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National cinemas (re)ignited

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NATIONAL CINEMAS (RE)IGNITED

Film and the state

*Lisa Shaw, Luis Duno-Gottberg, Joanna Page,
and Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado*

Editors' introduction

National cinema has long been about “selling” the nation—whether in the 1930s with the rise of more consolidated domestic industries interested in staking out market shares at home and abroad, the 1960s during the apogee of explicitly avant-garde, politicized filmmaking, or the present moment. Eschewing the earlier paradigm of national cinemas defined exclusively through cultural and artistic specificities, this chapter focuses on the range of common strategies through which, since at least the 1930s, producers and filmmakers have been encouraged, guided, or incentivized by the agencies that act on behalf of various nation-states to develop modern forms of national cinema. Lisa Shaw, Luis Duno-Gottberg, Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, and Joanna Page provide a valuable historical narrative of the evolution of that complex relation between state agencies and culturally defined film industries in the region. In their comparative and contrastive views of the relation of historical and more recent national film industries, they underscore the trans-regional nature of the role of the state in guiding, protecting, financially sustaining, and even coercing local national cinema. Implicitly, this essay encourages us to reconceptualize national cinema less as a unified, homogenous entity than as a plural, often tension-filled set of claims by different groups who invest in the cinema and sell the national (understood in a variety of ways), and to recognize how those varied claims involve the medium's dual status as representational form and as commodity.

Beyond the particular case studies presented, two interconnected points are especially noteworthy about this approach to the national in Latin American cinema. The first is the way discussions of national cinema only reaffirm the transborder nature of the national cinematic project. In this, the chapter echoes positions that figure prominently in Juan Poblete's inquiry into Chilean cinema in Chapter 1 and in Mexico and Brazil in Chapter 2 by Rielle Navitski. National cinema, understood as part of

a national state-invested project, enables us to appreciate the ways in which cinema seems always to have operated on levels that transcend what Andrew Higson (2000) famously termed the “limiting imagination of national cinema.” This is, indeed, the point of Masha Salazkina’s discussion of intellectual border crossings and exchanges in Chapter 13.

The second point relates to how previous studies of the national as a political construction have largely ignored the dynamics of audiences. Sánchez Prado and Page shine an important light on the ways in which the shifts in the cultural politics of the state in the contemporary neoliberal moment have reshaped Latin American markets and audiences. Film’s former role as a mass medium that educated domestic audiences in how to be citizens of the nation (per Carlos Monsiváis) has been taken over by television, as argued by Cerdán and Fernández Labayen in Chapter 23. Today, through the interplay of state initiatives and the expansion of global art cinema, the audience of much Latin American cinema is now shaped around a peculiar mix of a middle-brow, middle-class audience at home and an art cinema and alternative audience abroad, as documented by Gerard Dapena’s discussion of the international appeal of Latin American genre films. In these reconfigurations of audience, it is essential to note the way technology has impacted notions of audience and film reception. The impact of revolutionary digital technologies on film viewing, as discussed in Chapter 24, complements the thrust of this chapter by pointing to the limits of the presumed hegemony of the state’s claim to sovereignty over “national cinema” in an age when the very idea of national audiences has been diminished, if not made entirely irrelevant, by new audiovisual technologies.

This chapter argues for the essential role of state support for the ongoing production of films within national spaces, and recognizes its various manifestations, including direct and indirect funding mechanisms, screen quotas, and government-sponsored distribution networks and exhibition venues. In charting historical trajectories, the sections track the “stop-and-go development” of individual film industries as governments oscillated between liberal economic models and moderate-to-strong state intervention (Tompkins 2013: 21). At some historical junctures, governments would not only facilitate production (through grants, tax breaks, or the creation of state-owned production facilities), distribution, and even exhibition, but also fund national film archives. The opposite often occurred when governments liberalized their economies and retracted such support, generating a significant contraction of the domestic film industry.

The sections track a shift in funding models and in the relationship between private investments and state support. In the silent period, private entrepreneurship underwrote domestic production and exhibition. Starting in the 1930s, governments began to act as a vital stakeholder and invest public resources towards crafting a certain configuration of national cinema. If the 1980s witnessed the dismantling of state support, the 1990s initiated more heterogeneous funding models drawing on international support, private domestic investment (often encouraged by legislation), and other forms of indirect state support. In tracing these general patterns, the authors observe the variability of government initiatives in different countries and underscore how state intervention necessarily entails a disciplinary function to one degree or another. Some countries benefited significantly from

protectionist legislation and funding (Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, and Cuba); others did not (Peru, Bolivia). While some filmmakers suffered tremendous repression (Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba), those in other countries experienced it to a lesser extent (Venezuela, Mexico).

As we underscore the vital role of government support, we identify the state as one stakeholder (among others) with a vested interest in the cinema as both an ideological and economic “engine” of national development. The last two sections recognize how, in the present moment, the investments of other sectors have helped to reconfigure the story of national cinema—including a new generation of filmmakers who have fostered a more vibrant commercial cinema, the middle-class audiences in the domestic marketplace to whom such films are directed, and foreign entities (from European film festivals to Hollywood studios) that have begun to provide new sources of financing.

The emergence of film industries and the role of the state in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina in the early sound era

LISA SHAW

With the advent of the talkies in the 1930s, film production gathered momentum in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, Latin America’s traditional “big three” film industries, stimulated by governments keen to “sell” a vision of domestic progress and modernity to national audiences, and in some cases those of neighboring countries. In Mexico various state initiatives arose to foster the growth of private enterprise in the form of a variety of small production companies. The government of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940) took an active role in the development of the industry, introducing a protectionist policy for domestic film production, which included tax exemptions for local producers and a screen quota for Mexican films. This policy of state support, which was mirrored to some extent in Brazil, continued under the administration of Manuel Avila Camacho (1940–1946), which backed the Banco Cinematográfico, a bank created in 1942 with the sole purpose of financing national film production and distribution. In Argentina, however, the state was not *initially* a major stakeholder in the nascent film industry, and the first film studios remained largely in private hands during the 1930s and early 1940s, producing “national” films for domestic audiences and for export to most Latin American countries (Falicov 2007: 21). Ironically, privately produced Argentine cinema suffered during the war as a direct consequence of the government’s support for the Axis powers, which resulted in film stock from the US being redirected to Mexico as a reward for that country’s support for the Allied cause. Although until the outbreak of the war Mexican cinema had been trailing that of Argentina in terms of technical quality and the scale of production (Falicov 2007: 24), the US’s embargo on Argentina turned the tables in Mexico’s favor. By 1943, the Mexican film industry had established itself as the most important in Latin America. With the election to the presidency of Juan Perón in 1946, there was more intensive government intervention in the Argentine film industry, and the Peronist postwar years saw a partial recovery and a more overt attempt to create a national cinema that would increase Argentina’s status and market share abroad.

The situation in Brazil was slightly different in the early sound period, with the state and private entrepreneurs staking out alternate visions for national cinema. The regime of Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945) believed that cinema could transmit a nationalist ideology

and promote a sense of belonging to the wider national community, but concentrated its efforts on the educational and patriotic potential of filmmaking rather than on fostering a commercial film industry. Vargas's provisional government (1930–1933) passed the first legislation in support of national cinema, making it compulsory to screen one Brazilian short film in every cinema program, and giving a tremendous boost to short film production. The INCE (*Instituto Nacional de Cinema Educativo*—National Institute of Educational Cinema) was established on January 13, 1937, in response to fears that the unfettered growth of commercial film threatened to erode moral and educational standards. The INCE films, some of which were of feature length, were exhibited in schools, cultural centers, sporting associations and workers' organizations, and provided regular work for actors and technical staff, as well as helping Brazilian cinema fulfill the quota system introduced by the Vargas regime. These state-sponsored films represented a vision of "national" cinema as a way of fostering a sense of belonging and celebration of modernity for domestic audiences. This intensified with the establishment of the authoritarian *Estado Novo* (New State) in November 1937; the incentives that had previously been suggested to stimulate the involvement of private enterprise in the production of educational films were scrapped in favor of an overwhelming emphasis on the INCE, particularly in association with the talented director Humberto Mauro.

In the 1930s and 1940s, enterprising businessmen such as Adhemar Gonzaga supported a different vision of "national" cinema as an up-to-date industrial system that could exemplify the country's technological advances. Gonzaga founded the Cinearte studios in 1930 to tie in with his eponymous film magazine. Renamed Cinédia, this studio remained in continual operation until 1951, and was consciously modeled on the Hollywood majors. In São Paulo in the late 1940s, a group of bourgeois intellectuals founded the Vera Cruz film company. Although the studio system was by then in decline in Hollywood, Vera Cruz looked to the MGM studios for inspiration with regard to its structure, employing contract stars and directors on generous salaries, in spite of the absence of any sound economic infrastructure.

Private and public efforts to expand domestic film production (given the medium's economic and/or ideological potential) went hand in hand with developing representational conventions that could imagine the nation in particular ways. In order to lay claim to the domestic market, private entrepreneurs had to find repeatable formulas to distinguish their films from imports and to attract local audiences. This often entailed drawing on the power of local musical and performance traditions and established domestic stars, and placing these elements within Hollywood genres already familiar to Latin American audiences. In Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil, films capitalized on the existing reputations of local performers such as Carmen Miranda in Brazil, Libertad Lamarque in Argentina, and Pedro Infante and Jorge Negrete in Mexico, many of whom were well known to radio listeners.

Popular comedies were particularly central to the Brazilian and Mexican industries because of their ability to draw on the linguistic and sociocultural competencies of local audiences. Films starring comic performers such as Cantinflas and Tin Tan delighted Mexican audiences from the 1930s until the 1960s. Like the *chanchada* tradition in Brazil, these films poked fun at the nation's elite and middle classes, highlighting the artificial nature of the distinctions within Mexico's social hierarchy, and humorously represented the underdog—often a rural-urban migrant—in a constant battle with the modern, industrialized world. In Mexico and Brazil, the films of Cantinflas and the *chanchada*, respectively, addressed one of the principal social concerns of the 1940s: mass migration to the capital city.

These comic movies were a hit with working-class audiences throughout the nation, thus helping Mexicans and Brazilians to imagine a national community during a decade in flux, reflecting “national” cinema’s dual status as both commodity and representational form, and selling a critical vision of national modernity to those who least benefited from it. They were naturally favored by the semiliterate and illiterate masses over subtitled Hollywood imports, and appealed to rural-urban migrants who could identify with the characters and predicaments presented on screen.

In Brazil, popular genres, chiefly musical comedies that drew on the theme and music of carnival, became the mainstay of Cinédia’s productions in the 1930s and 1940s. Gonzaga astutely realized that this tried-and-trusted formula was the key to the commercial viability of his studio. It was thus at Cinédia that the *chanchada* tradition coalesced in the form of *Alô, alô, carnaval!* (*Hello, Hello, Carnival!*, 1936), directed by Gonzaga and starring Carmen Miranda, which definitively established the paradigms of Brazilian musical comedy with its pioneering combination of carnival music and festivity, a backstage plot, and a liberal dose of satire, particularly directed at foreign cultural forms. *Alô, alô, carnaval!* proved an unprecedented success at the box office in spite of its lack of sophistication in relation to imported Hollywood movies. In fact, Gonzaga’s film celebrated the limitations of the Brazilian film industry to great comic effect, establishing a vein of self-deprecating humor and lack of pretension that would run through the *chanchada* tradition and guarantee its enduring popularity. It was with the founding of the Atlântida Cinematográfica studio in Rio de Janeiro in 1941 that the *chanchada* came to exemplify the multivalent notions of “national” cinema. The genre was a product sold to domestic audiences, promoted a vision of modernity—albeit a satirical one—for the benefit of those it had left behind, and served as a site of identification and belonging for the masses. Despite the studio’s ambitious and patriotic mission statement, in which they promised to create cinema that provided “indisputable services to national greatness,” and initial investment in feature-length dramas that dealt with serious social themes, Atlântida soon turned its attentions to carnival musicals, developing the comedic dimension of the foolproof formula.

In contrast to Brazil, during the so-called “golden age” of the Mexican film industry (1940 to the mid-1950s), melodramas proved to be the most popular genre at the box office—particularly those involving the Mexican Revolution and, somewhat later, domestic strife—along with the *comedia ranchera*, a genre blending comedy and romance set in northern Mexican ranches, an iconic location of national identity in the post-revolutionary era. As with the *chanchada* in Brazil, which began as a vehicle for carnival marches and sambas performed by stars of the radio and nascent record industries, popular music was central to the *comedia ranchera* as well as the so-called *cabaretera* or brothel melodramas that enjoyed widespread popularity in Mexico in the 1940s and 1950s. Similarly, Argentine cinema was dominated in the 1930s by the tango melodrama, inspired by the lyrics of the national music. As John King states, “local producers soon realized the commercial potential of tango-led national cinema,” which gave rise to “investment in advanced technology and a cultivation of a homespun star system,” as well as defining the output of Argentina’s first two studios, Sono Film and Lumiton (King 2000: 37–38).

Even in these three countries, efforts to promote national cinema (as a domestic industry and a set of representational conventions) were not successful in dominating local markets. When Latin American audiences were not watching Hollywood imports between the 1930s and the late 1950s, however, they were going to the cinema to see homegrown comedies, melodramas, and musicals. Interestingly, the development

of distinctive national traditions such as the Brazilian *chanchada*, the Argentine tango movies, and Mexico's *cabareteras* and *comedias rancheras* also allowed them to travel across national borders and attract new audiences.

The role of the state in Cuba and Venezuela

LUIS DUNO-GOTTBERG

In contrast to the “big three” national cinemas, Cuba and Venezuela illustrate the ways in which state intervention shapes film industries with small and medium-sized domestic markets. The Venezuelan case demonstrates with particular clarity the frequently porous line between public and private endeavors, and how state investments, both direct and indirect support, can influence domestic productions carried out ostensibly by private companies.

As in other countries in Latin America, cinema arrived in Cuba as an import financed by private capital—a foreign technology and cultural commodity, soon to be appropriated to convey a particular sense of modernity and identity (López 2000; Paranguá 2003). Local entrepreneurs such as José Casasús and Enrique Díaz Quesada (1883–1923) made their first films through the sponsorship, respectively, of a local brewery (*El brujo desapareciendo* [*The Disappearing Wizard*, 1889]) and a North American company interested in promoting its local amusement park (*El Parque Palatino* [*Palatino Park*, 1906]). These vistas seem to anticipate the staging of an exotic Cuba for foreign consumption (Chanan 2004: 54), something that would be challenged by the Revolution of 1959. Domestic production would be extremely limited through the 1950s, as U.S. companies dominated distribution and exhibition, and imported films (from Hollywood, as well as some from Mexico and Argentina) ruled local screens.

While not providing support for domestic production, the state did intervene in the distribution and exhibition of films in these decades through ongoing censorship. Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship, for example, banned *El mégano* (*The Charcoal Worker*, 1955) after just one screening. A film showing the dire living conditions of workers harvesting wood to make coal in the countryside of Cuba was deemed too subversive years before the Revolution.

The weakness and dependency of the Cuban film industry persisted until the advent of the Revolution, at which time the Cuban state became the sole producer, distributor, and exhibitor of cinema. This new phase in the history of Cuban cinema rested on the explicit understanding of the medium's value as a crucial tool of the state's revolutionary politics. Indeed, almost immediately, the new government created a film department within the *Dirección de Cultura del Ejército Rebelde* (Culture Division of the Rebel Army). This was followed, in March 1959, by the *Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficos* (Institute of Cuban Cinematic Art and Industry, ICAIC), an organization that would significantly change the course of national cinema by directly investing and organizing production, distribution, and exhibition (from theaters and mobile projection units, to the influential *Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*). This founding gesture is remarkable and speaks of the relevance of cinema for those coming into power, considering its place as the second legislative action of the revolutionary government, only preceded by land reform.

Although a governmental institution, ICAIC aimed at preserving a degree of autonomy, while at the same time enacting the Revolution's goal of creating a national cinema. This balancing act frequently led to polemical decisions and clashes not only with filmmakers,

but also other representatives from the government. *PM* (1961), directed by Saba Cabrera Infante and Orlando Jiménez Leal, might be the most famous case of censorship; ICAIC interrupted its screening, deeming it untimely or inappropriate. The debates that ensued led to Fidel Castro's famous "Words to the Intellectuals." In the 1970s, in the context of the so-called *quinquenio gris*, and later in the 1980s, ICAIC delayed or restricted the release of films by Sara Gómez, Humberto Solás, Manuel Octavio Gómez, and Sergio Giral.

Nicolás Guillén Landrián offers a particularly notable case, as he experienced some of the most serious forms of censorship when his documentaries were seen as critical of the Cuban Revolution. His 1963 *En un barrio Viejo* (*In an Old Neighborhood*), for example, bears some resemblance to *PM*, censored the year before. After he was expelled from ICAIC, his films were often withdrawn from exhibition altogether. Between 1970 and 1989, the filmmaker was castigated, interrogated, and imprisoned multiple times.

Nevertheless, even as it carried out such disciplinary actions, ICAIC also clashed with members of the Communist Party—for example, while defending its right to exhibit films such as Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1961). The institution was also active in defending artists cast as "social misfits," who risked being sentenced to work at the Military Units to Augment Production (UMAP).

With the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in late 1989, Cuba entered a deep crisis known as the Special Period that greatly influenced the relationship between the state and the film industry. With greatly reduced funding, ICAIC confronted its biggest crisis, evident in the drastic fall in film production, and the forced merger with other institutions in 1991. This action coincided with the scandal of *Alicia en el pueblo de las maravillas* (*Alice in Wondertown* 1991), directed by Daniel Díaz Torres, a scatological critique of Cuban bureaucracy that confronted all sorts of institutional attacks (cf. Chanan 2004: 611; García Borrero 2013). Following the Special Period, the search for external funding became a matter of survival. Ibermedia, for example, supported Cuban cinema starting in the mid-1990s, and it was not uncommon to see co-productions that reproduced stereotypical images of the country to please international audiences. One of the most remarkable consequences of this transformation is the emergence of private producers in the last decade, some of them formerly connected to ICAIC. *Juan de los Muertos* (*Juan of the Dead*, 2011) is the most successful film produced within a commercial model and outside of the state. Along with these alternative sources of funding and distribution, digital technologies—including online distribution, with its new levels of autonomy—have granted significant freedom for a younger generation and the emergence of new subversive discourses.

As the country transitions to a more liberalized economy and film production relies more on private capital, the state continues to exercise control by regulating distribution and exhibition on the island and through subtle forms of censorship. The Ministry of Culture seems to create obstacles for some films, such as *Verde, verde* (*Green, Green*, Enrique Piñeda Barnet, 2011), *La piscina* (*The Swimming Pool*, Carlos Machado Quintela, 2011), and Carlos Lechuga's *Melaza* (*Molasses*, 2012), which received limited release and vanished from theaters. Movies such as *Memorias del desarrollo* (*Memories of Development*, Miguel Coyula, 2010) were excluded from the competition of Havana's Festival of New Latin American Cinema and would not receive an official release in the country. Other independent films have been excluded from the official catalog of Cuba's cinematheque, and thus from the archive that informs Cuba's national film history.

Venezuela's film industry has followed a different trajectory in terms of the role of the state, as government intervention has played an important role since very early on. Looking

at this history, one could assert that, in general, the attempts to develop a commercially viable industry have depended on and benefited from governmental support—ranging from direct subsidies and legislation, to the construction of technical facilities and infrastructure. As in the case of Cuba, cinema arrived in Venezuela as an import and did not immediately lead to the birth of an autonomous, commercially viable film industry. Local entrepreneurs produced shorts starting in 1896, as well as numerous newsreels, and Enrique Zimmerman directed the country's first feature, *La Dama de las Cayenas* (*The Lady of the Hibiscus*) in 1916. Unlike Cuba, the state took a strong interest in film, particularly in periods in which the national economy was flourishing. Starting in 1908, dictator Juan Vicente Gómez sponsored several films, mostly devoted to promote “his” public works and other state initiatives. In 1927, when Venezuela's oil exports took off, Gómez funded the *Laboratorio Cinematográfico de la Nación* (National Film Laboratory), placing it under the Ministry of Public Works (MOP). In the years to come, variations in oil revenue would determine the many cycles of investment and divestment in the film industry: the booms of the 1970s and 2000s coincided with high oil prices and a significant expansion of state intervention in the cultural arena.

The *Laboratorio* not only supported governmental projects, but also provided assistance to some private productions. Several technical experiments took place under the sponsorship of this state institution. The first non-synchronized sound film in the country, *La venus de nácar* (*The Mother-of Pearl Venus*, Efraín Gómez, 1932), is one example. Admittedly, the authoritarian and self-serving nature of Gómez's regime makes it hard to distinguish “state sponsorship” from a private venture. Indeed, many of the newsreels produced celebrate the industrial advances of the country by showcasing Gómez's own companies, or those of his relatives. Furthermore, it was Efraín Gómez, nephew of the dictator, who directed *Laboratorio Cinematográfico*, channeling his own interest in the nascent business of cinema. In 1928, he founded Maracay Films.

After Gómez's death, the *Laboratorio* became the *Servicio Cinematográfico Nacional*, and soon after that was privatized and renamed *Estudios Ávila*, under the supervision of the well-known writer Rómulo Gallegos. The importance of this short-lived project (1938–1942) cannot be overstated: it represents a serious attempt to create a national film industry (Acosta 1997: 190). The relationship with the state was not severed completely, as *Estudios Ávila* made a significant number of documentaries for the government; in fact, these documentaries constituted the majority of its production. In revising this history, one could perhaps speak of a project of privatization that allowed outsourcing of services for the state. In 1942, facing significant challenges, the equipment was returned to the MOP. Bolívar Films followed with a more successful business model, providing services for private and public interests after 1940. Beyond non-narrative cinema produced for/with the state, the 1940s–1950s is characterized by a series of alliances with Mexican producers, leading to the development of a small industry and modestly successful commercial model.

The most visible presence of the state appears toward the late 1960s, with the creation of the *Cinematoteca Nacional* (1966), under the direction of filmmaker Margot Benacerraf, and the increasing subsidies for production. The 1970s is remembered as a “golden era” and coincides with a great influx of oil revenue. This allowed significant funding for filmmakers, as well the development of protectionist legislation—such as screen quotas to guarantee exhibition. In 1975, for example, the Venezuelan government provided significant funding for the production of nine features: *Compañero Augusto* (Enver Cordero), *Los muertos*

sí salen (*The Dead Do Leave*, Alfredo Lugo), *Fiebre* (*Fever*, Alfredo Anzola, Juan Santana, and Fernando Toro), *Soy un delincuente* (*I Am a Delinquent*, Clemente de la Cerda), *Sagrado y obsceno* (*Sacred and Obscene*, Román Chalbaud), *Canción mansa para un pueblo bravo* (*A Meek Song for a Fierce People*, Giancarlo Carrer), *La ruta del triunfo* (*The Triumphant Route*, Manuel Díaz Ponceles), *300,000 héroes* (*300,000 Heroes*, María de Lourdes Carbonell), and *La invasión* (*The Invasion*, Julio César Mármol). This support came through unlikely state institutions: Corpoindustria (an organization devoted to modernization of national industry) and Corpoturismo (an organization devoted to tourism).

All this activity was overseen by the newly created *Comisión Nacional de Cinematografía* and led to a series of blockbuster films. As in other parts of Latin America, the 1980s was a period of deregulation and contraction. Nevertheless, institutional support was never completely absent, and in 1981 the government created the *Fondo de Fomento Cinematográfico* (FONCINE) to support national production. This institution was replaced in 1993 by the *Centro Nacional Autónomo de Cinematografía* (CNAC); at the same time, the first important legislation promoting and protecting national cinema appears—the “Ley de Cinematografía Nacional.” CNAC’s institutional model entailed collaboration between state entities and the private sector.

With the advent of the Bolivarian Revolution (1999), state participation increased to levels never seen before. In 2005, new legislation came into effect (*Reforma a la Ley de Cinematografía Nacional*), introducing a series of protectionist measures to benefit national production, while at the same time creating fiscal incentives for private investment (Villazana 2008). As a whole, an institutional network has been developed to support the production, distribution, and preservation of film: CNAC (Centro Nacional de Cinematografía), Amazonia Film (for distribution), Villa del Cine (for production), and the *Cinemateca Nacional* (for exhibition, research, and preservation).

This history of state support for film production would not be complete without acknowledging more repressive governmental measures, including the confiscation of films, defunding projects, censorship, and disciplining filmmakers and officials. The innovative video art project *Imagen de Caracas* (*Image of Caracas*, Jacobo Borges and Inocente Palacios, 1967) was commissioned by the Municipal Council of Caracas to commemorate the city’s 400th anniversary. A month after it opened, the project was shut down by the state, due to its polemical interpretation of national history. One of the best-known cases of censorship involved Luis Correa’s *Ledezma, el caso Mamera* (*Ledezma, the Mamera Case*, 1981). The director was eventually imprisoned in 1982, accused of “apology to crime.” Other films, such as Carlos Azpúrua’s *La pesca de arrastre* (*Trawling*, 1983) and *Caño Mánamo* (1986), were subject to different obstacles and censorship. In 2014, the government exerted undue pressure on Javier Guerrero, then President of *Cinemateca Nacional*, to influence programming the institution. His firm response to such pressure led to his ousting.

Cuba and Venezuela illustrate the ways in which state intervention shapes film industries in small and medium-sized domestic markets. It also exemplifies the pitfalls of governmental support, which can easily turn into a limiting factor when institutions dictate what national cinema ought to represent and how it should do so. One additional issue relates to the economic fluctuations affecting the state: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the collapse of oil prices radically affected the production of Cuban and Venezuelan cinemas, respectively. That being said, it would be naïve to think that private sponsorship is free from constraints, pressures, and risks.

The reinvention of the state in neoliberal Mexican cinema

IGNACIO M. SÁNCHEZ PRADO

Perhaps a testament to the historical role of the state in Mexican cinema is the publication, in 2012, by the previous administration of the Mexican Film Institute (IMCINE), of *El Estado y la imagen en movimiento*, a fairly comprehensive history of the relationship between the government and the national film industry since the beginnings to the present (*El Estado* 2012). The collection of essays tells a fascinating story that by and large periodizes Mexican cinema across the axes established by legislation, paradigms of subsidy, and the tension between the state and international factors such as Hollywood's power and trade practices. It is indeed true that the very existence of Mexican cinema between the end of the national period in the 1950s and the rise of the neoliberal period in the late 1980s owes a great deal to the different stages of state subsidy. As the authors in *El Estado* demonstrate, it would have been unthinkable for Mexican cinema in the 1960s to survive a massive decline of audiences without the support of state funding and the PRI-affiliated labor union. Indeed, the generation of directors that flourished in the 1970s, including Jorge Fons, Arturo Ripstein, and Felipe Cazals, were by and large favored by a proactive policy of film production by the administration of President Luis Echeverría (1970–1976), whose brother oversaw the institution in charge of national film at the time. It is also true that the support of populist genres by the government of President José López Portillo (1976–1982) and the subsequent withdrawal of the state from film funding as a result of the economic crisis of 1982 were devastating for the structures and paradigms that sustained the Mexican film industry for the previous half-century. Canonical accounts of Mexican cinema in the 1980s and early 1990s describe the period as a crisis (Pelayo 2012), or even as the “end” of the Mexican film industry (Saavedra Luna 2007), since the decline of state support was directly tied to the radical reduction of film venues and to the lack of film directors engaging in social issues or artistic pursuits. This crisis was not necessarily an industry crisis (which at the time had a thriving private sector based on vehicles for TV stars and raunchy comedies), but rather the end of a social contract: the true traumatic event was the idea of a “cinema without the state,” which reached its pinnacle during the near-extinction of the industry in 1995, when production declined to a paltry eight films per year as a result of the 1994 financial crisis.

When we speak of the relationship between the state and cinema in Mexico during the neoliberal era, the core element to consider is not so much the withdrawal of the state, but rather a fundamental reconstitution of its role in the industry. During the post-golden age decades, the state exercised what one could consider a near-monopoly over all stages of cinematic production and consumption. Yet, as neoliberalism became the operative state ideology in the 1990s, its role in Mexico's culture industries changed in significant but uneven ways. Distribution was one of the places where the transformation was most profound. A significant percentage of screens in Mexico were operated by the *Compañía Operadora de Teatros S.A. (COTSA)*, a state-owned entity that notoriously kept its theaters in awful condition. There was little encouragement for the private sector to enter the market, since price controls kept ticket prices artificially low and the workforce was mostly bound to the *Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria Cinematográfica (STIC)*, an old and all-encompassing union whose strict seniority rules prevented younger generations of filmmakers and workers from entering the industry. The administration of President Carlos

Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994) dismantled a significant part of this infrastructure, by closing COTSA and selling many of the theaters, and by liberalizing the price of the ticket. As the 1994 crisis hit, private investors used the absence of the state to launch the modern multiplex system, with the opening of the first Cinemark, which was closely followed by two companies: Cinemex and Organización Ramírez, which rebranded itself as Cinépolis. Misha MacLaird, who wrote one of the most concise and complete English-language accounts of the process, shows that it was part of a neoliberal framework that favored entrepreneurialism in culture industries, as well as the transformation of cultural audiences into target markets (MacLaird 2013: 21–74). In this, cinema followed general trends in the neoliberalization of media aligned with the elevation of consumption into a form of citizenship (García Canclini 2001).

More importantly, this had a fundamental effect on film aesthetics. Privatization led to a demographic change in film spectatorship in Mexico, which went from predominantly working class to predominantly middle and upper class. In turn, to cater to these new audiences, Mexican cinema, particularly the one intended for commercial audiences, dramatically and visibly shifted into genres and ideologies aligned with the new ticket-paying audiences (Sánchez Prado 2014). The effects of this were visible particularly in the first Mexican blockbusters of the late 1990s, such as *Sexo, pudor y lágrimas* (*Sex, Shame and Tears*, Antonio Serrano, 1998), *Todo el poder* (*Gimme Power*, Fernando Sariñana, 1999), and *Amores perros* (*Love's a Bitch*, Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2000). These films, different as they may seem, were all aimed at the new audiences through advertising schemes novel to the Mexican industry (such as the proactive use of the film soundtrack and the inclusion of well-known media figures in casts and publicity campaigns), and clearly reflected ideological concerns of the emerging middle class, including the idealization of creative work, a feeling of vulnerability in relation to urban crime, and the sense of unequal modernization that accompanied the neoliberal era. They were also examples of films that in different ways sought to dissociate themselves from the legacies of state-sponsored production in film.

The paradox here is that, as distribution and exhibition became predominantly private, and as film catered more directly to this commercial market, the size of the state's footprint in film production did not significantly diminish. An analysis from the 1970s recovered by Carl Mora showed that the overwhelming number of film productions between 1971 and 1976 were either produced by the state or by private entities financed through schemes of the state-owned Banco Cinematográfico (Mora 2005: 122). In the 1970s, at the height of cinematic statism, 37 out of 42 films were produced by the state, a whopping 88 percent. In 2015, according to numbers furnished by IMCINE (Carmona Álvarez and Sánchez y Sánchez 2012: 13), 70 percent of film production (98 out of 140 films) had some form of state support. It is possible that Mexico could have a viable industry without state support. After all, the top-grossing films are generally funded by two private production juggernauts, Televisa's Videocine and Pantelion enterprises, and the multinational AG Studios, which includes producers and distributors such as Lemon Films and Ítaca. But it is equally true that Mexico's amazing output and its diverse cinematic ecosystem (which includes considerable festival fare, a healthy documentary output, and a well-established art cinema circuit) would be unthinkable without state support. The key factor is that in most cases, governmental backing exists in the form of co-productions through a fellowship system that allows filmmakers to get different percentages of their funding through state funds, supported by legislation aimed at state-sponsored artistic production (Lay Arellano 2005).

The consequence of this scheme has not been the withdrawal of the state from film production, but rather the ability of sectors of the film industry to create a diversified industry precisely because they are not bound by either the narrow criteria of commercial cinema nor, as happened in the past, by a state agency with great power to censor film through funding restrictions.

Nonetheless, there is no better place to see how crucial state support is to cinematic ecosystems in the neoliberal era in Latin America than in Mexico's exhibition system. Over 90 percent of screens in Mexico are controlled by the Cinépolis-Cinemex duopoly, and other than the Cineteca Nacional, the state does not sustain any major exhibition space. In this situation, per IMCINE data, only 6 percent of all audiences goes to Mexican films; 19 percent of film releases are Mexican (and only 80 out of 140 films produced get any release at all, meaning that as much as 40 percent of films never actually reach theatrical audiences); and only 7–12 percent of screens show Mexican cinema in general, with a whole season (the summer, flooded with Hollywood releases) in which it is impossible to see a Mexican film in a multiplex. A new threat is emerging, as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) has a clause that forces Mexico to cap the number of screens devoted to national cinema at 10 percent, in direct contradiction to the industry's stated goal of 30 percent (Gutiérrez 2016). Should the Mexican government subscribe to this clause, it would radically damage the industry and undermine the state's crucial legacy, discarding the notion of the state as a protector of national cinema in favor of a new role guaranteeing the distribution of Hollywood film through trade policy.

Contemporary cinema in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile: the curious role of the state in a neoliberal era

JOANNA PAGE

In the midst of a wave of academic interest in border crossings, migration, the global, and the transnational, it can be easy to underplay the continued importance of the state in Latin American filmmaking. Paradoxically, public policy and state funding have gained a renewed significance in the current neoliberal era. Throughout the Southern Cone, government policies over the past two decades have had an enormous impact on the availability of film funding and exhibition space for national films. In Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, the introduction and enforcement in the mid-1990s of laws designed to protect and stimulate the national film industry are universally considered to have been the most significant enabling factors in the boom in film production that dates from that period. The timing of these laws is, at first sight, puzzling. As Gonzalo Aguilar points out, "cinema, in an era in which state protectionism was a bad word, was an activity that was subsidized and promoted by the State" (Aguilar 2008: 200). Why should cinema have been singled out for protectionist policies by a rampantly neoliberal regime? Mapping some features of the complex role of the state in the boom of cinema in Brazil and Argentina since 1995, and in Chile since 2005, will shed some light on this question.

A recognition of the vital role of government policies and public funding in Latin American filmmaking does not mean underestimating the extent to which the industry also benefits from foreign funding. While international co-productions still represent a minor fraction of the total films produced in any year by Argentina and Brazil, for example, a great number of productions are financed with the help of funds associated with

international film festivals, notably Hubert Bals and Sundance, or with other European or transatlantic programs, such as Fond Sud Cinéma and Ibermedia. These grants, however, generally cover a relatively low proportion of the cost of making a film. As a typical case, Gustavo Taretto's *Medianeras* (*Sidewalls*, Argentina, 2011) was made with the help of Ibermedia and Germany's World Cinema Fund, but the bulk of its budget was covered by Argentina's INCAA (Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales); Taretto readily affirms that "Without [the INCAA] it would be impossible to have a film industry in Argentina" (Naderzad 2011).

The considerable power wielded by the INCAA over the past decades is clearly to be seen in the stimulation of certain kinds of film production over others, which has resulted from shifts in its policies and modes of operation. As César Maranghello observes, in the last years of the Menem government, the INCAA reserved its funds for the biggest players in the industry; at the beginning of the 2000s, however, changes to loan policies created new opportunities for young directors, bringing in "a real change in generation," with *operas primas* representing 60 percent of the films released in 2001 (Maranghello 2005: 257–258; see Falicov 2007: 92–93, 115 for INCAA policies in the 1990s). While a few directors have pursued a career independently of INCAA support (notably Raúl Perrone and Mario Llinás), it continues to provide indispensable backing for almost all films produced in Argentina.

Public policies have also played a dramatic role in the resurgence of Brazilian cinema since President Fernando Collor de Mello's dismantling of the state film enterprise, Embrafilme, in 1990. In particular, new tax incentive laws implemented in 1992 paved the way for private corporations to invest in national films, and the creation of ANCINE (Agência Nacional do Cinema) in 1993 has led to the expansion and greater enforcement of legislation to protect the national film industry (Rêgo 2011: 35–39). Alessandra Meleiro gives the example of the blockbuster *Cidade de Deus* (*City of God*, Fernando Meirelles, 2002), with over 20 percent of its funding raised by means of the incentive laws. As Meleiro suggests, "Cases like this confirm the importance of the incentive laws and government policies in nurturing domestic film production" (Meleiro 2013: 188). Similarly, in his study of the film and audiovisual industries in Chile, Roberto Trejo Ojeda signals that the role played by the state should be seen as the single most important factor in the sector's recent growth (Trejo Ojeda 2009: 128). The consequence of a reliance on state support, of course, is that national film industries are peculiarly exposed to economic downturns. Dependence of this kind, as Trejo Ojeda suggests, marks both the condition of possibility of a national cinema and the limits of its development (p. 129).

Although public policy and state support for national film industries have often been important in Latin America, marking the rhythm and tempo of its silences and revivals, a change in rhetoric and practice has taken place in recent years. Instead of being conceived as a form of public spending, with the aim of protecting a national industry, state funding for cinema is now increasingly understood as an *investment* (Trejo Ojeda 2009: 119). This shift takes place as a result of the abandonment (or radical rewriting) of the "social contract" that had existed between the state and the national film industry in previous decades, as Sánchez Prado points out in the Mexican context (p. 53). Among other things, it means that the state becomes a powerful sponsor of national films, with the aim of promoting tourism but also to attract foreign companies to film in the country. This can bring significant benefits to local economies: for example, crew members of the James Bond film *Quantum of Solace* (2008) are estimated to have spent US\$8 million on hotels, food, and tourism during their brief visit to Chile's Atacama Desert (Long 2009).

The development of a national film industry becomes vital because it provides the skills and technologies needed to support foreign filmmaking in the country. Chile in particular has developed a high-quality post-production industry and is now the Latin American leader in this regard.

An expansion in national filmmaking is seen as crucial to Latin America's insertion into the global market more generally, with governments conscious that "a country without its own images might not seem to exist in the contemporary culture market," especially as audiovisual industries represent an important and growing sector within the world economy (Trejo Ojeda 2009: 9–10). Between 2013 and late 2014, "culture" had the third greatest presence in the coverage of Chile in the international media, surpassed only by "politics" and "sport," and references to culture and cinema contribute a good proportion of the positive coverage of the nation abroad (Fundación Imagen de Chile 2015: 6, 10). ProChile, the arm of the Foreign Affairs Ministry (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores) charged with promoting Chilean goods and services abroad and stimulating tourism at home, pays particular attention to the nation's film industry. As its Director explains, promoting visual arts and other creative industries "allows Chile to show itself to the world as an educated, trustworthy and developed country, which is of benefit to all export sectors" (ProChile 2013).

The audience for Latin American films since the 1980s differs dramatically from that of the "golden age" of the 1930s and 1940s, when films were primarily made for working-class audiences rather than the metropolitan elite (Falicov 2007: 81). With state support, contemporary filmmaking has tended to focus on an increasingly middle-class and intellectual section of the population. Ascanio Cavallo and Gonzalo Maza ascribe this phenomenon to the fact that many young filmmakers in Chile (as in other Latin American countries) are film school graduates, learning their trade within an academic environment, which explains "the self-reflexive form of many of their works." This new generation may not have consciously turned their back on the general public, they suggest, but have shown greater interest in "pursuing their own language and concerns" (Cavallo and Maza 2010: 15). While more commercial filmmakers such as Argentina's Daniel Burman and Juan José Campanella succeed in appealing to an enthusiastic middlebrow public, the majority of national films in Argentina are aimed at a much more reduced audience of cinephiles. This change in focus arises in tandem with a deeper shift in the social profile of cinema spectatorship in Latin America, however, where in many countries the incursion of multinational-owned multiplexes in the 1990s and the closure of neighborhood cinemas has made moviegoing an activity for wealthy urbanites. Sánchez Prado has observed the effect of this phenomenon on the narrative modes of Mexican films, for example, which have renounced the modes of melodrama that responded more clearly to popular tastes (Sánchez Prado 2014: 82).

For a number of critics, the recent wave of "novísimo cine chileno," which dates from 2005, is characterized by individualism, an autobiographical impetus, and a retreat into private, intimate spaces that is consonant with social relations under neoliberalism, finding an easy entry into the global market. Carlos Saavedra Cerda finds that "national cinema is directed towards the inner life and becomes an expression of an *auteur*, while at the same time the films produced represent the kind of object demanded by the international market of images" (Saavedra Cerda 2013: 22). He charges these films with "depoliticizing the subject" and "validating the market in their themes" (p. 23). However, the charting by recent Chilean films of the reduction of public space to spaces of consumption, together with the social segregation that marks a grossly unequal society, is certainly not carried out uncritically. The state's failure to provide basic welfare is tragically manifest in *La buena*

vida (*The Good Life*, Andrés Wood, 2008), for example, while *Huacho* (*Orphan*, Alejandro Fernández Almendras, 2009) highlights the vast inequalities that separate middle-class urban consumers from agricultural workers in the impoverished provinces. The fact that many recent productions are filmed almost exclusively in domestic, middle-class spaces, and signally fail to imagine forms of collective vision and action—examples would include *Velódromo* (Alberto Fuguet, 2009) and *Zoológico* (Rodrigo Marín, 2011)—does not imply an endorsement of their characters' narcissism and anomie.

Trejo Ojeda notes that the two elements that make up cinema's hybrid nature—at once aesthetic object and economic commodity—represent “two kinds of logic that do not always coincide and can even become contradictory” (Trejo Ojeda 2009: 18). Such divergences are abundantly evident in contemporary filmmaking in the Southern Cone, where the ideological “content” of films often renders paradoxical and even nonsensical their co-option by the state for the purposes of selling a positive image of the nation abroad and/or pursuing greater integration in the international economy. Many such films emphasize the internal fragmentation of the nation or the negligence and weakness of the state in the face of violence. One thinks of the systematic exploitation of farmworkers in *La mujer de barro* (*The Mud Woman*, Sergio Castro San Marín, Argentina–Chile, 2015), the institutional corruption rife in *El estudiante* (*The Student*, Santiago Mitre, Argentina, 2011), the discomfiting critique of white privilege and prejudice in *Casa grande* (*The Big House*, Felipe Barbosa, Brazil, 2014), or the precarious existence of indigenous communities whose rights are consistently ignored, as depicted in *El etnógrafo* (*The Ethnographer*, Ulises Rosell, Argentina, 2012).

And yet, perhaps this contradiction is less sharp, or less important, than it appears. Cinema has become an important means for post-dictatorship Southern Cone governments to project an image of a modern, technologically advanced, democratic nation. This means embracing a diversity of films, some of which may challenge the policies or even the status of the nation itself. Even the proliferation of films about repression under dictatorship serves to distance the contemporary state from such acts and to emphasize its return to democracy. During Alfonsín's regime, as Tamara L. Falicov reminds us, the circulation of “quality” films from Argentina on the international film festival circuit became a “primary vehicle” for promoting a new image of a modern, democratic country that invested in national culture (Falicov 2007: 53). Similarly, taken as a whole, films that attack the logic of the nation may merely emphasize choice, multiculturalism, and individual freedom, all of which sit comfortably within a neoliberal agenda, and provide no impediment to the marketing of a national cinema. If we have entered an era in which—as Aguilar argues—audiovisual art in a media-dominated society is not a space of resistance, but one increasingly shaped by politics and finance, many filmmakers have opted to “penetrate this machine of images,” nevertheless “marking out, with their own work, a difference” (Aguilar 2008: 196). That they are able to do so is, of course, testament to the fact that democracy has prospered in the Southern Cone, while throwing light on the facility with which neoliberal marketing machines may profit even from dissenting voices or apparently uncommercial activities.

State subsidies and promotion have aided the considerable success of Latin American productions at international film festivals, while audiences at home have dwindled. Many more films are currently being produced that could never hope to recoup their costs; relying heavily on state subsidies, and in the context of very limited screening opportunities within their own countries, directors have both the freedom and the incentive to find alternative distribution routes. The past few years have seen a boom in the distribution of films from

Latin America on the Internet, either directly uploaded onto sites such as YouTube or made available on websites that often describe themselves as a kind of “free Netflix,” via which viewers may stream a wide range of fiction and documentary films, including very recent ones. Examples of such sites would include the Chilean www.cinepata.com, established in 2008 by the writer and director Alberto Fuguet, and the Argentine www.cinemargentino.com, founded more recently in 2013. Both are endorsed by state bodies for film funding but receive little or no money from them; directors simply give their permission for films to be streamed free by means of Creative Commons licenses.

These sites are clearly conceived as means of circumventing the market forces of the global film industry, and often appeal to nationalist and regionalist sentiment in the celebration of what is not commercially viable. Fuguet, reflecting in 2015 on the creation of www.cinepata.com, suggests that they were able to anticipate a new trend in thinking about film in Chile: “that cinema should be part of garage culture: that is to say, stripped-down, artistic, without profit” (Orellana 2015). The distribution of Latin American cinema is important, for him, “because we feel Chilean and are Chilean, and are outside of the industry. Outside of the big circuit. It seems to us that our neighbours and allies are Latin American.” Indeed, few of the films available to stream are subtitled, which reinforces the site’s objectives of national and regional distribution, as an alternative to the “cinema for export” model promoted by the Chilean government.

Viewing films on the Internet rather than in cinemas or on television is fast becoming more popular across Latin America: boosted by the increase in online viewing, home video revenue is predicted to overtake cinema takings by 2018 in Argentina (Crettaz 2014). This provides significant opportunities for distribution beyond cinema circuits and a new impetus towards filming in digital formats. The growing centrality of the Internet in audiovisual entertainment is also opening up new creative possibilities in the form of transmedia projects such as *Malvinas30* (Alvaro Liuzzi, 2012) and *Tras los pasos del Hombre Bestia* (*Following the Footsteps of the Beast Man*, Roberto Igarza and Fernando Irigaray, 2013) in Argentina and *Latitudes* (Felipe Braga, 2013) in Brazil, together with alternative financing models such as crowdfunding. Yet, as Braga himself suggests, such alternatives may not bring about greater choice or liberty for the filmmaker. By comparison with Argentina and Chile, Brazil’s tax incentive laws have paved the way for a greater dominance of commercial sponsors: *Latitudes* is sponsored by Procter & Gamble and Heineken, among other companies. While Braga acknowledges that every filmmaker of his generation “owes their career to the tax incentive model,” he is concerned that “the categories ‘audience’ and ‘consumer’ will merge into one single thing. Brands will end up acting as curators of content” (Mango 2013). The state, as has been argued here, appears to be much less interested in “curating content” and more interested in pursuing international critical acclaim; the vigorous promotion of national cinema within the neoliberal “cinema for export” model has the ironic consequence of sheltering filmmakers from market forces and according them a surprising artistic freedom.

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