will be viewed as chapters in a single story.

Alejandro Ríos is a media specialist at Miami-Dade Community College. A film and art critic, he is founder and curator of MDCC's Cuban Cinema Series.

MAS ALLA DEL MAR (BEYOND THE SEA), a full-length documentary on the Mariel boatlift, premiered on the opening night of the Made in Miami Film Festival, January 10, 2002, at Miami's historic Tower Theater. Produced, filmed, and edited by Lisandro Pérez-Rey, with support from FIU's Cuban Research Institute and the Ford Foundation, the 80-minute documentary was awarded the Festival's prize for Best Documentary Feature. *Más Alla del Mar* presents the story of one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of human migrations. In a few short weeks in 1980, nearly 130,000 Cubans left their homeland in an unrelenting stream of vessels bound for Key West. More than two decades later, the personal stories surrounding the boatlift, filmed for this documentary, continue to resonate with an energy that can only be described as surreal, powerful. Weaving together these riveting stories along with rare historical images and footage from present-day Cuba, this film recreates the "explosion of 1980," a crisis that shook Cuban as well as American society.

MAS ALLA DEL MAR (BEYOND THE SEA)

A film by Lisandro Pérez-Rey

80 min., English/Spanish (with English subtitles)

Executive Producer: Lisandro Pérez

Sponsored by the CRJ, with support from the Ford Foundation

For more information, e-mail the CRJ at crinst@fiu.edu.

B-Movies in the Pampas

by Tamara L. Falicov

In a period when a deep economic crisis has profoundly affected all sectors of the Argentine economy, filmmakers face a grave challenge in financing films and keeping the national film industry afloat.

Although the current financial crisis is not the first of its kind (Argentina has suffered a cycle of booms and busts over the last 70 years or so), it is particularly sad to see filmmakers struggle after the upsurge in dynamic, innovative and unusual films to come out of Argentina in recent years. Films such as *La ciénaga* (2001), *Nueve reinas* (2000) and *Bolivia* (2000) were enthusiastically received at home and abroad and won awards at film festivals.

Traditionally, one strategy that has given producers an opportunity to pool funding and gain access to other markets has been the bi- and multilateral agreements known as film co-productions. More generally, the use of co-production financing vis-à-vis (typically) wealthier countries is an important outlet for films to be made, exhibited and distributed throughout Latin America. Argentina historically has had many co-production agreements with countries in Europe (principally Spain, France and Italy), the United States and other Latin American nations. The majority of films made in this fashion have an art house sensibility; for example, Subiela's Argentine-Spanish co-production, *El lado oscuro del corazón* (1992) and Solana's Franco-Argentine *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel* (1986). Co-pro-

Roger Corman's co-productions in Argentina

ductions are generally founded on an agreement in which a film is made and marketed for all countries involved. During the 1980s financial crisis, however, Argentine filmmakers were willing to appeal to any source of foreign investment to keep the national film industry alive. Enter Roger Corman's "schlockbuster" movies. Most of the film content had little bearing on Argentine culture. In addition, these films, unlike typical co-productions, were made principally for export. The case of Roger Corman's co-productions in Argentina raises the question: Do the economic benefits of these films outweigh the cultural costs?

In the 1980s, Argentina was the site of nine commercial releases produced in part by Corman, the master of the low-budget film. He teamed up with Héctor Olivera, one of the most successful producers in Argentina, on entertainment films such as *Death Stalker*, *Barbarian Queen*, *Two to Tango*, and *Cocaine Wars*.

Communications scholar Octavio Getino has argued that the production of these films was a boon to the Argentine film industry, providing employment and giving technicians the experience of working on low-budget genre movies. Yet most of these films did not represent Argentina or its culture in any way, and when they did, it was in a

stereotyped and distorted fashion. Most were shot in English and destined for the English-language market. Unequal power dynamics, described in interviews with Argentine members of the crew, plagued each film's production process. Research by Vincent Porter suggests that co-productions between nations often reinscribe the unequal economic relationships that exist between the two. An examination of the dynamics of these US-Argentine co-productions reveals the determining role played by the relative size and wealth of film markets in shaping film content and distribution.

Why Co-production Between the United States and Argentina?

During the 1980s, a period of financial instability and external debt, the Argentine economy was in shambles. The market for films had shrunk accordingly, and within the director-producer community, new strategies for encouraging international investment and film export were considered. In 1982, around the time that transition to democratic rule occurred, Olivera and producer Alejandro Sessa contacted Corman about producing low-budget cinema in Argentina.

The country was ideal for a low-budget filmmaker such as Corman. Not only were prices for labor and other commodities incredibly com-

petitive, but the technical expertise of the crew was outstanding. In addition, the Olivera-Corman duo was eligible to solicit the Argentine National Film Institute (INC) for low-interest loans and subsidies. One film, *Cocaine Wars*, was designated as "special interest" and thus given top priority in receiving a loan.

Roger Corman has been dubbed the "King of B Movies." He is one of the most prolific filmmakers in Hollywood, with more than 500 films to his credit. Central to his success are his time-saving techniques. For example, he often contracts actors who are working on a higher-budget film, borrows their set and hires them for their off-duty time. His current distribution company is called Concorde/New Horizons, and the majority of his productions are for the direct-to-video market. Some of his best known films include a series of Edgar Allan Poe stories such as *The Masque of Red Death* (1964) and the 1960 film *Little Shop of Horrors*. Many others of his films are of the "exploitation" genre (e.g., women in prison, schlock horror, rock and roll, etc.) and generally recoup their costs thanks to their low-budget production.

In 1956, Olivera founded Aries Cinematográfica Argentina with Fernando Ayala. The studio first produced commercial films, such as the psychedelic comedies *Pexoanálisis* (1968) and *Los neuróticos* (1969). Olivera directed and produced some of Argentina's best-known testimonial films, such as *La Patagonia rebelde* (1974) and *La noche de los lápices* (1986). He stated in a personal interview that these more politically engaged films were in a sense "subsidized" by the more popular genres that he produced. This model thus far has been successful, as Aries is one of

These films may have been shot in Argentina but they were emptied or erased of anything specific to the country in both the script content and the cinematography.

the few remaining Argentine film studios still in production. Given economic trends in Argentina, it would appear that Olivera's pact with Hollywood has provided a much-needed buffer to an industry starved for investment. However, this arguably begs the question regarding a national film industry as a cultural entity or as one reduced to an outpost for foreign (read: Hollywood) filmmaking.

The "Sword and Sorcery" Genre: Low-Budget Movies with a B-rated Cast

The Corman-Olivera productions were mainly a subgenre of the fantasy film, or the "sword and sorcery" genre. They were set in a medieval time period and could have been made in any forest locale. These films, such as *Deathstalker*, *Barbarian Queen* and *Wizards of the Lost Kingdom*, may have been shot in Argentina but were emptied or erased of anything specific to the country in both the script content and the cinematography. The production dynamics involved in producing the sword and sorcery films illustrate the power differential between the players involved.

The choice to make sword and sorcery films grew from the success of the 1982 Hollywood hit, *Conan the Barbarian* (dir. John Milus), starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. Corman's objectives for many of his films was to try to ride the wave of big Hollywood hits, albeit on a much lower budget. The co-pro-

duced films included imported low-budget actors and actresses, such as David Carradine of *Kung Fu* fame or Barbi Benton, a Playboy "playmate of the year." Few films were well received by critics. None were released in Argentine theaters.

The English-speaking target audience of such productions, and the importation of Hollywood actors of some name recognition (but questionable acting skill), by necessity relegated Argentine actors to the margins. Thus, the films did not allow equal opportunities for actors from both countries, but rather became vehicles for recognizable US actors for the US market, contrary to the spirit of co-productions as bilateral agreements.

The Unequal Processes of Co-production Collaboration

Behind the camera, power dynamics soon developed from the US-Argentine interaction on the set. In the case of this particular set of co-productions, the technical crew positions were held mainly by Argentines, but a few key positions, such as makeup and special effects, were filled by US technicians. Corman only visited a production set for one or two days at the outset. Production designer María Julia Bertotto recalled "a lack of experience and professionalism by the US crew. Corman would send down these young arrogant men to work in special effects. They felt uncomfortable working in collaboration with the Argentine crew, despite the fact that many of us

The Argentine crew members were instructed to change their names to pseudonyms that would sound more anglicized. Thus, the assistant director was billed as Andrew Sargent, but in fact was Américo Ortiz de Zárate. María Julia Bertotto became Mary Bertram.

spoke English. They essentially gave orders and refused to hear our suggestions. It was as though they had preconceived notions of Argentina and thought we were 'Indians with feathers on our heads.'

To add insult to injury, during the postproduction phase of *Wizards of the Lost Kingdom* Corman decided that the end credits needed to be altered. The Argentine crew members were instructed to change their names to pseudonyms that would sound more anglicized. Thus, the assistant director was billed as Andrew Sargent, but in fact was Américo Ortiz de Zárate. María Julia Bertotto became Mary Bertram. This move made it clear for whom the film was being made and simultaneously demonstrated a profound disrespect for the professionals who worked on it.

Argentine Views Regarding Co-productions with Wealthier Nations

Scenarios such as these have sparked debates about the presence of foreign film companies in Argentina. Getino justifies joint film productions on economic terms. He argues that US co-productions stimulate the Argentine film industry, despite the fact that most of the films have no thematic relation to the country and are not

even shown in Argentine theatres. He states: "US co-productions are a business and I think that is fine. This helps us because it makes our film crews undergo some technical exercises (*gimnasia técnica*) in film production. Some money stayed in the country, too, but fundamentally it was in the experience."

An opposing view, put forth by the film journal *Cinecuadernos del Sur*—a journal published by a state film school in Avellaneda, in Greater Buenos Aires—argues that Corman-type co-productions are detrimental to the country's national identity. "We are against those co-productions that control us, where we are only in charge of services and cheap raw materials and ultimately wind up playing the role of the lackey. We are against the notion that our cinema should become another 'Taiwan' in the form of production and consumption of B-rated products or worse."

In reality, the strategies that developing nations may choose are largely constrained by their economic outlook. In the words of Brazilian filmmaker Leon Hirszman, "The critic, if s/he wishes to truly understand Third World Cinema, must keep in mind that the material conditions of production exert a determining influence on their form." In Argentina, the phenomenon of commercial co-production in the 1980s was direct-

ly correlated with the general trend facing the nation. The US partner had more power in decision making. English was the dominant language, the script was formulated for US actors, and the film was destined for one market, not both.

Ultimately, Corman's quest for cheaper sources of labor and shooting locales was aided by Olivera's efforts to solicit US and European investment in Argentine co-productions. The phenomenon of US commercial co-productions came at a time when Argentina was willing to take whatever opportunity it could, despite the lack of cultural attributes of the films proposed. This commercial venture did not pay off financially at the video box office, but one could argue that it paved the way for later, high-quality productions, among them Roland Joffe's *The Mission* (1986). Corman's production company clearly benefited from the excellent infrastructure, technical capacity and low costs of shooting Hollywood-style B-movies in Argentina. In the long run, the Argentine film industry may have benefited economically as well, albeit at some social cost.

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Against the Tide

by Patricio Crooker

Bolivia has not produced many films over the decades, but several of those it has released rank as gems of Latin American cinema. Currently, despite years of economic recession, both national and regional efforts to support film production have resulted in a spate of promising new films. This article touches on some of the most important cinematic landmarks of the past and offers a brief assessment of the current state of the film industry in Bolivia.

Classic Films

After the 1952 revolution, Jorge Sanjinés directed two important movies, both based on scripts by Oscar Soria and with a heavy emphasis on social themes. The first was *Ukamau* ("That's the Way Things Are"), produced by the Instituto Cinematográfico Boliviano in 1966. A black and white film with dialogue in Spanish and Aymara, *Ukamau* was shot in the region of the sacred Lake Titicaca in the Andes. It won the Young Directors and Critics Awards at the 1967 Cannes Film Festival, helping to raise awareness of Bolivian film among international critics and audiences.

After *Ukamau*, Sanjinés made *Yawar Malleu* ("Condor Blood," 1969), one of the first Bolivian films to highlight the situation of the country's indigenous population. Violence, racism and other important social issues are widely discussed in the film, which was released without censorship. Its release in mining towns and rural areas contributed to its wide impact. Both *Ukamau* and

Yawar Malleu began to show the reality and politics of Bolivia's indigenous people and their relationship with the state. They emphasized the contrast between rural and urban areas, a division that persists in Bolivia today.

After Sanjinés retired from the Instituto Cinematográfico Boliviano, he and other independent filmmakers decided to organize an independent producers' organization, also called *Ukamau*. This led to what may have been the most important film producing time in the country's history, as filmmakers such as Sanjinés and Soria, along with newcomers Antonio Eguino and Paolo Agazzi, had more leeway to pursue their own projects. Some of the most outstanding films of this period were Jorge Ruiz's *Mina Alaska* (1968) and *Volver* (1969); Luis Espinal's *Pistolas para la paz* (1969); and Eguino's *Basta* (1970), which won an award at the Oberhausen Festival in Germany. Also during this period, in 1971, Sanjinés made *El coraje del pueblo*, which was censored by the military regime of General Hugo Bánzer. The government did, however, create Bolivia's National Television, which produced short films of its own.

Current Productions

The prospects for Bolivian film today are optimistic, says Eduardo López, director of the National Film Council (CONACINE). Part of the Ministry of Education, CONACINE was formed in the early 1990s with the purpose of assisting and promoting Bolivian-made films.

This effort resulted in several major productions, including the Bolivian

film that has won the most national and international awards, *Cuestión de fe* (1995), by Marcos Loayza. Other significant titles from this period include *Fonás y la ballena rosada* (1995), by Juan Carlos Valdivia; *El día que murió el silencio* (1997-1998), by Paolo Agazzi; *La calle de los poetas* (1998), by Diego Torres; and *El triángulo del lago* (2000), by Mauricio Calderón.

Despite ongoing socioeconomic problems, Bolivia's film industry is showing signs of a modest revival. Much of this success is due to CONACINE and the support of Ibermedia, a program created by the Ibero-American summit process to promote cinematic co-productions. In terms of quantity, Bolivian production remains minor, but the quality of the films has been excellent. The few national films that are made represent a valuable opportunity to spread awareness and understanding of Bolivian culture, and most Bolivian-made films have a pronounced social message.

In 2002, several films were in production at once. Marcos Loayza completed filming of *El corazón de Jesús* and Diego Torres moved into the editing stages of his latest production, *Alma y el viaje al mar*, the first digital film made in Bolivia. Paolo Agazzi was directing the third Bolivian film with support from Ibermedia. And finally, Angelino Jaimes was preparing to begin filming of *Hombre llorando* in January 2003.

Challenges of a Limited Market

Most Bolivian films are independently made. It is difficult to find pri-

Efforts to revive Bolivian film

vate investors to fund independent productions, however, and distribution and exhibition are further challenges. Bolivia has few movie theaters, and those that do exist show a steady diet of Hollywood productions. In addition, in a country with one of the highest rates of poverty in the hemisphere, movie going is a luxury not many can afford. The numbers of viewers attending theaters has been decreasing, and without audiences there is no reason to make films. Audience support is crucial in showing a level of interest in domestic productions. One of the main roles of CONACINE is to promote Bolivian-made films at home and abroad.

"In Bolivia we always go against winds and tides when making movies," says CONACINE's Eduardo López.

Digital technology, with its lower costs, holds promise for a new generation of young directors. Television networks have also begun to finance made-for-TV series.

Excitement over the enthusiastic reception granted several of the country's recent productions has contributed to the current surge in filmmaking activity, as has the support of CONACINE. The Ibermedia program also has played a vital role, in Bolivia as well as elsewhere, in helping to promote Latin American film production.

*Patricio Crooker is a photojournalist based in Bolivia. Much of the information in this article is drawn from *La aventura del cine boliviano*, by Carlos Mesa Gisbert.*



Marcos Loayza, director of the upcoming film "El corazón de Jesús."



Yawar Mallku (1969). Photo courtesy of Fundación Grupo Ukamau.



Ukamau (1966). Photo courtesy of Fundación Grupo Ukamau.



Cuestión de fe (1995).



Cuestión de fe (1995).



Cuernavaca (1995).



Cuestión de fe (1995).



Jonás y la ballena rosada (1995).



Jonás y la ballena rosada (1995).



Jonds y la ballena rosada (1995).

The City as Protagonist

by Eduardo Santa Cruz

Mexico City in Contemporary Mexican Cinema, by David William Foster. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.

In this timely study of the imaginary/metaphorical rather than “real” space known as Mexico City, David William Foster delves deeply into an ideological analysis of the representation and construction of the massive Mexican capital as it is projected through the Mexican cinema of the last three decades. This original work does not pretend to be a collection of data or a complete list enumerating the ways Mexico City is filmed in the many movies in which it inevitably appears. Instead, Foster’s thoughtful choice of 14 titles, from what could have been a lengthy list, would likely find quorum among critics for its artistic and meaningful relevance and because of what his argument suggests: that the megalopolis must be approached as an entity that produces meaning as much as it is the recipient of it through the dynamics of its inhabitants. Mexico City as a protagonist (or rather as a “locus of human lives”) is constantly changing and evolving, leading to multiple representations of the urban environment. Foster’s approach sets out to capture this evolution. His book draws us closer, through its discussion of Mexican film, to the “process of producing cultural meaning through its creation, enactment, and interpretation of the idea of Mexico City.”

From Rural to Urban, in Life and on Screen

As is well known, Mexican cinema had its apogee in the first half of the

The Mexican capital’s changing role on screen



twentieth century. Although still the strongest film industry in Latin America, Mexican production lost much of its support, appeal and distribution as Hollywood consolidated its mark throughout the region and the world. The golden age of Mexican cinema owed much to the state, which viewed film as a tool in the process of institutionalization of the Mexican Revolution. The films of this period helped define the Mexican nation and all things Mexican: national customs, food, drink, music, landscape, behavior, and, in particular, the essence of the people, then living mostly in rural areas. The urban space of the Mexican capital was treated merely as an accessory to what was more relevant—the authenticity of rural Mexico, where the true ideals of the revolution would be accomplished.

In the last three decades, the equation has been reversed. In both reality and on film, Mexico City has become, to a great extent and for better or for worse, synonymous with all of Mexico. As in most Latin American countries, power, national institutions, the economy and cultural expressions are centralized in the capital. In fact, Mexico City is perhaps the epitome of this pattern. The city is home to close to one-fifth of the country's inhabitants, more than the total population of several Central American or Caribbean nations combined.

It is no wonder then that the imaginary representation of Mexico City has become so prevalent in recent Mexican film production. And yet, no one selection of films could adequately represent the ample body of work that focuses on the capital. This makes Foster's criteria in choosing representative films all the more important. All of the 14 he selected have been awarded recognition in national and international forums. Interestingly, almost none emphasize

the city itself. And yet, as in the case of *Rojo amanecer*, where most of the action takes place in a claustrophobic apartment, we feel the city's omnipresence as its inhabitants come under surveillance and attack by the military during the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre.

The films Foster analyzes are not so much about Mexico City itself as they are a profound reflection on how the city is interpreted semiotically by the panning eye of the camera and the director behind it. Foster's study aims to uncover the urban reality captured in the films' narratives. Key to this process are the interactions between the city and the human beings who shape and are in turn affected by its daily reality.

Lenses for Viewing the City

The text, with a preface, an afterword, a selected filmography and a well-designed index, is divided into three chapters. The first, "Politics of the City," analyzes four films chosen for their representation of the politics and society of the period each addresses. They are: *Rojo amanecer*, *Novia que te vea*, *Frida*, *naturaleza viva* and *Sexo, pudor y lágrimas*. All present the dynamics of various sociopolitical processes and their elaboration within the parameters of the urban landscape. In this politics-of-the-city analysis, Foster chooses films that depict specific changes in the living conditions of various sectors of the now mostly urban society, a significant transition from the largely rural environment captured on film before the 1960s.

The films in Chapter Two, "Human Geographies," place their emphasis on the individual. They illustrate the different ways that the characters' lives are circumscribed by their urban environment. In particular, the films observe the efforts of vulnerable and less-represented subjects—children, women, the elderly

and the marginal—to cope with and survive violence, poverty, rejection and/or the act of subjecting their individuality to the control of others. *El callejón de los milagros*, *Mecánica nacional*, *El castillo de la pureza*, *Todo el poder* and *Lolo* all offer glimpses into types of human experiences that the "official story" tends to obliterate.

Finally, Chapter Three, "Mapping Gender," discusses five films that critique and challenge the patriarchal society through their handling of gender construction, acceptance of the "other," and the strategies that a variety of subjects and communities devise to gain representation. *Danzón*, *De noche vienes*, *Esmeralda*, *La tarea*, *Lola* and *Entre Pancho Villa y una mujer desnuda* all subvert the patriarchal paradigm, offering, as Foster puts it, "possibilities of queering heteronormativity" from different angles and representations of the urban society.

Along the lines of Julio Cortázar's allusion to the city as a metaphor, Foster's book contributes to the understanding of Mexico City as an entity in a continuing process of producing cultural meaning. As his analysis makes clear, part of contemporary Mexican film production is a concern for rescuing the endless complexities of human experiences. These are the stories that fill and transform the urban space of the place that Alfonso Reyes—and, later, Carlos Fuentes (using the term ironically)—called "the most transparent of regions," but which has become synonymous with the chaos and anonymity of modern urban life.

Eduardo Santa Cruz is assistant professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies at Hanover College in Indiana. He has published articles, commentaries and reviews about Mexico City, popular culture, film and contemporary literature.

Recent Film and Video Sources

by Marian Goslinga

As recently as a few years ago, audiovisual materials were considered a rather exotic reference source and seldom appeared in scholarly research papers. Now, all of that has changed; non-print items have gone mainstream and are frequently quoted in all sorts of publications, and an entirely new set of rules has been developed for their correct citation.

The list below provides, first of all, some of the major "gateways" for locating audiovisual materials on Latin America and the Caribbean, including video recordings, sound recordings and films. Most of these are accessible on-line at the URLs provided.

The second section provides a recent listing of 'general' resources; that is, those dealing with more than one country or the region as a whole. The final section suggests specific country titles.

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Area Studies: Latin America, Mexico and the Caribbean [Electronic resource]: An Annotated Videography of Holdings in the Media Resources Center, University of California, Berkeley. Compiled by Gary Handman. Berkeley: [s.n.], 2002. (Mode of access: Internet via the World Wide Web.)

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Film History Index: Latin America. Part of the World Wide Web Virtual Library providing a wide variety of research materials on film organized into a "general" category and a listing by country. Included are reference sources, main gateways, e-teaching items, journals and bibliographies. <http://www.iue.it/LIB/SISSCO/ML/hist-film/latin-america.html>

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Latin American Video Archives (LAVA). "The place to locate and purchase Latin American and U.S.

Latino-made Film and Video." Features new feature films and videos, including documentaries listed by country and/or by subject.

Resources for Locating and Evaluating Latin American Videos. Compiled at Cornell University, this thorough overview of available resources includes monographs, serials, websites, associations, databases, etc. <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/LatinAmericanVideos.htm>

General

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Dominican Republic

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El Salvador

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