Archipelagoes and Constellations: Political Economy and Aesthetics in Twenty-First Century Central American and Hispanic Caribbean Film

Amanda Alfaro Córdoba

UCL

PhD Thesis

SELCS/ Film Studies/ CMII

Signed Declaration

I, Amanda Alfaro Córdoba, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed:

Abstract

Filmmaking landscapes are changing as political and technological frameworks undergo deep transformations. This thesis argues that politics and technology, as well as the cinematographic languages derived from them, respond to mechanisms that pull in opposite directions: one divides up the resources and operational networks which are based on the structure of a fragmented political economy that conforms to what is often referred to as the New International Division of Cultural Labour; the technology-based cultural expressions, for their part, find connections in other ways, building paths between discordant cultural codes. This thesis asks the following questions: What impact has the changing infrastructural landscape had on film production and distribution, and the expression of themes in the twenty-first century cinema of the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America? What role have Hollywood and Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano played in this new era? By critically reading texts that explore and discuss the diversity of Latin American cinemas and the problem of defining a "house style", conducting interviews with filmmakers, decision-makers and cultural critics as well as viewing and analysing a wide range of films from Nicaragua, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Costa Rica that have circulated in film festivals, this thesis examines the influence of the political context at precisely the point in time when technological changes are starting to revolutionise filmmaking practices, circuits and dynamics.

In this thesis I examine three production contexts: (a) the political economy underpinning global cinematographic practices, (b) the legacy of the *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*, and (c) the impact of technology on production and distribution dynamics, via an analysis of nine films which exemplify the characteristics of each context. The thesis focuses in particular on the pathways followed by filmmaking in Latin America between the Scylla of politics and the Charybdis of technology. As a result, I argue that there are two oppositional trends. On one hand, there is the archipelagic drive that forces a wedge between the cultural and financial policies in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America based on economic conditions. The second, and oppositional trend, which is configurative – that is to say, it shows a continuity of meanings within the film texts – is underpinned by the convergence of a set of voices that face a similar set of challenges as a result of marginalisation, invisibilisation and de-contextualisation.

Impact Statement

In this research project I study the relationship between twenty-first century cinematic works from Central America and those from the Hispanic Caribbean, and, in the course of this investigation, I found it important to define three filmic contexts: the local, the regional and the global.[1] Filmmaking, as any cultural production, is performed and read differently in each of these arenas; the three contexts – the local, the regional and the global – respond to different political backdrops and while they sometimes overlap at other times they are divided from each other as a result of the material base that underpins and sustains their cinematic production. It is within this tripartite structure that imaginaries and agencies are staged and re-enacted, allowing representation to take form and thereby influence the ways in which audiences interact with their own historical space. The angle I chose for the present study acknowledges the fact that cinematographic legacy is a crucial motivator that associates resources with current and future actors, as well as their interests. Film is a powerful instrument which is able to activate soft power in a very effective way. In this sense, the present thesis highlights how films are produced financially as well as technically, and identifies the ways in which discourses emerge from these production practices, which in turn make the process of cultural domination visible.

Through a critical reading of the current scholarship on the subject I became aware of the absence of a middle ground in two senses: there were those critical works that analysed film production from a local perspective and others that did so from a global perspective. There is, of course, some critical writing about low-budget films but there is little scholarship – which is logical given the very low number of productions – on local blockbusters; what was missing was a regional perspective focussing on middle-budget films.[2] This more nuanced perspective is required to pinpoint how cinematographic practices adhere to or contest discourses of cultural domination. But finding this middle ground is hard to do because it emerges as a result of the practices of unseen actors such as contemporary filmmakers, cultural critics and cultural influencers. I therefore decided to interview a number of these individuals; my aim was to articulate, through their interviews, their viewpoints, their insights about their

[1] The term "national cinemas" is problematic as we shall see in the present study as discussed in Chapter Two.
[2] The range of filmmaking costs in Latin America differs from average costs in Europe and the United States, as discussed in Chapter One. For instance a middle-budget film in Europe or the United States typically costs US $2,000,000 while an average Latin American movie costs approximately US $700,000, according to Levine (2016), and thus any budget over US $1,000,000 represents a high-budget film.

aesthetic choices, and their cinematographic languages. I wanted tto allow these new voices to emerge and become visible.

This information, once synthesised and fed back to the region's filmmaking community, allows us to have a clearer understanding of the influence of cinema on public discourse, public policies and public engagement within the nation states studied in this thesis as well as its transnational impact. My hope is that this thesis, as a practice-inspired research project, will provide a new understanding of cinematographic representation in the Central American and Hispanic Caribbean regions, as presented in the documentary *Archipelagoes and Constellations* and analysed in the written component of the thesis.

Acknowledgements

During these four years I have had the support of my birth and extended family; friends all of them, who have been solidly there throughout the rollercoaster of the PhD process. My most sensitive gratitude to my grandmother Rosa (Lala) whose loss inevitably marked the process. My sister Marcela, mother Saray and partner George were pillars for my sanity. My father Edgar became present in the right moment, thank you. My friends Rebe, Nani, Melissa, Maricarmen, Caro H., Caro F., Joumana, Sammy, Adri S., Nick L., Adri C., Jose, Fran, Mirza, Juan Pa, Ileana, Álvaro, Eduardo, Yolanda, Hermida, Gustavo M., Naza, Octavio, Chris, Abileny, Macarena, Patricia in Costa Rica, some of them colleagues, all of them kindly accompanied me in every step.

In the inbetweeness of the globe Fraser, Lissy and Julio each in their own way were fundamental for the thesis and the documentary. My heartfelt thank you.

In London and Europe the constant care from Anila, Abhu, Neeraj, Darren, Amelia, Sarah H., Tom, Ana, Liberté, Nick R., Lorena, Paul, Sophie, Michele, Marja, Rodolfo, Stepan, Anne, Sofia, Melek, Sarah A., Fernando, Levke, Michele, Aiko reminded me that the tensions are transitory and the perseverance pays off. My colleagues from UCL Marina, Beatriz, Miriam, Allison and Chienya who inspired me with their example of discipline and humour. I am grateful with Liz Harvey-Katou, her support and orientation as a colleague and friend.

Two institutions were crucial for this research, the Universidad de Costa Rica, particularly through the Oficina de Asuntos Internacionales and the Escuela de Estudios Generales who partially funded my programme, and University College London at the School of European Languages Culture and Society and the Centre for Multidisciplinary and Intercultural Inquiry Departments which supported my life as a student in London through their Teaching Assistantship system and brought me into the local academic and human community. My gratitude to these institutions as well as to all my interviewews for their patience and invaluable testimonies: Vilma, Akley, Paz, Deborah, Toby, Jayro, Laura, Karina, María Lourdes, Demetrio, Florence and Juan Carlos.

Finally to both my supervisors Stephen Hart and Debbie Martin, whose invaluable work was a crucial orientation throughout, I owe them all the virtues in the present thesis. All its imperfections are only my responsibility.

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0. Prologue: The Case of *Cinema Alcázar*

In 1998, during the Berlin Film Festival, a short film that skirted the border between observational documentary and testimonial fiction, won the Silver Bear Award. The film told the story of a community of homeless Managuans, many of them immigrants from rural Nicaragua, while they were preparing meals, raising their babies and toddlers, and eking out a living with their precarious scrap-selling street carts. *Cinema Alcázar* (Jaugey, 1998) was the first Central American film ever to win recognition at an international film festival: it seemed that Central American film had finally arrived on the global stage. In the past the closest a production from the region had come to global recognition was *El norte* (Nava, 1983) a film shot in Guatemala by the US-born Gregory Nava which achieved great success in film circuits across the US.

Directed by a French woman, Florence Jaugey, who had come to Nicaragua a decade before to act as the main character in the Cuban/ French funded film *El señor presidente* (Gómez, 1983) – an adaptation of the Guatemalan novel by Miguel Ángel Asturias – *Cinema Alcázar* was made with the leftover film roll from the Spanish/ German/ British production *Carla´s Song* (Loach, 1996), on which Jaugey had worked as an Assistant Producer. However, there were setbacks in *Cinema Alcázar*'s production. The short film was shot with a camera from the 1940s that was so noisy that the acoustic ambience could not be recorded and thus required a complete sound make-over after the shoot. *Cinema Alcázar* tells the story of a dozen Managuans who inhabit the ruins of a former cinema destroyed after the 1972 earthquake.[3] The documentary draws on how these characters are trapped in a depressing struggle to survive; it is a situation in which the preparedness against natural disasters, adequate social investment and the equitable distribution of resources are non-existent. The film was seen at the time as an allegory of the ways in which Manguans struggle to cope in the historical remains (ruins) of a country struggle by natural and man-made disasters. It pointed to the consistently apathetic political management of a political group that led the country to revolution in 1979 only to then completely betray the sacrifice underwriting that political process. When the film was released, 25 years after the natural disaster and following decades of subsequent political

[3] This episode of Nicaraguan history was particularly meaningful since it brought insult on top of injury to an already complex social situation. The 6.2 magnitude quake destroyed 90% of the city's buildings, left 10,000 dead – nearly 2.5% of its total population at the time – and the tragic outcome became worse when the recently installed dictatorship mismanaged the international aid funds sent to Nicargua in order to alleviate the crisis (Alfaro Córdoba, 2008).

mismanagement, the Nicaraguan authorities had still not been able to rebuild the country's shattered landscape. Nicaragua was still in ruins.

This story is paradigmatic. Central American cinema has had to fight for transnational resources in order to make films with someone else's leftovers. State funding has been interrupted in every country in Central America for political reasons, whether as a result of the institutional erosion caused by war, or because of direct censorship or, lastly, as a result of evasive answers from a government only too willing to pass the buck (Cortés Pacheco, 2005; Harvey-Kattou, 2019). Two representative episodes which are symptomatic of this conscious disregard for cinematic production include the decision made by the Costa Rican government in the 1970s to sponsor the training and equipping of a group of documentarians, which was followed swiftly by the decision to withdraw the resources when the films portrayed the government negatively.[4] A recent example pointing in a similar direction includes the 2014 closure of the film festival *Muestra de Cine Internacional Memoria Verdad y Justicia* in Guatemala, followed by its reluctant re-opening in 2017.[5] In the Costa Rican episode the government intervened to create resources for the film industry, but then withdrew them when the messages proved to be inconvenient for their own political purposes; in the Guatemalan case an independently funded organisation established the human rights film festival and the government shut it down for three years before finally complying with public demand and re-opening it.

The legacy of these efforts has consistently shown the difficulty in obtaining support from any Central American government to fund filmmaking practices and resources without which it is almost impossible to produce films. As Shaw et al. argue in "National Cinemas (Re)Ignited",

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[4] Liz Harvey-Kattou (2019: p. 15) points out that, at that time, the Costa Rican government "felt that its national audiovisual production rate was falling behind that of other Latin American nations in the 1970s and as such designated funds to the Ministry for Youth, Culture and Sport to encourage documentary filmmaking. Ironically, although hundreds of documentaries were consequently made through official programmes, their content was not policed, resulting in embarrassing results as prostitution, alcoholism, poor worker conditions, and corruption were often highlighted. This culminated in the release of *Costa Rica: Banana Republic* by Ingo Niehaus in 1976, which was so negative in its portrayal of the nation's image that the government threatened to censor it. This led to the resignation of the country´s Minister for Culture Carmen Naranjo, who herself was a protest author of the generation of the 70s."

[5] The *Muestra de Cine Internacional Memoria, Verdad y Justicia* was originally designed to screen national and international documentaries which were absent from the Guatemalan commercial movie listings. It is described as an event for "social, humane and artistic cinema in a society marked by violence, exclusion, racism, injustice, impunity and intolerance" (*Hacer cine en Guatemala*, 2019). Its fourth edition, in 2014, convened 11,000 people – a high number for the standard audience numbers within the region, where for instance the CRFIC with a preproduction of five months and the support from the Costa Rican government attracted around 20,0000 people – but was coerced to remove three films from the listing under the threat of "possible reprisals" which the organizers interpreted as risk of death (*Hacer cine en Guatemala*, 2019).

government support has been vital for filmmaking in Latin American countries, or, in their words "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" (2017: p. 46). The same idea is suggested by Sydney Levine in her recent account of Latin American Film Industries (2016) and has been repeated by nearly every scholar working in Latin American Film Studies (Moguillasnky, 2019; Campos, 2012; Falicov, 2013; García Canclini, 2004; Getino, 2007). These scholars find that governments have typically interacted with filmmaking practices in Latin America in two different ways; either "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", or "[t]he opposite often occurred when governments liberalized their economies and retracted such support, generating a significant contraction of the domestic film industry" (Shaw et al, 2017: p. 45).

Due to the armed conflicts in Central America during the late twentieth century and the colliding agendas that emerged in the aftermath of these wars, Central American countries have never experienced sustained support for cultural production; moreover, when the governments "liberalized their economies" (Shaw et al., 2017) the meagre support filmmaking received led to filmmaking practices that, as I argue here, were stateless, and they thus fell deeper into precarious and informal modes of production[6] – if there was any production at all. For instance, countries like Belize, whose independence came less than 40 years ago – in 1981 – or Panama, whose active cultural state policies date from the regained control over the canal – in 1999 – exhibit fewer than five or no narrative feature films in their entire film catalogues; before 2017 not one of them had been selected at a first-or second-tier festival.[7] In an expanded geography – one that also includes the Hispanic Caribbean – Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic dealt with aggressive military occupancies and had their cultural budgets managed from New York (in the case of Puerto Rico) or with very limited resources (in the case of Dominican Republic), as John King (2000: p. 228) has documented. The only exception, during the 1960s, 70s and 80s was Cuba. Narrative feature films made in Cuba by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Juan Carlos Tabío, Armand Gatti, Humberto Solás, Octavio Cortázar and Fernando Pérez entered the selections at international film festivals in the latter half of the twentieth century. Indeed, amidst the intensity of Cold War confrontations Cuba's films had fierce supporters as well as

[6] Precarity has been articulated as a concept by Pierre Bourdieu – inspired by the Parisian upheavals of the 1960s and based on the discussions of the Frankfurt School where *One-dimensional Man* (Marcuse, 1964) and later *Empire* (Hardt & Negri, 2000) were founding texts – to then be described as a state of casual unprotected labour with temporary working conditions that condemn the workers to a weak "work-based identity" (Standing, 2016).
[7] For further information on the difference between first- and second-tier festivals see footnote 18.

detractors. These various pressures led to a unique filmic cartography that, as we shall see, is now changing due to the impact of the digital turn and new political contexts.

The process by which *Cinema Alcázar* was produced, screened, and was awarded recognition at a global festival but then was forgotten by Latin American filmic memoirs is an example, as we shall see, of the three aspects that characterise filmmaking in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean: (i) it drew on professionals and resources from inside and outside the region, and used new technologies which until that point had been rarely employed in local productions, (ii) it was funded transnationally, and this opened up opportunities for distribution and screening at international festivals; and (iii) it prioritized local actors, told stories about characters who lived in Central America and the Caribbean, and therefore articulated a "local" aesthetics.

But what were the common ingredients of filmmaking in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean? And how did they come together? Antonio Benítez Rojo provides some pointers on how to answer these and related questions. In *La isla que se repite: para una reinterpretación de la cultura* (1986), Benítez Rojo shows how a number of common cultural traits exist within Latin American nations, and particularly among those countries that form the Caribbean Basin; these traits operate and link their respective dynamics, despite the differences created as a result of their distinct experiences of colonialism. He observes how the "urgency" to systematize ("sistematizar") the political, economic, social and anthropological dynamics was a fairly recent phenomenon at the time when he was writing his seminal work (i.e. the mid-1980s). He goes on to underline the paradox of the Caribbean lands being the first to be explored by European colonisers (from the fifteenth century onwards) and the last to be known – his actual wording is that the Caribbean is "una de las regiones menos conocidas" (one of the least known regions). Benítez Rojo points to one of the main difficulties scholars confront when describing a peripheral space: its fragmentation, instability and reciprocal insularity ("su fragmentación; su inestabilidad; su recíproco aislamiento") generates a sense of uprootedness ("desarraigo"). It is as a result of this heterogeneity that the Caribbean lacks a coherent form of historiography or historical continuity (p. 115).

Drawing on Benítez Rojo's work I argue it is crucial to acknowledge that the disjointed discourses populating the space of the Hispanic Caribbean are a logical expression of the marginality they occupy in contemporary global imaginaries. Benítez Rojo's understanding of the Caribbean goes beyond strict geographic boundaries to include areas affected in similar ways by Spain's colonial machine ("máquina naval, territorial, geo-política, burocrática,

comercial"; p. 119); he includes obvious candidates such as Jamaica, Aruba, Puerto Rico and Haiti, but his mapping also stretches to continental territories such as Miami in continental North America and Recife in Brazil, as well as coastal towns of the circum-Caribbean such as Cartagena de las Indias (Colombia), Nombre de Dios (Panama) and San Juan de Ulúa (Veracruz; p. 119), without which the extractivist policies executed by Europeans during the colonial times in the American continent would have been useless. Alongside its heterogeneity and *mestizaje*, the colonial "hinge" created an intense cultural exchange which Benítez Rojo describes as joining the atmospheres from all continents ("el Caribe [puede hallarse] en las bajas y rumorosas riveras de Gambia, [en] un templo de Bali, en una vieja taberna de Bristol […] en la *saudade* existencial de una canción portuguesa"; p. 116). In this sense Benítez Rojo is able to argue that "the history of the Caribbean is one of the main threads of capitalism's history, and viceversa" ("la historia del Caribe es uno de los hilos principales de la historia del capitalismo, y viceversa"; p. 117).

Benítez Rojo clearly has a fluid rather than static understanding of the cultural meaning of the Caribbean. Thus, at one point, this web of cultural appropriations is described as a meta-archipelago in *La isla que se repite…*; he states that the best way to visually explain the Caribbean is that it is like the *Milky Way* since its "transformative plasma flows and twists with parsimony in our globe's vault, drawing a cartography that continuously modifies itself, objects that are born while others disappear […] production, exchange, consumption, machine (are the words that come to mind)" (Benítez Rojo, 1986: p. 116). My approach to the Caribbean is inspired by Benítez Rojo's vibrant account, but I propose to expand the physical geography affected by Spain's "colonial machine" and suggest that, particularly in the context of contemporary filmmaking practices, the Hispanic Caribbean and the countries of Central America possess similar cultural codes and have faced the same economic pressures. For this reason, I have joined the Caribbean Basin and its geographic western flank up from Panama, that is, the countries of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.[8] All of these countries possess a similar cultural heritage, a similar geographic size, populations of less than 18 million and, crucially, they have experienced similar trajectories in terms of addressing the challenge of creating a national film industry and a *national audience* that is of sufficient size to sustain its cultural production via market forces.[9] By comparing and

[8] Even those Central American countries who have coasts onto the Caribbean Sea, such as Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras, are rarely associated in the Global Imaginary with the Caribbean.

[9] I will discuss in more detail both of these notions – national cinema and the way it has been argued to work within small nations – mainly through the lens provided by Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie's work, in Chapter 1, Sections 4 and 5.

contrasting the filmic production of countries of the Hispanic Caribbean with those of Central America, I hope to elucidate the challenges faced, strategies used and solutions created by film directors, producers and distributors in the twenty-first century during a crucially important period of extraordinary growth for their national film industries.

The present analysis works with two concepts: archipelago and constellation. Each term explores one of two dynamics which I find constant in the filmmaking practices encountered in the twenty-first century in the nations of the Caribbean Basin and its western flank. By archipelago, I refer to a "sea with many scattered islands" (*Concise English Dictionary*), and I will be using this metaphor to refer to the broken network that operates in the region, particularly in terms of market penetration and film production. As the case studies show, the economic pressures experienced by the filmmakers as a result of the aggressive policies co-ordinated by the mainstream film industry are similar whether they are living in Cuba, the Dominican Republic or any of the Central American countries. These policies lead to a fragmented network of filmmakers and producers who are faced with a never-ending set of obstacles when they attempt to produce cultural work, particularly when they seek to address regional audiences directly, which, as we shall see, is crucial for those filmmakers who rely on transnational funding for their sustainability. This metaphor has the advantage of allowing us to see filmmakers and producers as islands, scattered against an economic archipelago created as a result of the divisions backed by the majors in order to isolate and weaken local film distribution.

The negative dynamics underlying the notion of archipelago, however, need to be balanced by an appreciation of the positive kudos attached to the notion of the "constellation". As we have seen, Benítez Rojo relies on this metaphor when he describes the Caribbean as a "Milky Way", and I draw on this idea when pointing to the existence of a web of solidary associations linking together filmmaking in the Hispanic Caribbean and filmmaking in Central America. According to the *Concise English Dictionary* a constellation is a "number of fixed stars grouped within an imaginary outline" and in my study the "fixed stars" are represented by film movements such as Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, film directors such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, funding organisations such as Cinergia – and to a lesser degree Ibermedia –, institutions such as the Fundación para el nuevo cine latinoamericano and Film Schools such as the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión. These "fixed stars" offered a point of resilience in opposition to the economic archipelago. Indeed, the institutions raised to support the NCL movement, which operated from Cuba and expanded outwards to various parts of Latin

America, found particularly fertile ground, as we shall see, within the Central American countries; Cinergia, for example, focussed on funding the films of filmmakers based specifically in Cuba and in Central America (Falicov, 2019).

The conflict between the "archipelago" and the "constellation" epitomises the contradictory dynamics underpinning filmmaking in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America, which has been caught between the cross-winds of the marketing practices pursued by the majors (from the Hollywood film industry) and the consolidation of the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano movement. While Hollywood sought to drive its resources in order to secure these countries within the U.S. transnational model, funding organisations such as Cinergia and Ibermedia strengthened the links between the countries of Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean, particularly Cuba, via the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión (EICTV), the Fundación para el nuevo cine latinoamericano and the NCL movement. These links between Cuba and Central America were initiated in the 1960s and they came to fruition in the 1980s when the EICTV, founded in 1985, began to promote and encourage collaborations between Latin American filmmakers. The intra-regional link promoted by the EICTV's philosophy was welcomed with open arms by Central American filmmakers since no school had existed in the region before the EICTV, and this led to a constant stream from the 1990s onwards of film students from Central America applying for a place on the "curso regular" at the International Film and TV School in San Antonio de los Baños. According to Hispano Durón "by 2010 a total of eighty-eight Central Americans [had] graduated from EICTV" (p. 43). Durón argues that the EICTV in effect created what he calls a New Central American Cinema during this period; this assertion is based on the testimony of several alumni from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador or Costa Rica who have stated that the EICTV was crucial for Central Americans in their search for access to training opportunities. The absence of film schools in the isthmus – before the establishment of the Nueva Escuela de Cine y Televisión at Universidad Veritas (Costa Rica) and the Escuela de Cine y TV Casa Comal (Guatemala) in 2002 – made the Cuban school a unique place where the collaboration between professionals from Central America and Cuba, as well as the practice of a "radical spirit of the Cuban and Latin American Left [and to a spirit of internationalism]" (Durón, 2014: p. 43) was particularly fruitful. This influence was "more evident in Central America" than anywhere else in Latin America, as Durón (2014: p. 46) argues, and his argument is backed up by Jessica Guifarro and Luis Naguil's testimonies. The lack of any type of Film School or filmmaking institution in Central America during the 1980s and 1990s meant that the EICTV was the favoured destination of budding film directors

in Central America during this period. As a result, as we shall see, links between Cuban and Central American film grew intensely during this period.

Octavio Getino, in his book *Cine Iberoamericano. Los desafíos del nuevo siglo* (2007) argues that, given the scale and historical circumstances of film production in the Caribbean and Central American countries, the corpus, as well as their contextual discourses, should be understood as part of a continuum created "in order to enhance every community's film and cultural industries for the benefit of the region as a whole" (p. 126). The continuum relates to a country's cultural base, which is shared widely with other countries across Latin America. Tamara Falicov (2019) observes that, according to Getino (2006), "between 1930 and 2000 12,500 films were produced in Latin America"; of these just 1,250 were made outside Mexico, Argentina or Brazil which leaves an average of 17 films per year made by 17 countries. Falicov contends that, given these numbers, with the exception of the three big producing countries, rather than speaking about film industries, it is more accurate to refer to the existence of "film traditions" in those countries outside the "Big Three" filmmaking nations. Things began to change from 2000 onwards; as the United Nations has recorded, the new millenium was characterized by an increase in global filmmaking. In *Diversity and the film industry* (United Nations, 2016) regions are classified as low, medium and high film producers. As I will show in Chapter 1 numbers of films released in all Central American and Hispanic Caribbean countries for the years between 2000 and 2013 are listed as under 20 per annum (i.e. in the low-production bracket). Films made in these countries used to amount for 0 to 1 per year before 2000, the production dynamic has changed in recent years, mainly through digital possibilities; however Cuba and Dominican Republic – as bearers of the higher numbers – are still well below the film release numbers recorded for Venezuela or Colombia – countries that are adjacent to the region studied in this thesis – or, indeed, Mexico which regularly releases 100+ films per annum (i.e. as a high-production category nation). The countries from the Caribbean and Central America, which are precisely the countries where political fragmention has been most extreme, remain, throughout the period studies in this thesis, in the low-production bracket.

Getino, in line with García Canclini, has observed that inequalities in the region's filmmaking practices are as obvious as the commercial trends which added to the impoverishment of the diversity represented in these productions. In García Canclini's opinion the debates during the 1980s and 1990s "were focused on the policies for representation and multiculturality within each country"; nowadays, however, the conversion of "demographic majorities into cultural minorities demands regional and global policies that regulate exchanges between

communication industries in order to guarantee production, communication and reception opportunities for the purpose of diversifying those channels that the market itself tends to reduce" (García Canclini, 2004: p. 204, my translation).[10] This thesis analyses the political economy underlying these cultural minorities in order to focus on those films that cross production and distribution barriers. It is because these films have, as it were, beaten the system that they have been included for analysis in this thesis. These films are, in effect pioneer narrative representations that have breached institutional filters and therefore managed to contribute to the sustainability of local filmmaking practices; as we shall see, their success has been helped by the financial support provided by transnational institutions such as *Ibermedia* and *Cinergia*, as well as the space provided by international festivals such as the *Festival Ícaro* (in Guatemala), the *Costa Rica Festival Internacional de Cine* and the *Festival del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* (in Cuba) and *Pacífica Grey* (the latter for circulatory purposes). These films, I suggest, owe their existence to a complex constellation of cultural narratives.

The picture of filmmaking in the Caribbean and Central America is characterised by fragmentation in the majority of the countries surveyed; it is a fragmentation which affects training and funding strategies as well as film criticism, and has hindered the creation of a regional strategy, thereby blurring the boundaries of the traditional distribution channels for regional audiences. These are the "demographic majorities" mentioned above by Canclini, and the same point appears in the testimonies recorded in the documentary, *Archipelagoes and constellations*, which accompanies this thesis. Indeed, their status as "cultural minorities", again to use García Canclini's term, is partly a consequence of the distribution barriers mentioned in the documentary. At the same time we should note that a support network does exist, that is, a "constellation", as described above, which provides a cultural legacy clearly embodied in the language, cultural priorities, staging and scale of films produced,[11] as well as

[10] "La asociación de diferencias y desigualdades, las tendencias comerciales a empobrecer la diversidad, indican la necesidad de políticas interculturales transnacionales. En décadas pasadas los debates se concentraban en políticas de representación y multiculturalidad dentro de cada país. Ahora, la conversión de mayorías demográficas en minorías culturales exige políticas regionales y mundiales que regulen los intercambios de las industrias comunicacionales a fin de garantizar oportunidades de producción, comunicación y recepción diversificada que la lógica de los mercados tiende a estrechar" (García Canclini, 2004: p. 204).

[11] As a reference regarding film release data, the Unesco Institute for Statistics (UIS) published an interactive map which can be retrieved via the following website: http://uis.unesco.org/en/news/cinema-data-release. The number of films released are colour-coded, whereby, for example, light lilac describes countries that have released 20 or less films during the decade previous to the survey's publication date. As users scroll down the American continent every country in Central America and the Caribbean – with the exception of the Dominican Republic – are colour-coded lilac whilst the neighbouring countries of Mexico, Colombia and Brazil are colour-coded in light or dark violet, indicating they produced either 20-61 films (Colombia and Brazil) or more than 100 films (Mexico) during the previous year. Cuba is indicated as a low-producing country as are other low film producing countries such as Panamá, Nicaragua and El Salvador (with only one fiction film to their name during the last couple of

the financial organisations that provide much-needed regional support.[12] The archipelago, the broken network, is particularly visible in the way audiences are "scattered" across the countries of the Hispanic Carribean and Central America – precisely where the industrial flow of the moving image is constantly obstructed.

In the following chapters I will describe the specific characteristics of film production in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean in order to analyse the journey taken by its filmmakers towards the digital turn in the twenty-first century and examine the new expressive possibilities the technological advances have opened up. The documentary provides a narrative about these issues which complements the written thesis, and is mainly based on the information provided by interviews with key players in the film industry in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America. The documentary, like the film commentaries included in the written thesis, addresses the foundational research question of this project: What impact has the changing infrastructural landscape had on film production and distribution, and the expression of themes in the twenty-first century cinema of the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America? Given the contradictions between the marketing practices pursued by the majors, as described above, and the "constellation" provided by institutions inspired by the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano movement, this thesis analyses, firstly, the influence that Hollywood has had on the development of the film industry in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America, and, secondly, the role played by the NCL movement in that development. It was basically as a result of the research information provided by the film directors, film producers and actors who were interviewed during the making of the documentary that the research question was tweaked to produce the following question: What role have Hollywood and Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano played in this new era?

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decades). The Dominican Republic, however, breaks through the threshold for the current numbers, with more than 35 fiction productions. Clearly the Cinema Law in the Dominican Republic has pushed film production to new heights as can be seen by this survey, published in 2017, which is the most reliable data source. Although it is worth noting that Haiti, Martinique, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago do have films listed as made during this period, it may have been difficult to capture this data as some of the filmmakers do not live permanently on these islands, which is probably the reason why the data has not been compiled; even so it is unlikely that any of them made more than 20 films during the survey year.

[12] For instance, the Dominican Republic is a non-funding member of the *Banco Centroamericano de Integración Económica* – as are Belize and Panamá. The Dominican Republic is also teamed up with Central American countries – except for Belize and Panamá – for the Free Trade Agreement with the United States (CAFTA or TLC) which is the major trade partner for all Central American and Caribbean countries, with the exception of Cuba but including Puerto Rico. According to the World Bank (2019) and the International Monetary Fund (2019) the poverty indexes as well as the consumption indexes, with particular emphasis on cultural consumption, are broadly similar for the economies of the BCIE members, even if there are very specific individual characteristics such as the political and humanitarian crises in Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

Cinema Alcázar was an outstanding short film – and it will be considered in greater depth in Chapter One – and, as a result, its success was in constant collision with the wider geopolitical context in which the distribution of film was actively controlled by the mainstream film industry through the division of cultural labour and "its marketing strategy" (Miller, 2017). But there is another side to this story and it involves the Cuban context, and how its policies reached out to an alternative construction of Latin American and, within this, Central American cinematography. The postrevolutionary Cuban government used specific tactics to resist the political manouevres used by the mainstream film industry. In what follows, I will focus on three defining phases of this resistance: (a) the founding of the *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos*, with particular reference to its role as a founder and active supporter of the *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* cinematographic movement, (b) the period of co-productions that occurred towards the end of the 1980s and continued during the 1990s, and (c) the opening of markets and state institutions from the twenty-first century onwards. The scale of production during this latter period was impacted by the digital turn, which, as I will discuss, had profound implications for the evolution of global film in the twenty-first century (Hart, 2015: p. 107), particularly in terms of the tools used for production, funding and distribution [13] – or circulation as some critics prefer to describe the activities of the contemporary film circuit. It is important to note how each of these stages has been influenced by the political and economic landscape that underpins domestic and regional filmmaking. Despite the difference in the trajectories followed by this group of nations in the twentieth century – an active resistance in the Cuban case as contrasted with "scattered" and disjointed resistance practices in the Central American countries and the Dominican Republic – the contemporaneous economic and political contexts played a crucial and signifiant role in channelling both filmmaking practices – in the Hispanic Caribbean as much as in Central America – along a similar path.

[13] A clear landmark in the switch to digital in Cuba was the 2001 film *Miel para Oshún* (Solás) which was shot, edited and released digitally – even before VoD platforms had added expanded possibilities to filmmaking practices. In the Dominican Republic, the digital turn had such a decisive impact on filmmaking practices that the Institute for Cinematography called 2003 the "Año cero" since it was the year when a "constant fiction production practice was established" (DGCine, 2019). As for Central America, numerous films have been produced, edited and circulated specifically as a result of the digital turn, including films analysed in the following chapters such as *La Yuma* (Jaugey, 2009), *Princesas rojas* (Astorga, 2013) and *Ixcanul* (Bustamante, 2015). Many scholars and film-practicioners agree that digital possibilities have enhanced local filmmaking practices, and a dramatic case is the Costa Rican filmography which released just ten fiction films throughout the whole twentieth century, and yet has now "brought nearly 70 films to screen since the turn of the century" (Alarcón, A.X. & Molina, L. *Dirección del Centro Costarricense de Producción Cinematográfica e Ibermedia*, Personal Communication 28/5/2019: min. 39), that is, at precisely the time when filmmaking became digital.

An awareness of these contexts helps us to frame the commentary of the texts analysed in this study, thereby integrating two perspectives on film: one that sees films as a commodity and another that interprets films as a vehicle of artistic expression. These two perspectives have traditionally been perceived as contradictory; however, as I argue below, on the contrary, these two perspectives, in the Caribbean basin and Central America, actually complement each other in the sense that the lower costs of filming, editing and distributing filmic works contived to blur the previously cast-iron distinction between entertainment-film and art house film. This is the reflection on which my argument in this thesis is built: I seek to describe that new historic context via the voices of its protagonists and thereby analyse how those experiences ultimately shaped filmmaking practices, thereby making different distinctions between films than those provided by the traditional divide between entertainment and art house film. [14]

In the following three chapters I have assembled eight critical commentaries about nine different case studies – one establishes a comparison and thus merges two of them – which are viewed as examples of the different types of production funding which emerged in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean during the last decade. In Chapter One, for example, a brief sketch of the political economy of the nation is balanced by an analysis of the political eonomy of the film industry in the Central American and Caribbean contexts via an analysis of three films funded by Cinergia. The three films selected for commentary are *Viva Cuba* (Cremata Malberti, 2005), *La Yuma* (Jaugey, 2009) and *Princesas rojas* (Astorga Carrera, 2013) In Chapter Two, I analyse the legacies of *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* through a long overdue dialogue between Hollywood and a decolonial filmic discourse. This chapter includes detailed commentaries on three films funded by Ibermedia, namely, *Agua fría de mar* (Fábrega, 2010), *Dólares de arena* (Guzmán & Cárdenas, 2014) and *Últimos días en La Habana* (Pérez, 2016).[15] Chapter Three inspects the changes digital technologies have brought to filmmaking practices; the examples chosen range from *Ixcanul* (Bustamante, 2015) to *Atrás hay relámpagos* (Hernández Cordón, 2017) and *El techo* (Ramos, 2017). This last group was partly supported by Cinergia through workshops after the fund was cancelled by their main sponsors

[14] The traditional market separates entertainment films from those described as *art house*, and some of the academic discourses around film also follow such divisions (see Cham, 1992; Cortés Pacheco, 2005) in that they insist that the difference between entertainment and art house film ignores any sustained consideration of how film began to circulate after the advent of the digital turn.

[15] Some films made in Cuba met the criteria for the second chapter. *Vestido de novia* by Marylin Solaya, for instance, and *Santa y Andrés* by Carlos Lechuga were also funded by Ibermedia; however, they were not available on time – even though their commercial release pre-dated the appearance of *Últimos días en La Habana*. Other potential choices for inclusion in the analysis were *Conducta* by Ernesto Daranas, *José Martí: el ojo del canario* by Fernando Pérez, in Cuba, *Por las plumas*, by Ernesto Villalobos and *Caribe*, by Esteban Ramírez, but, though they had some visibility in film festivals, they were not funded by Ibermedia.

(Ford and Hivos). They received funding, therefore, via what I call "hybrid schemes" since they were partially supported with initial funding yet this was withdrawn , and were forced back on their own resources, and they found pioneering ways to reach their audiences by "hybrid" means. The analyses of the films are mediated by references to the three above-mentioned trends: the dialogue with Hollywood, the legacy of *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* and the decolonial discourse as enabled by the digital turn, as discussed in each chapter.

The films have been chosen from the assembled list of all narrative feature films made in Central America (Annex 1) and the Caribbean (Annex 2)[16] between 2001 and 2017; the movies selected for analysis consist of those screened at first- or second-tier festivals; their curation at these film festivals (de Valck, 2007: p. 37) ensured that they reached regional as well as global audiences. Furthermore, all the films studied in this thesis share three characteristics: (a) they are all narrative feature films that represent spaces contained within Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean; (b) they have been pioneers in a specific way[17] and (c) they were selected for screening at either first- or second-tier festivals.[18] I have organised the analysis of the films accordingly to their primary funding, so that, for instance, those films which were funded by Cinergia are analysed in Chapter One, those primarily funded by Ibermedia are studied in

[16] Annex 1 *Central American Films 2001-2017* is based on a list initiated by María Lourdes Cortés – a first version of which was published in *La pantalla rota* (2005) –, and updated through the data base at *Portal de Cine Latinoamericano*; Annex 2 *Caribbean Films 2001 – 2017* is a list derived from this last source. Both build a catalogue that shows the narrative feature films, those which have been selected to first or second tier film festivals and if they have been awarded. These lists update previous catalogues and show the general listing of narrative feature films available; they exclude all documentaries made in the region as the focus of the present research is fiction films.

[17] Each film either was the first to be made in a country after a two-decade drought – like *La Yuma* – or was in the first group of films to be directed by a woman in that specific country – like *El techo*. Some have been pioneers of a prolonged training path through a film festival preproduction scheme – like *Princesas rojas* with Berlinale – or have implemented production schemes that had not been a common practice before – like the transnational co-production strategy taken by *Agua fría de mar*, *Viva Cuba* and *Dólares de arena*. Alternatively they have followed the pathway of consecrated filmmakers – like *Atrás hay relámpagos* and *Últimos días en La Habana* – and were pioneers in the sense of being part of a particularly promising corpus or they pioneered the "consecration" route as a result of winning a globally prominent prize at a "first tier festival" (de Valck, 2014: 47), such as occurred with *Ixcanul*.

[18] Marijke de Valck argues that the film festival circuit plays "a central role in the cultural consecration of films and filmmakers" (2014: p. 41) while they also stand as a "cultural gatekeeper to interest potential financiers" (46) and thus inject sustainability into local filmmaking practices. This scholar bases her appreciation of the festival phenomenon on studies previously made by Daniel Dayan, Mark Peranson and Minerva Campos to argue that first and second tier festivals "hold the core power grip" within the circuit or "offer specialized services that significantly feed back into the festival core" (2013: p. 48) holding the filters to a representative corpus from the area that transcends what I argue are the most relevant artistic institutions for this cultural form. While the festivals in the first tier "organize the handful of markets that really matter internationally" by hosting the most prestigious competitions, festivals in the second tier stand outside the core but relevant areas since they "feed back into the festival core" by offering the services of leading co-production market and/or fund(s), providing a vibrant independent scene and "cutting edge special programs" (48).

Chapter Two and those made despite these sources of funding drying up, in what I call "hybrid schemes", are considered in Chapter Three.

0.1 Practice-based research

This study focuses on the relationship between the materiality of filmmaking and the aesthetics chosen to "seduce" targeted audiences. It uses a practice-based approach, whereby the text is supported by a documentary. As a result of looking at the secondary criticism on the field of Caribbean Basin film, especially Cuba, Dominican Republic and Central America, I found that the middle ground was missing, namely, a critical approach to middle-budget films that speak to regional – rather than local or global – audiences. The documentary *Archipelagoes and Constellations* discusses the challenges of having a voice that represents the culture of a peripheral geography, populated by characters that – I argue – are subalterns within the power relations of the global economic system.[19] Both pieces of work, that is, the text and the documentary, build a case from points of view that describe a material and a philosophical angle, complementing each other. The documentary registers a series of filmmakers and their unorthodox practices: from entirely voluntary preproduction schemes (in the case of *Ixcanul*) to training guided by institutions from film festivals (like *Princesas rojas*) to pioneering co-production agreements that harness a transnational flow of investments (*Viva Cuba* or *Agua fría de mar*). By building a narrative that tracks every step in filmmaking (i.e. from preproduction to production, from editing to circulation) the testimonies of filmmakers, producers, film critics and policy/decision makers sketch out the contours of the "archipelagic" experience that these various film practices are based on. The documentary also discusses challenges filmmaking practices face as well as inspecting some of the themes, characters and preoccupations portrayed by the films through the juxtaposition of scenes and comments on these scenes as provided by the filmmakers themselves.

The written part of the thesis bases its argument on the interviews undertaken for the documentary, while organising the corpus by means of the funding with which each film group

[19] As Duncan Petrie and Mette Hjort prove in *The Cinema of Small Nations* (2003) being a small cultural producer does not always mean that one is "unprotected", since states such as Denmark, Iceland, Cuba and New Zealand have reversed the neoliberal tendencies and protected their film production and film industry. As the Cuban case has shown this policy involves a continuous and ongoing process of negotiation.

was primarily made (i.e. Cinergia for Chapter One, Ibermedia for Chapter Two and hybrid schemes for Chapter Three). As result of bibliographical research, testimonies, catalogues and film analyses it explores how the material and the political drive on one hand, and the cinematographic languages, on the other hand, respond to diametrically opposed mechanisms. I argue in this thesis that this political drive divides up resources and operational networks according to the rules of a fragmented political economy, and, on this point, my analysis draws on the theory of the New International Division of Cultural Labour[20] (Getino, 2007; Miller, 2001; Miller & Kraidy, 2016; *Archipelagoes and Constellations*, 2019). I shall argue that the latter are linked through those codes, themes and preocupations that surface through technology-based cultural expressions. They build paths between discordant cultural codes and find connections "in another way" (Fehimovic, 2017) constructing new relational, cultural, political and decolonial codes.

When I started the present research project, it was clear that the technological turn and particularly its digital innovations appeared to offer a great deal of potential at that time to film production. I myself had experienced the feeling of being part of a film crew for a fiction feature film that embarked on the arduous journey to the global circuit via the film festival pathway. My starting point, through my experience, acknowledged the second part of what I now call *Archipelagoes and Constellations*: it became clear to me that a cultural connection existed among the many artistic expressions being produced throughout Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean, as well as an urgency felt by artists in general and filmmakers in particular to forge cultural links between the different and "scattered" audiovisual expressions. The need for a *constellation*, an assemblage, a configuration, a group of elements – stars or filmmakers – joined by an imaginary outline of cultural links and meaningful networks across

[20] It was initially as a consequence of the colonial experience that a split between the conditions of production in the Global North and the Global South emerged. The industrial revolution contrived to exacerbate the gap between a Global North that held the production centres through the import of ideas, fashion and skilled workers and a Global South that provided raw materials while consuming media texts that promoted the reproduction and the production of this dependency; this trend has been described as dependent development (*dependencia*) by Raúl Prebisch and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Cardoso, 2009; Prebisch, 1979). The concept was further refined when the concept was re-coined as the New International Division of Labour by Folker Fröbel (Fröbel, Heinrichs, & Kreye, 1980). This is the concept that Toby Miller uses in order to describe the convergence of cultural and economic flows; indeed, he show how the flow of resources has been adapted to the logic of culture. According to Miller, "[by] the 1970s, developing markets for labour and products, and the shift from the spatial *se*nsitivities of electrics to the spatial *in*sensitivities of electronics, pushed the Global North beyond treating the Global South as supplier of raw materials to view them as shadow-setters of the price work, competing amongst themselves and with the Global North for employment. Production became split across continents via a New International Division of Labor (NICL) […] This presaged the [New International Division of Cultural Labor]: labor market expansion and developments in global transportation and communications technology have diminished the need for colocation of management, work and consumption" (Miller & Kraidy, 2016: p. 26).

its diversity – what Michael Chanan, quoting Fernando Birri, called "el uno en el diverso" (unity in the diverse) – was even more important since, as Chanan also pointed out, in Latin American cinema, there never was a "house style" (Chanan, 2006: p. 38). Intriguingly, though, this fact had not stopped Latin American film from becoming a significant cinematographic movement. What was more difficult to define, though, was the first part, the *archipelago*, for it was apparent that there were many diverse political approaches to the notion of an overarching cultural policy, which was in any case controversial. There was also little understanding of how these different networks worked in relation to each other, and, indeed, how they might be improved.

Through a critical reading of previous and contemporary texts that explore this problem, conducting interviews with the protagonists – filmmakers, cultural critics and cultural decision makers – and viewing and analysing their films, I have proposed an interpretation of the filmic culture of the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America which attempts to use the information about the production and distribution practices of the films themselves as a means of "disrupting" our interpretations – aesthetic and otherwise – of the visual-audio reality of the films. I have identified the presence of two simultaneous dynamics. The first is *archipelagic,* and it drives a wedge between the cultural and financial policies in the region based on economic factors as they currently operate in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean: distancing its means of production, the archipelago draws different economic and political models which separate training resources, funding and production schemes, audiences and exhibition practices. The second is *configurative,* and it brings together a set of voices which share a common cultural vibrancy, which acts as a constellation of solidarity, via the legacy of the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano movement, its concerted struggle against the marginalisation, invisibilisation and de-contextualization of genuine autochthonous voices, and its creation of strong links with formative spaces such as Cinergia and the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión. This thesis uses the struggle between these two poles – the "archipelago" and the "constellation" – as a pathway to analyse and evaluate the trajectories that filmmakers in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean have pursued during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, while negotiating the challenges of the present-day technological and political context, and it argues that the filmmaking practices analysed serve as a co-narrative to the characters and their stories.

1. Chapter One: Global Cinematic Practices in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean: A Study of Three Cinergia-funded films: *Viva Cuba* (2005), *La Yuma* (2009) and *Princesas rojas* (2013)

1.1 Introduction

Through the commentaries of three films that were primarily funded by Cinergia, I examine the way filmic stories negotiate genres, narrative structures and character design to open up a space where tales that are ignored by the mainstream film industry are staged. The three films analysed in the present chapter are *Viva Cuba*, a road movie that tackles the ideological confrontations in Cuba during the early twenty-first century; *Princesas rojas*, a period film that narrates the memory of *sandinista* militants through an infant's point of view; and *La Yuma*, a sports film that represents the class and gender struggles Managuans from the marginal neighbourhoods face (and overcome). "We cannot be what we cannot see" said Olivia Hetreed at a conference held at the London Film School in January 2019. She was talking about the representation of women's voices among the European film industry but the phrase, I propose, also refers to underrepresented groups like the ones that appear in the films studied in this chapter. The battle over representation traverses economic and political contexts that eventually affect the cultural production and the crucial step that is its audience reach.

In Chapter One I discuss how the New International Division of Cultural Labour (NICL) has marginalised Central American and Hispanic Caribbean's filmic representations, obliging audiences to consume an excess (98% of broadcasted films) of Hollywood mainstream movies and pushing their tastes towards proven industrial formulas that saturate the screen time in the region, even if the stories represented therein are from (and portray) local voices. The chapter starts by describing how soft power operates in these particular geographies (*Soft power and filmic geographies*) and then goes on to then reflect upon two crucial aspects of this operation: the construction of national belonging through cinema (*Films for imagined communities*) and the way economic structures dominate cultural praxis (*Cinematographic practices and the new international division of cultural labour*). Through the examination of the ways in which soft power operates in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean, and the films that have been funded by Cinergia and selected at film festivals during the early twenty-first century, I point to a narrative dependence on industrial formulas that frame local conflicts and characters, thereby proving and confirming the enormous impact Hollywod narratives have had on the making of these films and the specific negotiations they make.

1.2 Soft power and filmic geographies

The moving images that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century were the pioneers of audiovisual media and entertainment as we know them today. Cinema came into the lives of metropolitan city dwellers even before the advent of radio. Described as an empathy machine (BFI, 2014), cinema's persuasive ability, it has been argued, created *soft power*[21] that contains ideologies and businesses as well as nations. The representational machine of cinema has the potential to influence its audience through the portrayal of their resources, actions and memories, thereby perhaps encouraging audiences to question the ways in which they approach their lives.

The battle over narration, portrayal and representation is not a minor one when dealing with geopolitical domination, and it becomes crucial when it stages (or misrepresents) the potential imaginaries and agencies of the dominated classes. Traditionally seen as a mirror for represented spaces, cinema is more a place for the re-enactment of the historical world. In the words of Vitali and Willemen,

> [i]t is precisely as discursive terrains for struggle between dominant and non-dominant forces over the power to fix the meaning of the given narrative stock that films can be seen not to "reflect", but to "stage" the historical conditions that constitute "the national" and, in the process, to "mediate" the socio-economic dynamics that shape cinematic production along with the other production sectors governed by national industrial regulation and legislation. (2006: p. 8)

As an artistic institution, film production requires a dynamic rhythm, that is, a pace that enables the development of the craft to build a particular means of expression. Within industrial praxis these cultural productions are thought of as commodities. But they are very specific since their production and distribution costs are higher than those of any other artistic practice and because the filmmaking flow requires sufficient resources to build a commodity with an *exchange value* that can re-ignite the process and thus make it sustainable in the long run – thus as a commodity *per se* film holds a negative *use value*. Several scholars acknowledge cinema's *exchange value* as *culturally complex*, *persuasive* and *fertile*, and thus crucial to the process of reconstituting

[21] Described as a cultural artefact that "represents a body of thought that is associated with resources invested in attraction-power as well as with strategies for using such resources to further actors' interests", Naren Chitty, following Joseph Nye, identifies a myriad of resources as necessary in order for this attraction to take place, such as a competent military, a successful economy and culture. The latter is a crucial component of soft power as adumbrated in Nye's work (see Chitty, 2016: p. 1).

subjects with agency (García Canclini, 1997, 2007; Getino, 1988; López, 1997; Miller, 2001; O´Regan, 1999). It is within that recognition that the question of whether its "destiny [should be measured] only under the rules of standardization and globalization of the economic rationale" (García Canclini, 1997: p. 255) arises.

As many cultural critics have suggested, the film industry is particularly sensitive to economic tides, especially insofar as its macrodynamics are concerned. The financial structures underpinning the dynamics of representation are crucial in determining character staging and the agency, priorities, and even dignity with which these characters are represented. O'Regan's argument with regard to the structure of the film industry is crucial in this context. As he points out, the decisions around every step of the industrial filmmaking process are controlled by "a handful of major transnational corporations. Such multinationals conduct a largely unequal relationship with weaker domestic producers, exhibitors, and policy-makers" (O'Regan, 1999: p. 269). In his incisive argument about cultural exchange O'Regan proves that the structural dynamics of cinema and "its system of scale production with mass distribution and exhibition" asphyxiate film initiatives which find themselves outside the industrial centres, thereby "shaping the production possibilities and contexts of peripheral film industries, nations, peoples, and centres" (O'Regan, 1999: p. 269). This cultural suffocation is particularly evident in the way films circulate within the Central American countries, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic where up to 95% of the films screened in Central American theatres (Avellán Troz, K. *Interview with Karina Avellán Troz*, Personal Communicationn 16/ 01/2018) come from the above-mentioned transnational corporations,[22] complicating the production cycle as little screen space remains available for local and regional productions. As an example of this, *Table 1* shows the proportion of films distributed by the majors as compared to those distributed by independent companies in Costa Rican theatres.

[22] The numbers relating to the screening of films in Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico are available under a paid service that was not a possibility for the present research – while Cuba has a different dynamic with regards to film circulation that will be discussed in the following chapters; empirically, however, theatres in every country show the same monopolistic behaviour.

Table 1. Costa Rica: Number of Films Distributed by Majors Against Independent Film Distributors, 2010 – 2019*

Year	*Number of films*	*Films from majors*	*Independent films*	*Percentage of films from major distributors*
2010	174	172	2	98.8%
2011	158	154	4	97.4%
2012	153	152	1	99.3%
2013	177	173	4	97.7%
2014	188	181	7	96.2%
2015	236	227	9	96.1%
2016	237	230	7	97%
2017	263	247	16	93.9%
2018	299	286	13	95.6%
2019**	118	114	4	96.6%

* Prepared by the author from data available at the *International Box Office Essentials*. It does not count screenings in cultural centres or Video on Demand.

** Includes figures up to June 2019 only

The numbers fluctuate between 96% and 99% of screened films directly distibuted by the majors (Fox, Universal, Warner Brothers, among others), while any film made locally circulates through the independent companies in a package that comprises other independent films made in Latin America, Europe and the United States. The hurdles to circulation coupled with the absence of state protection are such that filmmaking has remained a very fragile endeavour in Costa Rica as well as elsewhere in Central America; this fragility is reflected in the minimal success rate of countries which have been able to implement national film laws that legally support cinematic production.[23]

[23] For instance, the Nicaraguan Cinema Law was approved by Congress since 2010, but it has remained inactive up until the present day (Ley de Cine, 2019); Costa Rica, Guatemala and Cuba are still negotiating versions of their respective laws while the Dominican Republic approved a progressive Law which has led to striking advances in the national film industry. Every case differs in its strategies to protect local filmmaking practices; however, there are shared circumstances, two of the most visible being (a) the obstacles to define screen quotas, and (b) the shrinking of theatre ticket payers coupled with the possibilities brought about by Video on Demand, which appeared during the last decade, that have radically transformed the way films are brought to audiences (Alarcón & Molina, 2019: min. 6:40).

Precisely due to its scale, more than any other form of cultural production, film requires high internal investment if it is to remain sustainable and/or profitable. When film occurs in precarious national economies – and even within strong ones, as the French case has shown – its profitability, if not subsidised, regulated and supported by the direct action from the state (Getino, 2007: p. 34), eventually fades away. Furthermore, the film industry is characterised by a predetermined and fixed division of labour (Getino, 1988: p. 36; Miller, 2001: p. 51; Fornet, 1997: p. xii), which has historically situated the subjects of the peripheral regions as passive consumers, rather than cultural producers (Fornet, 1997; López, 1997).

As a result of its peripheral context, Latin America is a multilayered region, and while some countries in the subcontinent struggle to achieve access to integrated markets, its strongest centres are broadly managed from the global centres or metropolises. The prevalence of economic dependence has, indeed, persuaded Latin American societies to passively consume foreign cultural productions. The question as to whether Latin Americans should be *citizens* (i.e. possessors of agency, with channels to discuss their problems, build public opinion, have influence over their political circumstances (García Canclini, 1995: p. 24) and the option to choose how to be represented on screen) or *consumers* (i.e. passive recipients of a one-way cultural flow (O'Regan, 1999: p. 270), a consumption-link in a deterritorialised economy forced to accept being represented by an agenda dictated by *others*) has loomed ever since filmic technology first convened a group with aspirations to represent the subcontinent. It has also relegated production practices to the commercial end of filmmaking, which itself leads to very small audiences, and thus unsustainable cycles. Within each separate country from Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean this dynamic becomes more constrained, as the general audience figures hardly ever surpass average numbers for blockbusters. Throughout the twentieth century, the struggle over the means of representation, even though it was always fragile due to the existence of continent-wide political structures, culminated in the development of a *new* continental cinema.

Ana M. López argues convincingly that this process ocurred in the early 1960s, when the films screened at festivals in Latin America transitioned from being exclusively European art cinema to including local and regional productions (1988: p. 105). That period coincided with the political changes inaugurated by the Cuban Revolution[24] as well as with the establishment of

[24] As I will discuss in Chapter Two, the 1960s enabled a cultural epicentre for alternative Latin American filmmaking to take shape along different geographies. The cultural agenda proposed by Latin American filmmakers throughout the SODRE (*Servicio Oficial de Difusión, Representación y Espectáculos*) Festival in Uruguay (1958) and the Festival of Latin American Cinema in Sestri Levante (Italy, 1962) gave rise to the Viña

post-war European film festivals. New regional cinematographies emerged across the subcontinent as some of the strongest Latin American governments of the time established state policies designed to support film production. Laws promoted in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, for example, "favoured the emergence of new proposals and allowed for new filmmakers to work at the margin of the 'industry'" (Campos Rabadán, 2016: p. 232), eventually creating schools and ateliers where filmmakers experimented with languages and production practices in a broad sense. The institution of cinema laws changed the number of films produced as well as the channels used to reach local audiences, since they are based on screen quotas which are used to support local film productions (Campos Rabadán, 2016: p. 239). Over the years the tendency to install local film broadcast reached countries with small audiences like Uruguay and Cuba but was never the case in Nicaragua, Guatemala or Costa Rica as the political contexts did not prioritize this type of cultural growth.

The way films were made at this time, however experimental they happened to be, did not ultimately reach a wide Latin American audience because distribution remained controlled by mainstream Hollywood networks. Since the wide-screen offers were filtered by the mainstream industry, the audience's preferences over time were moulded towards an acceptance of the aesthetics and narratives that predominated in these films. In a broad sense, the majority of Latin American films, when reacting against Hollywood's hegemony, were split between two tendencies. Ambrosio Fornet summarises these two options as follows:

> Convinced of the impossibility of either defeating Hollywood or ignoring it — of competing with its technology and its incredible financing, or of disregarding altogether its discursive strategies — the majority of Latin American cineasts divided in two groups: those who dedicated themselves, passively, to imitate consecrated models; and those who employed conventional narrative structures, but to tell *other* stories, conflicts, and peripeteias pulled from their own reality. (1997: p. xiii)

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del Mar Festival (1967) from which institutions such as the Latin American Center for New Cinema and the *Cinemateca del Tercer Mundo* were established. These initiatives coupled with the call from the *Centro de Cine Documental* at the Universidad de los Andes "consolidated and implemented the New Latin American Cinema [movement]" (López, 1988: pp. 108) which was then the resource with which institutions such as the *Festival de Cine Latinoamericano*, the *Fundación para el Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* and the *Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión* were to be funded during the 1980s in Cuba. Through the establishment of these institutions a production dynamic slowly but steadily established the cinematographic movement I will discuss in Chapter Two.

The conditions underpinning these filmic representations are problematic in themselves. Taking a multifaceted perspective, it is worth noting that there were at least four time periods within the history of the film movement we now know by the name of *Nuevo Cine Latinamericano* (NCL). Different authors have periodised the movement's timeline, as I will expand on in Chapter Two. Although different epochs are pointed out, the beginning and the end are consual: on the one hand, Cuba was crucial for the beginning of the NCL, not as a centre for it but because as a political project and in the face of the blockade it needed new allies and Latin America was a natural one; and on the other hand the later turn, that can be safely named as contemporary, is widely seen as a time for the *cinema of democracy* (Chacón & Lillo, 1999; Padrón, 2011; Russo, Caballero, 2005, Sánchez Prado, 2016; García Canclini, 2004; Moguillansky, 2018; Campos, 2012).[25]

The economic, political and aesthetic conditions of Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean are embbeded in continental tendencies; however, they share particular circumstances in terms of scale. Film production in both these spaces is distant from the dynamics in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela or Brazil since no populations in the Central American and the Hispanic Caribbean countries chosen for the present study surpass 17 million inhabitants (that of Guatemala).[26] Having a population nearly half the size of the smallest of its neighbours (Venezuela's population is about 32 million and neither the Brazilian, Mexican nor Colombian populations fall below 45 million) makes the studied countries particularly vulnerable in terms of market reources and protective schemes for their cultural production.

The size of the population determines "the size of the internal market before the foreign trade factor comes into operation" (Olafsson, 1998: p. 9); moreover, it has an effect on the way workers in cultural production organize themselves in protected schemes and thus have the space to build narratives around a given sense of nation-state, community or belonging. In *Diversity and the film industry* (United Nations, 2016), an excellent analysis of global filmmaking, for example, UNESCO classifies regions as bearers of low, medium and high concentration of feature film production. According to this report the number of films made during 2013, or the preceding decade if there were no films during that year, falls to under 20

[25] Democracy on its own is a complex notion in Latin America and certainly within the region studied in these pages. The democratic exercise continues to be a question mark – for different reasons – for Cuba, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

[26] Most of them oscillate around 10 million inhabitants with Nicaragua and Costa Rica well under this number and Cuba and the Dominican Republic on 11 and 10 million, according to the censuses made in 2017 and 2018, respectively (IMF, 2019).

for all Central American and Hispanic Caribbean countries. Unlike Venezuela or Colombia, which border on the countries studied in this thesis and produce between 21 and 60 films per year, or, indeed, Mexico which releases 100+ films per annum, the countries in question stay in the low production bracket. Moreover, these are precisely the countries where political fragmention has operated with the greatest intensity.

The artistic cinematographic text has been variously described within the European academy as the mobilisation of "art", "culture", "quality" and "nationhood" discourses, as pitted "against Hollywood's mass entertainment film" (Neale, 1981; Higson, 1988). The way in which nationhood is defined within Latin American countries is problematic, and particularly in its small nations which, as Mette Hjort and Duncan Pietre (2007: p. 2) have pointed out, are "marked by a history of colonial rule and thus by an important relational complexity that emphases on American cultural and economic imperialism tend to obscure". Based on Chris Berry's reading of the national frame, and how it fits within film studies, Hjort and Pietre (2007: p. 13) highlight the erosion of the nation-state as a discursive actor following the global economic and free trade frameworks, as well as the "growth of international co-productions and transnational networks of distribution and exhibition". This suggests we need to identify a transnational approach that better articulates the filmmaking phenomenon. Gabriela Copertari and Carolina Sitnisky (2015: p. 15), for their part, place the state within Latin American filmmaking practices as one holder of "symbolic credit", alongside other sources of validity and certification that create "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1998: 376).

In an attempt to build a bridge between Latin American film production practices and, more specifically, the Central American and Hispanic Caribbean film production contexts and Anglo-Saxon critical frames, the present study tackles, on the one hand, a general description of the division of cultural labour (and particularly the New International Division of Cultural Labour exemplified through the distribution of mainstream cinema, as embodied and guided by Hollywood); and, on the other hand, it addresses the ways in which counter-discourses have attempted to disturb this scenario. Before outlining the role played by the Hispanic Caribbean and Central American films within the *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*, it is crucial to unpack the specific geography of this space and the relation between its geography and the ways in which it has been represented. It is also crucial to recognise these filmic geographies as built, in terms of Bourdieu's above-mentioned cultural capital, by some limited state funding but also by transnational funds such as Ibermedia, Cinergia, and Film Festival initiatives, like Hubert Bals, *Cine en Construcción* and Berlinale Talents. While funding and resources for this type of film

are often precarious – what we find typically is an "archipelago" of resources – occasionally the films are lucky enough to end up being screened at Film Festivals that guarantee their exhibition.

1.3 Films for imagined communities

As mentioned above, Hjort and Petrie have noted in regard to film studies that "[s]ome small nations or states are marked by a history of colonial rule and thus by an important relational complexity that emphases on American [United States] cultural and economic imperialism tend to obscure" (2007: p. 2). The word "some" used here is rather understated when it comes to Central America and the Caribbean. All small nations in this region are so as a consequence of the place they had to face as the *defeated* in history.[27] The entire Caribbean itself stands as a space ravaged by centuries of clashes. Enormous armed conflicts commanded by imperial powers (the Spanish, the French, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British) added to the numerous battles each one of those empires engaged in with the inhabitants of the newly colonised lands. With many interests colliding with each other, they can roughly be summarised as ranging from a naval coaling station to the ports from which the headquarters of the slave triangle would operate; from the wars between the Spanish and the British empires to the negotiations between the newly formed states and the old empires. Control over the Caribbean demanded an enormous aggressiveness, which was sustained over centuries. Throughout its history the Caribbean and its ancient layered conflicts overflowed to the Central American isthmus and permeated other landscapes. This conflicted past underpins the dynamics of the cultural production of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, cinema being a crucial component within that mix.

In Getino's words, cinema "reproduces the ratio of existing forces within the confronted historical spaces" (1988: p. 20).[28] The control over how films are distributed or exhibited

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[27] Carry Gibson recounts the history of the Caribbean territories, some of them tiny spaces and even islands shared by two different hegemonies (like St Martin or La Hispaniola) to illustrate the difficulties in building a shared political belonging between them. For the purpose of this study it is interesting to note how even the Spanish Caribbean is fragmented politically (one as a Republic, another as an single-party socialist state and the third as an Associated Free State Pretectorate of the United States).

[28] Michael Chanan describes the dynamics of film distribution in Cuba and the Latin America of that time, citing sources from the British consul-general in Havana during the 1920s, the cinema historian Peter Bachlin and the North American film lawyer William Marston Seabury, among others, when at the time they reported how the proximity to the United States was fatal for Cuban film production of that decade. This observation is particularly relevant as Cuba was still in its early and brief independence period, the embargo would not begin for about forty years, and Havana was the most developed urban space of the Caribbean and Central America. The descriptions Bachlin, Seabury and the consul-general give, exemplify how the very logic of film distribution purposely

remains key to how they interact with local markets. Cinema production derives from a particular accumulation of capital and technology, and, in terms of the capacity to pay for its costs, is dependent on the inhabitants of the metropolis. Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean were, in effect, rural spaces in which, with the exception of Havana, and arguably Guatemala City, conurbations with an extended urban history were non-existent. In this sense it could be seen as contradictory to extricate the notion of a film production belonging to a space of this kind. As Getino points out:

> Cinema was born […] as a part of the process of the industrial and technological expansion of the central nations. It was the result and the support of the economic and political power these nations had begun to exert over large areas of the globe. A powerful cultural and communicational industry – and a growing substitute of the traditional educational and formative institutions – it served to sustain cinematographic activity and transnationalize production and consumption models, which were rapidly being imposed on our [Latin American] countries. (1988: p. 20, my translation)[29]

Nonetheless, it has become evident in recent years that both the countries lacking a thriving film industry as well as those with an established cinematic archive throughout the twentieth century have increased their production exponentially as a result of digital technology. In their pioneering book *The Cinema of Small Nations* Hjort and Petrie establish that "questions having to do with domination, the struggle for autonomy, spheres of influence, and a balance of power are crucial for any genuine understanding of the more general social and political frameworks for small-nation filmmaking" (2007: p. 6). While digital technologies have heavily influenced most aspects of the cinematic project, the global economy has rearranged political and labour relations in unforeseen ways, thereby stripping the concept of "nation" from the mythical sphere that would designate it as the hegemonic bearer of meaning. Those imagined communities, to use Benedict Anderson's term (2006: p. 6), are plural and in constant negotiation with the different states within which they are situated, yet they are culturally

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obstructs exhibition channels for any production made outside their oligopoly, for international markets represented in the 1920s 25% of the overall market (Chanan, 2003: p. 75). Indeed, the fraction controlled by the mainstream film industry has continued to grow and by 2016 represented 70% of the market (Follows, 2016).

[29] "El cine nació [...] como parte del proceso de expansión industrial y tecnológica de las naciones centrales, resultante y sustento a su vez del poder económico y político que dichas naciones habían comenzado a instalar sobre la mayor parte del mundo. Una poderosa industria cultural y comunicacional – sustitutoria creciente de las tradicionales instituciones educativas y formativas – sirvió para alimentar la actividad cinematográfica y para transnacionalizar modelos de producción y de uso, que fueron rápidamente impuestos sobre nuestros países [latinoamericanos]."

connected, in the way stars are connected in a constellation: through cultural meaning. The notions of belonging and of nationhood become particularly ambiguous within those countries that have endured a history of ongoing and devastating colonisation. As Bhabha observes, if "colonialism was the founding other upon which modernity (and therefore nation) posited its dominance […], the possibility of ungrounding the nation's dominance, then, is most evident when the re-emergent histories of postcolonial or diasporic populations, 'threaten' the maintenance of the pedagogic view of national identity" (Bhabha cited by Martin-Jones, 2006: p. 35).

An increasing number of scholars have acknowledged the shift in film studies "away from a concern with national cinema in a narrow sense towards greater interest in a transnational frame of reference [that] also embraces questions of culture" (Hjort & Petrie, 2007: p. 10). Domestic film industries and the political economies that enclose them are closely linked to global trends, and Hispanic Caribbean and Central American film cultures have not been immune to these processes. From a theoretical perspective, as Hjort and Petrie point out, scholars, such as Higson, who pointed to the emergence of a national film industry, are now beginning to "question some of the assumptions that underpinned [their] earlier position" (2007: p. 10). Hjort and Petrie note that the way in which Higson observes *national cinema* is "[i]nfluenced by certain strains of post-colonial thinking" as "Higson now advocates a post-national approach that recognises the extent to which national cultures are characterised by plurality, heterogeneity and diversity". As he puts it, "all nations are in some sense diasporic […], forged in the tension between unity and disunity, between home and homelessness" (2007: p. 10). Seen through the lens of the political economy, the space in question has undergone tensions that are geopolitical as well as meaningful. As Hjort and Petrie have argued,

> [the] transformative effect of globalisation on the international motion picture industry has had other significant implications for the nature of national film industries and film policy [where] the traditional binary model that pitted an essentially commercial, free-market and internationally oriented industrial model (Hollywood) against a culturally-informed and state-subsidised model (European national cinemas) has been superseded by a "new international division of cultural labour". (2007: p. 9)

The debates around the relevance of cinema and its nature as an autochthonous cultural expression triggered some efforts from filmmakers' networks which, in turn, shaped a new political context, providing film funds, workshops and institutions that channelled resources

from various national governments. During the last few decades the urgent need to have institutions tailored to individual Latin American, Caribbean and Central American contexts led to the establishment of continental film funds, such as Ibermedia, El Fauno and Cinergia, and film festivals, like *Festival Ícaro*, the *Festival Internacional de Cine Panamá* or Costa Rica's *Festival Internacional de Cine*, that followed on from already established events, such as the *Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* (in Havana) and the *Festival Internacional de Cine Cartagena de Indias*, and took on a new role as regional convenors. Quite separate from the national framework, all of these projects had global and regional aspirations. Nowadays, some schools, such as the *Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión in San Antonio de los Baños* (Cuba), the *Escuela de Cine y Televisión de la Universidad Veritas* (Costa Rica) or the *Escuela de Cine y Televisión Casa Comal* (Guatemala), are training a new generation of filmmakers. From the twenty-first century onwards, the increase in production has led to a massive reconfiguration of cultural possibilities; even so, the screen space that has been increasingly controlled by transnational capital has excluded most of the films that are produced in the above-mentioned film schools from international distribution outlets and circuits during the last ten years (see *Table 1*).

1.4 The Caribbean problem

An aim for the present study is to establish a geographical connection between mainland and Hispanic Caribbean island spaces, something previous studies have rarely managed to do. The Caribbean possesses various facets of cultural domination that have been constant throughout the centuries and continue to influence its very definition. As Dunja Fehimovic suggests, when racial, linguistic, historical and cultural criteria are added to the geographical categories, "the Caribbean 'in theory' increasingly starts to clash against the Caribbean 'in practice'" (2017: p. 111).[30] In order to examine these clashes it is useful to observe the distance between political and physical geography. On the one hand, some scholars (Getino, 2007; Pérez Brignoli & Hall, 2001; Whitehead, 2007) have pointed to the historical need to include the Caribbean within Latin America, even if they admit that it "complicates the picture" (Whitehead, 2007: p. 206). This complication is context-specific, as it derives from the inclusion of voices other than those narrowed by market – Eurocentric – and the same complications arise within the Latin American spaces that deal with indigineity. On the other hand, renowned scholars, like Antonio

[30] It is within the cultural practices that former relational schemes begin to gain relevance, one that emerged through the present study's process was colonial legacies, the most obvious of them being language but also the channels that exist to gain resources from former European colonisers. The most visible of these for filmmaking is the Ibermedia fund and the *Conferencia de Autoridades Audiovisuales y Cinematográficas de Iberoamérica*.

Benítez Rojo, have discussed the Caribbean as a space abruptly cut out from the continental colonial dynamics, and Central America has also been included in this paradigm as being part of these continental dynamics. This distinction is made via the argument that, culturally, Central America and the Caribbean are distanced by the historical paths they have each pursued – or which have been imposed on them. Whereas Central America experienced a strategy of deculturalisation, the Caribbean underwent a massive genocide that left a deserted space to be populated by Europeans and the African enslaved they brought to the New World during the sixteenth century and beyond (Benítez Rojo, 1989: p. 77). The Hispanic Caribbean economic paradigm led to a stronger dependency on the Spanish Crown on behalf of the *plantadores caribeños,* who had a solid commitment to the Spanish State – as they both held a common interest in the production-consumption of leather, tobacco and sugar – at a time when the narrowly populated Central American isthmus would treat the crown officers with disdain – as little of their survival depended on the *metropolis*.[31] The difference between both the Caribbean and the Central American political paradigms continued over time and eventually shaped two dependency models that, as I will argue, have now crossed each other's boundaries. Benítez Rojo draws the connection – *enchufe* – between both subcontinents:

> If we were to take the Central American link as our connection between continents, the results would be much less fruitful […]. [T]he cog that really counts is the one made by the Caribbean machine, whose flux, whose noise, and whose complexity intersects with the course followed by the contingencies of world history, ranging from the magesterial changes in economic discourse to the greatest collisions of races and cultures that the world has ever seen. (1989: p. 19, my translation)[32]

My understanding of Central America frames it as an extension of the Caribbean context, especially in the filmmaking practices derived from the institutions installed by the NCL movement – i.e. EICTV and later Cinergia. Thus I suggest that filmmaking practices and film circulation in both spaces were profoundly affected by the same paradigm of dependency on European – and subsequently on United States – bureaucracy, technology and networks. The

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[31] Benítez Rojo explains the level of dependency on the metropolis and by way of example points to the Mexican landowners at the time, arguing that economic management was not focussed primarily at that time on agricultural exports to Europe but was a much more complex and multi-layered administrative process which was, indeed, sometimes more complex than the European model (Ibid.: p. 79).

[32] "[S]i tomásemos como conexión de ambos subcontinentes el enchufe centroamericano, los resultados serían mucho menos productivos además de ajenos a este libro [...]. [E]l enchufe que cuenta es el que hace la máquina Caribe, cuyo flujo, cuyo ruido, cuya complejidad atraviesan la cronología de las grandes contingencias de la historia universal, de los cambios magistrales del discurso económico, de los mayores choques de razas y culturas que ha visto la humanidad."

economic obstacles in Central America and the Dominican Republic come from heavy debt burdens towards global financial institutions and thi dependency continues throughout the Caribbean in the form of embargo-riddled countries (Cuba) or colonial settlements (Puerto Rico). This dynamic of dependency that operates throughout Latin American film industries is solidified and felt even more keenly within the smaller nations of this region since their markets are considerably smaller,[33] their governments poorer, and thus the options to sustain local narratives are more limited.[34]

Recent studies encourage Caribbean scholars to think of this space as something beyond the idea of national statehood; the Caribbean, write Mauricio Chaves Fernández, Werner Mackenbach and Héctor Pérez Brignoli is "a space of its own, [where] histories and cultures [operate] that are not identical to those of the national states which exist in their territory".[35] Moreover, historians and cultural critics Chaves et al. point to the academic silence about the relationship between Central America and the Caribbean that has prevailed for two hundred years, and become even more pronounced in the second half of the twentieth century. A mutual ignorance on the relationship between "the insular Caribbean and the Central American Caribbean" (Chaves Fernández, Mackenbach & Pérez-Brignoli, 2018: p. ix) has perpetuated a fragmented understanding that far from focusing on the "mobile, linked, crossed and re-crossed

[33] Not to mention that their very existence on such a small scale is a consequence of the regional fragmentation present since independence when the "leading elites had found great difficulties to impose their hegemony over the inherited territory" (Pinto Soria, 1993: p. 134); the prevailing political order sustained local structures that impeded regional agreements. Sergio Ramírez Mercado described the political and cultural process staged in Central America during the late XIX century as *balcanazation* establishing a metaphor with the case of former Yugoslavia, describing the political path by which each country's possibilities were made to weaken local autonomy and thus make the production dynamics heavily dependent on European institutions. Even though Ramírez Mercado comments mainly on literature, as that was the available cultural production at the time, in his essay *Balcanes y volcanes* the writer notices how the literary codes were conceived in opposition to the process that made each Central American country independent and viable; as an example he brings in the *Popol Wuj* on one hand – as an example of a (temporarily) hidden text at the time of the independence – or on the other hand "metropolitan inspired contributions" (Ramírez Mercado, 1973) such as Rafael Landívar *La Rusticatio Mexicana* (1982) that were written by Central Americans but with the voice of an outsider.

[34] A detailed analysis of how these imaginaries were constructed on a global scale, and also how cultural and metaphoric landscapes were described, is provided by Robert Stam and Ella Shohat when they compare the way tourist advertisements from the 1990s represented the Greek Islands (as a pilgrimage to the cradle of the European civilisation) and the Caribbean (as a place to escape from everything, stripping the latter from any historical origin), thereby creating for each space a distanced macro-narrative to suit the imaginaries of the tourist industries (2002: pp. 71-73).

[35] The authors expand on the urgency to break with old perceptions of the Caribbean space and "open them up" to their multiple relations: "…el Caribe es mucho más que los estados nacionales: un espacio propio, culturas e historias propias que no son idénticas con los estados nacionales que existen en su territorio. Por el otro lado, no debemos encerrarnos en un concepto limitado de Centroamérica. Obviamente sigue siendo importante e imprescindible visibilizarla como zona propia (sea a través de Historias generales, sea a través de Historias literarias y culturales). Sin embargo, es preciso abrir los estudios hacia sus múltiples relaciones más allá del territorio centroamericano, hacer la región visible en sus múltiples interrelaciones transregionales y transreales." (Chaves Fernández, Mackenbach & Pérez-Brignoli, 2018: p. xii).

relations" sticks to traditional appreciations derived from a "politics of intervention and neo-colonial fragmentation"; these strategies were implemented by the United States governments in their dealings with all the Central American and Caribbean countries (Chaves Fernández, Mackenbach & Pérez-Brignoli, 2018: p. x). This trend towards a two-way oblivion has been slowly replaced by a more complex understanding of the convergence of Cuban and Central American film production via specific funds for the region and the collaboration of filmmakers from the Central American isthmus and the Caribbean islands, particularly after the first decade of the twenty-first century when the efforts from the EICTV and Cinergia produced a number of films. For instance, as I expand on in Chapter Two, whilst all the filmmaking practices that have accompanied the films in this study are transnational, not all of them depend on the same transnational funding institutions. In other words, while the praxis of the Spanish Empire from the sixteenth century onwards along with the neo-colonial fragmentation from the nineteenth century onward do not provide sufficient grounds to explain the overall cultural dynamics of the region, yet they are the foundation of the disjointed platform from which modern-day marginal production possibilities which characterize film production in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean stem.

Contemporary filmmaking practices are traversed by transnational collaborations, which seem to be "a precondition for industrial viability, especially for productions without a large domestic market" (de Valck, 2007: p. 109). The *enchufe* is highly visible within the contemporary economic and political contexts as transnational production schemes affect every cinematographic dynamic, and do so with particular intensity in the case of smaller nations. Indeed, the connection between filmmaking in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean become even more visible once we take into account the film selection process at local film festivals (Alarcón, A.X. & Molina, L. Personal Communication 28/5/2019: min. 59:00) as well as funding reach (see also the documentary, *Archipelagoes and Constellations*, 2019: min. 29:30), but this appraoch is discouraged by macroeconomic trends that operate by asphyxiating marketing strategies for local productions. In this sense, the convoluted history of this connecting space in the Americas reveals how cultural dynamics are a fundamental aspect of how these geographies were built. It is the "scattered" nature of these cultural ingredients that underpins what I have called the "economic archipelago" (see above).

Global discourses have operated throughout the Caribbean via enclaves. This has led to a double representation of space. On the one hand, the space is seen from a foreign perspective; Hjort and Petrie (2007: p. 16), for example, describe the dynamics of this type of film production as centrifugal since it seeks an audience external to the territory where the

cinematographic productions were made. On the other hand, we find a perspective that I will call *decolonial* but which may also be described as *centripetal;* [36] it is focused on a territory which builds a representation of its subjects/ citizens/ inhabitants based on a political apparatus – the state. Following García-Canclini´s discussion about identities that perform *socio-spatially* as well as *socio-communicationally*, the decolonial or centripetal filmmaking dynamic "articulates the local, national, and post national cultures that play an increasingly significant role in configuring identities everywhere and in restructuring the significance of local or regional qualities emanating from distinct territorial experiences" (1997: p. 256). These articulations are built by institutions that are cultural holders in that they possess a political agenda. In the words of Copertari and Sitnisky (2015: p. 14), following Stuart Hall, cinema brings into the spotlight the tensions between "the nation state and its transnational imperatives". It is a continued re-enactment of both: the means by which films are prepared, thought of, produced, and made available to audiences as well as the characters and themes represented on screen.

1.5 Cinematographic practices and the New International Division of Cultural Labour

As several scholars have suggested, the division of cultural labour has affected film production on the periphery (Fornet, 1997; Chanan, 2003; García Canclini, 1987; Getino, 1988; López, 1997; Miller, 2001; Stock, 1997; O´Regan, 1999), with Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean serving as extreme examples. The process that by the 1970s had developed "markets for labor and products […] pushed the Global North beyond treating the Global South as a supplier of raw materials to view them as shadow-setters of the price of work" (Miller & Kraidy, 2016: p. 26). By shifting the focus to consumption, the NIDCL spots the way in which inequality colours everyday work by pushing the value generated by workers to the central capital which produces the final good (Miller, 2016: p. 99); it is the reign of the *cogniariat*: cultural workers "who have heady educational backgrounds yet live at the uncertain interstices of capital, qualifications, and government in a post-Fordist era [of] occupational insecurity" (Miller, 2016: p. 104). As Toby Miller and Marwan Kraidy point out, cultural production – filmmaking and television in particular – requires "by far the highest amount of initial investment per unit, most of which is high risk" (p. 112). The majority of investments are

[36] I expand on the relations between decolonial and centripetal perspectives in Chapter Two, see 2.2 Films from Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean in the light of contemporary continental currents.

spread across an extensive portfolio of productions, on account of which investors are assured a profit for at least some of them. These investments originate in highly accumulative economies while the consumption spreads throughout the wider Global South.

As Miller goes on to explain, political economy "examines the role of state and capital in controlling labour" (2016: p. 99) influencing citizens' and consumers' ideologies. This shift from markets and the supply-demand link to a focus that closely examines how consumption works stresses "production as a source of value and a site of control" (Miller, 2016: p. 99), is followed in this study. In this sense state and capital control the conditions and possibilities of the workplace as well as its production of surplus value. The New International Division of Cultural Labour continues to observe the subdivisions, multiplications and geographical spread that resulted from the division of labour, demonstrating how the added value generated by workers is hidden within cultural production. The emphasis when observing these divisions through the NICL is that its aim is to demonstrate how the workers' production is in fact socially controlled so as to make the craft invisible, thereby bringing the "technological wizardry, corporate stardom, or entrepreneurial fables" into the spotlight (Marx cited in Miller, 2016: p. 100).

As a consequence, the Global North controls technology and production, leaving little of the production and even less of the control over the distribution of films to the Global South (see *Archipelagoes and Constellations*, 2019: min. 02:25). Despite this asymmetry there have been a number of success cases in the last few years. Some Central American and Caribbean filmmakers managed to enter North American and European competitive film circuits: Gabriel Serra's *La Parka* was nominated for the 2015 Oscars after thirty-three years of drought during which very few films – only *La Yuma* (Jaugey, 2009), *Princesas rojas* (Astorga Carrera, 2013), and *Ixcanul* (Bustamante, 2015) – sought international recognition through the Oscars platform and managed to be shortlisted, although they were not nominated in the end.

In spite of some reluctance on the part of the Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts and Sciences to acknowledge Cuban filmmaking in their selections – no film from Cuba has been shortlisted since *Fresa y chocolate* in 1995 –, numerous Cuban movies have been nominated for the Goya Prize: *Habana Blues* (Zambrano, 2005); *Juan de los muertos* (Brugués, 2011) and *Conducta* (Daranas, 2014). Other Caribbean productions, such as those from Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica or Haiti, have not led to a national nomination. Meanwhile, European film festivals such as Locarno, San Sebastian and Rotterdam, officially selected *Te prometo anarquía* (Hernández Cordón, 2015) and *Atrás hay relámpagos* (Hernández Cordón, 2016); while

Ixcanul (Bustamante, 2015) and *Agua fría de mar* (Fábrega, 2010) were awarded the Silver Bear and the Tiger Award respectively (see Annex: 1 *Central American Feature Fiction Films 2001-2017*).

Be it as a "new cult" (García-Espinosa, 2007: p. 172), or as an established business, or as an example of the time-image or the movement image (Deleuze, 1988; Martin-Jones, 2006: p. 38), cinema has fired up the ambitions of Caribbean and Central American artists, and on the festival circuit they have been seduced by the promise of a wider audience reach for their films. Nevertheless, it is not an exaggeration to say that their hope is for either "a warm reception in Cannes or an enthusiastic public in Madrid" (Whitehead, 2007: p. 196), rather than a foursquare dialogue with transnational or global audiences or even those more elusive local audiences. This is related to the market's possibilities as well as to the place cinema occupies within each of the local government's cultural investment portfolios. Throughout the twentieth century cinematographic practices in most Latin American countries were "reduced to an assembly activity" (Getino, 1988: p. 19), a craft in which the contents and the traits of movies were controlled by ideological and cultural components of the "central nations" (Getino, 1988: p. 19). This trend, Getino argues, is partly due to the fact that the actual technology to create or physically develop the filmic text was exclusively in the hands of the Global North.

During the last decade the control over cinematographic production technology has become more widespread – I elaborate on this idea in Chapter Three – but, notwithstanding this, the power relations have essentially remained the same. The production trends during the twentieth century became heavily oriented towards the market demands. As a result of Cold War polarisation throughout the second half of the past century, the market in Western countries was clearly managed by the rules imposed by industrial centres. Their strategies blended a careful control of film demand with a disproportionately high investment in advertisement for the movies they produced.

The International Division of Cultural Labour observes exhibition quotas, and it is these figures which allow the film's existence as a commodity to be traced. However, as Michael Chanan has warned, films – and cultural production in general, film being the most persuasive example – by default have a negative value. As a commodity, they exist in a unique spectrum of the economy that requires a high initial investment which may not, ultimately, achieve a return. Chanan explains that these practices – i.e. once a film is produced, printed and meets its costs to satisfy the demand, it relies solely on advertisement to make a profit – create a dynamic

whereby producers have to pay to bring the film's existence to the attention of an audience. As a result, the box office receipts rarely cover the medium's cost.[37]

Referring back to the early decades of commercial film development, Chanan notes that the film business established itself by relying on the pool of film distribution as a secured monopoly. The major production companies in the 1920s became protagonists "not through physical exchange of the object itself, but through gate money, the price of admission, in this way manifesting its affinity with various other forms of cultural production and entertainment" (2003: p. 73). Chanan, furthermore, argues that, as a result of this gate money, the exhibitor became the main target for this distribution flow. The distributors then "find [ways] to manipulate the conditions of rental – 'block booking' and 'blind booking,' for example, in which they force exhibitors to take pictures they don't want and sometimes haven't seen in order to get the ones they do want" (2003: p. 73).

The way in which gate money influences the demand, price, admission, exhibition and, as a consequence, availability of certain films over others did not change throughout the twentieth century. Right across Latin America, which at that time found itself under the direct political, cultural and economic influence of the United States, the strategy of centralising film resources led to an extreme concentration of screen access. This phenomenon is expertly described by O'Regan; he suggests that the United States' control of foreign film markets with respect to motion pictures was "approximately 95% for South America" in 1922. This monopoly, argues O'Regan, has its origins "in the structural dynamics of the cinema – its system of scale production with mass distribution and exhibition – requiring expensive technology, specialized screening venues, continuously improving standards of image-making and large-scale, administrative coordination" (1999: p. 269). During the course of the twentieth century it became clear that the Hollywood industry remained a strong player that actively distorted the market in dominant and predatory ways. Its tendency to expand and crush other filmmaking initiatives became progressively more vigorous, and was typical of a ruthlessly applied business formula.

Within the exhibition quota, as several scholars stress, "the world market is crucial to the US" (Miller, 2001: p. 4; Getino, 2007; King, 2000; Chanan, 1997). Indeed, though movie production

[37] An exception in the area, as Liz Harvey (2018: p. 170) has pointed out, is *Maikol Yordan de viaje perdido* (Gómez, 2015) which attracted 17% of the Costa Rican population as a direct cinema audience and a matching number from Honduran and Nicaraguan audiences. It is crucial to mention that *Maikol Yordan de viaje perdido* stands as an example of intermediality as it appropriates characters that were already famous from television to adapt them to a feature film.

has not remained the same over time, Hollywood took four steps which secured its dominance of the world market throughout the twentieth century. These were: (a) the adherence to a New International Division of Cultural Labour (NICL), in which all stages of production – from project development to exhibition and distribution – were considered crucial to the health of the industry and and therefore has their own separate budget framed within the logic of a production line; (b) building cinema as a cultural and entertainment commodity rather than a socio-cultural production, even though, as Chanan has noted, this commodity possessed a negative value; (c) developing a business strategy that offset its costs via domestic audiences (in this case from the United States), thereby allowing the distributors to offer their movies overseas at a low cost, and in effect creating a dumping price policy with prejudicial effects for foreign film industries and, finally, (d) using a diplomatic approach to deal with its business partners so as to promote better deals for its cultural commodities through Free Trade Agreements together with aggressive investments in theatres and new technology.[38]

In addition to the control over distribution, the film market strives to position the symbolic added value of its films in a pre-established logic of distinctive traits based fundamentally on the genre scheme and the star system (*Archipelagoes and Constellations*, documentary, 2019: min. 02:30). This framework excludes Latin America's film production as very few of the continental efforts fit into this logic.

Whilst time-image films are seen as an expressive vehicle which fragments perception in a dynamic where the real is "no longer represented or reproduced but 'aimed at'" (Deleuze, 1988) they hardly ever appeal to commercial audiences. This paradox does not disappear even if the artistic institutions establish a film market in a business-oriented way (Campos Rabadán, 2016). In other words, film markets within the artistic intitutions base the quality of their product on a legitimised competition – run by a jury under the aegis of artistic institutions such as film festivals – even though the nominations themselves are clearly dependent on the distribution potential of each film. The film festival's market reach is much smaller than that possessed by industrial (even if it is movement-image) film – since the organisers do not set

[38] Hollywood's four steps, as described by Toby Miller (2005: pp. 1- 49), contribute to (i) its building of a New International Division of Cultural Labour, (ii) the establishment of cinema as an entertainment commodity (iii) the support towards its costs through local audiences and (iv) the promotion of better deals in international markets (the latter has been described by García-Canclini in terms of aggressive imposed deals combined with the accumulation of professional experience, the rapid development of industrial and urban centres and tax exemption strategies) – all of which has led to the creation of a deeply frustrating panorama for local filmmakers. The possible market shifts from local audiences to global niches were reduced and had to be competitive within a broader scale of actors and stories.

their sights on a mass audience – and thus, their distribution obeys a different logic from the market paradigm. While the approach of film festivals such as Locarno, Berlinale and Rotterdam is different from an event such as the Oscars, the nomination structure is built around the notion of a film's distribution potential. Thomas Elsaesser unpacks the function of the festival circuit in an interesting way, seeing it as a crucial interface with Hollywood. In his view "festivals constitute (like Hollywood) a global platform but one which unlike Hollywood is at one and the same time a 'market place'" (2005: p. 88). Elsaesser compares film festivals to a "bazaar" and the Hollywood circuit to "a stock exchange". This bazaar, he suggests, exhibits a "cultural showcase (comparable to music or theatre festivals), a 'competitive venue' (like the Olympic Games), and a world-body (an ad-hoc United Nations, a parliament of national cinemas, or cinematic NGOs, considering some of the various festivals' political agendas)" (2005: p. 88). It is important to note that, when viewed from this angle, film recovers a cultural value that no longer depends on the negative evaluation previously imposed by the marketisation-paradigm. Indeed, all exhibitors see themselves as institutions that are triggered either by market competition or by the festival market system and therefore typically see Latin-American movies as aiming for a production flow that over time will be able to establish an agenda. Given that cinema production and distribution depend on the New International Division of Cultural Labour (Miller, 2001: p. 4, 44-66) and the four above-mentioned strategies, and because Latin American distributors systematically fail to follow these steps, the film festival circuit becomes even more important for those cultural productions that emerge in countries lacking an industrial media network of their own.

The narrative behind the film market never transcends Debord's theory of the "society of spectacle" (Fornet: 1997, p. xiii). However, particularly during the 1960s, it did embark on a three-way journey in which Hollywood would administer "entertainment, European art, and Latin America social conscience" (Fornet: 1997, p. xii). Since the early studies identified New Latin American Cinema as above a cultural phenomenon, these three ingredients have been visible. In *Cine iberoamericano. Los desafíos del nuevo siglo*, for example, Octavio Getino identifies the main reason behind the hegemony possessed by US cultural industries, specifically cinema, through considering the costs of making a film until the late 1990s. He differentiates *major* from independent production companies within the Hollywood market and, by doing so, argues on behalf of the diplomatic value of cinema as a cultural production; he suggests that there is a concrete cultural benefit created by the film industries of the 1960s in Latin America, and it is something that goes beyond box office success.

Getino points to the number of Latin American films produced as a percentage of the global film market. He underlines how in a global market context, as promoted by Hollywood, it is safer to invest in movies with a fifty million dollar budget than in those costing ten million (2007: p. 17). If the fifty million dollar movie ends up having a weak story, special effects and advertisement can always be added, allowing it to perform according to a market-driven logic. The marked increase in market and budgets for Hollywood majors is described by Getino in the following terms:

> The *major*'s production budgets have increased over time, in terms of the so-called "negative costs" – which include not just what was invested from the beginning of the production to the first ensemble of the film – as much as in terms of the costs of copies, distribution, publicity and promotion (print & advertisement or p & a).
>
> The budgets have multiplied fifteen-fold between 1972 and 1992 and three-fold between 1982 and 1992. In 1970 the average budget was 1.5 million dollars per feature film, and this cost would increase to 9.3 million dollars by 1980, 26.8 million by 1990 and 34.3 million by 1994. To date the cost of the p & a on average exceeds fifty million dollars. To this figure copies and marketing costs have to be added which can represent an additional 50%, meaning that a major´s investment for a middle-range production can amount to 70 to 80 million dollars. (2007: p. 15, my translation)[39]

Although these numbers only apply to the decades spanning from the 1970s to the 1990s, they give us an idea about the budget scale of those productions when compared to the estimated cost of, for example, Central American movies. For that particular period Cortés Pacheco (2005: p. 518) points out that the budget of the Guatemalan film *El norte* (1983) was said to have been US $800,000, while twenty years later, *Anita la cazadora de insectos* (Durón, 2002) cost less than US $35,000. In both cases, the costs are well below the US $9,000,000-50,000,000 typically spent on a major as described by Getino.

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[39] "Los presupuestos de producción de las *majors* se han elevado a lo largo del tiempo, tanto en lo referente a los llamados "costos del negativo" (negative cost) –que incluyen solamente lo invertido desde el inicio de la producción hasta el primer negativo armado del filme – como en los de tirada de copias, distribución, publicidad y promoción (print and advertising cost or p & a cost). Los primeros se han multiplicado por quince entre 1972 y 1992 y por tres de 1982 a 1992. En 1970 eran de 1,5 millones de dólares por largometraje, mientras que ascendían a 9,3 millones en 1980, 26,8 millones en 1990 y 34,3 millones en 1994. Actualmente superan los 50 millones como promedio. A ello se suman los costos de copias y marketing, que pueden representar un 50% más, con lo cual la inversión de una *major* en una producción de tipo medio puede representar entre 70 y 80 millones de dólares."

According to Getino, cinema is part of a cultural strategy that seeks to build "the collective imaginaries, and identifying processes for every community along with their cultural diversity and cultural democracy" (2007: p. 19). These cultural strategies are operationalized when the Department of State of the United States negotiates film production and distribution; as Getino sees it, the national and global reach of Hollywood´s monopolised business industry "has served the aim to expand the world´s most powerful monoculture," transforming it into "a serious threat for the industries and cultures of other nations" (Getino, 2007: p. 21, my translation).[40] Those general policies actually affect daily life in Latin America and render its markets insignificant when compared to the US film industry as a whole. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the films Hollywood distributed in Latin America came to just 10% of Hollywood's international revenues (Getino, 2007: p. 21); nevertheless the decision to maintain Latin American film production at such a low level was politically strategic rather than crucial for the business. The US filmmaking industry not only controls budgets that dwarf Latin American – let alone Central American – independent cinema, but also continues to maintain an aggressive distribution policy, which effectively buttresses and protects an established mainstream industry (Avellán, 2018; See *Table 1*).

An analysis of the statistics of films made in U.S. in the 1980s showed that only two to three feature films for every ten would recoup their investment. In this scenario the majors had "60% of the screening time" of the then "capitalist countries" (Getino, 1988: p. 18). In this sense, Getino concludes, the film industry depends heavily on external markets (1988: p. 18). López, Fornet, Stock and García-Canclini echo Getino´s argument, and repeat the same percentage – 60% of screen time is monopolised by Hollywood in Latin America. Furthermore, Fornet backs García Canclini's point, stating that at the time "Latin America constitute[d] only one of the sources of income, and not the most important one" (1997: p. xiii). The subcontinent´s cinema cannot rely solely on its local market since these markets were "scattered" and are still "scattered" today. During the 1980s the average cost of producing a film was US $250,000, and, in an average Latin American country, "the price of a ticket at the box office was fifty cents, so that in order for a film to recover its production cost, it had to attract a minimum of half a million spectators, a number few films could manage in their respective markets" (1997: p. xiii).

[40] "[S]irvió a los propósitos de expansión de la monocultura más poderosa del planeta, los que se traducen [...] en una seria amenaza a las industrias y a las culturas de otras naciones."

In the Central American and Caribbean countries, which were the geographically closest "overseas" regions to Hollywood's film industry, all these strategies led to a decline in any film production that fell outside the industrial system. As this monopoly continued to solidify over the course of the twentieth century, the aegis of the films became and is still largely dictated by the film distribution market. In Central America specifically, with distributors depending on major US companies, 96-99% of the films screened are now from the Hollywood majors (Avellán, 2018). As a result in Central America "the public is receptive solely to such super productions and, while they like to see themselves reflected on screen, it has been difficult to do away with the prejudice that our own movies are bad just because they do not meet Hollywood standards or narrative models" (Fornet, 1997: p. xiii). A similar proportion of Hollywood movies come to Hispanic Caribbean screens ("Caribbean Cinemas," 2018). The local films are shown in very limited venues and this lack of protectionism as applied to native filmmakers is a direct consequence of the internal politics in each of the Caribbean states. Indeed, out of the twenty-eight states in the Caribbean region only two of the countries have passed cinema laws protecting national film production (the Dominican Republic and Panama). Both cases have been successful in boosting the quantity of the films made, despite the challenges created by globalisation.

In Central America film production has been forced to rely on a border-crossing strategy; as small nations by definition have "very limited domestic markets for all locally produced goods and services – including culture – and so have been forced by the neo-liberal economic and political pressures of globalisation into a greater dependency on external markets" (Hjort and Pietre, 2007: p. 15). This situation has pushed local producers, writers and directors into methods of production that are not always supported by their own governments. While the filmmakers look for backing to their national governments (Bustamante, 2015: min. 3:57; Fábrega, 2015b: min. 5:13; *Archipelagoes and Constellations*, 2019: min. 11:05), the political decision-makers rarely appreciate the urgency of their petitions. The Panamanian and the Dominican governments, for example, are the only two states that have established proper budgets (of around three million dollars each) exclusively for the production of new films (Mango, 2012). These funds rarely focus on one production and demand that films benefitting from these start-up funds seek co-production. The changes brought by the transnational economy networks coincided with the spread of harmful protective measures forced upon small countries to "eliminate film quotas and promote exports of American films to other countries" (Crane, 2014: p. 372). In Central America the percentage of films from the majors is described by Karina Avellán, head of the Independent Film Distributor Pacífica Grey, as between 96%

and 99% for Costa Rica, and, as shown in *Table 1*, the percentage has stayed in that range during the last 10 years.

Heterogeneous as it is, it is this transnational economy that accounts for what Grossberg describes as the "complicated relations between belonging and alienation, identity and identification, subjectivation and subjectification [sic]" (2010: p. 34). Even if what happens in the Hispanic Caribbean is not limited to this particular context, the experience of a variety of nations with diverse colonial backgrounds, languages and political organisations is particularly intense. In addition, low political consciousness relating to the internal dynamics appears to be a key factor in the paucity of cultural productions as well as the problems with distribution within this region. The scarcity of distributive channels has had a negative effect on the films' potential to engage directly with local culture and local priorities (Avellán, 2018; *Archipelagoes and Constellations*, 2019: min. 06:14; see *Table 1*).

In the last three decades the economic, cultural and political characteristics as outlined above have privileged social articulations around business and private earnings rather than the cultural and/ or artistic expression of a "national discourse". Political articulations are scattered and their operations are triggered by the global economy according to a dynamic that tends to be divorced from the region's cultural-historical circumstances. The layers of colonial domination strategies are built out of alienation in the sense that they limit local appropriations and lead to, on the one hand, a blurred sense of global belonging and, on the other, to a persistent incomprehension as far as the immediate actors are concerned, fostering instability and isolation. Marina Moguillansky (2019: p. 28, my translation) examines this dynamic for the whole continent which she describes as a "wide demographic whole that finds no coherent cultural expression, as the industrial cultural productions are a minority and circulate little"; it is so, Moguillansky recalls from García Canclini (2004: p. 195), that the cutural globalisation which repeats the same film titles in every screen encourage the perversive effect of "interrupting the communication between the creators and their own societies stripping the peripheral nations from their patrimony". While production has stretched particularly in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and Panama as a consequence of the available laws, training and funding described previously (See *Soft power and filmic geographies*), distribution remains controled by the majors. For instance, in Central America, out of the total of titles distributed, the number of films from the majors range between 96% and 99% (Avellán, 2018; See *Table* 1); in the Hispanic Caribbean these numbers are harder to pin down, as I will discuss for the Cuban and Dominican cases.

The present study takes into account the heterogeneous nature of the region and argues that hybridity and cross-cultural approaches best describe its cultural dynamics. By so doing, it seeks to consider the new context for cultural and filmic distribution as one that brings new elements to a territory that has been transnational and culturally diverse since it was first named by Europeans. In an affective and legal sense, Latin America has not yet succeeded in bringing adequate economic, political or social resources together in order to work towards a common cultural ground. The history of film production and distribution in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America has, indeed, always been determined by strong hegemonic control from the United States. The proximity of the region to the current economic and political hegemony of the United States has led to a specific type of epistemic violence, that is a tight control over its physical as well as semantic space, with its media being among the most important. This context was famously contested by the Cuban government in 1959, when it "answered" with strategic resources designed to counterbalance the vigorous cultural influence the United States had established up until that point through most media outlets. While films have proven to be one of the most persuasive of all media expressions, this trait has made it a target for cultural control. Cuba made a decision in 1959 to prioritise its own cinema and cinematic taste by nationalising theatres and film production. However, training for filmmakers remained exclusive and distribution nearly non-existent (Chanan, 2003: p. 534). In the rest of the Caribbean and Central America, countries' training and distribution were likewise poorly funded until roughly five years ago.

When describing the phenomenon of national film production versus the distribution of US films in foreign markets, García-Canclini notes that the global semi-monopoly of the distribution circuits has been "echoed in a startling way, in Latin American countries. Even in countries that have a long tradition of national filmmaking, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, Hollywood movies take up around 90 per cent of screen time" (2007: p. 185). This situation affects cultural policies in every country and is compounded by the fact that film has proven to be an extremely expensive cultural production, which makes it even more difficult to build an appropriate circuit for its production and consumption in economically peripheral regions.

Like the Caribbean Cinemas chain in most of the Antilles, privately owned cinemas (e.g. Russell's Cinema in Saint Vincent) or Cinépolis and Cinemark in Central America, offered only a narrow portfolio of national films and, indeed, do so to this day. Within the neo-liberal scenario that has been prevalent since the 1980s, distribution practices in Latin America and the Caribbean continued to privilege cinema from the US (García-Canclini, 2007: p. 185), and

specifically from Hollywood. This is what García-Canclini describes as "the global hegemony of US cinema", that is, a hegemony that

> came about historically as a result of clearly political factors […] such as (a) the early developments of the film industry in the United States (which was parallel to developments in the fields of culture and communication), which generated an accumulation of professional experience, sophisticated technical knowledge, and an advanced knowledge of the markets; (b) rapid urbanization and industrial development, in the United States and Latin America, which led to strong migratory patterns; (c) tax exemptions as well as other protectionist incentives used by the U.S. government to aid its national film industry, combined with a semi-monopolizing control over distribution and screening, which itself became more effective as a barrier against the film industries of other countries and other languages that the screen quotas that were established in other countries via the regulation of public organizations. (2007: pp. 185-186)

To quote Grossberg, cultural productions are framed in a territory which he defines as a "complex set of affective articulations" that implies a narrative and aesthetic strategy "inscribed in affective reality" (2010: p. 34). At the same time, their audiences are determined by social locations, at least inasmuch as the texts tell human stories. It is also important to bear in mind the circumstances of visitors to film festivals − who are sensitive to different cultural (global) problems − as well as the potential protagonists of the stories and worlds that are represented through a particular film but fail to reenact the connections these artistic expressions may provoke in them as they do not "belong" to the represented space. The key audience or market for a film is overseen by the production team in the first place, and in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America − with the exception of Cuba − that audience is rarely local. As López suggests, we live in a time when the "force field of 'Cuban cinema' as delimited by the frontiers of the nation" is impossible to define. The imagined community persists but "its sphere of creation and influence exceeds both the limits of 'Cuba' as an island and the limits of 'cinema' as a medium" (2007: p. 195).

It is clear for Cuba as well as for the rest of the Hispanic Caribbean countries that any national market will not generate enough revenue to cover the cost of making its own films (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: p. 48). This network for filmmaking could, in effect, end the cultural context of the *repeating island*, one that reaches a complex affective, aesthetic, political and economic net but overlooks its immediate political circumstances. Being "Big Brother's [closest]

Backyard" (King, 2000: p. 225) has, indeed, made it difficult for Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean to assemble a cinematographic community, produce and establish a creative system and thus a filmic voice of its own. The *Conferencia de Autoridades Audiovisuales y Cinematográficas* and Ibermedia have reveresed this tendency since 2014, particularly adding training and funding that operates regionally and demands co-production between several countries. As Campos and Moguillansky have documented, these initiatives have impacted production, and as well as the rise of institutions in Cuba, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Panamá (Moguillansky, 2019; Campos, 2012), and fiction films have adjusted to the coproduction schemes in various ways as I will develop in Chapters Two and Three.

So much has been written about film hegemony and rather than adding to the debate, the present chapter seeks to clarify the tactics that have established which side holds the baton even in the present scenario. In short, that the circumstances Hjort and Petrie enumerate for a global cinematographic market apply with particular accuracy to the geo-political immediacy of the wealthiest cultural industry in the world, and it is mainly through monopolic distribution strategies that it has strengthened this control through neoliberal "trade practices and terms" (2007: pp. 8-9).

The high exposure to Hollywood's formula, syntax, trends and marketing strategies influenced a number of Central American and Caribbean filmmakers, who thought the audience would only watch their films if they adhered to these mainstream rules. Most films made in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean between 2001 and 2015 establish dialogues with aesthetic and narrative techniques from Hollywood; for instance they consist of character-driven plots that adjust to genres and exhibit a clear Aristotelian narrative arc (Mc Kee, 1997: pp. 44-46). However, I will investigate three films that are relevant for specific reasons – such as, for example, that they were funded by Cinergia, awarded prizes from several festivals around the world, like *Viva Cuba* (Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti, 2005), or they were the first features made in more than two decades within a country, like *La Yuma* (Jaugey, 2009), or they were pioneers in overcoming the obstacles to attract funding from global agencies (such as workshops and postproduction support from the Berlinale), like *Princesas rojas* (Astorga Carrera, 2013). All of the three films selected for analysis in this section had their world premieres at Class A film festivals, albeit some were screened out of competition.

Interestingly, these three films fit the industrial formula in the sense that they embrace the above mentioned mainstream narrative frame. Nevertheless, as we shall see, they also contest

the very system that supports Hollywood (i.e. the New International Division of Cultural Labour) through stories that choose "outlawed" characters and themes. The plots these films bring to the forefront contradict a number of preconceived ideas central to neoliberal culture. For example, they may question migration to the metropolis (a recurrent theme in Cuban films), they challenge the supposed passivity over marginal economic circumstances or they open up for discussion the consensus over a Manichean war; all three films foreground characters – children, female boxers and guerrilla fighters – who resist those clichés which, until now, have not been scrutinised. The films thus utilise the Hollywood formula to examine the agency, context and nuanced circumstances that drive the stories of hitherto invisible protagonists. Both the aesthetic and narrative trends of these films overlap with specific genres. *Viva Cuba*, for example, corresponds to the formula of a road movie, while *La Yuma* follows what the industry calls a sports movie. In the case of *Princesas rojas,* the film is a thriller/ epoch drama. Their themes – resistance to migration, precarity or political Manicheism – cross the borders of each country showing shared priorities within a cultural constellation. Notwithstanding this cultural link, their budgets are very far from the industrial average and their funding comes from a wide – indeed archipelagic – range and mixture of sources, none of which is of a "national type". The financial resources arrive from transnational networks which operate simultaneously as peripheral and transnational. Cinergia, funded by the Dutch cooperation for humanities (Hivos) and the Ford Foundation,[41] stands out as a major donor for the three films, while all of them also drew on private donations. Even though these productions are embedded in their aspiration towards an industrial logic, none make use of the Hollywood star system. For the Latin American context the lack of such a framework corresponds to its fragmented system (Kemp, 2017), which shares the local (national), regional and global spheres without the sense of a clear hegemony (Kantaris, 2017: p. 93). As an alternative to the star system, they bet on "new" talent: very young actors – children in the cases of *Viva Cuba* and *Princesas rojas*, and a young professional dancer in the case of *La Yuma*.

[41] Operating between 2003 and 2015 with direct sponsorship from the Dutch Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries, as well as the Ford Foundation, Cinergia managed a budget of around US $30,000 per year during those 12 years. These funds coupled with alliances in several European Film Festivals allowed the fund to bring training and financial support to some 50 cinematographic projects from Central American countries, Cuba and Puerto Rico (see *Archipelagoes and Constellations* documentary, 2019: min. 26:55)

1.6 *Viva Cuba*: The road movie's border

Viva Cuba was made in Cuba, co-produced by France (through QUAD Cinema), financed by Cinergia and QUAD and approved as well as distributed inside Cuba by the *Instituto Cubano del Arte, Industria y Cinematografía*. Cremata Malberti has suggested that the post-production and distribution were managed through the production company QUAD (Cremata Malberti, J. C. *Interview with Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti*, Personal Communication 15/07/15). This enterprise allowed investments that were coming from New York to be rechannelled from the United States through France, something that would not have been allowed directly at the time, due to the US embargo on Cuba. It was produced with US $45,000 and won 47 prizes. The distribution was managed through Film Movement (US), Vivarto (Poland) and the Epicentre Films & Latido Films Alliance (France/ Spain) outside of Cuba. None of the profits from this distribution reached the film's production crew (Cremata Malberti, J. C. *Interview with Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti*, Personal Communication 15/07/15). Even so, as the director has pointed out, the film was distributed in Greece, France, Russia, Germany, Mexico and the United States. Latido Films and QUAD were also associate distributors (*Archipelagoes and Contellations* documentary, min. 20:34).

Many critics see *Viva Cuba* as a pioneering work on different levels: its extensive portrayal of the Cuban landscape – even if not the first Cuban *road movie*, as *Guantanamera* predates it (Stock, 2009: p. 159) – the work with child actors, its production based on a very small crew – something unusual for fictions – and, particularly, the fact that it went ahead regardless of the lack of support from the ICAIC for its production. In a fundamental and most extensive essay about this film – also one that uses a long interview with Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti as its primary source – Ann Marie Stock argues that the film vigorously avoids taking sides in the opposition it portrays, that of the revolutionary Cubans against the counterrevolutionary Cubans at the end of the Special Period. As this scholar sees it, the film plays with the overwhelming reference to the revolution to go beyond it, and explores the characters' "desires to locate themselves [in a] quest for community [that] resonates for viewers everywhere" (Stock, 2009: p. 157). In this sense, the "different possibilities of the forms and configurations of investment, emplacement and orientation, change and security, attention and mattering, pleasure, desire, and emotions" (Grossberg, 2012: p. 34) switch along with the characters' search for a community, one that can be safely described as *cubanía* (Cubaness). The film "abounds" in iconography that exerts "the country's right to exist" (Fehimovic, 2015: p. 504); the question is how much of that *cubanía* derives from the iconic legacy of the revolution, and how much overflows into imageries that existed before the revolution. Stock highlights how

notably "absent from its dialogue are the words 'revolution', 'Fidel', 'United States' and 'Miami'"; her analysis of the film supports the director's idea of it being 'neutral', however evident in the conflict's *mise-en-scène* the revolutionary references appear.

Stock herself, as well as other critics,[42] observe how the beginning of the story presents the school's rituals to endorse the revolution. From there on, the contrasts that built between the families of the two child protagonists show the nuances of contemporary Cuban culture. Both children and their families are portrayed in a mirror game. While Malú's shiny and pink backpack seems imported, Jorgito's is an old-fashioned maroon sack, while Malú's mother lives in a rather deteriorated house – possibly a sign of negligence, since the mother's life seems to be somewhere else – Jorgito's family home is well painted and refurbished, showing care and work; while Malú's mother lives with her aunt and – as we discover later on – has married a "foreigner", Jorgito's parents live together and follow the ideals of the revolutionary government, they do so having come from the provinces to the capital to serve their country, as we find out later on. Saying the revolution is absent from the film is inaccurate as its cultural framework is taken as one of the portrayed sides that contrasts in a wider representation of contemporary Cuba; in other words, the references to the revolution are half of the scenario. In this sense the film is about the complexity of taking a standpoint within the challenges contemporary Cubans face, as well as the borders of the culture derived from different historical stages. For instance, Elegguá appears as a figure derived from the Yoruba religions – present on the island through the syncretic connection between Catholic beliefs and those of the enslaved persons – the *güije* is an element of the folkloric (Spanish) colonial culture and the game of war the children play is a re-enactment of the battles which led to Cuba's independence from Spain. Both children are presented within a fight that seems like a childish love game: deriving from a child's battle, in which Jorgito and his friends are pretending to be Cuban and Spanish soldiers, its representation plays with the expectations of a global audience that would expect revolutionary battles in lieu of that other confrontation, which is less important from a contemporary perspective. The battles for Cuban independence, which occurred during the last years of the nineteenth century, are virtually invisible within the present imaginary of the island, partly because of the distance in time and partly because their

[42] For instance, the readings Dunja Fehimovic (2015) and Georgia Seminet (2011) provide of this film both point to that direction. The latter states "There are several examples in *Viva Cuba* that stress the priority the Cuban state gives to the formation of a common cultural foundation in its children, and though there are clear references to the history of post-revolutionary Cuba, there are also examples that integrate the shared history of Cubans before the ideological schisms exacerbated by the Revolution that led to exile and massive migration" (p. 192).

historical significance has faded as a result of the relevance of the more recent battles and confrontations experienced by Cuba in its twentieth century revolution.

Due to the focus on *cubanía*, and because it features children as their protagonists, *Viva Cuba* also voices an open question about Cuba's future. It opens up the discussion about what can be regarded as strictly Cuban cultural particularities and where their borders lie. In doing so, the narrative and *mise-en-scène* play with references that mainly resonate with local audiences but are read at another level from a global perspective. The road-movie genre appears to be a crucial aspect of the movie, underpinning its production scheme and its reception. As Sánchez Prado points out, the road movie genre delves uniquely into Latin America, not as a mere adaptation from the Hollywood formula that since the 1960s has been "intimately related to the particular global capitalist assemblages constructed around the economic and symbolic primacy of the USA" (2016: p. 66) or as a portrayal of an alleged modernity with which the genre has "established from its beginnings a tight connection" (Garibotto & Pérez, 2016: p. 12). Adapted to the Latin American landscapes, the road movie has shifted its focus from the material support of the vehicles, highways and changing scenes to the particular characters from the region – those living outside the metropolis – their questions and priorities and particularly their relation to local and regional concerns, as well as the borders that have been placed for their representation (Garibotto & Pérez, 2016). Cremata Malberti in effect builds a road movie on the island, travelling from Havana to Punta de Maisí, in Eastern Baracoa, where Jorgito and Malú flee to look for her father and ask him to preclude her mother from taking her away. The film, set on the whole island's geography, depicts Cuba from within Havana as well as outside the city, portraying people from various social classes as well as a variety of religious and dogmatic beliefs which underpin the commitment to the revolution's heroes as well as to *santería*[43] and Catholic figures – a paradoxical mix on this socialist island. The plot commences with a fake war, started by the children through their game and ends with a real one between their parents, who apparently have very different destinies for their children in mind and fail to agree on how to keep them united.

Vicky Unruh observes how the disruption in *Viva Cuba*'s narrative does not come from a material breakdown – on the contrary, "*Viva*'s train, planes and automobiles seem to be running just fine" (2016: p. 88). The disruption Unruh notes comes from the erosion of the children's

[43] Established as a spiritual practice that brought Western African beliefs into Roman Catholic structures, Santería is a syncretistic series of rituals. The name literally means the "worship of saints" and emerged during the time of the Spanish and Portuguese empires which sprung upon the Atlantic coasts of the Americas. Santería is particularly widespread in Brazil and Cuba.

friendship when they face exhaustion, thirst and hunger: from the dissolution of the community. The film spotlights how this suspension affects the future generation in particular, and it ends when the road – the island, the imagined community, the location, the territory – breaks off, placing both its protagonists in focus, while the adults remain blurred in the back when a wave overtakes the children. Unruh sees this aesthetic decision in *Viva Cuba* as simultaneously highlighting "the obvious fact that Cuba is an island," while clarifying that whatever may come after belongs to Jorgito and Malú, rather that "their predecessors" (both Unruh, 2016: p. 90), that is to say, the owners of the revolutionary vs. counterrevolutionary dispute.

The film's trajectory came from the experience Cremata Malberti had had with *Candela*, his previous film, but its journey began even earlier as a result of his experience and networking since the 1980s, when he started his film career as a student at the EICTV. He was "one of the first cineastes to cross the line and make films inside and outside the state-supported film institute" (Stock, 2009: p. 150). Cremata Malberti's authorial identity sways along a liminal space as his themes have constructed him simultaneously as "'Cuban' filmmaker working to enhance the island's national culture and a transnational auteur engaged with global cinema practices" (Stock, 2009: p. 150) – hence *Viva Cuba*'s rhetoric is intertwined simultaneously for local and global audiences.[44]

Throughout the film the protagonists appear to live in a dream-like world for children. They freely play in the Havana streets during the afternoon, have all their meals and attend a school that teaches them basic demography, history, physiology, mathematics and even the *danzón* steps. They walk freely, immersed in a geography of astonishing sunsets and magical constellations, before the big question arises: What happens next? What follows childhood? Cremata brings their infancy to the *mise-en-scène* through dialogue, with a very significant one being when Malú tells Jorgito her mother wants to take her to a foreign country. In the middle of the drama, as the girl explains her worries to her friend, the boy tries to understand what that means and naïvely asks: *Entonces, ¿no vas a bailar en el acto del fin de curso?* (min. 20:08) – "That means you won't dance at the end-of-the-course ball?" – at their age the future does not exist beyond the end of the school year.

[44] From 2016, and due to a confrontation with the Cuban government based on censorship of his work, Cremata Malberti, changed his residency to Miami from where he writes nostalgic letters about his longing to come back to the island. From the information available on Cibercuba it is unclear whether his return to the island depends on paperwork from the US or the Cuban government (Cibercuba, 2019).

The one place where harmony is missing in the lives of Malú and Jorgito is their homes. The narrative insists on portraying failed fatherhoods: Malú's father is absent, while Jorgito's is aggressive and leaves all the housework to his wife, as she resents in their constant arguments. The film also shows the inevitable transgressions the children will undergo in their life journey as they grow up. An interesting example of this is when they reach the ocean in Varadero and Malú undresses to go into the water. Jorgito explains his father wouldn't allow him to bathe in his underwear, which is all he is wearing. After a moment of reflection and carefully looking around – in case his father is there – Jorgito decides to follow Malú, and enters into her sea bath.

Viva Cuba brings a combination of Afro-Cuban rhythms, drum pace and playful flutes and an occasional piano solo to a story that aims to represent a culturally condensed picture that portrays a Cuban society from beyond the boundaries of Havana and – perhaps more poignantly – from a child's point of view. It is a gaze that partially understands the historic confrontations and political structures that ruin a colourful life. If the classic road movie genre highlights and celebrates the signs of modernity (technology, infrastructure, connectiveness, trade), this particular adaptation of the formula stresses the caveats of an island that has been excluded from the advantages of the period, changing the focus from the material precarity to the questions of how human connectedness, location and perspective affect the social project. At another level, that is both obvious and crucial, the film focusses on the physical border of that potential future, which is not so much conditioned by political decisions but by physical geography, even if the children's drama is conditioned by political decisions.

The film's distribution began in European theatres, and the festival circuit brought *Viva Cuba* to over forty festivals across four continents. According to Cremata, its attributes as a family movie – one that has no sex or violence – showed a different face as well as the new landscapes of Cuba; it has opened several doors for him, more than any other film he produced, and has been screened at the *Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* in Havana and subsequently on the Cuban circuit. However, without there being a legal framework in place to protect subsequent Cuban films, it became difficult for Cremata to repeat this journey with other films. Cremata Malberti reflects on this saying the reason why "we are fighting for a Cinema Law is that we need to re-invest the resources made by one movie into the next one" (Cremata Malberti, J. C. *Interview with Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti*, Personal Communication 15/07/15; *Archipelagoes and Constellations* documentary, 2019: min.18:14). This is something that has not yet happened in Cuba, moreover due to the later discussions over that specific law, Cremata Malberti is now living in exile in Miami (Cibercuba, 2019).

I will refer to the process that the project for a Cuban Cinema Law has undergone and the discussions around contemporary Cuban art policies and their institutions in Chapter Two, however, it is not redundant to say the regional circulation is as limited for Cuban films as it is for those from the isthmus; the Cinergia Fund which operated as one of the concrete sponsors for Cremata Malberti's film has not been available since 2015 and the political changes undergone by the island and its relationship with the United States have left a confusing panorama for the island as well as for the region.[45] The impossibility of funding films within the Cuban institutions gave way to a pioneering financial scheme and to a transnational distributive network that even if embedded within the scheme by which Cremata Malberti and his crew generates value – the film tha has achieved most awards in the last decade – its gains remain hostage of geopolitical relations and businesses held by third parties.

All these circumstances add to the the broken network that operates in the region, particularly in terms of market for film production, which I refer to as archipelagic financial and political policies that tear apart basic structures to recover financially and reinvest, allowing for sustainable production practices and by these means pushing trained practitioners to pursue their career in more suitable locations – which means, within the NICL structure, industrial cinematographic centres –; on an oppositional trend, however, the characters portrayed in *Viva Cuba* are as skeptical of migration as those in the following films. Malú and Jorgito share with Yuma and Claudia a commitment to the territory (in this case insular) where they configure an investment and emplacement, in which they find security (Grossberg, 2012: p. 34), despite the political hostilities. The controversy towards this agression lays in the fact that, from the children's point of view, they come from unresolved conflicts that came from previous generations while outside the screen the director himself has, recently, declared the tensions to be an ongoing problem that overwhelm basic life stability. The characters in *La Yuma* and *Princesas rojas* continue to pose the questions suggested by Malú and Jorgito in the sense that their traditional family patterns do not fit their life challenges, while at the same time political negotiations stand firm against the possibility of leaving a space that is culturally enjoyable and allows for a defense of the local.

[45] This centres on Obama's announcement for the US to open up relations with Cuba, then Trump winning the elections and reversing all the progress towards diplomatic relations between the two countries.

1.7 *La Yuma*: Intersectionalities after a twenty-year drought

According to Florence Jaugey, sufficient conditions to produce cinema were absent in Nicaragua during the last couple of decades of the twentieth century[46] as "the conditions, whether economic or technical, to produce films [in] Nicaragua did not exist" (no [había] ningunas condiciones ni economicas [sic], ni técnicas para producir cine [en] Nicaragua (2008)). Jaugey, a filmmaker of French origin, and established in Nicaragua since 1989, had worked on audiovisual productions with her partner Frank Pineda for twenty years before pulling together the resources for her first fiction feature. As her previous work had placed her and her team at the forefront of Nicaragua's storytellers, Jaugey used this reputation to build a series of documentaries about incest, migration and children's rights in the isthmic country. The short documentary about the ruins of *Cinema Alcázar* was an allegoric portrayal of Nicaraguan history – it is set in a theatre that had remained in ruins since the 1972 earthquake – and it gained her international renown.

The precarious circumstances in which that first short was made changed dramatically, as since the beginning of the twenty-first century it has been possible to record image and sound through digital means in an inexpensive manner. However, the circulation of cultural productions remains to this day as severely controlled by the majors as in Costa Rica (See Table 1). Faced with the absence of state support, and the hurdles to implementing an existing Cinema Law, Jaugey reached out for private and regional funding. The Cinergia Fund gave more than US $30,000 for the development, production and post-production of her first feature. Ibermedia supported the project through collaborative schemes via Mexico and Spain, and the *l'Ile de France* Fund, which operates and is funded by French taxes, was approached by the filmmaker; this last overture proved the most successful since she is a French national. Some thirty-five collaborators worked on *La Yuma*, as opposed to her previous project, *Cinema Alcázar*, on which approximately ten professionals collaborated during the final stages of production. The volume of professionals involved increased production costs from US $5,000 (the cost of the short documentary) to US $700,000 (the approximate cost of the feature).

La Yuma is the first fiction feature film made in Nicaragua in twenty years. It tells the story of a girl from a marginal neighbourhood in Managua who wants to be a boxer but then becomes

[46] From 1980 the Nicaraguan government that took control after the revolution installed the *Instituto Nicaragüense de Cine* (INCINE), a state organisation created to support the production and distribution of the nascent film industry but also to promote documentaries that would spread the revolutionary discourse. The INCINE was transformed into the *Asociación Nicaragüense de Cinematografía* (ANCINE) in 1988, then to be defunded and merged into a more general organisation: the *Instituto Nicaragüense de Cultura* (INC) in 1990.

interested in a young, middle-class journalist who at first seems to return her affection but subsequently rejects her, even going as far as to stigmatise and fear her. The film's world premiere was at the Biarritz Amérique Latine Festival in October 2009. It then went on a small festival tour (Cartagena and Malaga being two main stops) and screened in Managua in April 2010. According to Jaugey *La Yuma* was a box-office success. The film was shown for six weeks in Managua and, as stated by the filmmaker, had more than one million internet downloads.[47] Those downloads were illegal and proved that had the movie asked for "just 1 cent per download," it would have recouped the cost of the shoot (Jaugey, 2008, my translation; see *Archipelagoes and Contellations* documentary, 2019: min.32:26).

The production cost of this film was funded by one hundred small and medium Nicaraguan businesses, ranging from *Pollos Estrella* – chicken farmers – to major beer companies, like *Toña*, to the telecommunications transnational *Movistar,* to *British Tobacco*. The production team was directed by Jaugey and drew upon every available fund in Central America and, indeed, in the Hispanic world. *La Yuma* starts its plot placing the audience at a baseball game. As critic Raciel del Toro observes, this decision shows the filmmaker's determination to vindicate Nicaraguan culture through audiovisual representation – a highly relevant action in a country that had been lacking a feature film for more than twenty years. This film was described as a "Nicaraguan cultural claim; to give a face in terms of sound and image to a country that had not produced a feature film since 1988" (del Toro, 2011).[48]

In Jaugey's film, Yuma, the protagonist starts training with Polvorita, a well-known coach in Managua. The film is in essence a social drama in which the protagonist, interpreted by Alma Blanco, endures the rough social circumstances of a triple discrimination: as a result of socio-economics, as well as her gender and her age. These factors crystallise and become part of a coherent representation of the character construction of the film's characters "and their conflicts, as well as attempting to open a window on Nicaraguan society" (Salas Murillo, 2018: p. 235). Boxing becomes a pretext used to develop a second narrative that foregrounds the story

[47] This number did not surprise the Jaugey, as the 2005 Nicaraguan Census (INEC, 2005) estimates that about 2,000,000 Nicaraguans are living abroad.

[48] It is precisely the idea of the "family album" that underpins the need and urgency for a screen representation of small countries whose "projection to the world [still today] depends on the CNN news broadcast" ("[cuya] proyección hacia el mundo [continúa dependiendo] de las coberturas noticiosas de CNN" (del Toro, 2011)). Metaphorically and literally, the Central American countries continue on the cultural domination's objectified side, which holds the mediatic relations that monopolise televised broadcasts as well as cinematographic distribution. Del Toro's extended quote states: "[L]a reivindicación cultural nicaragüense; darle un rostro en imagen y sonido a un país que no producía un largometraje de ficción desde hacía más de 20 años […] Luego de que Ramiro Lacayo rodó *El espectro de la guerra* en 1988" (del Toro, 2011). This critic writes from a perspective which distances itself from those appreciations of *La Yuma* that promote the film commercially by adapting it to prefabricated discourses on development policies (Cfr. Gálvez, Lewis, Rodger & Woolcock, Ureña).

of Ernesto, a young journalist who falls in love with Yuma, on the one hand, and that of her stepfather, mother, and siblings, on the other – there is a sting in the tail of this sub-plot in that the stepfather is portrayed as abusing all of them.

With the exception of Ernesto, the life of every single character in this movie depends on the informal economy, which is represented as the last survival resource within the neoliberal model, the legal framework and the political decisions made during the governments of structural adjustment. Ernesto's family is a representation of the economic network that supports the inhabitants of Nicaragua. His father, as some 500,000 over the last decade and 100,000 during the last crisis, left the country leaving the economy heavily dependent on remmitances. In his lines Ernesto mentions how his family lives on what his father sends, pointing towards a common survival practice for the middle classes. It is notorious how no other character mentions transnational migration in any form, even if Yuma's last appearance suggests a move to another town, allegedly within the same country.

In her previous short films, Jaugey had portrayed a city withdrawn from any development path, both at the time of the dictatorship and during the eleven years the revolution lasted as well as across the three different neoliberal governments that continued in power from 1990 onwards. It is important to highlight that *La Yuma* was produced during the time of transition to the *new sandinismo*, which proved to be useless for the majority of Nicaragua's population. The zeitgeist of these times is the historical backdrop to the plot.[49]

Violence is shown with particular cruelty in the case of Yuma's younger sister, Marjorie, an eleven year-old, whom the stepfather locks up and abuses sexually, as the ending of the movie suggests. The main character deals with such aggression by running away from home, thereby taking ownership of her own and her sibling's life. The gaze articulated in the film is built from a woman's perspective, describing different forms of exclusion, discrimination, sexual and domestic abuse. However, it is not presented from a perspective of paralysis or discouragement; rather it is portrayed through the energy of a young female boxer who searches for "emancipation and the right to work, to own decisions and to free will" (del Toro, my translation).[50] The expressive tools of naturalism are used explicitly in the film: chronological narration, general establishing shots, medium shots to show the character in focus, along with

[49] Based on a recent account that began in April 2018, Nicaragua's uprising of the students brought the country to a political and social crisis that left 400 dead - most of the victims very young adults - and 700 detained, 600 of them liberated as I write these lines after 8 months in prison.
[50] "[L]a emancipación, el derecho al trabajo, a la decisión propia y al libre albedrío."

accompanying travelling shots. None of the actors are professionals and in many cases (like that of Polvorita) they embody their real-life "persona" in the movie.

A range of characters portrayed as diverse are paraded on the screen: alongside the child abuser, there are gang members, business women and sport coaches. Then Ernesto appears – he is an archetype of the middle class that has inherited the legacy of *sandinismo* sustaining "a romantic nearly naïve perspective" (del Toro, my translation).[51] Like the gang members, he does not appreciate boxing, and refuses to acknowledge the tough life that Managua´s marginal neighbourhoods endure. Yuma is a fighter and, as such, she strikes back at the environmental violence that surrounds her daily life. Through her gaze the audience recognises her space and her neighbourhood as marginal, impoverished and filled with violence, and that of Ernesto's as a middle-class university and professional environment. The relationship they build eventually ends, taking them onto two separate paths. Their short love affair "ends up being weaker than the inequalities that erode the social network: the portrayal is that of a Nicaragua relegated to be the second poorest economy in the occidental hemisphere, with a high crime index and a population violently divided by different classes" (del Toro, my translation); inequalities between a new political and economic class embodied by the government representatives (from the *nuevo sandinismo*) and a general working class that sticks to the informal economy.[52] The clash between both strata has built an economic and political crisis that still shows an institutional paralysis (El Confidencial, 2019).

Within the film, the family is a failed institution, even if it is shown as accepted under the circumstances depicted in the film, and yet – as we eventually see – it is brought to a new network of relations in which the protagonist protects her siblings by assuming a motherly role. The government is not even mentioned; it is not an authority that can be trusted. For instance, when Ernesto is robbed (by Yuma's brother), he does not try to make a formal complaint to the police on the grounds that there is nothing that can be done about it. The robbers, abusers or delinquents are all characters close to Yuma, even if she does not fit those character descriptors herself. The rural spaces which are so predominant in Nicaraguan literature, music and previous cinematic works, are excluded from this film, with the exception of one sequence.[53] All there is left is an urban space observed from "a lens that enters without

[51] "[P]erspectiva romántica, casi ingenua."
[52] "[A]caba siendo más débil que las desigualdades que lastran la sociedad donde buscan un espacio: una Nicaragua relegada a la segunda economía más pobre del hemisferio occidental, con altos índices de criminalidad y una población dividida en clases violentamente diferenciadas."
[53] Some of the most visible literature that describes the particular Nicaraguan geography with dexterity includes Claribel Alegría, José Coronel Urtrecho and Pablo Antonio Cuadra's poetry and Sergio Ramírez Mercado and

restrictions into the rivers of leftovers, the improvised tin houses, the unpaved or dirt streets" (del Toro, my translation),[54] where commerce is highly informal and includes pawn shops and numerous stolen electronic gadgets.

Many scholars interpret this film as a representation of the gender and class struggles that construct a power framework which is better understood from the theoretical perspective of intersectionality. Bértold Salas Murillo (2018: 239), for instance, finds that "discrimination practices form and feed into each other" in his analysis, and he coincides with del Toro in that "the exclusion suffered by the subject in question, Yuma, is better understood when simultaneously considering her gender, her socio-economical [sic] capacities and limitations, and her age" (Salas Murillo, 2018: p. 239).

The film is a representation of the vulnerable yet courageous and diverse marginal classes in contemporary Nicaragua, a country where survivors resist the numerous ways of the violence that state, society and patriarchy impose on them. The aesthetic choices made by the film director draw a complex picture with very modest traces that show the director's concerns in a genuine and grounded manner. The film is at times very close to a documentary format, yet it contains enough elements to build an artistic voice with respect to the socio-historic issues. *La Yuma* refers to an audience who have an affective connection with Nicaragua and who want to see a photo album from a place that was cinematographically invisible until now. Sports, music, language and even the variety of characters all establish a discrete variation of Latin American themes and narratives which are still rooted in traditional naturalism. The implied spatial configuration of investment, placement and orientation converts the migrant as well as the local Nicaraguan peoples into the central focus of the film. Indeed, in order to appreciate the film, the audience has to first appreciate the imaginaries embedded in the country; this local frame portrayed by means of documentary language is complemented by the global and mainstream frame of the sports genre.

Gioconda Belli's narratives; these authors bring the mysticism of volcanic landscapes, connecting characters with the lakes and indigenous heritage through legends that portray a strong relationship with nature. Carlos and Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy's lyrics as well as the painting from the Solentiname community supported by Ernesto Cardenal are a homage to Nicaragua's agrarian life. In *La Yuma* Nicaragua's bucolic side appears in one single sequence when Ernesto and Yuma hitchhike to the lake beach, where they spend the night together.

[54] "[E]l lente [que] se adentra sin tabúes entre los ríos de desechos, las casas de lata improvisadas, las calles adoquinadas o de tierra que nunca han visto un gramo de asfalto."

1.7.1 The sports and boxing genre

The narrative framework in *La Yuma* has been analysed as a documentary register of the life of Managuan residents, particularly those from the marginal neighbourhoods. This, coupled with the power dynamics that arise from three different characteristics represented by Virginia Roa (Yuma) as the protagonist – her condition as a woman and young person of a struggling class –, establish a double narrative stream that is structurally embedded in the mainstream sports genre. The documentary characteristics are intertwined with "the generic filmic conventions of boxing films (camera work and editing)" (Salas Murillo, 2018: p. 239) and added to a plot that establishes a dialogue with the expectations of a sports movie: social adversities have to be overcome and training sessions and climactic fights need to occur.

According to Salas Murillo, even if the film very much relies on the boxing genre, its theme "weaves a plot of complex relationships and social tensions, offering an ending that differs from others of this genre" (2018: p. 234). In his analysis Salas Murillo observes that filming Yuma's relation and fascination with Ernesto, a middle-class journalist, draws attention to the class contradictions that exist in Nicaragua today. The young woman's aspiration is to achieve autonomy, not to be the best boxer in the world. In this sense, boxing, as her escape from a dysfunctional family, and/ or her brief love affair are all means to break away from the neighbourhood in which she lives.[55]

Some of the cinematographic techniques used in the film resemble the strategies of the realistic aesthetic in which "the camera highlights poverty through a focus on clothing, housing and street scenes" (Salas Murillo, 2018: pp. 234-235). At the same time the film fixes its gaze on a contemporary time that is marked by a sad historical heritage – the social injustices suffered by Nicaragua's poor for more than a century. The backdrop represented in the film appears either as an impoverished, marginal or dysfunctional city, where the protagonist moves from a precarious neighbourhood represented by tin houses and dirt floors to a greener, even if nonetheless still modest area, where Ernesto attends university and works as a journalist; there

[55] The attempts to achieve freedom that this movie points to are listed by Bértold Salas Murillo: "On the one hand, that the protagonist leaves a professional competition and begins to work in a circus confirms the anomalous – even freakish – character of female boxing. On the other hand, however, if the reading assumes that the film is not about boxing, but about a young woman who finds autonomy, the reading then becomes more optimistic. In this sense, in his talk at the First Film Conference of Central American Cinema, Jorge Chen called attention to the fact that *La Yuma*'s promotional material did not portray the protagonist as a boxer, but was rather shown on the street, smiling and lifting her thumb. The circus' name, Libertad ('Freedom') and the name of its owner, Salvador ('Saviour') confirm the emancipatory tone underpinning the film's conclusion. *La Yuma* begins and ends with a game, and always in the same space" (2018: p. 246).

is also a brief interlude when the characters escape to the coast, after hitchhiking. This is the only sequence in which the characters are joyful, they reach a level of intimacy and connection, erasing the class and gender divides so prominently drawn in the rest of the story.

The piles of trash and broken streets are drawn through panoramic camera shots that draw attention insistently to the generalised poverty. This existential precarity is underlined in the dialogues Yuma and her friends – the Cuban or Ms. Scarlet – have, in which they confirm how they eke out a living. They are all supported by informal jobs (such as second hand clothes sales, prostitution or strip dancing), and even Ernesto, a middle class man, lives on the remittances which his father, a working class immigrant in the US, sends him. Nicaragua is depicted as a country that has, over the course of more than forty years, transitioned from a dictatorship to neoliberal governments and is currently trapped by a new authoritarian regime run by the same politicians who led the revolution. Thus the state of the country depicted in *La Yuma*, set at a time that occurred nine years before the present time of the film, is portrayed as a prognosis for the social tragedy Nicaragua is experiencing today, in 2018.

The depiction of Nicaragua in the film incorporates some ingredients of the genre of the sports film, containing elements of the documentary and social realism as stage props that allow the director to explore socially significant themes such as the resistance towards migration, the daily struggles of an impoverished class in Managua, as well as the overwhelming weight of the patriarchal system bearing down on a very specific character, who represents the courage, strength and creativity of Nicaragua's poor classes who manage to cling on, despite being surrounded by the ruins of a failed national project.

Just like *Viva Cuba*, *La Yuma* was funded by Cinergia. Both films portray specific social struggles from which an easy answer is to migrate, leaving the tensions (in the case of *Viva Cuba*) and the poverty (in the case of *La Yuma*) behind. *Princesas rojas*, also funded by Cinergia, explores a longer historical narrative, that of the confrontation between the contras and the *sandinistas* in the 1980s. It does so on the basis of another film genre – the thriller – portraying an involuntary migration at a time when the meaning of being a *sandinista* switched from the defenders of democracy to a threat to the regional hegemony.

1.8 *Princesas rojas*: Memories of the Central American Wars

Crucial to the aim of bringing Hollywood formulas to Central American characters and stories, two aspects stand out as being key factors allowing a film director to reach out to local audiences: (i) the construction of a star system encompassing actors, technicians and producers and (ii) the insertion of the stories into the convention of a well-known genre in order to ease the audience's insertion into the story. Both practices assume the audience will *purchase* the film if it recognises (and likes) all or some of the professionals involved in its making, thus positioning the film as a commodity and giving it the resources to operate as such. *Princesas rojas* (Astorga Carrera, 2013) exhibits the second of these characteristics since it revamps the war genre, foregrounding recent Central American history while revitalising the narrative thread from which the plot derives.

Princesas rojas appears in the midst of a prolonged discussion over the generic conventions of testimony. The film clearly uses the testimonial function as a rhetorical strategy for the plot. Generally speaking the testimonial function exhibits three basic characteristics that distance it from other discursive forms: (i) it represents the individual as a synecdoche of an identifiable collective, (ii) it reconstructs facts from the subaltern's point of view and (iii) it demonstrates an anticanonical trait. Each of these characteristics show up through a semantic web that is proof in itself of how the testimonial subjects have been "asediados" (beleaguered) in their right to represent the stories from their own point of view.

Testimony as a convened genre may be described as a post-literary text (John Beverley) or a story designed to recover "collective memory and transmit the hidden or repressed history" (Zavala, 1990: p. 260). Many scholars celebrate the testimonial function as one that clarifies aspects of the historical narrative by displacing or destabilizing modern discourse (Larsen, 1995; Yúdice, 1991). Taking this discussion a step further, the neo-historical perspective (Mackenbach, 2012; Osterkamp, 2008) highlights multiple narratives that display an "aesthetic reconciliation tied to the consciousness of fictionality"[56] (Mackenbach, 2012: p. 234, my translation) in discussions around the testimonial function in regards to its definition, authenticity and vitality throughout half a century. As Mackenbach concludes:

> The canonisation of testimony in the 1970s and 1980s has ceded the way to what we could call a new complexity or apprehensibility shown in heterogeneous and multiple trends within testimonial literature itself. With post-revolutionary

[56] "[U]na estética de la reconciliación vinculada con la conciencia de la ficcionalidad."

> testimony, the use of testimonial elements in recent fictional texts and in autobiographical, documental and explicitly fictional memories has definitely produced a shift in the paradigm. The new testimonial literature's distinctive trait relies on having lost faith in the "one" historical truth (in a similar way the new historical novel has), the abandonment of the claim of representativeness in the name of the subaltern and the recovery of the aspiration for literariety. Individualisation, fragmentation, relativisation and fictionalisation are some of the characteristics seen in the majority of these texts. With that, the testimony's function in the construction of national identities, as well as its role as a privileged place within the master national narrations have changed. (2015: p. 424, my translation)[57]

The concept of testimony, as a genre, recovers actuality as it switches to testimony as a function present in autofictions such as *Princesas rojas*. It no longer pretends to be a historical truth and abandons the aspiration to fit into a homogeneous metanarrative or unique representation. According to Mackenbach, the role of the testimony shifts from a master narrative into a place of relativity. The testimony "becomes a textual space occupied by the marginalised, oppressed or, at least, those affected by the revolutionary process itself, showing their identity and 'forgotten' history" (Mackenbach, 2013: p. 239, my translation).[58] The aspiration to offer a totalising narrative becomes outdated within a multiple narrative flow that constantly negotiates meanings from the margins to the centre. Testimonial techniques remain relevant, as a re-fictionalised narration, "not in the shape of texts that pretend to build one or 'the' memory, but as those that tell either collective memories or individual ones in a plural form" (Mackenbach, 2013: p. 239, my translation).[59]

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[57] "La canonización del testimonio en los años setenta y ochenta ha cedido el paso a lo que podríamos llamar una nueva complejidad o inabarcabilidad como se ha visto en las heterogéneas y múltiples tendencias dentro de la literatura testimonial misma. Con el testimonio posrevolucionario, la utilización de elementos testimoniales en textos ficcionales recientes y en las memorias autobiográficas, documentales y al mismo tiempo explícitamente ficcionales se ha producido, definitivamente, un cambio de paradigma. El rasgo distintivo de esta novísima literatura testimonial es el haber perdido la fe en «una» verdad histórica (de modo similar a la nueva novela histórica), el haber abandonado el reclamo de representatividad en nombre del subalterno y el haber recuperado la pretensión de literariedad. Individualización, fragmentación, relativización y ficcionalización caracterizan la mayoría de dichos textos. Con ello, ha cambiado también la función del testimonio en la construcción de la identidad nacional, su rol como lugar privilegiado de las narraciones magistrales nacionales."

[58] "[S]e convierte en un espacio textual que es ocupado por los marginados, oprimidos o por lo menos, los afectados por el proceso revolucionario mismo, para dar a conocer su identidad e historia 'olvidadas'."

[59] "[Y]a no en forma de textos que pretenden construir una o la memoria, sino que relatan memorias colectivas y/ o individuales, en plural."

This paradigm-shift brought a space for appreciation of the testimony as a subgenre inscribed in the interdependency between narrative instances; its heterogeneous trait allows various viewpoints to speak.

1.8.1 Theme and register

While the main drama of *Princesas rojas* is presented as the tension (and splitting off) experienced in Central America during the 1980s between the factions that had worked on the *sandinista* front clandestinely and their former comrades, its filmic register, as a fiction – a thriller/ epoch drama – reveals it to be, ultimately, a cinematographic narration inspired and anchored in recent Central American history. The topic is particularly complex since the mentioned tension on both sides, and in the context of the cold war period, reveals the high risks to the lives of the main characters, as well as that of other guerrilleros and their humanity as common for Central American citizens of the time. In this sense the film breaks the Manichean preconceptions of guerrilleros as terrorists.

Princesas rojas tells the story of Claudia (11) and her sister Antonia (8), the daughters of the *sandinista* militants Magda and Felipe, who were operating clandestinely from Costa Rica after the *contra*'s onslaught in the 1980s .[60] Magda and Felipe take their daughters to settle in San José after the battle, which exposes them to cold-war tensions, and estrangement. Magda

[60] As Víctor Hugo Acuña writes, from the beginning of the *sandinista* revolution the struggle was influenced by "two closely related ideological factors: the ideological affinity between the *sandinistas* and the regimes within the countries of 'real socialism' and the open hostility from the North American government, led by Ronald Reagan, to the Nicaraguan political experiment" (Acuña et al., 2000: 474, my translation). The actions of Reagan's government brought the *sandinistas* to a "policy of erosion through the support of the contra, while it blocked the country economically and financially" (Acuña et al. 2000: 482, my translation). The anguish and hopelessness provoked by these geopolitical confrontations frustrated the route to a social project and left instead a framework of neglected institutions during the years that followed. The *sandinista* revolution was won militarily in 1979, only then to cede space in 1990, when the political project lost strength after the *sandinista*-contras war. The *sandinista* movement became multiple political projects, such as the *Movimiento Renovador Sandinista* (MRS) or the official *nuevo sandinismo* that is currently led by Daniel Ortega and that faces serious human rights accusations from civil society. On a narrative level, Leonardo Astorga has recently balanced the opinions of what *sandinismo* stood for in public opinion. According to Astorga, "authors such as Kinzer and Victor Bulmer-Thomas have noted that the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional's* final and long term objective was to install (gradually and accordingly to the Nicaraguan society) a revolutionary regime of a socialist nature, while for other scholars like Edward A. Lynch the *sandinistas* "fought under the guise of moderation, nationalism and no alignment, their true totalitarian plans of turning Nicaragua into a second Cuba as soon as possible. It was so that the opposition between democracy and communism turned into (and has been) a theme within the Nicaraguan process" (2018: p. 65). By examining themes such as democracy, communism, foreign intervention and sovereignty in right-wing newspapers (such as *La Nación*), religious media (*Eco Católico*), university media (*Semanario Universidad*) and left wing periodicals (*Libertad*) in Costa Rica during the years between 1979 and 1981, Astorga argues that the *sandinistas* had the general support from all the news outlets while fighting against Somoza – who was depicted as the real threat to democracy before 1979 (2018: p. 77) – however, this support shifted, erasing the consensus and provoking a mediatic confrontation where *La Nación* mistrusted the revolutionary process while *Semanario* and *Libertad* identified their opinions with the *sandinistas* (2018: p. 70).

betrays the clandestine movement by fleeing to Miami and holding on to confidential information while Felipe undertakes a last mission that leaves him badly injured.

As a period film, *Princesas rojas* portrays a detailed adaptation of a specific slice of time. It contains carefully picked props, projection devices, phonographs, clothing, cars and candy wrappers, which succeed in their double task. On the one hand, these devices transport the audience to a specific time and space, that is to say Central America during the 1980s, and, on the other hand, this decision portrays the protagonist's priorities. As a girl, Claudia's attention is focused on entertainment, candy and the construction of her own identity, even if the adults drag her into an "understanding" of other registers.

Amidst all the theoretical approaches around the testimonial function of a text, it is important to point to *Princesas rojas*' plot and its structure as a typical archiplot (McKee, 1999), the industry's narrative formula: the story progresses in a linear fashion to reach two different peaks – a point of no return when Magda disappears and the climax when she ends up leaving for good. This plot-arc is suited to industrial cinematographic productions, where an advancement as well as an escalation are expected and it is through this narrative/ rhetorical strategy that the film regulates the historiography's literary phase, adding legibility and visibility to an unheard voice within the mainstream film genre.

This film's narration is knitted together via three elements: suspense (the mystery, the questions the audience is expected to pose based on the on-screen actions), the construction of the diegetic world through Claudia's point of view (her actions as well as the camera's perspective) and, finally, the sense of urgency. These elements are witnessed through Claudia as her gaze is constructed in a specific place "under siege, constrained by social, ideological and cultural structures that belong to the society preferred by the gaze" (Grüner, 2002: p. 2, my translation).[61] Age is also crucial to this particular story, as the scholar Valeria Grinberg-Pla notes: "the infant gaze adds precisely the necessary combination of curiosity and naïveness, allowing the articulation of a sometimes critical, sometimes ironic distance with regard to what happened" (2015, my translation).[62]

The suspense is constructed through a number of codes, many of which relate to the Soviet alliance. The girls do not seem to understand them fully, as we see when Claudia confesses to

[61] "[E]n un específico lugar […] que está en estado de sitio, constreñida por las estructuras sociales, ideológicas y culturales de la sociedad a la cual esta mirada da una particular preferencia."
[62] "La mirada de la infancia aporta precisamente el elemento necesario de curiosidad e ingenuidad que permite articular un distanciamiento, a veces crítico, a veces irónico, con respecto de lo ocurrido."

her music teacher (see *Archipelagoes and Constellations* documentary, 2019: min. 15:30), or are gathered in confusing references, such as when the girls discuss geography and Antonia insists that her mum told her Libya was "by Cuba's side" (min. 36), thereby confusing the political and geographical spaces. The suspense is built up through Magda's steps, her constant anger, disgust and frustration, the impression that she will do something radical (although this is left further undefined), her transit to the United States Embassy (min. 26), her sister's sudden appearance (min. 38), her decision to steal the passports she was falsifying as Ana later explains (min. 59). All these elements are unveiled from the point of view of an inquisitive (and fragmented) gaze, that is, Claudia's, and escalate until Magda herself provokes her own escape.

The testimonial function nuances the "official version" bringing elements to the picture that conflict it and introducing a diverse flow of narratives.[63] The protagonist establishes the narrative priorities from her infancy, which simultaneously represents the collective of descendants from the militants of the clandestine network. This group is excluded from institutions, rituals or frameworks wherein they might perform their catharsis, discharge the rage and the sadness that the violence of those years has provoked in them. A powerful way in which this film deals with these feelings is through music.

As a child, Claudia's character shows a keen aptitude for music. One of her strong traits is her love of singing. The first time she appears on screen she is mumbling *Pust vsegda budet* (*May There Always Be Sunshine*), a folkloric Russian song, to herself, from the back seat of the car in which her parents are bringing her to Costa Rica across the Nicaraguan border. That same tune will be present in Claudia's singing throughout the film. It is this song she translates for her cousins, when her aunt receives the news about her father's accident, and it is also the one that appears immediately after the epilogue while the credits run, making a circular narrative that guides the emphasis from the solitude of her singing, at the beginning, to the moment when she tries to share the tune with her closest community (her cousins), until the conclusion of the diegesis with the same frequency (the same song), this time sung by a children's chorus from the Soviet Radio and TV System. The main aim of this analysis has not been to focus on the specificity of the Soviet signs,[64] or the cultural or geographical distance of these to Central America. For our purposes, it is more important to note the link between this musical leitmotiv,

[63] According to Mackenbach, by the end of the 1980s there was a paradigm-shift in the writing style that accompanied the political-military shift: "[t]he testimonies – as the North American critic Barbara Harlow wrote – 'do not just narrate strategies to resist, but are in themselves one of those strategies'" (1999: 125, my translation from: "[l]os testimonios – así escribió la crítica norteamericana Barbara Harlow – 'no sólo relatan estrategias de resistencia; son en sí mismos una de estas estrategias'").

[64] The role played by this leitmotif has, indeed, already been analysed by Valeria Grinberg-Pla (2016).

showing the same tune in crucial parts of the plot whilst, on the one hand, the character transits from her solitude as an individual singing to the orchestration of a choir and, on the other, the unveiling of Claudia's impossibility to join that ensemble, as it is simultaneously strange and remote with no cultural bridges outside the political juncture.

Furthermore, Claudia builds her links with Costa Rica with the institution she finds there (the school) and the community (her cousins, her classmates) through that same attraction for music. Within the institution, in which multiple artistic options (dance, instrumental music, choir) are offered, Claudia chooses the choir. When this happens she listens to her teacher singing *Lascia ch'Io Pianga* (*Let Me Cry*), by Georg Friedrich Händel, of German origin. Though far from Central America, the song is immersed in a stream of classical tunes and it is distanced geographically, yet not culturally. The musical code announces a double intention: the need, firstly, to sublimate frustration, anger and resentment, as the story reiterates constantly, and secondly, to bring a profound sadness onto the stage that ends up revolving and closing the meaning through the tone of the song itself. Finally, as Grinberg-Pla has pointed out, it is through the intonation of another folkloric Soviet song (in this case *Beriozka*, or *Birch Tree* in English) that Claudia convinces her music teacher to allow her into school choir once she has unsuccessfully tried the musical scale following the teacher's piano.

Another tactical technique characteristic of the cinematographic language is evident in the machines that constantly stop working, such as the washing machine (broken from min. 23 onwards) or the family car that refuses to start when Felipe flees from one of the refuges as he has just noticed that Magda or another comrade (this detail remains open) has taken the money he had kept (min. 72). These objects in the film are always seen from Claudia's perspective. Their appearance works as a pretext for the adults to bring their point of view into the *mise-en-scène*, which for the film as a whole is marginal. For instance, when Magda's opinion is expressed with "[W]hat happens? this crap does not work" (min. 23) as an answer to Felipe when he unsuccessfully tries to calm her down by saying, "No, it is not a matter of fixing it, it is broken!" In an attack of rage, she begins to yell at him in front of their daughters as the washing machine becomes a metaphor for their relationship. In a car scene, Felipe talks to his daughters explaining why they have had to flee from the place where they were living. While the car seems broken, the girls look at their father sceptically, trying to understand the reason for them having to leave. Felipe repeatedly attempts to start up the car and while he does so, he uses a dramatic pause to disguise the political attack they have just suffered in the form of a robbery (min. 72).

Both in the scene of the broken washing machine as well as in that of the car, the camera's perspective starts with the parental figure, next it pauses with a medium two-shot of the girls, who react and question what is happening, and then finishes in an American three-shot of the girls and their mother. The scene at min. 23 shows how Magda pushes both girls through the house's hall, or with a same shot of the children and Felipe trapped inside the broken car in the case of the scene at minute 72.

Unlike the shots at the beginning of the film, where the house's space takes centre stage when the family first arrives in San José and show close-ups of every detail of the candy wrappers, books, frames, devices and decoration (of the ballerina and the matrioskas) placed on the shelves next to bullets; the cutaways accompanying the discussion reveal a contrast with human figures, always in two or three-shots and at a medium distance. While the adults' world is full of discussions and disagreements, that of the girls contains fragmented references to fantastic worlds and faraway places.

A strong sense of the characters' desires is brought about through the adroit use of *mise-en scène*. We quickly become aware of the characters' goals. Magda's plan to run away comes through in the plot in a chain of events, as does Claudia's aspiration to join the school choir. In the same way the film shows us through a specific building of the character's point of view, Claudia's aspirations for the collective, and this narrative vein opens a drive to the double intention between the characters. Magda's running away, described with a sense of suspense, is narrated through progressive elements as her frustration reveals, through Claudia's eyes, Magda appearing and vanishing, increasing the girls' anguish. Magda's abandonment of her family and, more importantly, the political project she had held hitherto with her husband, is slowly revealed. Her actions bounce into the children's perception, making their fear escalate beyond control. What Claudia fears the most is the separation of her parents and she tries to prevent that by finding attachment and community in her new school, cousins, and choir group. The urgency in Magda's actions, as she is desperate to run away, turns into the urgency the girls experience as they are desperate to exit the tense environment they are trapped in and stay in San José rather than follow their mother in her escape.

Claudia's singing vocation is constructed from min. 17 onwards, when she sees the choir teacher interpreting *Let Me Cry* through a peephole. Her desire becomes obvious when her friends try to teach her how to pray. After first asking God for a working washing machine (which her friends find unimportant), she prays for her wish to sing to come true (min. 24). Later in the story, the girl takes a singing test and then, after a couple of failed trials with

musical scales and an ambiguous answer from the teacher, she attempts singing *Beriozka* (*Birch Tree*) only to finally win a place in the school choir (min. 40). Her spot is soon at risk because of her repeated absences from rehearsals, but the conflict is resolved when her classmate Daniela is banned from singing lessons and she is required as a substitute (min. 63). From then on Claudia's singing is brought to story through the preparations for the concert. During the rehearsals (min. 70) in the last thirty minutes of the story, anguish triggered by Claudia's suspicion of her mother's abandonment comes back again through the unsolved issue of her dress for the big day (min.72), which is never ready. Claudia gives up wearing a dress different from the group as she slowly comes to realise that both the dress as well as the day of the choral performance will never come.

Both desires – Magda's to run away as well as Claudia's to sing – build up gradually throughout the film. In the first sixty minutes of the movie, the narration constructs this double urgency by staging the conflicted agendas mother and daughter have, which unfold through very concrete objects representing both characters' priorities: the scores in Claudia's case, the passports in Magda's. They eventually explode in the climax.

1.8.2 Testimony disguised as film

Claudia's story is intimately connected to the trauma of having lived through her parents' divorce (Astorga Carrera, L. *Interview with Laura Astorga Carrera*, Personal Communication 5/5/2015), but also the divorce from their political and life projects and, above all, the experience of the events that brought her into isolation. Her aspiration to belong to the choir, and the dramatic circle that is expressed via the music through the interpretation of the musical piece, *Pust vsegda budet solntse* (*May There Always Be Sunshine*), show her longing to overcome individual pain and find a new collective – that is, a generation of sons and daughters of Central American militants who fought and lost the wars and were condemned to silence within history's official writings. The shame of having lost the war against the contras, together with the obstacles in the blurred memory (Gould, 2016: p. 347) of their struggles has made many of the protagonists of these generations confused and caught them in rhetorical traps that doubted the veracity of their remembrances.

As a girl, Claudia appears as a subaltern in the film in the sense that even if she had wanted to, she would not have been able to adequately channel her story because of her age and her isolation, despite the fact that the events are presented as a trauma in her life. At the same time, even if the narration is built as a cinematographic lens that sustains a viewpoint in its affective

priorities, the details that end up being staged (through props, costumes and characters) and the main chaaracter's point of view construct a narrative that extends as a thread from the protagonist as a historical figure (and her memory) through the actors to the audience. The detailed close-ups of the candy wrappers, books, frames, devices and decoration (of the ballerina and the matrioskas) mentioned above place the angle on Claudia's gaze reaching for an audience that invests its emotions, to use Grossberg's definition of territory, in a political matrix that does not condemn the guerrilla fighters. This audience is again local and global at the same time and, above all, determined by a narrative framework that challenges the official historical version, bringing humanity to characters that had previously been stigmatised, as discussed in footnote 43 on Nicaraguan history.

The event of Magda's betrayal and the battle established from the south front, during the Nicaraguan Revolution, are narrated from start to end with references to the historical information that frames the clandestine struggle and its point of view, overcoming the oblivion the former guerrilla members had been condemned to amid shame and pain. The memory is just one among dozens of memories within the political mosaic, nonetheless this one breaks onto the stage, it becomes represented and thus discussed and taken into account by the local viewers.

The war that confronted the *contras* against the *sandinistas* in the aftermath of the Nicaraguan revolution is portrayed as a transitional effort that does not lead to plain results. The outcome of the confrontation, even if thought of as a success for the *sandinistas*, was always marginal and fragmented. To remember them it is necessary to make the transition from the actual event, in itself a historical happening, through the narrative to the memory of that event. The camera lens is proposed here as a formidable tool and on the screen the voice's strength is palpable if the audience chooses to hear it. This film in particular is inscribed within a logic which moves from the individual to the collective, placing a dialogue between the filmmaker and a former version of herself, while connecting memory´s mutilated fragments of the official history. As with *La Yuma*, the protagonist of this plot (Claudia) is reluctant to comply with the stereotypical expectations of Central American actors. Both films portray young women who negotiate hostile surroundings and resist the urge to flee from an agression that is out of control. While Yuma confronts her antagonistic context by using her talent (boxing) in a creative way to protect herself and her siblings, Claudia hopes for her musical vocation to welcome her into the community. Characters in both films share the determination to stay wherever the community may spring up, as do Malú and Jorgito in *Viva Cuba*. All three films opt to fit their stories into industrial genres by adapting local characters to mainstream codes.

1.9 Concluding Remarks

These three films – *Viva Cuba*, *La Yuma* and *Princesas rojas* – show a mobile, transnational and future-oriented focus on both perspective and location, through characters that show a commitment towards their communities. While all three of the films demonstrate the standard arch plot narrative formula (Mc Kee, 1997: pp. 44-46), which is used in order to establish a storytelling bridge with the audience, the characters, spaces and conflicts represented all refer to spaces that have been torn apart by intense migration processes forcing their inhabitants to move from one state/ country/ reality to another. This serves to underline how the new generations, be they children or adolescents, are confronted with a life that is characterized by a harsh oppositionality, that is, an "outside" as well as an "inside". Through mainstream movie genres, that are the most common in the cinema listings and thus what the market expects the audience to prefer, they bring the Central American and Hispanic Caribbean spaces into a dialogue which uncovers the frictions between both dimensions as well as the dramatic situations they carry within.

Faithful to each film's narrative tactics – there are contrasts, for example, in the case of *Viva Cuba*, documentary intertexts and realism in the case of *La Yuma,* and the use of music and metaphors built on broken machines in *Princesas rojas* – the three films join hands in bringing a background genre to the big screen, thereby integrating local dramatic narratives within a "proven" industrial syntax, be it a road movie, a boxing (sports) film or an epoch drama/ thriller. Through this blending of the standard film industry formula to which the audience is accustomed with the characters, perspectives and problems that are unique to the Central America and the Caribbean, the processes of affective identification and empathy with hitherto ignored dramas is extended to the audience. In this sense the films tell three different stories that are connected by a common theme: the continuing violence that provoked the root of their characters' struggles. There are, as we can see, a constellation of themes that extend across a number of different contexts – whether Cuban, Costa Rican or Nicaraguan.[65]

[65] Some other films were as successful reaching the audiences, for instance in Cuba *Juan de los Muertos* or *Habanastation* or in Costa Rica *Maikol Yordan de viaje perdido*; however, none of them were selected at First or Second Tier Film Festival, where the festival's "core power grip" (De Valck, 2014: p. 48) exercises a significant filter to define the films aesthetically. One exception in the present chapter is *La Yuma*, which was selected and won awards at the Malaga Film Festival but not Cannes, Rotterdam or Berlinale, unlike the other films mentioned. The positive discrimination in regards to *La Yuma* responds to the desire to have a filmic representation of as many countries as possible.

However, in terms of their narrative and their aesthetic these three films needed to attract massive audiences in order to succeed, and on this basis they, ultimately were not successful. Indeed their strategy to bring Hollywood´s formulas by using broad narrative codes and the "focus on external agents and shifting geopolitical relations whereby the local is marginalized in favour of the foreign" (Harvey-Kattou & Alfaro Córdoba, 2018: p. 139) did not provide a solution to the problem of product sustainability. The infrastructural landscape had clearly had an impact on the means by which these films had been produced; however it did not materially affect the ways in which the films were able to circulate, or at least not in a way that led to the sustainability of the filmmakers' craft. This dynamic, in effect, means that the filmmakers had not been able to trascend their positionality as a member of the *cognitariat* (Miller, 2016: p. 104) a crucial working status, as discussed above (See Section 1.4). Their filmic gesture can be understood in terms of an attempt to integrate local dramatic narratives within a "proven" industrial syntax, as epitomised by the filmic genres used to tell stories about local characters, but this gesture did not, of itself, lead to any break-through in terms of markedly higher audience figures. Instead it pointed to the existence of a disjointed strategy that was still operating within a fragmented network, a space where many scattered isolated efforts added to, rather than streamlining, an "archipelago" of filmmaking practices. However, on the plus side, these three films managed to foreground common questions about the future, the emancipation and the potential for reframing historical narratives which coulid reachi out and connect with local as well as global audiences.

2. Chapter Two: The legacy of *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* in the New Era: An Analysis of Three IBERMEDIA-funded films: *Agua fría de mar* (2010), *Dólares de arena* (2014) and *Últimos días en La Habana* (2016)

2.1 Introduction

The present chapter examines three films, one from Cuba, one from the Dominican Republic and the other from Costa Rica, which reveal how changes in cinematographic production have expanded the scope of funding and, as a result, intesnsified the expressiveness of the characters, themes, cinematographic language and aesthetics in each of the films selected. Through a consideration of contemporary funding trends – led by Ibermedia – (in *Films from Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean in the light of contemporary continental currents*), the analysis of how the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano's policies were implemented throughout the Latin American Sub-Continent (in *NCL and the colonial experience*, *Cuban exceptionalism*, *Art's role in revolutionary Cuba*, *Spiral growth* and *Central America*) via three close readings of films from Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean – *Agua fría de mar* (Fábrega, 2010), *Dólares de arena* (Guzmán & Cárdenas, 2014), and *Últimos días en La Habana* (Pérez, 2016) – I contend that the legacy of NCL is sustained through experimental forms of production practices chiefly funded by institutions that reach out towards global Art Cinema audiences. The chapter develops the first research question – i.e. what impact has the changing infrastructural landscape had on film production and distribution and the expression of themes in twenty-first century cinema of the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America? – by providing a comparative analysis of these three films.

As discussed in Chapter One, many of the films made in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean oscillate between a narrative that is in dialogue with Hollywood and a filmic tradition developed by the *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* specifically in terms of its ideology of aesthetic resistance. The first trend is based on a very specific formula: the rigid genre structures that are generally assumed to be very much in demand by a local audience, such as sports movies, war thrillers or road movies; and thus also offer the promise of box office success, along with an early version of the star system and, more recently, films that bridge between intermedial formats, mainly television but also including stand-up comedy, war testimonies, short stories, novels and social media characters. The second trend affects those films from Cuba and

Central America – or broadly speaking the Hispanic Caribbean and Latin America – which are not understood as cinematic commodities. This trend generally uses characters to build stories, as well as ambience, photography and sound design in what could be described as more experimental forms of cinema. It stems from the political standpoints that the NCL brought to the Latin American filmmaking scene in the 1960s and 1970s, but which has gone through various stages that have been described as Old NCL, New NCL, *Cine de exilio* and *Cine de democracia* (Susz, 1987; Chacón & Lillo, 1999; Caballero, 2005; Padrón, 2011; Copertari & Sitnisky, 2015).

2.2 Films from Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean in the light of contemporary continental currents

As discursive networks expand, the risks associated with disregarding significant Latin American films are changing. Once upon a time the danger boiled down to the failure to access a particular film or its critique, but nowadays readers and viewers are exposed to so many films, critiques and catalogues that it is difficult to isolate common tropes and themes. In this study it is clear that four aspects of the cinematic object stand out: as worthy of analysis, namely: (i) the economic, political and cultural contexts that make (the object) possible, (ii) the object in itself, (iii) the institution that legitimises it as such (art) and (iv) the audience that it reaches. The analysis provided in this chapter tackles the first of these perspctives while seeking to establish a basis for the possible appreciation of the second, which will be explored in the film commentaries. A research project such as this, which focuses on the contexts surrounding the artistic discourse and the object in itself, considers institutional frameworks as pointing towards a curatorial orientation in the films' composition. In order to foreground Central American and Hispanic Caribbean films, the questions then arising are (a) Who are the intended audiences for these films and which curatorial texts make them visible? (b) Which audiences do these films actually reach? (c) Is it an audience that lives within the spaces represented in the films themselves, i.e. Central America and/ or the Caribbean, or is it an audience identified with the spaces that fund and/ or sponsor the making of these films, or both? (d) Or are these two spaces identical?

Ibermedia is an important player within this context since it set a significant predecent in Latin America for the financing of contemporary film, and Marina Moguillansky describes it as a watershed for the whole Latin American film scene. Operating since 1998, Ibermedia has had a decisive impact on Latin American filmmaking praxis in two concrete ways: (a) it has admitted for consideration for funding those films made by filmmakers from Central American and Hispanic Caribbean countries since 2007; this was after a negotiated fee that was not always guaranteed from the Central American countries [66] and (b) it has consistently encouraged film institutes in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America to be more systematic in their approach and proposed that cinema laws should be formalised (Moguillansky, 2019: p. 29). Moguillansky has stressed that even if Ibermedia is seen as a neo-colonial project – since originally Spain was bringing nearly 4 million Euros to the common pool of funding, while countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela or México had fees of less than US $500,000, and Spain in effect was dipping into the resources (and money) from the governments of its former colonies – these suspicions disappeared completely after the 2008 Spanish economic crisis which coincided with a buoyant financial scene in Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina. During that time Latin American countries continued to pay fees of around US $600,000, as in the case of Venezuela and US $800,000 US in the case of Brazil[67] while Spain shrank its input to as low as US $311,000, thereby shifting the fund's hegemony (Moguillansky, 2019: p. 29). In Central America, Costa Rican filmmaking institutions saw the regional fund as an excellent incentive to push forward with a Cinema Law (which has been debated in Congress since 2006), real budget for the local film institution, the CCPC, and a formally established film fund (of US $500,000 with an annual competition). Cuba and Guatemala were inserted into the contributing countries, with the latter having been active on and off since 2014, and the Dominican Republic approved an exemplary Cinema Law and established a well-funded film institution, DGCINE.

[66] Laura Molina, the Costa Rican representative for Ibermedia, recalls that originally the secretariats from all Central American countries proposed to pay the minimum Ibermedia fee as a group (Alarcón & Molina, 2019: min. 1:40). Later on, the same film institutions in disputes over their uneven sizes and priorities decided to contribute individually and only Costa Rica and Guatemala found the resources to do so. Guatemala later was unable to find sufficient resources for a minimum fee and then regained it after a change of government (Alarcón & Molina, 2019: min. 3:26; min. 60:40).

[67] Brazil went as far as to pay for Paraguay's fee, but with the recent change in government the cultural policies changed again and this led to cinema having less prominence (Alarcón & Molina, 2019: min. 06:00)

Contexts, institutions and audiences affect the status these films might have as art objects. Since they are from Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean, they already find themselves amidst contested notions of nationhood and belonging, and the way the resources for film production are invested or redirected relates to these notions. In identifying a common intellectual source for the majority of the films analysed in this thesis, the most appropriate precedent is without a doubt that of the *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*,[68] although, as discussed in Chapter One, Latin American films have also established cinematographic connections, mainly via genre, with Hollywood . Even though NCL has promoted the re-creation of "both national and regional cinemas" (Villazana, 2013) since its beginnings and this has been present within the trends that have emerged from its legacy – i.e regional Latin American cultural discourse was, early on, often anti-imperialist and defensive of the Sub-Continent's imagined community – contemporary films have been constructed in such a way that their production schemes are transnational (Falicov & Barrow, 2013). Nonetheless, in Central America and most of the Hispanic Caribbean, the state resources channelled into building symbolic agency through film have remained precarious and this fact has had a significant impact on the continental project.

Films from Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean were inserted into transnational filmmaking flows and within the global circuits that had operated since the 1930s (Chanan, 2006) as in the rest of the Latin American countries. In this sense the political backdrop has forced these countries' films to "incorporate the importance of the national within the necessarily pan-Latin American nature of any such class-cultural struggle" (López, 1988: p. 104). However, the seminal ideas at the root of NCL went through several stages before arriving at their current formulation.

Globally, cinema constitutes a platform to negotiate contested definitions of "nation, state, people and country" (Chanan, 2006). This debate becomes highly significant for Latin America in that the NCL's "revolutionary cultural significance" resides precisely in its conversations with the dynamics of dependence and the "creation and maintenance of underdeveloped nations" (López, 1988: p. 104). Born at a time of

[68] It is crucial to underline that, even today, no consensus has been reached with regard to the concept of *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* as to whether it should be defined in political terms or seen as a "fiction" (López, 1988) or even as a foundational movement (Delgado; Hart & Johnson, 2017). The NCL is a porous cinematographic movement that, just as the continent it seeks to represent, holds ongoing political negotiations about "a different kind of national and hemispheric consciousness" (López, 1988: p. 100) than the one articulated by bourgeois nationalist discourses.

political re-articulations throughout the continent, framed initially from a European perspective, and supported by pan-Latin American filmmakers "in a series of festivals sponsored in Italy by a Jesuit cultural group dedicated to straightening the relationship between 'New' and 'Old' worlds" (López, 1988: p. 6) the *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* developed over the course of numerous festivals in the 1960s in Europe and South America, some of which still remain active, particularly the *Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*. During the 1960s the movement developed exponentially as more filmmakers recognised the need to find accompaniment in a challenging, yet necessary occupation, building a cinematographic expression for a region hitherto marginalised from the mainstream film circuits.

López transcribes a description of the movement as it was thought of in 1968 by the *Editorial: El desafío del nuevo cine* and the editorial board of the time:

> A cinema committed to national reality; a cinema which rejects all evasive and harmful formulas and indifference caused by ignorance, in order to confront the problematics of the sociological, political, economic, and cultural processes which each country, according to its particular situation and characteristics, is living through; a cinema which creates works permeated by realism, whether they be fictional or documentary, simple testimonies, profound analyses, or agitational tools. A cinema born in impossible conditions, because of the infinite passion of its authors, as an act of faith. An act of faith that must not only overcome the material problems of interpretation, the comprehension of new contents, and the formal elaborations of those contents. A cinema that even when produced encounters another obstacle: finding new appropriate distribution/ exhibition channels so that the films can be seen and truly accomplish their objectives. (1968: p. 2)

In brief, the NCL (a) is a movement, (b) is predicated on the practices of independent cinema, (c) has/ possesses training and funding that are transnational and (d) represents a nation, certainly an "imagined community", even if this nation is the "continental collectivity" for which Simón Bolívar fought, of which José Martí dreamt, and which has been refashioned by most contemporary statespersons more or less visibly, successfully or legitimately, depending on their political persuasion

(Barrow, 2010; Campos Rabadán, 2016; Getino, 2007) – Martí's project of the Latin American Nation State, or meta-identity, is a symbolic reference all but emptied of resources. It is, indeed, best described as a shattered imagined community hanging on the precarious thread of limited financial resources coupled with the political will to create transcontinental narratives of history (see *Archipelagoes and Constellations* documentary, 2019: min. 18:47). Latin America's artistic memory has its own Achilles's heel for it lacks what Ranajit Guha (2003) has described as *historiography* – as opposed to historicity – that is, a systematic and continuous appreciation of those traits that are shared trans-continentally. Whilst the complexity of this circumstance throughout the hemisphere goes beyond the remit of the present study, this lack is particularly evident in every one of the Central American and Caribbean states, with the exception of Cuba. The main hegemonic discourses of belonging – those that come from the state institution – have excluded individuals, themes and events from their founding narratives, and most cultural productions have taken part in this process of exclusion.

Pedro Susz observed in 1987 that Cuba was crucial for the founding of the NCL, but not particularly a centre for it. The relation was symbiotic as the NCL's political project proposed a transnational community which the island was striving for in the face of the blockade. The revolutionary project needed new allies and Latin America was a natural choice. Over the years, Susz suggests (1987: p. 148), distribution was consistently frustrated, and during the 1980s, when theatres reached a sizeable audience, TV and video broke through into the market leaving cinemas into extinction. Cinemas began their existence away from the audiences they portrayed, while NCL had several proposals, according to Susz what linked them was the sense of "urgency"; their proposals were always anti-imperialist, nationalist in the self-protective sense and popular, but they never achieved market success. After the mid-1970s the NCL became a cinema of exile, and Cuba became a haven for escaping filmmakers. According to Chacón & Lillo (1999) since the 1990s the roots of a cinema of democracy began, one which broke the block of Latin American Cinema into three facets: Old NCL (the classic), new NCL (the cinema of exile) and the cinema of democracy (Chacón & Lillo, 1999: pp. 41-44).

This is, of course, a very succinct sumary of the political, economic and cultural context; as for the objects themselves, there is a heritage of films that certainly "confront the problematic of the sociological, political, economic, and cultural

processes which each country, according to its particular situation and characteristics, is living through" while creating works that are "permeated by realism" (López, 1988: p. 108). None of the films in question have reached an extended audience inside any of the countries where they were made (See Table 3); however, as has happened in the past with films from the NCL movement, long-term academic projects and their dialogue with cultural and artistic institutions, such as film festivals, film funds or general catalogues, have been able to build a trajectory, allowing them to provide a bridge between the various components of the corpus.

Three crucial aspects about the films chosen for analysis in this chapter are as follows: (i) they have been selected and promoted by film festivals, (ii) they portray an aspect of a complex regional situation, and (iii) their discourse reveals an intertext that reaches out to deeper cultural reflections. In the case of places where there has been scarce film production, as in Nicaragua, I opted for those films that broke the cinematic drought. *La Yuma* (Jaugey, 2009) has spurred a sense of fictional representation within local – and diasporic – audiences, as well as instilled trust that filmic texts can include characters, themes and plots from these hitherto marginalised and invisible spaces.

The arrival of the twenty-first century brought transformations in at least three different ways related to Latin American cinematographic production: firstly, the technological scene changed the way sound and image were recorded and edited, while, secondly, the political changes in cinema laws within many Latin American countries, particularly Argentina, Ecuador and Colombia, brought state-sponsored cultural policies that supported local film production, allowing it to fit into transnational schemes "in some cases for the first time" (Campos, 2016: p. 221). A third aspect, related to the first two, gained strength on the global and, particularly, the European film scene, as film festivals began to train young filmmakers, investing in some of their early films and hosting film lab events that were established as parallel film schools. This has been the case for Laura Astorga in Costa Rica (*Archipelagoes and Constellations* documentary, 2019: min. 13:59), Jayro Bustamante in Guatemala and Patricia Ramos in Cuba.

It is important to remember that these resources did not operate in a vacuum. Many Latin American countries, as I will touch on in Chapter Three, had tried to provide professional training for budding film directors before; however, the deep changes

brought about on those two fronts (the technological and the political) allowed for hope that some of the production would eventually achieve long-awaited sustainability. The result of this triple flow in film production was an undeniable growth in the number of films and a vigorous push from filmmaking communities to provide more and better spaces to relate to viewers. In terms of audiences, global filmmaking has operated in two different ways since the 1960s, which have been described by Mette Hjort as centrifugal and centripetal, that is, depending on the targeted audience. As a "technological and ideological product of modernity" (Álvarez Pitaluga, 2017: p. 5) the Latin American film industry – or its film tradition as it is more accurately defined for small countries (Falicov, 2019) – has depended heavily on subsidies and state support. As these subsidies arrived from mainly European film festivals, tax shelters and funds, the resulting films built their cinematic gaze, themes and *mise-en-scène* accordingly. Coming from small countries with minuscule film audiences, this is what Hjort describes as centrifugal production: one that responds to foreign tastes. Even while some Latin American countries were busy approving cinema laws and state funds to support local production, another production scheme has appeared recently: the centripetal one. This production model had already existed in Cuba, which was in many ways the cradle of the idea of NCL. The centripetal model acknowledges, supports, sponsors and celebrates the filmic representation of the local, and typically functions through state intervention. This model generally gives rise to films based on the national state idea but, as occurred in Cuba, it is focussed on the regional context – that is, Latin American culture – as well. This process, as we can see, is part and parcel of a decolonial drive within film praxis.

The cinematic idea of Latin America faces three different challenges that I will describe and analyse, as follows: (i) the failure of Latin America as a national territory and, as a consequence of that, the lack of what is described from a European perspective as a national cinema that has a symbolic as well as a "material component"[69]; (ii) the heavy financial burden of film production, in the mainstream

[69] The Latin American democracies – with the exception of Bolivia – have invested in the idea of having a single Nation-State that can cover the diverse communities that exist in the real territories. This forced scheme coupled with the way the media has permeated the continent – and the globe – has led to a paradoxical situation in which, on one hand, there are tangible resources, such as identity documents or funds that operate through taxes, and thus are bound to a single state or laws that operate within specific borders and, on the other, identities, affective links or loyalties that may be described as hybrid, diasporic or liquid, depending on one's theoretical frame. The similarities between each Latin American state – each with its own diversities – may account for what can be described as an "imagined community" (nation). It is that imagined community that I describe as unsuccessful,

circuits, as well as its nature as a commodity with a negative value; and finally, (iii) the lack of a political framework to support the symbolic – i.e. fictional – construction of identities, imagination and/or agency.

Table 2. Funding landscape

	Available funding	Film State Institution	Number of Feature Films 2005-2018	Prize-winning Films
Costa Rica	Ibermedia Fauno Cinergia	CCPC	40	1
Cuba	ICAIC Cinergia	ICAIC	68	7
Guatemala	Cinergia	N/A	21	1
Nicaragua	Cinergia	ANCI	2	1
República Dominicana	Ibermedia		35	1

2.2.1 Latin American films and the colonial experience

As argued in the introduction to this thesis, the Caribbean and Central American territories are "scattered" from an economic and political point of view. Formed of

precisely because it has not had the necessary material support to flourish and because this absence has given space for the creation of an imaginary of the region which does not rely on its inhabitants for its existence and is more often than not subjected to derogatory critique (Castellanos Moya, 2018).

numerous small nation states, all of them ex- or current European and United States colonies, these countries face an ongoing decolonial process that remains "at the heart of unresolved debates and repeated attempts at (self-)definition" (Fehimovic, 2017). There are at least five overlapping and interconnected geographical descriptions for the Caribbean and an open discussion about its borders. With seventeen territories that remain non-sovereign, the politics of the space remains dependent on regional and global institutions, as does its cultural production and the discourses that analyse that production. In this sense it has been observed that film production might have been integrated between the Caribbean and Central American nations and with other Latin American countries "in order to enhance every community's film and cultural industries for the benefit of the region as a whole" (Getino, 2007: p. 126). This integration remains a challenge as well as a provocative hypothesis for the twenty-first century.

Getino has suggested that Latin American film production is at the core of the cultural industries and that its film communities suit their social actors' representational needs (2007: pp. 9-11), self-expression and agency. Cultural and artistic production are means to work out the symbolic revitalisation of the culture itself. Getino, quoting Cortés Pacheco, summarises what can only be described as a chaotic *state* of the art when describing Central American film production, which is not only invisible as far as global viewers are concerned, but also for Central American audiences:

> The cinematographic attempts in the region have not just faced common problems in the entire Latin American continent, but also in the specific challenges that have turned Central America into the most disputed geography by world powers over the last two centuries. Being a thin strip of land, trapped in the geopolitical interests, the internal trend has leaned towards fragmentation, isolation and a tendency to look towards the external decision makers, instead of the needed integration. The Central American audiovisual presentation has had to come up to the surface through the rubble of wars and natural disasters, it has had to confront dictatorships and invasions and, moreover, it has fought against the

> screens filled with the "ever perfect" images from mainstream cinema. (Cortés-Pacheco, 2006, my translation)[70]

Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic are similar in terms of their sociocultural affinities to Central America, which Getino describes as "balkanised along the twentieth century to suit interests totally alien to their inhabitants" (2007: p. 126). It is because of this distance – i.e. every single space holding on to each other – that the idea of a repeating island, one that, as developed in Chapter One, reaches out to numerous global spaces with which it has had a political and cultural connection, but that also promotes an insular behaviour within which it continues throughout the continental land in the sub-region's small isthmic countries, is an appropriate metaphor to describe the challenges facing sustained cultural integration. Some films, particularly documentaries, like *Invasión* by Abner Benaim (Panamá, 2014) stage these discussions cinematatically, while fictional features question the regional context in a less direct way.

The debate over these conditions in Caribbean and Central American (C&CA) cultural production allows for a more nuanced comprehension of cinema in the postcolonial – and still colonial – world, and offers a perspective which is important both in terms of knowledge and politics. Apart from some case studies, which remain on a national scale, there has been incipient interest in Caribbean film production, as evidenced by *Ex-iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, a compilation of essays edited by Mbye Cham in 1992, or the chapter *Connected in 'Another Way',* written by Dunja Fehimovic, and included in the *Routledge Companion for World Cinema* in 2017. The former, in spite of its title, deals with national cases and some dialogues around the propositions supporting the relevance of identity and representation in what is a highly heterogeneous region. However, inexplicably, it excludes Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic – namely the Hispanic Caribbean – from its purview. For its part, Fehimovic's text, as a chapter within a wider compilation of global reach, brings Cham's book into the discussion, highlighting

[70] "Los intentos cinematográficos de la región no sólo han debido sortear problemas comunes a todo el continente latinoamericano, sino también aquellos específicos que han hecho de Centroamérica la región más disputada por las grandes potencias durante los dos últimos siglos. El hecho de ser una franja de tierra, y los intereses geopolíticos que se han jugado en ella, han producido, en vez de integración, fragmentación y aislamiento entre los países, así como una tendencia a mirar hacia lo extranjero. El audiovisual centroamericano ha tenido que surgir entre los escombros de las guerras y los desastres naturales; ha debido sortear dictaduras e invasiones y, sobre todo, ha peleado con pantallas copadas por las imágenes "siempre perfectas" del cine dominante" (Cortés Pacheco, 2006).

some of the most relevant films, including *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Gutiérrez Alea, 1968), *The Harder They Come* (Henzell, 1972) and *Rue cases nègres* (Palcy, 1983), which points to the diversity of the films chosen. According to Fehimovic, these films represent

> a Cuban film that has been associated with Latin America and the New Latin American Cinema movement of the 1960s and 70s, a Martiniquan story that speaks broadly to the postcolonial experience, a Jamaican "classic" in critical dialogue with Hollywood practices and images […] all of which are of uncertain or mixed genre. (2017: p. 118)

The period when *Ex-iles* was published refers to a different conjuncture in economic and technological terms. Cham's book leaves us with a sense of how – if the means of production changes into a more accesible technology – it may become accessible for Caribbean artists and this cultural production could then blossom in the same way literature did throughout the continent during the twentieth century. Fehimovic's chapter, unlike Cham's approach, brings the Hispanic Caribbean to a corpus that encompases English and French speaking films, while insisting on the problems involved in the categorisation of these films. The films – still fragmented according to their geographic, cultural and linguistic frames – "encourage readers and viewers to adopt a relational perspective that […] reinforces the historic marginalisation of Caribbean cultures" (Fehimovic, 2017: p. 118). This warning is preceded by the question of how to define Caribbean cinema, and the Caribbean itself.[71] There is, as we can see, a general consensus about how the lack of any geographical, cultural or political definition is self-perpetuating in these colonial dependencies (Fehimovic, 2017; Campos, 2016; Getino, 2007; López, 1988).

María Lourdes Cortés Pacheco's book *La pantalla rota. Cien años de cine en Centroamérica* (2005) represents a turning point in the region's secondary literature on film. As with Cham's work, Cortés Pacheco's book takes the historical route by creating an inventory of themes and technologies until 2005. By constructing a survey

[71] Fehimovic points to the link towards the mainland territories as one possibility; she mentions the possibility of linking the production to the cases of Venezuela and Colombia. As mentioned before, I contend that linking the Caribbean film production to the main land stands as a clearer way to relate these cinemas, however, Colombia or Venezuela surpass the audience scale and resources, given their stronger economies. The scope of the present work restricts itself to the Central American mainland countries.

of Central American films since the beginning of the twentieth century, Cortés Pacheco summarises the process whereby previous cinema reviews drew the region as a compendium of separate parts, and thereby refrained from contextualising Central American film directly as a global phenomenon. Her book outlines the current state as well as the future potential of Central American cultural industries, pointing to the underlying trend of regionalisation and suggests a number of research approaches: the link between artistic and cultural production with the geography's socio-history, the particular institutional framework for the arts in every Central American state, as well as the funding and training initiatives that have operated in the isthmus and via Cuba, especially by way of the *Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión*. Very little is mentioned about the expectations that arose as a result of the technological changes in the decades that followed, and could already be foreseen at the time.

To describe how the films from the Caribbean and Central America fit within a wider picture, the proximity to the world's biggest industry has to be taken into account. The dependency on Hollywood's production and distribution circuits has prevailed since cinematic institutions started (King, 2000: p. 226). Every country in the Caribbean has been different: while Cuba had made some 164 feature films by 1986[72] (King, 2000: p. 146), cinematography was entirely absent in the Dominican Republic until 1961, when Trujillo was overthrown (King, 2000: p. 227). Puerto Rico's main cultural producers operated from New York and most of its cinema was created as a reproduction of "stereotypes imposed by the US cinema of the 1920s onwards", with some exceptions such as Cuesta, García Torres and Zurinaga[73] (both King, 2000: p. 228), while Haiti's filmic discussions about human rights, political repression and the legitimacy of Caribbean aesthetics were chiefly made for foreign audiences (King, 2000: p. 226). Jamaica released its first feature in 1972 (*The Harder They Come*, Henzell), ten years after gaining independence, while Trinidad and Tobago had

[72] Half of those films – eighty – were made before the revolution, whilst the foundation of the ICAIC (1959), the Havana Film Festival (1978) and the *Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión* (1986), the three institutions dependant on the revolutionary process, supported a continuous production.

[73] Critical reviews over Puerto Rican filmmakers from the twentieth century list *Angelitos negros* (1976), by Mike Cuesta; *Destino manifiesto* (1977), by José García Torres; *Alicia Alonso* (1978), by Marcos Zurinaga, and *Reflejos de nuestro pasado* (1979), by Luis Soto as the most relevant films. John King describes these stories as blending music, ballet and anti-imperialist political analyses: "Cuesta muestra la dramática muerte de un niño puertorriqueño en Nueva York, y su funeral, sin emplear diálogos sino las canciones de uno de los mayores cantantes de Puerto Rico, Willie Colón. El simpático retrato que hace Zurinaga de la prima donna cubana Alicia Alonso, y el amplio análisis político de García Torres sobre el imperialismo norteamericano bajo el disfraz de un destino manifiesto, demuestran un sutil y complejo manejo de diferentes materiales cinematográficos" (King, 1994: p. 324).

produced documentaries as well as video and filmmakers before the 1990s (Cham, 1992), but no fiction features.

Within Central America, King remembers productions that approached the revolutionary changes – from foreign investment, such as *Salvador* (Stone, 1986) – as being "more worried about its images' spectacular" effects than about the tough tasks "national reconstruction" demanded, as "those [tasks] were less interesting to consider and they demanded a clearer political perspective" (2000: p. 232). Even though Central America during the period covered by *Magical Reels* was overwhelmed by armed conflict in the region, King mentions how some documentary initiatives managed by local universities and government institutions for cultural development, operated through a truce throughout the isthmus and the Dominican Republic. However, these initiatives were too costly for general cultural or educational budgets. King gives a clear example of the scale on which these productions were made, pointing out that the whole capital invested in *Salvador* surpassed the total amount of resources for all the filmmakers in El Salvador for the previous decade. These circumstances, King concluded when writing in 1994, might change for Central American and Caribbean cinema's history as "video maintains the possibility of [keeping] a cinematographic culture alive" (2000: p. 250). Both López's (1988) and Hart's approaches follow King's and recall a period in which "home-grown films" were made as the only apparent safe route "echoing a foreign model which meant it could achieve a larger audience eventually – and then add some home-grown ingredients" (Hart, 2004: p. 5), Central American and Caribbean filmmaking practices are a case in point.

2.2.2 Cuban Exceptionalism

The NCL movement tried to reverse the production dependency, from various fronts and institutions. Cuba had an overwhelming leadership in the process; however the result of the movement, its spirit, and institutions "overflowed" the "construct of revolutionary Cuban cinema" (López, 1988). The NCL project both "predates and exceeds the boundaries of Cuba's influence and national priorities." López suggests the following of the scope for Cuban cinema with respect to the NCL movement:

> Cuba was and is a case apart. At the time the only socialist nation of Latin America, its films have always been seen as contributing to the New Latin American Cinema project. In fact, the Cubans have been instrumental in promoting the idea and – through extensive collaborative arrangements – the very existence of the New Latin American Cinema project. The role Cuba has played in fostering the New Latin American Cinema has yet to be fully detailed: a listing of coproductions [sic] and Latin American exhibitions and distribution agreements is not enough to explain the influential role of the ICAIC and the Cuban Revolution itself throughout the continent. For example, in the 1980s, the annual International Festival of New Latin American Cinema has become a mecca for Latin American filmmakers, producers, and distributors who travel to Havana to simultaneously engage in film "business" and theoretical seminars. However, what must be clarified is that the New Latin American Cinema is far from being simply a Cuban "construct." The desire for this cinema – exemplified in the Cinema Novo and in the Nueva Ola, for example – both predates and exceeds the boundaries of Cuba's influence and the national priorities of its own cinema. (1988: p. 110)

The logic underlying film production, as part of the media network in every territory, responds to other symbolic and economic constructions. The interconnection of these systems among the Caribbean and Central American countries remains based, with few exceptional efforts, on North American TV corporations, which were guided mainly by Mexican and American actors that had brought cultural chain programmes in the form of *blockbusters,* establishing a scheme of cultural consumption that has often led to an inadequate dialogue with the diversity of local cultures.

Before 1959 Cuban cinema existed as a trifling means of expression, "despite having studios and artists and there being an enthusiastic cinema-going audience" (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: p. 48). The cinematography of the time is described "as market-driven, artistically vulgar and ethically questionable by virtue of their tendency to reduce the island to its erotico-tropical elements" (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: p. 48). Most scholars explain the relation between the early establishment of the revolutionary Cuban government and the development of a national/ regional cinema as events undergoing a spiralling effect (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: pp. 48-49; King, 2000: pp. 147-151; López, 2007: p. 181). The construction of the "revolutionary nation" relied on the way media

was treated as a political tool as well as the relevance of its audience's reaction and support for its administration. In the Cuban case this two-way path was crucial internally as well as externally, particularly with regard to its immediate cultural universe: Latin America, where some of its pioneering filmmakers, overwhelmed by the thriving mainstream cinema industry, saw the island's new cultural programme as a counterbalance to the "backyard" status (King, 2000: p. 225). The space built by the revolutionary government through numerous and creative resources would host a wide diversity of artists from the whole continent who were unhappy with – or even harassed by – their own governments.

2.2.3 Art's role in revolutionary Cuba

While for the Cuban experience art was given a place detached from the market and "defined as a form of socio-cultural production", it clearly had other loyalties. Within twentieth-century Cuba the "socio-political role [assigned to art was] building revolutionary consciousness and contributing to the recovery of national sovereignty" (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015). This agenda would be heavily supported by a "system of artists' grants and bursaries that were announced at the 1961 congress [which in turn] were part of a broader plan to eliminate money" (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: pp. 48-49). On a rhetorical level, the revolutionary government acknowledged culture as "a part of social production, with mankind's happiness as its ultimate goal" (Chanan, 2003: p. 4; Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: p. 48). From the beginning of the Revolution's political journey the most relevant intellectuals and artists established creating "a cinematic industry, on firm bases, which had the capacity to become an important source of work and wealth and a vehicle of national expression" (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: p. 48) as the main objective. Some of the most prominent filmmakers of the time argued about the social place of film and art. Gutiérrez Alea insisted that "the support of the viewing public would be crucial, necessitating high-quality productions" (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: p. 48), in his view and that "by directing their attention towards everyday life and promoting sincerity over artifice, Cuban film-makers could discover their own language and profoundly local subject matter, isolating a 'Cuban means of expression with universal value, the source of which has to be the reality of our people'" (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: p. 48). The ICAIC's critique of socialist realism was not just that it constituted a culturally alien style, but that it resulted from an inadequate conceptualisation of the conditions of production in art (Chanan, 2003: p. 173).

In general, the idea of a cinematographic audience that was faithful to the ideal of Cuban resistance against the general understanding of film (and art) as a commodity coincided with "the principle and practice of universal access, [as it refuted] the idea of the cinema-goer as consumer, treating viewers instead as 'consciously interdependent subjects, whose free choices are continually replete with serious implications for humanity in general'" (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: p. 55). Hampering them in this effort would be the fact that the Cuban market did not generate enough revenue to cover the cost of making films, which forced external markets to be sought. To overcome this situation, it was predicted that other branches of national culture would need to be embraced, including the realist strain in literature (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: p. 48).

2.2.4 Spiral growth

By the early 1960s, every cultural production in Cuba was a tool designed to reiterate the revolutionary agenda. As Chanan (2003: p. 4) reminds us in the introduction to *Cuban Cinema*, filmmaking was no exception: "The Revolution […] unleashed among a new generation of filmmakers a furious creative energy as they turned the cameras on the process they were living, and told the Cuban people – and anyone else who was interested – who they were and what they were doing." This point of view is shared by King and López, who agree about the decade of the 1960s being "the most significant period in Cuban film history" (King, 2000: p. 147). López summarises the beginning of the revolutionary government and the creation of the Cuban Film Institute as the single most important event of the Revolution's cultural legacy:

> Cuban cinema precedes 1959, yet it is only with the Revolution that the national cinema emerged at the forefront of cultural production. The Cuban Film Institute, ICAIC (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos), was created via one of the first cultural acts of the new Revolutionary government. Defined as 'the most powerful and suggestive medium of artistic expression and the most direct and extensive vehicle for education and the popularisation of ideas', the cinema was called upon to participate actively in the ideological realm of the revolutionary process. ICAIC was set up as an independent agency, governed by an appointed director and by a three-member advisory board that, until the mid-1970s, was responsible for all activities. (2007: p. 181)

Art in general and cinematography in particular became tools for communication as well as political activism. The latter's persuasive drive and the "universality" of its language made film a great medium to convoke the Revolution's potential supporters and swell the political ranks while inventing new expressive codes to re-channel previous cultural productions. In the middle of the Cold War, in the shoes of the protagonist of some of its tensest confrontations – like the Cuban Missile Crisis –, and in a decade when many colonial powers were negotiating their share and reshaped dependencies, the cultural changes on the island were crucial to the general project. In order to build this new cultural programme, the chain of events breaks down into three major decisions that would fuel and affect the bulk of cinematographic production during the following years: (a) the creation of supportive institutions, (b) a sustained growth of cinematographic production anchored on the region – as a close cultural universe – and assisted by the then Soviet network, and (c) centralised control over every cinematographic effort.

In contrast, during the revolutionary government's first decade, cinematographic production untied its aesthetic drive from the market and experimented with European influences, such as neorealism, social realism and experimental documentaries:

> By 1968, Cuban cinema was identified not only with anti-imperialism, but with films such as Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and *Lucía* by Solás, in which the aesthetic of the European new wave is metamorphosed through a kind of revolutionary transfiguration; and the documentaries of Santiago Álvarez (*Now, LBJ, Hasta la Victoria siempre*, and many others), which seemed to reinvent Soviet agitprop of the 1920s. With films like these, the white building at the corner of 23rd and 12th in Havana's Vedado district that once housed dentists' consulting rooms, threw down an exhilarating and infectious experimentalist challenge to the hegemony of the culture industry headquartered in Hollywood. […] Since very few films made in Latin America, and especially not those that espoused any kind of revolutionary politics, were seen in any country other than their own – a consequence of the monopoly control of distribution by the Hollywood-based majors – Havana became the continent's capital of cinema, practically the only city where everything made in Latin America worth seeing could be seen, and a home away from home for many who,

> like several Chilean filmmakers after the coup of 1973, were forced into political exile. (Chanan, 2003: p. 8)

That production line and pace, run by ICAIC, "established a solid base for production (with reasonable studio facilities and equipment) as well as an extensive distribution and exhibition network. [Most importantly] ICAIC set out to build a national audience for Cuban cinema" (López, 2007: p. 182) that went continental later on. As a cultural organiser, ICAIC became a pioneer for institutions that were founded later in other Caribbean as well as Central American countries. It was "a government agency directly financed through the state, entrusted with all aspects of the national cinema and run primarily by filmmakers rather than government bureaucrats" (López, 2007: p. 182).

From March 1959 to March 1971 ICAIC made more than thirty feature films and one hundred documentaries (*Portal del cine y el audiovisual latinoamericano y caribeño*, 2013). Most of these productions were screened in Havana and in provincial theatres that had been built in the 1940s and 1950s. They were also taken to wider audiences through a 'cinema to the villages' project that in the long run built an everyday relation with this new artistic support on virtually the whole island:

> Serving a population of just over seven million, Cuba could soon boast a total of 616 cinemas housing 16mm projection facilities – 480 of which were stationary, 112 pulled by lorry, twenty-two drawn by animals and two carried by boat around the coast – as part of the concerted effort to dissolve discrepancies between the rural and urban areas which formed one of the overarching priorities of the Revolution. (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: p. 53)

The films produced during this first decade plotted mainly official narratives about the Revolution: how it was achieved, on the one hand, and the on-going changes the government promoted along the island, on the other. Behind the production was a first generation of filmmakers (Julio García Espinosa, Santiago Álvarez and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, among others), who had been trained in Rome and the United States before 1959, while a second batch (including Sara Gómez and Octavio Cortázar) began their training in Moscow, Prague and Havana. During the 1970s, film production continued at an average of fifty movies per year (*Fundación del Nuevo*

Cine Latinoamericano, 2018); however, the controversy around Heberto Padilla's imprisonment provoked an ideological – and ethical – polarisation among the intellectuals and artists over whether individual questioning should keep to its role of "engagement with social reality" (King, 2000: p. 156) or try to take a marginal standpoint.

The same alignment against the government's decision to outlaw the poet reached a number of "prestigious North American, European and Latin American intellectuals" (King, 2000: p. 157), who withdrew their until then unconditional support for the Revolution. This necessary discussion split the sympathies and developed two ways to deal with the Revolution. On the government's side, the rhetoric insisted on creative freedom that would respect the dictum made at the "Words to the Intellectuals" speech (1961) – i.e. "dentro de la Revolución todo; contra la Revolución, nada" (within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing) – while on the other side were a large list of intellectuals who called for active coherence to stop censorship. The controversy as a whole revealed a political aspect implicit in the support for cultural productions: they become political statements. The Padilla affair, as it was described later on, marked an "end to the mystique of the Cuban Revolution that had attracted so many fellow travellers" and sponsorship and resources that were then obtained via the Soviet geopolitical and economic model (Chanan, 2003: p. 313).

Over the years to come – after the Revolution – the filmmakers-government relationship would go through different cycles that are described as *intimate* and *strategic* in one first epoch (1960s), *sceptical* in a second stage (1970s), *generous* and *protective* during the years of the Soviet alliance (from the mid-1970s to 1990s), *secretive* and *slow* during the Special Period (1990s) and *dried out by its centralised control* from the twenty-first century onwards. At the beginning of these periods, the island became an epicentre for alternative Latin American filmmaking, a status which was first promoted by the ICAIC and then strengthened with institutions that directly pursued the integration of the region's cinema, such as the *Festival de Cine Latinoamericano*, the *Fundación para el Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* and the *Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión*.

Throughout all these phases, the key agenda is described as a confrontation between "the pacifying tendency of [mainstream] cinema which had been evident since the early twentieth century" (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015: p. 250) and one that would hold a

combative tone standing in resistance to hegemony's sway. Over the years a controversy would arise when the latter trend stood against power centres within the same Cuban government, rather than the imperial one. What matters for the regional approach, this study holds, are the reasons for the construction of an alternative filmmaking and the institutions through which that space for cinematographic production was enhanced. By the end of the period of Soviet economic and political protection, it seemed a natural step to expand film production resources to include continental ambitions. In March 1985 the *Comité de Cineastas de América Latina* (C-CAL), following two decades of networking – since the Viña del Mar Film Festival (Chile, 1967) and the Congress for the *Centro Latinoamericano del Nuevo Cine* (Caracas, 1974) – drew up the official paperwork and infrastructure for the *Fundación del Cine Latinoamericano*, whose main objectives were "to integrate the regional cinema, accomplish an audio-visual common universe and collaborate with the struggle to rescue and secure Latin American and Caribbean cultural identity" (*Portal del cine y el audiovisual latinoamericano y caribeño*, 2013). The desired integration of the region led to the establishment of the *Escuela de Cine y Televisión* with the sponsorship of the government and some of the (symbolic and financial) resources from Gabriel García Márquez's Nobel Prize. García Márquez remained the president of both institutions and Argentine filmmaker Fernando Birri was appointed as the director. The school has to date (2018) graduated thirty-seven cohorts of filmmakers from all continents on its regular three-year course and receives attendees for multiple workshops. While the school is open to students beyond Latin American and Caribbean borders, it has certainly stimulated local (national, regional, continental) filmmaking (*Archipelagoes and Constellations* documentary, 2019: min. 18:34).

Every country has dealt differently with the cultural limitations imposed by the market and their stated "invisibility" (2007: p. 171), drawn from a hindered production. As García Espinosa explains it, for the Cuban case:

> Despite all of the aforementioned milestones [i.e. various generations of trained filmmakers, the creations of key institutions such as the Fundación para el Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano], achieving the right to show our films in our own country proved to be a traumatic experience. The commercial sector refused to share their jealously guarded freedoms with the film directors. They guaranteed their business profits by opening their doors subject to conditions that were imposed by the big North American

> companies. They required you to buy ten second-rate films before you were allowed a first-rate film. This prevented the possibility of creating a space for national film production and also prevented us from seeing films from other parts of the world. (2007: p. 147)

The journey taken by Cuba to resist an overwhelming control over media, art and symbolic representations is still a path pending for the other Caribbean and Central American countries. It is, in any event, too early to determine whether the "digital turn" will prove to be a "false dawn" for the region's cultural expression; this issue will be discussed in Chapter Three.

2.2.5 Central America

Most of the Central American countries experimented with filmmaking before the 1950s, but this does not mean that an exclusive cinematography in the region existed. María Lourdes Cortés Pacheco (2005) has argued that since the 1950s every country in the region made films with the aspiration to establish a "national cinematography"; however, those films were excluded from international exposure: "Central American images have remained invisible and hidden, not only for the foreign audience, but also for the Central American one" (Cortés Pacheco, 2005: p. 534, my translation). Throughout the years some feature films were produced in El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica and their subject matter was influenced by the NCL:

> [F]rom the 1970s, the region's cinema turned to social themes and those of denouncement, especially through the documentary genre. In the heat of the Cuban revolution and the emergence of its vigorous cinematographic movement, Central America found a possible model to found its own cinematographic language. (Cortés Pacheco, 2005: pp. 538-539, my translation)[74]

During this period, and because of the enthusiasm inspired by the "causes", most states managed to create cinematographic institutions thanks to government support. This is

[74] "[A] partir de los años sesenta, el cine de la región da un giro hacia las temáticas sociales y de denuncia, especialmente mediante el género documental. Al calor del triunfo de la revolución cubana y de la emergencia de su vigoroso movimiento cinematográfico, Centroamérica encuentra un modelo posible para fundar una cinematografía propia."

the case of the *Grupo Experimental de Cine Universitario* (GECU) in Panama, the *Centro Costarricense de Producción Cinematográfica* (CCPC) in Costa Rica, and the *Instituto Nicaragüense de Cinematografía* (INCINE) in Nicaragua, the *Instituto Cinematográfico de El Salvador* (ICSR) and the *Sistema de Radio Venceremos* in El Salvador, and, finally, the *Departamento de Cine del Ministerio de Cultura* in Honduras (Cortés Pacheco, 2005: p. 537).

Unfortunately, most of these institutions were themselves dragged into a resourceless political shell during this period, which was marked by a series of different political conflicts, a situation that – once again – reshaped the audio-visual landscape. Cortés Pacheco explains this new drought by the combination of the development of video – at the expense of traditional cinemas – and the loss of state support, which made the filmmakers return to a less visible option, that of "independent funding" (2005: p. 547, my translation). That perspective, however, does not mention the structural changes brought about in Central American economies during the 1990s. The post-Central American war years remain as a period of renegotiating the economic structures and dependencies, in the case of Mexico, Central America, the Dominican Republic and Colombia, mainly through Free Trade Agreements (Getino, 2007; Harvey, 2007).

The new neoliberal context discouraged cultural production from pursuing an artistic angle and encouraged entertainment to be less engaged with its artistic value. As Crane describes this:

> FTAs have been interpreted as diminishing the cultural sovereignty of other countries and the rights of their citizens to enjoy locally created culture and employment in the industries that produce them […] FTAs are "driven not by human rights but by a powerful commitment from the US political apparatus and the US entertainment industry to take care of their own interests" through unfettered access to other markets. (2014: p. 373)

In short, post-war Central America, like the Cuba of the Special Period, left the filmmaking institutions trapped in a virtual desert. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, this institutional desert has begun to change. Every country has its own political context, institutions and numbers. Whilst it is difficult to give a precise overview, it is clear that for most countries in Central America the number of films produced has surged during the last fifteen years. For example, Panama has

made 75% of the total number of its fiction features since 2007, Costa Rica made 50+ films in the last decade, compared to nine during the whole twentieth century (Cortés Pacheco, 2010), Nicaragua made two in the last decade, in 2009, after twenty years of paralysis, *La Yuma* made its way to the big screen, and Guatemala almost twenty, after a century that produced just three feature films. Honduras and El Salvador have had a less regular cinematographic production (Fundación del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano, 2018), and this issue in particular will be addressed in Chapter Three.

Many of these movies, as previously mentioned, were chosen as part of the official selections for European Festivals as well as for international distribution. These changes respond, according to Quirós (2012) and Cortés Pacheco (*El inesperado auge del cine centroamericano*, 2010) to five fundamental reasons: (i) the fact that many directors from the isthmus have returned after completing cinematographic training in film schools in Cuba, London, Moscow, New York and San Francisco, with their training providing not only movies of their own but also training a new generation of students, thereby giving some degree of sustainability to the profession; (ii) the foundation of a number of film festivals within the region, among them the Ícaro Film Festival in Guatemala, funded in 1998, and the *Muestra de Cine y Video Costarricense*, from 1992 (Quirós, 2012, my translation); (iii) the approval of cinematographic laws in Nicaragua and Panama and the initiation of similar legal processes in Costa Rica and El Salvador; (iv) the successful insertion of two countries from Central America into Ibermedia and the creation of Cinergia as an economic option to support the cinemas of all Central American countries and Cuba (as well as, for a while, that of Puerto Rico); finally (v) the fact that the *new technologies* (Internet, high definition cameras, editing software, etc.) have reduced the cost of cinematographic production (Quirós, 2012: p. 183), allowing greater access to film expression resources.

Table 3. Budgets, Funding, Audience and Awards for the Films in the Corpus

Film	Producing Funds	Co-production countries	Budget	Recorded audience	Awards
Agua fría de mar	Ibermedia		900,000 USD	5000	3
Atrás hay relámpagos	Private Companies: (Cerveza Imperial, Honda Cars, Nasional, Walmart) CRFIC / CCPC Cinergia	Guatemala – Costa Rica	50,000 USD	5000	–
Dólares de arena	Ibermedia	Dominican Republic	unknown	unknown	6
Ixcanul	Cinergia	Guatemala – France		60,000	23
Princesas rojas	Ibermedia /Cinergia The Global Film Initiative Melico Salazar/ ProArtes /		800,000 USD	unknown	unknown

	Centro Nacional Autónomo de Cinemtografía				
El techo	Cinergia	Cuba	unknown	unknown	2
Últimos días en La Habana	Ibermedia ICAIC	Cuba		unknown	4
Viva Cuba	Cinergia Quad Cinema	Cuba – France	45,000 USD		47
La Yuma	Cinergia Private Companies: (Cerveza Toña, Pollos Estrella, etc.)	Nicaragua – France	70,000 USD	1 million viewers	7

2.3 Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic

2.3.1 Genre, tourism and industry in *Agua fría de mar* and *Dólares de arena*

Cultural expressions have been profoundly affected by these new options to register sound and image, as well as the ability to edit moving images and distribute them or make them available for an audience, in the case of film. In the Caribbean region (Antillean and the mainland) the contexts for production and distribution have been linked to political processes, as discussed in the previous section.

As a result of the technological advances created at the dawn of the twenty-first century, a new horizon appeared for the filmmaking sector throughout Latin America. Agendas concerned with finding ways to manage cultural production chimed well

with a new political landscape that provided some support via laws and institutions in a number of countries. Particularly in Argentina, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama and the Dominican Republic this new framework connected with a professional network that stems from few filmmakers that stay in the region and the many who leave to go to urban centres where there are "more funds, more networks – in short, more opportunities to produce" (Fehimovic, 2017). Specifically for Caribbean filmmakers, the movement within their professional careers brings another obstacle to overcome, that is of being *foreigners* – thus with more restrictive access to production resources – in an already highly competitive pool (in places like New York, Paris or Berlin). The circle of film production is also restrictive as the distributive paths are shown to be very fragile, as Fehimovic points out, "the absence of a local film *industry* proper is both cause and effect of the dominance of Hollywood productions and foreign-owned cinema complexes in many parts of the Caribbean" (2017) this scenario overflows into the Central American Isthmus.

The actual resources – laws, funds and training – available differ from one country to the next. Even when most contemporary independent film production depends on transnational alliances (Campos, 2018: p. 34), there is some space for action promoted by the politics of each space although "the infrastructures that are now sustaining the cinema of the subcontinent are associated with the new forms of the economy that expanded worldwide after the fall of the Berlin wall" (Alvaray, 2011: p. 71). So, as discussed in the previous chapter, a "free trade, deregulated economy has prevailed over the alliances that from Europe and the United States have stimulated the growth of Latin American cinema" (Alvaray, 2011: p. 71). This new framework fitted into a conjuncture where the biggest Latin American governments were disengaging from supporting their filmmakers, which left a gap "opened for private companies and foreign investors to step in and become the primary funding sources for national cinemas" (Alvaray, 2011: p. 71). Alvaray describes this financial landscape as diffused – a landscape with a scattered authority behind the filmmaking process, one that has been sometimes taken up by transnational funding – primarily Ibermedia – but that has not shown systematic support for cultural projects. The diffused financial support has certainly appeared vulnerable, however, my argument holds that further from being diffused, this way of filmmaking also turns into something informal, as it is not an arbitrary state but one that stubbornly insists on production formulas that actively maintain a blurred cycle which, combined with very specific themes – like

informal tourism and the struggles around a rigid patriarchal order –, reveal an aesthetic tendency that simultaneously relied on foreign investment and had a deceptively obfuscated appearance.

The Dominican Republic and Costa Rica have some common circumstances, even if each republic has proceeded along diverse pathways. While the Dominican Republic's belonging to Kiskeya, its neighbouring – nearly twin – relation with the first Latin American country to gain independence – Haiti –, has simultaneously given the island a strategic role and fierce foreign control over its destiny; Costa Rica, as part of the Central American isthmus, was a marginal actor during colonial times, mainly a transit border between both continental masses. The Dominican economy relied on the slave trade for three hundred years, as did most of the insular territories, and its early development was traversed by the logic of the plantation in which the hybrid compositions were focused on the needs of the *metrópolis* – in what could be described as an alienating strategy – , while that of the isthmus remained focused on subsistence agriculture and the transit of goods across the continent, meaning that Central America's population entailed a systematic deculturalisation from the indigenous cultures to serve the new mestizos. Both countries obtained their independence from Spain in the same year (1821).

During the twentieth century the Dominican economy turned to mining as its main resource of production (*Banco Central de la República Dominicana*, 2017a), while Costa Rica's economy was heavily geared towards agricultural exports until the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the main source of income-creation shifted to technological manufacturing, particularly of health appliances (*Programa Estado de la Nación*, 2017). Both countries have developed a steady income from the tourist industry since the 1960s (Hein, 2002), while in 2008 the Central American Free Trade Agreement – that included the Dominican Republic as the only Caribbean island – was signed by both and slightly increased their economic flows. This growth has been combined with an unruly widening of inequality in each country, as evidenced by their respective Gini coefficient,[75] which in summary shows that wealth

[75] The Gini coefficient is a measure of statistical dispersion that represents the distribution of wealth or income inside a country or specific region. Hence, it is an instrument often used to compare levels of inequality between countries. Nonetheless, the interpretation of its numerical value is not always straightforward, since the same value may result from many different distribution curves. While an increasing time series of Gini coefficients represents a country where inequality is growing, the Gini coefficient does not reveal whose income is increasing and whose is decreasing. Additionally, the

has grown and – interpreted by means of examining the Structural Adjustment Model implemented since the 1980s in Central America – stayed in the hands of an elite (Robles Rivera, 2010).

There are three aspects of the economic contexts I wish to comment on and highlight in the analyses provided of these two films, *Agua fría de mar* and *Dólares de arena*. One is the shift towards a tourist economy that both countries have developed, particularly during the last 40 years (Hein, 2002), and which certainly has increased its revenues during the last 20 years; to date tourism represents 5.7% of Costa Rica's GDP, while it represents 10.2% for the Dominican Republic's economy. The second aspect concerns the growth the economies have undergone and the extent to which these have spread through informal means, as I am interested in the way revenues from tourism tend to rely on informal services to see how the economic push has also had a significant impact on the living contexts and the priorities in storytelling. The third aspect relates to how much of the revenue from tourism has gone into culture and specifically film production. While the economic growth has remained steady, the distribution of wealth has not spread, leaving wide sectors of the population in conditions of poverty and with an aggressive mirror that shows the new opulence on the other side. The tourist landscape affects film production in two ways: it encourages intense encounters between local and foreign actors, while it brings more money to an economy that is alien to an actual channel for cultural production – as most of its gains remain within the informal economy. Both motifs permeate the financial and material support behind *Agua fría de mar* (Fábrega, 2010) and *Dólares de arena* (Guzmán & Cárdenas, 2014) as well as their respective narratives.

Economic growth has spurred an expansion of production resources for the film industry, which has also amplified represented voices and thus represented characters. Examples of this development are that both countries have been compliant with the Ibero American Cinematographic Integration Agreement (*Convenio de Integración Cinematográfica Iberoamericana*) since 2011 (Campos Rabadán, 2016; Slot, 2017) and that Costa Rica was the headquarters for Cinergia, a fund managing around US

numerical values of the coefficient might change dramatically before and after taxes and transfers. In general terms, there are over a dozen variants of the Gini coefficient. The demographic structure should also be taken into account: an aging population or baby boom translate into an increasing pre-tax Gini coefficient even if real income distribution for working adults remains constant. In general terms, if all people have non-negative income or wealth, the Gini coefficient can theoretically range from 0 (complete equality) to 1 (complete inequality).

$90,000 annually, for a period of thirteen years. Cinergia extended its reach to fund films from Cuba and Puerto Rico, while also covering the Dominican Republic. The latter two, according to María Lourdes Cortés Pacheco, rejected the fund on the basis that it was too small (*Archipelagoes and Constellations* documentary, 2019: min. 26:14). Finally, the Dominican Republic has activated a robust law which has directed RD pesos 95,600,000 (approximately US $2,000,000) for the support of national film production (Rivera, 2018). However, this growth occurred within a political framework that lacks a consistent regional network to support audiences due to the cultural priorities each country holds, and thus their circulation encountered numerous obstacles in trying to reach local or regional audiences.

Both technological and political changes have expanded the representational spectrums and encouraged the emergence of a new diversity of voices. These changes have given rise to narrative variations that escape the Hollywood formulas while bringing into the frame characters hitherto invisible or ignored by previous films; among these we should mention the representation of women immersed in rigid patriarchal societies. The women appearing are unconventional, and the two stories focus on adults with turbulent pasts who meet younger women and become obsessed with them, which is what happens to Mariana in *Agua fría de mar*, or are "hopelessly in love" (Weissberg, 2014), as occurs with Anne in *Dólares de arena*.

While Guzmán and Cárdenas's film title, *Dólares de arena*, directly signals sex tourism, Fábrega's film builds the viewers' expectation around a deception. Both films end up highlighting the human connection created by everyday events as a major theme. The Dominican movie creates a metaphor around the contrast between "Europe's decay [accumulation and wealth] and the Caribbean's vitality" (Báez, 2016), while the Costa Rican work decentres the transcontinental relations of dependence in order to focus on a mirrored definition of each woman's self-image and the struggles they share due to the crushing presence of patriarchy.

The funds that made each film possible – i.e. the production formula each underwent – and the themes they develop connect in various ways. In both films it is clear that the represented women are not drawn into a predominant male gaze – they do not fit into what Laura Mulvey would have called the pleasure of to-be-looked-at-ness (Mulvey, 1999: 837) – nor are they compelled to connect and establish dialogues in order to elicit a man's desire, at least not in the conventional way, according to the

feminist methodological perspectives (particularly Mulvey and Bechdel, 2018). They do, however, point to the patriarchal contexts and relate to two aspects that I find crucial: the above-mentioned connection established among women and the way they are inserted into growing emergent economies (both the Costa Rican as well as the Dominican) that are heavily based on tourism and, to a certain extent, on an informal economy. The informal political framework as well as the vulnerable economic juncture that is left behind as a consequence of this informality enters the narrative as well as the aesthetic decisions seen on the screen.

2.3.2 The challenges of the industry

It has often been noted that the women in both films appear to be disoriented (Báez, 2016; Salas, 2017). In the case of *Agua fría de mar* this disorientation appears to have been created by the memory of a trauma that Mariana's encounter with Karina triggers, while in the case of *Dólares de arena* by the mesmerising effect Noeli's body has on Anne. In *Agua fría de mar*, Carolina Sanabria (2011) compares Mariana's way of representing female silence with Giuliana, the main character in *Il deserto rosso* (Antonioni, 1964). In her view Mariana loses herself in an existential crisis that, even though it is not completely justified or even outlined, certainly connects with the open landscape.

Agua fría de mar began as a classic co-production between Costa Rica, Mexico, France, Holland and Spain. Some of the funds supporting it came from Hubert Balls, Cinergia, Ibermedia, Torino, Arte Cofinova and Foundation Gant, the latter worked as an insurance company; the film had a pre-production of three years (*Archipelagoes and Constellations* documentary, 2019: min. 16:45). The executive producer is a French businessman that profited from the tax shelter used to protect their earnings against a tax increase – in order to stay in a lower tax band (Fábrega, P. *Interview with Paz Fábrega: Production and Distribution of Agua fría de mar*, Personal Communication 08/08/15). He was contacted by the French producers (who Fábrega met at the Buenos Aires Lab), who also identified the finance scheme: the investment had to be made exclusively for French producers and thus the project was able to access the funds through the link with the European producer. In this sense the transnationality of the funding model expanded the film's resources.

Although the project was made in Central America, it paid European wages (established through unions), something that led to another level of cost as the insertion of the new companies are expensive. *Agua fría de mar*, as the other film analysed in this section, was managed on voluntary work – and professional practice programmes – for the local crew and exceeding wages for the foreign one. Ibermedia arranged the distribution for Latin America. The film probably made US $100,000, but the production crew did not receive any of that money since all of it went back to the original investors (Fábrega, 2015). From the director's point of view, it was a rather unethical process; Fábrega compares it to a Non-Governmental Organisation's dynamics: "It's as if the operative costs are greater and more important than the objectives (in this case the movie itself)" (2015). The director sees herself as a vulnerable part, the bottom line being there is no frame for her to cover or decide the production scheme as it all depends on foreign operations.

The film cost an estimated US $1,015,837 (IMDB, 2018), which was mainly spent on plane tickets and insurance plans. It attracted an audience of 2,000 people during its screening period in Costa Rica. The film was designed as a radical opponent to mainstream cinema, in the sense that it does not even bother to tell a story (Fábrega, 2015); according to the filmmaker it conjures an atmosphere, a metaphor, a dream. It suits what Jonathan Romney (2010) describes as a "different form of escape", one that forces "our aesthetic sensibility to seek ways of slowing down". The aim of the film is to elicit the audience's attention through image, sound and environments rather than a cause-effect (narrative) drama or as de Luca (p. 197) describes the contemplative trend in film festivals, one in which its "sheer recording undermines the storytelling". It won three prizes, one of them being the Tiger Award at the Rotterdam Film Festival.

The story foregrounds a girl (Karina, 11) and a young woman (Mariana, 28), who meet by accident at a hill overlooking the Marino Ballena National Park which the girl climbs, as she runs away from her family in an act that can be interpreted as caused by boredom, annoyance or confusion.[76] Both characters are blurred – as are the visuals of the entire film –, while the environment and sticky emotions develop an opaque representation of what the "holidays" are for these two women, who come from different classes and backgrounds. The blurred aesthetic appears as a way to choose a

[76] Many film critics (Hart, 2015; Quirós, 2012; Salas, 2017) point to the conscious ambiguity and its willingness inside the *mise-en-scène* of this particular film. The resources for such aesthetic decision will be discussed in greater detail later in the thesis.

vague or indefinite definition of characters and thus of their wills and actions, the bits that are to move the plot forward. The director describes this aesthetic decision as a deliberate way to portray the liminal world in which the story appears: this world is half conscious and half real and within it both the perception of the social constellation and the gender dynamic that enunciates a terrible concern are suffocated. The semi-cut dialogues and jungle, wavy diegetic sound, the reverse shots and, particularly, the wide shots that open up the coastal landscape all add to the feeling of being ungrounded (*Archipelagoes and Constellations* documentary, 2019: min. 16:19). It is on this basis that the meaning of the film is diluted rather than being concentrated on a concrete theme. This mirrors the same currents that finance the film – which were scattered and unfocused – and shows how this background permeates and influences the narrative through an unsure voice and a blurred image.

The story hinges on the relationship that both characters establish when Mariana believes Karina's story – in the vulnerable state as an orphan, as she presents herself. The girl suggests she may have been sexually abused by her uncle, something that is never clarified but which is signalled to be untrue. This assumption plays out on two different dramatic pathways for Mariana: on the one hand, she becomes disturbed in a way that may be interpreted as if she had been sexually abused herself (Schulz, 2010), with the 'lie' from Karina awakening her trouble and trauma; on the other hand, Mariana becomes truly worried about Karina and tries to look out for her and guarantee her safety through all her means.

Characters, plot (or its absence), decisions about colour palette use, and lens focus are all parts of a diluted formula that subtends the decision of keeping the context blurred. The film had a crew of twenty technicians and some thirty actors involved in a shoot at a national park from where the producers had to take ten-hour flight to Madrid, and a drive to Paris – "as that is where the funding came from, we had to develop them there" (Fábrega, 2015) – with the film cans in order to keep the production on track. The resources are spread out and add to a confusion which appears as a symptom of a process where the means are more visible than the end product; however, even within all the scattered means, the film manages to design a mixed environment that draws contrasted characters and their set objectives. The delusional aims and actions are also sketched differently for each gender. While the portrayed men have clear goals, for instance, Rodrigo (31), Mariana's boyfriend, is focused on selling his father's land, the foreigner he is selling it to appears as a business man with a set goal for his

(prolonged) stay in Costa Rica; the park ranger, as well as Karina's father, both have set, specific occupations and embody their identity as middle-aged men. There are other women on the screen, like Karina's mother or Mariana's friends, both women protagonists meanwhile are 'errant', as they are hesitant and driven by an intangible desire that is described through the screen's borders and not quite the screen itself. This is crucial, as their desire, words and actions are what orientate our attention to the screen. The state of errancy in *Agua fría de mar*'s female characters is shared with the portrayed women in *Dólares de arena*.

On an initial level both films are about the connection between two women, and the (im)possibility of their communication. On a secondary level, they are both about social classes that are brought to the screen through the contrast of resources and behaviours as they are exposed by both protagonists, their families and surroundings. The third stance that both films take is the relationship these women have with their own bodies, particularly Mariana and Anne, and the anguish provoked by the threat of losing control over their bodies, as that fear guides the narrative. In the case of *Agua fría de mar*, as Natalia Salas interprets the film, Karina as well as Mariana are travelling individuals, errant, vagabonds that struggle with their solitudes, although Mariana is much more rigid than Karina. Somehow they find refuge in this loneliness. Salas observes: "Mariana, then, is lonely. […] [H]er mother exists, but Mariana refrains from calling her because somehow she is preparing to pass from her mother to the boyfriend" (2017). As the adult of the story, Mariana does not show agency, moreover, her attention, energy and actions are bewildered, while she seems to move by inertia throughout the highway, hotel, and hill until she finally finds a path towards the ocean and goes in search of Karina.

Karina, on the other hand, in her journey towards the dark side, finds nocturnal horse riders – probably tourists, although this remains unclear –, Mariana herself at the top of the mountain, and on a second trip she finds the snake that she allows herself to be bitten by, provoking her low fever. The *mise-en-scène* mixes every element of the place: the family members with their kitchen utensils, the sand pits where the children play, the trucks where the whole family sleeps together. The ways in which the characters are portrayed on the beach uses a documentary treatment, but even this decision is fragmented, showing the life, movement and games on the beach without intervening. It is a blurred gaze that describes Karina's family. The representation of the family appears as embedded in a constant omen, the built sensation is that there is

an off-screen force that will reveal its vigour spontaneously. The opening of the diegesis to off-screen elements is attained through acousmatic sound, mainly from natural sources like waves, insects and birds that can be guessed at but which do not appear directly and end up disappearing or never growing in stature.

According to Quirós, the movie's voice is not capable of establishing an affective standpoint from where to talk about the society that produces the film's cultural references:

> First, it talks about small, suffocating places, being enclosed, incest, and then about terror and senselessness. Thus, the film's greatest achievement may be to capture those same "unspeakable sensations", the affective ambiguity of a generation that does not see neoliberalism as a viable socio-economic project, but that furthermore reveals itself as sceptical of a better future. (2012: p. 198, my translation)[77]

The confusion and inertia in which the women appear contrasts with the representation of the social classes as they work in each character's lives. It is so that Karina's family drives an old truck, where they sleep as they spend their holidays, parked in front of the beach for several weeks. Within this environment, the women appear cooking and looking after the children, under improvised gazebos. To gazes external to Latin America, the coastal landscape unveils itself as an aesthetic of a war site or a gypsy camp, with the children playing with the sand and under the natural caves of the Marino Ballena National Park and the mix of working trucks that have slogans from the family businesses (e.g. "Carnes La inmaculada"), as other smaller cars filled with mattresses and hanging hammocks point to a low-budget family adventure.

Mariana stays at an all-purpose hotel while her fiancé looks for a foreigner to whom his family wants to sell their piece of land to build a *Boutique Hotel*. All these events take place while the characters are waiting for New Year's Eve. Their friends and Mariana and Rodrigo themselves arrive in new four-wheel drive cars (much more expensive than the transport that Karina's family uses) and spend the day drinking around an old, filthy swimming pool. Ambiguous as it purposely is, the *mise-en-scène*

[77] "Primero habla de pequeñez, de encierro, de incesto, y luego de terror y sinsentido. Así, el mayor logro de la película tal vez sea captar estas mismas "sensaciones innombrables", la ambigüedad afectiva de una generación que ya no ve en el neoliberalismo un proyecto socio-económico viable, pero que además se muestra escéptica ante la fe en un futuro mejor."

shows the class differences with the kind of 'exceptions' Lucrecia Martel would use: even though Mariana's resources are greater than those of Karina's family, her aspirations are to stay at a hotel with no other assets than a pool of stagnant water with questionable hygiene. As in Martel's style, "[e]lliptical narrative structures, weak or missing causal links, major events which happen off-screen, and shots which either withhold information or include too much information – often in the form of many minor acts happening at once – all contribute to the creation of uncertainty and disorientate the spectator" (Martin, 2016: p. 10). Fábrega chooses to go from the clifftop hotel, where Mariana is staying, to the sea shore, where Karina and her family are camping, following fragmented landscapes. The broken causality is mainly drawn by the ambiguity with which Karina's description of her uncle's abuse is staged.

Both characters have a tendency towards self-destruction, which intensifies in a key scene when Mariana, after hearing the story from Karina, wakes up from an afternoon nap and realises she has wet the bed.[78] This sequence is connected with the one following, a scene in which hundreds of snakes come out from the sea, something that is suggested to be a reaction of these reptiles to the low water temperature – snakes come out onto the sand looking for a warmer place –, building "a mirror game between the characters' coldness among their relationship and the cold sea currents that affect nature" (Quirós, 2012).

Set in a national park, *Agua fría de mar´*s *mise-en-scène* uses a blurred image, which brings a feeling of disorientation to the audience, and allows the camera to enter into the waves of the ocean, while it registers the characters from a tilted point of view with poisonous snakes that, according to the park's guard, are lethal. The turning of the camera purposely registers a twisted angle, one that shows the apparatus and the landscape it allegedly captures to overflow the frame. The photography constantly reminds the audience how the portrayed spaces are wider than that what fits onto the screen. Together with the subtle movement and slightly defocused lense, the camera's point of view contributes to the errancy embodied by the protagonists.

Through obfuscated dialogues, extending sounds from the ocean and the jungle, a photography treatment that invites the audience to recognise the continuation – and blurriness – of the landscapes' images, *Agua fría de mar* unveils characters distanced

[78] This is a suggested symptom of sexually abused victims.

by their inability to communicate across classes. They appear to be frozen by gender codes that provoke constant awkward interactions in a critique of Costa Rica's middle classes which pose a socio-economic privilege clearly linked to neoliberal policies (Quirós, 2012: p. 198) and are constantly exposed and sometimes connected to less affluent social actors. The multiple dialogues among blurred characters establish the power relations that cross over gender and class lines, showing an exuberant landscape and minimal relations from a decentred perspective.

2.3.3 Tourism and colonial relations

Described as an economy that relies much more heavily on informal takings, and the largest tourist industry in the region, which in turn is heavily "based on leisure and beach, sun, and sand tourism" (Banerjee, Henseler, & Velasco, 2017), coupled with a context of weak social capital, based on businesses to scale, scarce state regulation and hotel development behind the local communities' back, the Dominican tourist industry is inclined to sexual tourism (Gregory, 2007; Marple, 2015). Official numbers are difficult to find as it is a sensitive topic for the government, its regional reputation and the industry itself; nonetheless, it is widely accepted that a broad portion of the tourist business revolves around sexual services and that the dynamics bring difficult social situations, such as commercial sexual exploitation of children, human trafficking and the intervention of foreign white males as perpetrators of the abuses against the children involved (Miranda, 2017).[79] Gregory points to the complications of reducing sex work "neither to 'sex' nor to 'work' but instead [embracing] disparate practices through which women renegotiated and contested hierarchies that were secured simultaneously in terms of gender, sex, race, and class" (2007: pp. 135-136). According to this anthropologist, it is in the overlap of these negotiations that most sexual exchanges happen in the Dominican Republic.

Dólares de arena carefully depicts this dynamic as it stages the adaptation based on a slippery representation of the characters and focuses on the way the weaker of these

[79] Myra Miranda notes a report previously made by UN Special Rapporteur Maud de Boer-Buquicchio (2017), which summarised the problem of tackling responsible parties for the exploitation against children, in these terms: "The blame is often put on the families and the children themselves, while perpetrators – often foreign males from Western countries whose crimes are facilitated by all sorts of intermediaries – walk around with a complete sense of impunity" (Boer-Buquicchio cited in Miranda, 2017).

women control their connection. While money is a strong element in the way they interact, the film builds through silences, staring and wide shots of the tourist landscapes through which they share a confusion between their link and an affective relationship. Both women enjoy the clean green-blue waters in silence, while the sounds of the sea and the jungle cover their bodily exchange, establishing since the beginning the possibility of their connection as a transgression to the economic dependency. Even if Anne (70) is fifty years older than Noelí (20), their relationship is based on a dual bond which emerges from material dependence as well as from an affective relationship that travels both ways. Ramón Cordero, a widely known bachata singer in the Dominican Republic, opens and ends the film with the suggestive song *Morena mía* while the camera travels around the dance floor in a documentary treatment of the village's ambience. Yanet Mojica, who plays Noelí, and Ricardo Ariel Toribio, who plays Yeremi, are respectively salsa dancer and percussionist (Báez, 2016) and thus familiar to the bachata dance floor portrayed in the opening.

According to the directors, *Dólares de arena* "stems from a [their] wish to portray a world full of contradictions, contradictions that go from parties, and vacations, to love, betrayal, pleasure, morality and loneliness" (Aurora Dominicana, 2014). The story initiates *in medias res*, showing the relationship Anne and Noelí have had throughout three years. Noelí is Anne's companion, her dependency on the French woman is economic as well as emotional, even if this last reliance is split between her and her boyfriend, to whom she seems to have a stronger attraction. The women's relation is framed by the resources Anne appears to have: her house in front of the beach, the pond, in which she can swim freely, the servants around it, her family in France and the possibility of going to Europe. Las Terrenas is presented as a lush natural setting where Anne – "la doña" to her servants and Noelí – moves without any restrictions, swims in crystal clear water and in defiance of the sea currents.

As a free adaptation from Jean-Noël Pancrazi's novel *Les dollards de sables*, the film structures the steep contrast between the village, where the Dominican lover lives with her boyfriend, and the beach, where the French character stays in Las Terrenas (Báez, 2016). As in the novel, all of the French character's resources contrast with those of Noelí's world: the little room she shares with her boyfriend, the few belongings they have, and the way they treat objects and money reveals the scarce exposure they have had to it. The way from Las Terrenas to the village is always made through a travelling

shot over the scooter that Noelí and Yeremi share, and in the village the ubiquitous signs for "rooms for rent" show the different economy held there and in Las Terrenas.

Since the Dominican Cinema Law was passed, an average of 13 films have been made on the island every year. This particular film draws the representations of how the tourist and informal workers behave. According to the novel's author, Jean-Noël Pancrazi, and its translator, David Puig, the world portrayed in both texts is close to the way the foreigners and Dominicans in Las Terrenas relate. Tourism is a particularly fast growing industry that maintained steady growth throughout the last five years (*Banco Central de la República Dominicana*, 2017a: p. 34). The informal workers within the Dominican economy represent 50% of the total work force (*Banco Central de la República Dominicana*, 2017b: p. 28). Even if the formal sectors are calculated to earn twice as much as the informal ones, the latter have increased their income four times more quickly than the former.[80] Puig describes the complexity of the world portrayed in both the novel and the film, the unusual love story and the way it describes the nation, "[t]hrough the homosexual relationship between the foreign narrator and the young married Dominican man, the novel describes the Dominican coasts with their hotels that have turned into places of transactions and experimentation" (Báez, 2016). Similar transactions take place in the way the film was financed, even if its direction and original idea – the novel from which it is adapted – come from filmmakers and writers that live and are bound to the Dominican Republic and it received RD 4,900,000 pesos (equivalent to approximately US $100,000) from the Fonprocine Fund, a prize run by the Dominican Government. Most of its development and production budget was covered by external funds, which brings the same external-internal relations to the screen as it portrays the divide between the way foreigners and locals live.[81] The most visible way in which *Dólares*

[80] The latest reports, both about the tourist industry and about the general state of the economy, point to a steady increase in the income received by the country. The Dominican Republic's foreign direct investment is predominantly for mining and telecommunications. However, the real estate industry represents 9% of the whole gross gains made during the last two years on the island, while tourism represents 10.2% of the total investment (*Banco Central de la República Dominicana*, 2017a). The average wage in the informal sector is equivalent to 3$ an hour for the formal sector, which falls into a precarious level of income, if we were to describe it from a global perspective (*Banco Central de la República Dominicana*, 2017a: p. 34). According to the 2017 *Banco Central de la República Dominicana* economic report, there has been sustained growth in the last three years – an additional $592.8M (US), which represents an increase of 13.6%. This raise was provoked by an "increase of 9.9% in the income from tourism that reached $6,723.3M (US) in 2016" (my translation).

[81] *Dólares de arena*'s case bears little resemblance to Anne Marie Stock's description of the funding arrangements for *El dorado* (Saura, 1988; see Stock, 2009: pp. 199-200). Nonetheless, the main investments are still coming from the Pan-Latin American Fund Ibermedia, Hubert Bals in the Netherlands, the Mexican Fonprocine and the INCAA Fund in Argentina.

de arena is a place for transaction and experimentation involving foreign investment is the way in which it ended up being screened – mostly at global film festivals. From a material viewpoint, both films were financed by Ibermedia. *Agua fría de mar* received some support from Cinergia, while *Doláres de arena* received approximately one eighth of its total budget from the Fonprocine Fund, which had kicked off in 2012, when Guzmán and Cárdenas's film won the award. Both films portray prolonged wide shots that show the detail of the presumably touristic landscapes. One set in Parque Nacional Marino Ballena and the other in Las Terrenas, as each film consciously exposes places that are known as tourist destinations within each country´s industry.

2.3.4 Transactions and feminism

More so than *Agua fría del mar*, *Dólares de arena* sketches a subtle turning-point at minute 35, when Noelí crashes her motorcycle on the way to Anne's house after they have fought over Noelí's flirting with Yeremi in the discotheque. It remains ambiguous whether Anne believes Noelí when she insists that Yeremi is her brother, particularly after this scene, as their bond appears to be negotiated from then onwards. However, the new pace in their negotiation may be a consequence of the accident as well as of the loss of trust, derived from the flirting incident.

The film reveals a specific framing of the relation that Anne and Noelí establish. This appears particularly clearly when Anne is buying clothes for her lover, so that she has an appropriate outfit for her trip to France. The windows at the shop take the point of view of the shop owner and Anne as they discuss while Noelí tries on different outfits foreseeing her European life. This framing establishes the gaze´s standpoint as deliberately distanced and by doing so opens the option for another perspective of the story to be considered. Nature's voluptuous traces in the surroundings of Las Terrenas, on the way to Anne's house and particularly as seen from her room's window, are also photographed showing the implicit frame and thus a point of view that effectively draws a detachment between the spectator and the screen.

The *mise-en-scène* plays with the frames around different atmospheres and how they belong to each character. There are three elements that interact to build the film's language: the contrast between a space that is inhabited by the Europeans and the

village, the frames by which each character and their interactions are presented, and the music, all of it composed and played by Dominican musicians.

The directors explain the decision about the framing and contrasts, as they were initially inspired by the region and the socio-economic dynamics within it. Las Terrenas is known as a space where Europeans have their houses and hotels, being "one of the most exquisite areas of the Dominican Republic" (Báez, 2016). The represented Dominicans are drawn from the village on the other side of the hill. The relations between the Europeans and Dominicans appear profoundly divided, pointing, as in the book, to the ongoing colonial dependencies on the island.

The access to knowledge, languages and consumption also distances the two women. While Anne is polyglot, Noelí listens in silence to the dialogues of Anne's friends. We do not know how much English or French she understands, but can just observe her subtle expressions. Noelí is absent from the spaces of the 'whites': she faces linguistic, cultural and economic borders. The cultural abyss between Anne´s and Yeremi/ Noelí's worlds is carefully highlighted at the party Anne hosts, where Yeremi is hired as a musician. When Noelí approaches him with a glass of wine, he reacts, half caught between the newness and an ambiguous curiosity, towards the rosé Noelí is sipping. Their presence is unthreatening, they fit in the foreigners' world, even if they do not belong to it, as the resolution of the story shows: Noelí steals the money and a passport from Anne, betraying her and by doing so renounces the trip to Europe she had been dreaming of throughout the film. She shows that she cares more about Yeremi than any of the temptations that money or travels represent.

Both titles refer to the tourist resources that may be exploited within the respective industries. However, *Dólares de arena* more so than *Agua fría del mar* points to the possibility of a sexual transaction embedded within the tourist industry logic, while the latter relates its title more to a disappointment. Even so, neither of these films represent transactional sex directly, or even more the exposition of the abuses that are suggested by the female characters (particularly Karina in *Agua fría de mar*); this particular idea stays off screen. By means of fragmented shots that separate the uphill from the sea shore, in the case of *Agua fría del mar*, or the off-field light and sound to which the characters react but which are not revealed to the audience, the tensions that surround the diegetic world are subtly suggested. In the case of *Dólares de arena*, the transactions are suggested in the first dialogue Noelí establishes with an Italian tourist

and are supported by the tension that money brings into her relationship with Anne, but no abuses come into focus. The connection, interaction, complicity and negotiation between the women, their relation with an oppressive patriarchal background – which, in one case, suggests sexual abuse of children, while, in the other, a context of sexual exploitation emerges – and their contact with a growing economy that reveals a tendency to escape the space and thus leaves its inhabitants vulnerable – all these stand as unspeakable problems that are suggested but remain at the margin of the frame. Both films regard the relation between women that hold different power realities, particularly due to their class and age circumstances, however, they show how even the women with less advantage in these relations have connections that, despite all their disadvantages, are still held and operate at a horizontal level.

Finally, the female characters portray conflicts that relate to their relationships with the landscapes, but more importantly with the resources around these, with the tourist industry being most relevant and visible and with the characters' bodies and problems. The connection portrayed is not one that shows the fears, traumas or delusions that these women face directly. Through a treatment that privileges subjective appreciations, it blends the characters' perceptions to a cinematographic language that draws the audience into a confusing state, a state in which we, as viewers, can share the questions and the moving ground they step on. This way in which environment, light, sound and dialogue are portrayed frames a state of mind and sensorial perceptions that defocus the energies, turning the spotlight into a cinematographic version of the way the films have been financed and made possible, while they continue a legacy of cinematographic expressions that refuses to fit into the formulas of the global mainstream industry. The emplacement and orientation expected on the audience for these two films is global and niche, while it does not rely on the Hollywood standards its means of production and rhetoric emerge as informal, failing to reach distribution pathways to maintain the production cycle.

2.4 Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano in Cuba

2.4.1 Últimos días en La Habana

In the twentieth century the most prominent Cuban filmmakers often experimented with documentary techniques. In theory, as on screen, Sara Gómez, Julio García Espinosa and Santiago Álvarez brought innovative ways to the forefront to express their cinematographic voices on themes that were relevant to the revolution, such as the place of women, Afro-Cubans, or rural dwellers in the new political agenda. Fiction films were distinct, as they required a different kind of experimentation brought from theatrical techniques and control over sound and light, training that would develop another set of skills than those applied in documentary. They also required larger budgets and this made the *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos* key to the selection of fictional voices. Between the 1960s and the 1980s nearly every feature made on the island by Cuban directors received its budget from the ICAIC. The codes of this corpus has laid out some historical reconstructions of key periods within Cuban history – like *Lucía* (1968), by Humberto Solás – or the re-enactment of the opposition against colonial authorities, like in *Una pelea cubana contra los demonios* (1972), which Tomás Gutiérrez Alea directed with Fernando Pérez working as his assistant. The legacy of NCL is closely linked to Gutiérrez Alea´s films, particularly *Fresa y chocolate* (Gutiérrez Alea, 1993), as this prominent filmmaker tutored Fernando Pérez during the "hyper-productive period of the first decade of Revolutionary film" (Mennell, 2008: p. 90).

In many ways *Últimos días en La Habana* (Pérez, 2016) is a re-examination of the classic Cuban feature film, *Fresa y chocolate*. It brings two male characters – one openly homosexual and the other closeted – with the obligatory reference to the regime's policy towards the LGBT community. So *Fresa y chocolate,* like *Últimos días en La Habana,* displays its characters in an enclosed room, where their connection as humans is performed in a theatrical way. Both deal with the topic of depression in the context of a deteriorated city, and stage an unsuccessful suicide attempt – Diego, from *Últimos días en La Habana,* tries to kill himself, just like the neighbour in *Fresa y chocolate*. Each also places the *mise-en-scène* of the community arrangements and the surrogate families around the characters. Both films portray a lament of the deterioration of the city's buildings, highlighting, although through a different tone in each case, the need to migrate from a political project that is

crumbling. In this sense, both films appear as a continuum of a similar context and characters. As Fernando Pérez has admitted himself, *Últimos días en La Habana* is a homage to *Fresa y chocolate* while it revives characters from a film he made commissioned by a Spanish producer fifteen years before: in Pérez's words, fiction also serves as a new approach to the subjects he previously portrayed in *Suite Habana* (Belinchón, 2017).

Unlike Gutiérrez Alea's films, Fernando began production schemes that surpassed the resources available at the Cuban institutions. The way his films raised resources since the 1990s disrupted an inertial traditional of having the ICAIC as the main contributor, a practice which the filmmaker describes as a circumstance for growth since the director's authorship was "absolutely respected" [82]. In Pérez's own words "from *La vida es silbar* all my films have been coproductions; I mean, that since 1998 I have been coproducing, or rather, they have coproduced me". The coproduction schemes, Pérez continues, came within doubt as "the idea of a capitalist producer, like those from Hollywood, arriving to impose their criteria and take possession over the film" (Díaz Torres, 2011: p. 11, my translation) prevailed, it is the same funding strategy Cremata Malberti refers to (*Viva Cuba Archipelagoes and Constellations* documentary, 2019: min. 20:34). In this same interview, the filmmaker remembers how difficult it was to request any resources to make films at a time when the average Cuban citizen struggled to cover their basic needs. Such was the Special Period.

While *Fresa y chocolate* emphasises the fact that the spying dynamic is crucial to its plot, as well as the way neighbours survey each other through their *Comité de Defensa de la Revolución* (CDR), *Últimos días en La Habana* jumps directly into the way governmental agencies operate arbitrarily following family disagreements. However, *Últimos días en La Habana* expands the themes and concerns, previously laid out by Gutiérrez Alea, and defocuses them. Through the topics Pérez explored in his previous films (such as the effects the Special Period had on the psyche of young Cubans, migration, the resonance of urban spaces, the divides in Cuba or the heterogeneity of

[82] "Desde *La vida es silbar* hasta hoy, todas mis películas son coproducciones; es decir, que desde 1998 estoy coproduciendo, o perdón, me están coproduciendo [...] Recuerdo que a principios de los noventa, tenía muchos prejuicios hacia las coproducciones, debido a la idea de que vendría un productor capitalista tipo Hollywood, a imponer su criterio, y a adueñarse de la película. Todo lo contrario de nuestra práctica en el ICAIC, donde la autoridad máxima de una película siempre pertenecía al director, cuya condición de autor era respetada absolutamente. Así crecimos todos en el ICAIC" (Díaz Torres, 2011: p. 11).

its inhabitants) he has opened a sensibility to the way "[m]any young Cubans lost their illusions, and ideology, once converted into doctrine and reiterated, lost its meaning" (Chanan, 2017: p. 134). Chanan observes how Pérez became "obsessed with giving expression to what was happening within each of us, the subjective laceration, how the crisis began to pierce our souls, the spiritual erosion that would forever mark all of us who lived through this moment" (2017: p. 134). This is the main difference between Gutiérrez Alea's and Pérez's styles: the former still fits into the revolution's official narrative and, sometimes apologetically, sometimes confronting the implementation of its ideas; the latter highlights the daily life questions and struggles the Havanans have.

Últimos días en La Habana tells the story of the coexistence two men in their 40s establish in the midst of the crumbling city of Havana. The building where Diego – in a clear reference to *Fresa y chocolate*'s main character – is agonising over an HIV infection plays a major role in the plot, as it has no running water or electricity, constituting an open allegory to the country's precarious infrastructure. The second character, Miguel, works at a restaurant washing dishes while he waits for his visa for the United States. The film takes a sudden turn when Diego's fifteen year old niece appears pregnant and injects a different rhythm into the narration. Through the theatrical staging, the intertexts with *Fresa y chocolate* and the subtle divides within Cuban society, Pérez brings forward the community and surrogate families that outgrow and survive within the difficult urban circumstances.

Miguel embodies the up-to-a-certain point controversial persona of the dissident. He has long given up on the island, the leftovers of the revolution and its contradictions, and has decided to go through an extended visa application process. From the first sequence onwards, we are exposed to the indifference the main character shows towards any news from the island. The TV talks about public health and regional issues. Miguel is shown to be so focused on his own business that he does not realise the other characters' worries. When news about the US is shown on TV, Miguel is eager to understand and listens carefully, as this time they are talking about Los Angeles, where an earthquake has taken place.

The following scenes from *Últimos días en La Habana* exhibit the diffused legacy of the NCL, and particularly from *Fresa y chocolate*, as we see the streets of Havana while Miguel passes by, then reaches home. There, a half-working refrigerator – just

as the one in *Fresa y chocolate* – makes its appearance, as a variety of characters, that signal different aspects of Cuban society, come to the scene. There is, for example, la tía Clara, who simultaneously talks in the terms of the "revolutionary discourse" and inheritance, showing an upfront contradiction with the visual evidence the film chooses to frame. It also stages the official government discourse – and its hypocrisy – through the police who comes into the house looking for Yusisleydis, Diego's underaged nice. Yusisleydis herself, a fifteen year old pregnant teenager, and her boyfriend, a young, aspiring baker, are a meaningful staging of a concern Pérez has referred to in his previous films: the manner in which the new generations are handling the inherited contradictions and building new, if also confusing, paths to hope.

Some new concerns of the city's inhabitants are also staged randomly, as if they were irrelevant. For instance, there is the support of football (inexistent ten years ago when baseball was the only sport that was really commented on), the common place of sex workers (something that previously appeared in *Los dioses rotos*, but that now is represented as an ordinary piece of the urban landscape), and the certainty and consequences of the cyclones that hit the island every year (min. 18:33). Besides the football commentary that appears casually when Miguel is trimming his hair and when the conversation in the barbershop transitions to a passionate discussion about Spanish players, all the other new topics brought into the narrative point to the characters' frustrations.

The characters' mood is consistently staged through diegetic music or media sound, like what we hear from the television, or Yusisleydis' singing of *Laschia q´io piangia*, the same tune Claudia's singing teacher in *Princesas rojas* is performing when she meets her. Each character holds a different *mise-en-scène* for the common theme of depression. While Miguel is trying to escape the island and continues to wash dishes in Havana as well as in Oregon later on – in a kind of clarification that even if they leave the island the precarity will follow them in the form of migrant struggles –, Diego is drawn as a living dead who listens to 'música de muerto' (as his friend describes the Beethoven tunes), requests for his last wishes and, finally, throws himself into a cyclone in a suicidal attempt. Yusisleydis stages her frustration and sadness through a rebellious but tender stubbornness to look for a better life within the island, not just for her but also for her child. The themes shown connect with the obfuscation *Agua fría de mar* and *Dólares de arena* represent in a constellation of concerns even if precariety resists the proposal of migration as a solution. A resistance

against emigration, as mentioned in *La Yuma* or *Viva Cuba*, is also pointed at, in this case as a warning of an actual movement of Cubans represented to join precarious work deals on the other side, in the foreign geography. Even if from a distanced narrative framework, as these films do not fit thoroughly within the mainstream rhetoric, as Fernando Pérez continues a depiction of characters with similar concerns as those staged by the films discussed in the previous chapter.

Últimos días en La Habana continues the dynamic of the constellation while its funding comes from mixed (private) supporters within Cuban financial sources inside and outside of the island, showing a configuration of investments which, as in the case of *La Yuma*, focus on a diasporic community anchored in the residual shell of the *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos*, an institution that no longer has the power to control every aspect concerning the film production process even if, to this day, it still maintains control over the formal distribution of every film in Cuba. *Últimos días en La Habana* was sponsored by Ibermedia and by private Cuban capital, and not solely by the ICAIC. ICAIC still controls both the distribution and exhibition of films in Cuba, but is nowadays unable to provide 100% funding as used to be the case. The circulation strategy favours the policy of global circulation via exhibition at film festivals.

2.5 *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano*'s legacy for the Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean

In *Agua fría de mar*, as in *Dólares de arena* and *Últimos días en La Habana*, the represented themes and characters have common trends and links: these are, firstly, the exploration of the relations and negotiations between an outside and an inside world within the Caribbean, secondly, the cinematic potential related to mobility, and, thirdly, a penetrating interrogation of hegemonic patriarchy. These three themes are present throughout all three films and the first one, in particular, resonates with Mette Hjort's definition of "centrifugal" film, that is, a film that responds to foreign tastes (see above). This may be inevitable given the fact that these films were funded by a foreign (Spanish) funding agency, Ibermedia. In this set of cases, the formed constellation is heavily attracted by the resources for distribution and legimacy that film festivals offer.

It is important to note, however, that the three films studied in this chapter differed from the films studied in the first chapter in that they did not seek a dialogue with Hollywood`s formulas or set genres as those films had done, but instead sought to to capture a more explorative cinematic language, one in which the spectator is encouraged to look at the world in a different way, and persuade "our aesthetic sensibility to seek ways of slowing itself down" (Romney, 2010), adopting a point of view which de Luca describes as "contemplative" (2012: p.197). In this sense we can argue that the three films studied in this chapter were more informal than ever, and this, indeed, reflects the way in which these productions were sustained, from a financial point of view, in that they were more archipelagic than ever, – after all, as already mentioned, the ICAIC did not function as the producer and the films made in the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica are dominated by their expression of the *cognitariat* and its intrinsic occupational insecurity. This intrinsic occupational insecurity is mirrored at the aesthetic level by the exploration of resistant versions of film rhetoric, particularly those characterised by the contemplative – a weak, unfunded configuration of investment, yet one that still permeates the region's movies. Each of the stories gravitate around the precarious economies in which the films were produced, guiding the film's rhetoric towards a scattered narrative that, as with the economy at its base line, remains characterized by informality. Characters, plot (or the absence thereof), decisions about colour palette use, and lens focus are all parts of a diluted formula that subtends the authorial decision to keep the context blurred, adding a layer over the archipelagic filmmaking practices.

To conclude: the distribution of *Agua fría de mar*, as in *Dólares de arena* and *Últimos días en La Habana* in their local space – i.e. in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America – was limited. As to be expected from a funding organisation such as Ibermedia, global distribution options were sought through film festival circuits. The informality and precarity underpinning the production of these films was reflected in the cinematic style of the films, characterised by a slow film format in which the plot was drained out, the colour palette diluted and the context blurred, namely, a highly explorative, informal cinematic praxis.

The question I will now be addressing is the extent to which the new technologies associated with the digital turn had a decisive impact on the "archipelagic" nature of film such as I have analysed it in this thesis so far. I will address themes such as the ways in which feminism combines with resilience and the creative ways in which

confronting the precarious economies are represented in film. In the following and final chapter I examine three examples of the ways in which cinematographic voices have attempted to appropiate the potential offered by the digital turn along with the extent to which these new expressive forms are allowed to circulate.

3. Chapter Three: The Impact of Technology: Production, Distribution, Themes: An Analysis of Three "Hybrid Scheme" Films: *Ixcanul* (2015), *Atrás hay relámpagos* (2017), and *El techo* (2017)

3.1 Introduction

As digital technologies continue to permeate every aspect of filmmaking practices in the twenty-first century, numerous spaces that had little to no audiovisual patrimony begin to build their own "family photo album" (Guzmán, 2012). For the present chapter I consider *Ixcanul* (Bustamante, 2015), *Atrás hay relámpagos* (Hérnández Cordón, 2017) and *El techo* (Ramos, 2017) as case-studies in order to analyse how the technological changes that have occurred in the film industry (particularly the influence of digital on the recording of image and sound, and editing) have had a crucial impact on Central American and Caribbean cinemas.[83] Each one of these films failed to be funded by Ibermedia and came to life at a time when Cinergia was closing down its financial support for filmmaking, which obliged these three film directors to become pioneers in the arts of production and circulation. The hybrid schemes of filmmaking allowed previously ignored cinematographic voices to surface and thereby become more visible while the new potential for greater circulation via digital circuits uncovered new hermeneutic challenges for their audience who occasionally lacked awareness and knowledge of the cultural context of these films readings.

In this chapter, I will address the debates and arguments surrounding the issue of resources for filmmaking by drawing attention to the inadequacy of the term "national cinematographies" as a moniker to describe local film production (in *National cinematographies?*); I also analyse the consequences of the decision to produce films within an informal and independent environment, one that is external to the state as well as external to commercial institutions, in *From a non-existent industry to global possibilities*. Additionally, I will describe how distribution dynamics have changed within the digital era, in *From film distribution to film circulation* while focussing on the earliest examples of digital cinema produced in Central America. I will firstly take *Ixcanul* (Bustamante, 2015) as a case study and use it to analyse how the technological

[83] The three films, together with *Dólares de Arena* were selected for the one hundred finalists at *The 10 Best Latin American Films of the Decade (2010- 2019)*. This compilation ranked 234 films representing 17 countries "based on a poll of 97 international film festival and cinemathèque programmers" from 19 different countries (Cinema Tropical, 2019). As a leading presenter of Latin American cinemas in the U.S. and global markets, Cinema Tropical developed an unusually complex methodology that is described in their website.

changes that have occurred in the film industry (particularly the recording of image and sound) have had a crucial impact on Central American cinema. Secondly, I will focus on *Atrás hay relámpagos*[84] (Hérnández Cordón, 2017) in order to examine some aspects of the changes that have occurred recently in filmic circulation culture, and address an example of how themes that are prominent in local readings lose their meaning in a global context (including when the film is screened internationally). Thirdly, I will summarise the new generation of Cuban filmmakers before scrutinising one example from this new cohort of films: *El techo* (Ramos, 2017).

3.2 National Cinematographies?

As many scholars have pointed out (Chanan, 2006; Shaw, 2013; Villazana, 2013) the professionals who founded the *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* movement in the 1960s and 70s promoted the re-creation of "both national and regional cinemas," even if the effort to support such a project contested their means of production, most of which "can yet be identified as being transnational" (Villazana, 2013). In this sense, most of the emerging "filmmakers/ theorists to a great degree [already belonged] to a transnational cinema community" (Villazana, 2013: p. 44). Indeed, over the last fifty years, the global economy has shifted and geo-political relations have been radically transformed to such an extent that the lands once known as "raw material and workforce" providers – such as the Caribbean and Central America – are now "export-processing zones" (Fernández Kelly & Nash, 1983: p. viii). These changes were nuanced and complex; what is important for this study is that they led to a model of commercial exchange "propelled and frequently supported by a 'transnational community of businessmen, financers [sic], and government officials'" (Villazana, 2013: p. 33) who while "working across borders […] profited from the existence of national frontiers [As] financial gain lay precisely in exploiting different national circumstances" (Clavin, 2005: p. 430). This relation, described as systematically uneven and asymmetrical, affected social resources which were as much economic as they were cultural. In terms of culture, it is now clear that the ways in which the

[84] It is interesting to notice that *Atrás hay relámpagos* only has a Spanish title, despite screening at international festivals like Rotterdam. This can indicate the audience targeted and the way the theme was conceived of, produced and circulated in a predominantly local circuit, despite its small audience in Central America.

notions of community, affect, or belonging surfaced and yet lacked the tools as well as the soft power needed in order to achieve successful expression; finance rather than culture was the important tool for the elites of Central American and Caribbean countries at that time. The gaps left behind in the cultural production of Central American and Caribbean countries were filled by mainstream productions (mainly from Hollywood), and Hollywood's cultural strategy at that time was focused on the global rather than the local consumer (Miller, 2001).

The twenty-first century has seen some radical changes in the filmic traditions of the Caribbean and Central American countries. There has been a push to increase film production across the board in these regions but the success of that initiative has varied from state to state, and has been highly dependent on the political environment at different points in time. Cuban cinema has been the subject of numerous studies, and Costa Rican cinema has been described by Cortés Pacheco in terms of *the paradox of the producer state*; the cinematic production of both of these countries has been outlined in Chapter 2. This paradox has been more keenly felt in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean than in other Latin American countries; for film-makers in these regions of the world film production has always been heavily dependent on the political situation at any given time, and there have been periods when the aspiration for a national cinematography has not always been translated into concrete films. It is within this context that a number of crucial questions about the influence of the digital turn over the region's cultural production have arisen; how, for example, has the technological paradigm shift from analogue to digital registers and circulation affected filmmaking practices in these regions?

In the next three sections I intend to analyse the way in which digital film practices have operated in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean; the film commentaries included in Chapter One, examined how those which succeeded within the artistic institution engage in a meaningful dialogue with these historical contexts.

3.3 From a non-existent industry to global possibilities

While the scale of Central American film production has increased over the years – especially since the year 2000 – the films themselves have followed different pathways to reach their audiences. The most common path taken in almost every part

of the world has been the industrial one: inspired by Hollywood, it is taken for granted that "huge-scale productions […] bring in the bucks" (Follows, 2016); however, and as a handful of scholars have shown (García Canclini, 2007; Miller, 2001), the very existence of those huge-scale productions – and, particularly, the distribution system on which they rely – has prevented regions like Central America and the Caribbean from creating a system that could meet their internal needs. A film industry as such – with training, funding, exhibition circuits –, has not been concreted to this day in Central America.[85] The films that experiment with different aesthetic strategies and resist mainstream formulas practically equal the number of commercial films, as neither are really that lucrative. The exhibition cycle is not supported by institutions that subsidise new productions while audiences, as in the global film business, play a marginal role in financial reinvestment. Thus, commercially-oriented films operate as the heirs of NCL and they have their own rationale, agenda and target audience. However, the high risk and potentially negative cost of making a movie affects all film projects in their own ways, thus influencing the paths chosen to reach a specific – and sometimes unreachable – audience.

At least two different trends of movie-making can be observed within the region: (i) one which is inscribed within the global economy, believes in the market rules and produces films that can hopefully be paid for by the audience, this one still portrays a contemporary model of the colonial subject who is now also the consumer; and (ii) a second type that embraces a discourse about human rights, and the artistic expression and production that may support it, while it considers the geopolitical complexities in which this lies and tries to bring about a critical approach to the tensions within. This second type portrays the stories created by children, by the LGBTQ+ community, by indigenous, blacks, women and all "others" as perceived by the conventional storytellers. Many of the movies made based on this formula are looking to reach a niche audience, namely, via the film festival circuit understood as a global institution catering for the benefit of the visual arts. Hardly any films made within the region have crossed-over from one bracket to the other.[86]

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[85] For a discussion about the meanings of film industry and film tradition see Tamara Falicov's *Latin American Film Industries* (2019).

[86] A recent example in the wider region is *Roma* by Alfonso Cuarón. This films stages a mixteca indigenous woman (Cleo) and her tensions, priorities and points of view while through a digital platform it reaches a massive global audience.

Alongside the technological advances that have occurred in the last two decades, two changes have become evident in the way audiences have access to films. On the one hand, following the music and the book industries in the inevitable disintermediation over contents through the Internet, the range of films has radically expanded. The process to establish a wider offer of cultural productions has been pushed into the market by negotiations between the distributors and the supporters of the so-called piracy[87] of films. The films made outside the mainstream circuits have benefitted more from new platforms;[88] however, this process has also advanced the progressive weathering of the old means of distribution.[89] On the other hand, this expanding portfolio of available films has slowly rearranged the way the festival circuit coordinates the film flow; on a scene where improved technology enables a more fluid network "the lessened power of distributors who previously dictated circulation of material and the facilitated direct access to content change the picture substantially" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012), allowing for the film festival itself to become the main distribution channel. This newly available circulation route – i.e. the move from the analogic model to the digital one – has diverted film production from its expensive, "product-centric" structures characterised by narrow geographical patterns to a more "consumer-centric" dynamic (Pardo, 2015: p. 39).[90] However, the selection of films

[87] Iordanova debates the practices of so-called piracy, summarising that "[a]n increasing number of authors exploring the global dynamics of cultural industries are writing about the lack of understanding of piracy and the untenable, exaggerated and inflexible model still used by the larger players in the West"; she recalls Henry Jenkins's observation (2006) that a "much wider range of content is being pirated and that it is not only American studios, but also a number of other international players who could raise concerns over the piracy practices related to their own products", from her perspective it´s important to recognise "a more flexible interpretation of what constitutes 'piracy', and subjecting to critical scrutiny the inflexible economic practices that facilitate it" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012).

[88] In this sense, as Iordanova has pointed out, while the "indie" movies are released across a number of platforms and take clear advantage of these, simultaneously, "[a]n increasing variety of studio-produced films have become available on the Internet for streaming or downloading" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012).

[89] Alejandro Pardo and Dina Iordanova quote the table *A comparative analysis of 'old world' and 'new world' distribution principles* that Peter Broderick published in the magazine *Wire*, in 2008. The table compares ten aspects of how the business of film distribution worked before the technological changes made it switch from what Alejandro Pardo calls a 'product- centric' to a 'consumer-centric' model (Alejandro Pardo, 2015: p. 39).

[90] Iordanova describes the analogue flow as "windows – sequentially-positioned phases granted to secure the uniqueness of a certain form of exploitation of content for a given period of time" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012); she argues that such a method for exhibiting moving images is "shrinking across the board in a radical and deep rearrangement that dramatically affects the mediators" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012). In this new context, Iordanova states, legal rights that were unnegotiable for the distributors have entered more flexible schemes so that "copyright holders are more and more likely to opt to retain rights to the content they create; solely acknowledging their moral right to authorship no longer seems to suffice" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012).

has shifted to another institution to such an extent that, as Iordanova suggests, the film festival circuit now occupies a privileged position in the hierarchy of film circulation.

As far as the first change is concerned, Iordanova has noted that precisely amidst the movement of peoples the current economic context denotes that "where substantial populations live in a diasporic condition or in a migratory mode" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012) there is an ever increasing volume of viewers "turning to the Internet for cultural consumption that transcends borders" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012).[91] This dynamic has characterised Central American films such as *La Yuma* and Caribbean films such as *Viva Cuba* or *El techo*, as suggested in previous chapters. An important aim of these films was to reach audiences who found themselves in economic or political exile. According to Iordanova et al.:

> The Internet not only caters to special interest audiences by making available a wide range of classic and contemporary non-mainstream cinema, it also allows those fans based far from major metropolitan hubs to gain unprecedented access to films that were previously out of reach for them. This is a disruption that makes the film lover's experience more inclusive as it allows access to a wider diversity of material and brings to life a multiplicity of various critical voices. (2012).

The film festival circuit enters a *space of flows* made up of different material supports, nodes, hubs and a "spatial organization of the dominant, managerial elites" (Castells, 2010: pp. 442-445) between a financial sector, "business services and even cross-border trafficking" that constitute networks of interaction; its insertion within the *space of flows* comes to a place of advantage given the development of professional frameworks that institutions have created over the decades (Moguillansky, 2009). The film festival circuit thereby simultaneously provides expertise, a habitat for the social actors that navigate them, direct exhibition and even a space for training for the future holders of the craft; in this sense while within the "traditional distributor-dominated

[91] Comparing the way it was before, this scholar observes that "[p]reviously, scattered diasporic audiences were only partially reached (if at all) in the context of an export-import business model that, in order to effectively link production and distribution, had to rely on dedicated outlets that targeted specific, singular user groups for particular cultural imports […] Building on the ease of transborder flows, some of the most innovative approaches were brought about by transnational individuals, who seem to be acutely aware of the buoyancy of global audiences" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012); thought of as a *new* platform with the potential to expand possibilities, entire populations that were diasporic since before, like the Salvadorian, Cuban or Nicaraguan, make use of innovative and ever increasing channels.

set-up, the film festival was outside the distribution chain and seen as pre-cursor to distribution itself: a film would screen at festivals in the hope of striking deals that would get it through to distribution", in the new disintermediated set-up the film festival "itself is the distribution" staging in the process a new way of intermediation that simply navigates across other "managerial elites" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012).

3.4 From film distribution to film circulation

Many scholars (Pardo, 2015; Crisp & Menotti Goring, 2015; Follows, 2016; Aguilar, Lacunza, 2017; Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012) have pointed out the differences digital technology has brought to filmmaking. These are very evident in the ways in which image and sound are now recorded as well as edited less expensively and with a quality that holds up for wide screen display; this ease in production is also relevant for multiple film sizes if necessary, free of bulky data transfers – as in the case described by Paz Fábrega with *Agua fría de mar*. However, these aspects relate to the technological delivery of film and do not necessarily relate to what is more crucial, i.e. the way in which these films reach audiences and are meaningful as a result of the stories they tell. As mentioned above, the table devised by Peter Broderick and entitled, "A comparative analysis of 'old world' and 'new world' distribution principles", reveals the changing distribution patterns as it compares the ways in which distribution was handled by studios and film businesses throughout the twentieth century, and the ways in which digital availability has transformed those dynamics. The table suggests that the modern tendency is towards "freeing" control; perhaps the most obvious switch, is that the channels that worked within the old system – i.e. Home Entertainment, Pay TV and Pay Per View (Follows, 2016) – have now merged into just Video on Demand, which offers different prices – some of which are low – and arranges its offer according to targeted audiences defined by their cultural sensibilities rather than their class or geographical origins.[92] This is a change

[92] The new screening venues and possibilities became "treasure troves of content announcing the existence of an untapped universe of alternative cinematic content" for the audiences whose geographies were constantly changing. The prediction Iordanova et al. make for this specific transformation is rather optimistic. She observes that as film is "expected to fit and be seen on 'any size of screen', the lines between feature films and made-for-TV films are becoming increasingly blurred, as both ultimately receive their widest circulation through transnational television" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012).

that has occurred globally, expanding the way these films are accessible, and up to a certain point it has influenced the entire region analysed in this thesis.

The virtual infrastructure which has dramatically reduced the "creation and maintenance costs" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012) undermines the concerns over piracy, and builds new consumption models that recognise that "those who cannot pay for content ought to be treated as consumers with equal rights and legitimacy, and that it is the content owners who ought to adjust their own operations and accommodate the potential consumers of pirated content" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012). However, cultural productions are available depending, among other factors, on a material support that does not exist throughout the region in the same way. If during the times of analogic distribution the key issue in order to have access to a film corpus depended on being an urban or rural dweller, now the main factor is whether audiences have access to screening technology, this encompasses the actual apparatus but also the broadband capacity which is still contingent to geographic locations.

Iordanova's appreciation observes how the analogue way of registering and distributing could control the flow as it "required the signing away of copyright" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012) as an imposition based on the rationale that "special expertise was needed for the reproduction and distribution of the work of art in order to make it widely available" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012); the disintermediation triggered by digital technologies enables the content creator to handle the dissemination as "for the first time in history [the filmmakers] have at their disposal the means to access previously distant audiences who may not be particularly large, but are sufficient to provide the modest revenue needed to keep [the production] going" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012). In this sense Iordanova observes that

> [t]o a large extent, the closure of exhibition windows is dictated by the need to counteract the speed at which pirated material can now travel over the Internet; but it is not just that. The disintermediation processes reflect activist work towards reinstating various other channels of exhibition that were previously pushed aside. And consequently the concept of 'distribution' gradually dissolves, whilst a new concept – one of film circulation – becomes ever more viable. (2012)

While the actual gains from films are difficult to determine, given the negative costs, or what Follows (2016) explains as the hidden cost –"the studios often try to hide the true cost of a movie, in order to make themselves seem thriftier, smarter or more in control than they actually are" –, numbers for Central America are still quite transparent as the interviews with the filmmakers point out, as are the difficulties of supporting filmmaking from audience takings. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the only successful case has been *Maikol Yordan de viaje perdido* (Gómez, 2014).

Another important issue to bear in mind is that within film production, as discussed in Section (3.2 National cinematographies?), most Latin American countries withdrew regulations and embraced investments from Anglo-Saxon American countries as well as Australia to shift the theatre infrastructure towards a multicomplex model. This, as discussed in Chapter 1, led to a shrinking of local film productions, and those films that were actually made saw their screening potential radically diminished. Both negative costs and the deregulation of protection policies have shrunk the returns from the gains made from filmmaking per se, leaving the guild with little to no revenues for cyclical production.

Since the last technological turn hit the audio-visual industry, some scholars are optimistic that film distribution can move away from analogic models that are consistently described as expensive, and the expectation to switch circulation into multiple pathways that meet a greater diversity of demands has long been on the horizon. On the other hand, constant promises of economic integration, made as a result of the aim to fit the global frame, have driven the political decisions of emergent economies into building connections (mainly staged by Trade Agreements; see Harvey, 2007: p. 40) which would enhance merged markets, connecting them with consumers and audiences. Whilst both assurances – the technological and the economic – are impelled by the growing hope of having a new and diverse range of characters represented through a medium that has fenced off production resources over time, an implementation of this kind faces challenges around both the real reach these new technologies can achieve as well as the actual possibility that these new economic systems will outstrip the elite, nation-state based status quo.

Due to the economic changes that have occurred during the last forty years, the parameters applied to national territories have been modified in their legal and economic substance, enabling new ways of facilitating economic and political

relations. Neoliberalism bases its gains on unequal distribution and, as Harvey (2007) has argued with respect to China, Chile and South Korea, every case of economic growth has implied a wider gap between high and low incomes. In terms of cultural finances this means a big gap in the means between producers and consumers, and for the filmmaking cycle this gap applies to the way films are consumed.[93] Epstein (2017) discusses this gap within the entertainment industry, arguing that the blockbuster model has not yet been affected by the technological turn:

> And yet as a business, entertainment has in some ways become less democratic, not more. Technology is making the rich richer, skewing people's consumption of entertainment towards the biggest hits and the most powerful platforms. This world is dominated by an oligarchy of giants, including Facebook, Google, Amazon, Netflix and Disney (as well as Alibaba and Tencent within China's walled ecosystem). Those lacking sufficient scale barely get noticed. Paradoxically, enabling every individual and product on the planet to find a market has made it next to impossible for the market to find them. Consumers generally favour whatever they find on their mobile screens or at the top of their search results. The tail is indeed long, but it is very skinny. (2017)

The way these films are circulating appears to be far from the democratisation to which film scholars originally aspired. Op den Kamp (2015: p. 151) has argued that the digital turn has appeared to bring all relevant works to the public domain while it still maintains complex economic limitations that restrain it from free access. These material limitations are one step before another barrier which can be described as that of the acquired taste, described in the previous chapters. Criterion collections, university syllabi and cinematographic retrospectives within film institutions pose new cycles for key films that are intended to be stored as representative of a certain culture. Viewers tend to privilege the selection of cultural productions that feel they can understand, and while movies that are on the film festival circuits have already

[93] In terms of the variety of films, Iordanova points to the shrinking variety that analogic distribution brings to the *mainstream* screens. In her words "'[l]ess than one percent of the films produced on planet earth get distribution in the United States,' they say in their promotional materials. It is the alluring market opportunity of the untapped 99 percent of cinema –the periphery–" (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012).

proven to be worthy as an artistic discourse, this does not guarantee they will reach a wide audience.

With the advent of the technological turn during the first decades of the twenty-first century a new kind of cinema appeared which developed more heterogeneous languages. New aesthetic perspectives allowed entire filming crews to express cultural perspectives that were close to their sensitivities, and this cinema had recourse to different geographical and cultural hybridities in order to express new points of view about subaltern cultures. The fact that these movies could enter a global filmic culture was a phenomenon that moved "the pivotal force to 'consumer-centric'" (Pardo, 2015: p. 39) logics. One way of understanding the changes brought about by this technological paradigm-shift is to see it as created by a transformation of the profile of the average media consumer:

> Regarding the new consumer profile, marketing experts are convinced that this generation of new technology users has now reached a critical mass in numerical terms, and their consumer behaviour is markedly different to that which went before. Among others, the following features should be remarked: (a) a more participative and active attitude with respect to audio-visual and entertainment content (user-generated content); (b) multi-tasking skills; (c) new forms of socializing through virtual communities; (d) a preference for versatility and portability over quality in consumer use; (e) new consumer behaviour as a catalyst for the creation of new market niches (low demand, personalized and individually tailored consumption); and (f) unconventional understanding of the free circulation of audio-visual material (piracy). In summary, as Gubbins remarks, we are in front of a new kind of "active audience". (Gubbins in Pardo, 2015: p. 25)

In terms of distribution, Michael Gubbins, whose description of the active audience Pardo quotes, argues that the digital revolution has "changed the relationship between audiences and content"; these are the two elements that Pardo equates to "consumers and markets" (all quotes from Pardo, 2015: p. 25) that have given cinema space as a commodity. Chris Anderson, the editor of *Wired* magazine, has analysed several companies in the retail sector and offers a nuanced perspective to this argument. His conclusion is that the Internet is ideal for bringing together dispersed sectors as a result

of the low (or non-existent) costs of distribution. This switch creates a new business environment where "popularity is no longer the key factor in market value; in fact, the Internet is especially apt (and profitable) for the sale of relatively unknown or minority interest products" (Anderson, 2006). The change goes deeper than that of a shift "of paradigm in distribution patterns" and Pardo argues that what is actually changing is the mentality "in all the key players of the film value chain" (all 2015: p. 27).

Iordanova, for her part, describes those changes as a turning-point for the hierarchies that have operated for over a century, i.e. roughly since the patent war ended:

> Traditional distribution – where studios control box office revenues by releasing films for coordinated showing a system of theatres and then direct them through an inflexible succession of hierarchical ordered windows of exhibition and formats – is radically undermined by new technologies. Chances are that film distribution as we have known it will soon represent a fraction of the multiple ways in which film can travel around the globe. The result will be a new film circulation environment: a more intricate phenomenon that includes a plethora of circuits and, possibly, revenue streams. (Iordanova & Cunningham, 2012: p. 1)

A very particular case in the way circulation is run in Cuba is broadly known as *el paquete*. Leila Cobo asserts that while high-speed Internet is still a rare commodity so that very few can access or afford to download video, "a massive, one-tetrabyte [sic] hard drive that is curated weekly and includes nearly 100 folders packed with videos, TV series, award shows, classified ads, and music" (Cobo, 2018) is produced every Thursday in Havana. While the selection is made by anonymous "experts", Cobo describes how "content comes from various sources: high speed Internet for the few who have it, bootlegged copies, friends in Miami" (2018). The dynamic demonstrates that "at any given time, three to five *paquetes* will be in circulation in Havana, produced by different people but assembled the same way: on Thursdays, all the content aggregators gather in one location (obviously, sending big files via email is not an option) to upload their bounty to a single hard drive" (Cobo, 2018). The *paquete* is part of a wide range of circulation conduits that operate differently in every region.

Within the scattered economic, political and cultural (film) institutions that operate in the Caribbean and Central American region, these *new technologies* in film have

opened up new ways of communicating with audiences. Along with this switch, they have created easier production methods by lowering the costs of registering image and sound, and decreasing crew sizes. Notwithstanding the specific ways in which these recent films have reached their audiences, it is important to underline the fact that their impact has been characterised by three expressive features: (i) the articulation of local voices that had until now remained "unheard", (ii) the use of distance and irony so that local themes could be rechannelled within global readings, and (iii) Cuba's specifical journey in the form of its 'independent' filmmakers. I will closely analyse each of the following films with particular reference to the first two of these dynamics.

3.5 From the subaltern to staged "modernity": Interpreting *Ixcanul*

3.5.1 An intercultural production

The *mise-en-scène* of *Ixcanul* (2015) displays a particular density as a result of the intercultural negotiations present within both its production and its narrative. It deciphers hermeneutic codes through its representation of the subaltern and how this group acts according to the cyclical logic of Mayan time. This rounded logic is staged through births, harvests, lunar cycles, volcanic offerings (religious rituals), verbal language and cinematographic montage, the latter being the only register external to the historic and contemporary cosmovision of the Mayans. It has been noted that *Ixcanul* was produced by a transnational and multicultural crew[94], which supported the almost entirely Kaq´chikel[95] cast (Coroy, Telón and Antún leading) by creating filmic tools collectively – scenes, dialogues and plot twists – and thus achieving a rhetorical density within the script and narrative arc that is embedded in the Mayan cosmovision. These tools were facilitated by funds and resources external to the

[94] Most of the crew was gathered from Bustamante's close collaborators: the make-up person is a professional of Japanese origin (Sato), the editor is of Belgian and Guatemalan origin (Díaz), the camera person and two of the producers are Argentinian (Arteaga, Peredo and Tenenbaum), another producer is Spanish (Nofuentes) and Bustamente himself is Guatemalan-born and France-based. The production, privately and publicly funded from France, Guatemala, Spain and the Film Fund Cinergia, shows the stories of the Mayan community it represents (Bustamante 2015). All professionals gather around *La Casa de Producción*, a production company founded by Bustamante.

[95] Some films had been made in Kiché such as *Maya, Where the Sun is Born* (Jiménez, 2013) or Mam, such as *La casa más grande del mundo/ The Greatest House in the World* (Bojórquez and Carreras) or have partial dialogues in Kaq´chikel, Kechi, Tzotzil or Tz´utujil like *El regreso de Lencho/ The return of Lencho* (Fernández, 2010), *Numaj Ruq´ii Q´aq Bajlam/ The myth of time* (Jaguar X, 2008) or *El Norte/ The North* (Nava, 1983). *Ixcanul* is the first film to be entirely spoken in Kaq´chikel.

Mayan community. By entrusting the film's technical production to a predominantly Mayan *mise-en-scène*, *Ixcanul* connects the film's materiality to Mayan cultural and linguistic codes rarely represented by the filmic medium. This collaboration requires a semantic negotiation that runs the risk of distorting the original voice, and it is this subaltern voice which I will further examine in this section.

This section contends that *La Casa de Producción* – the team behind the making of the film – contributes to, as Gleghorn states, "unsettl[ing] dominant colonial narratives of indigeneity" (2017: p. 183) by re-articulating the Mayan cosmovision. This is no minor task, considering the numerous layers that surround narratives about indigeneity: language and cultural codes are only part of the biases that sustain aggressive material and discursive control over the community portrayed in this film. The uneven relations the Kaq´chikel in particular, and the Mayans and indigenous people in general, endure and are shown on and around *Ixcanul*'s screen. To highlight and transgress this hostile environment, the crew effectively overcame three obstacles: the material, the discursive and the linguistic. This section explores, analyses and describes the three elements, considering the film as an example of intermedial practice that succeeds in connecting oral and dramatic traditions to filmic registers, enabling a dialogue through its political intentions, themes and intended audiences in order to challenge some of the power structures that hold back decolonial dialogue in Guatemala. Throughout the next sections I examine the scope of María's voice and the process of bringing it out through intermedial representation, before briefly exploring the subaltern's voice through concrete examples from the film.

3.5.2 Resources for an intertextual representation

The film's language and structure build a cadence that forces the viewer to watch it as a diegesis guided by the mores and actions of the Mayan characters. In a country where the *ladino*-indigenous dichotomy is the basis of exploitative social relations sustained by land distribution failures at the expense of the indigenous population's workforce (Salguero Rodas, 2016: p. 402), it is important to note that speaking Kaq´chikel – a language native to roughly half a million speakers – was made a basic requisite to play the leading role in the *Ixcanul*. This decision was strategic and aimed to achieve the unique cultural diegesis attained by the film: while none of the technical crew's members were of indigenous origin, the fact that most of the professionals involved in the film's production were not *ladinos* successfully erased (or nuanced)

the *ladino*-indigenous dichotomy which otherwise might have caused tensions (Bustamante, J. *Interview with Jayro Bustamante*. Personal Communication. 18/10/2015). In the director's view, the multicultural origins of the technical crew contributed to smooth the relationship between cast and crew, which bridged the gap between the need for skilled technical personnel and the expression of the Mayan point of view and voice. The team's agenda and the filming process were important in order to avoid the tendency within hegemonic media representation that, according to Gleghorn, "remains to this day saturated with condescending and violent portrayals of Indigenous people" (2017: p. 168), while also running the risk that the re-enactment of their stories will become "complicit with the ethnographic tendency to fixate on an existing reality anchored in the past" (Marguiles, 2011: p. 6). This representational trend continues to paralyse the necessary "community renewal, dialogue and esteem" (Gleghorn, 2017: p. 172) that practitioners and viewers strive for in Guatemalan, and more widely, Central American and Latin American societies.

The US $8,000 of funding from Cinergia in 2014 kickstarted the original idea for the film (Fundacine, 2015) as well as the voluntary work of a fifteen-person crew, which operated as technical support. Bustamante also withdrew a 30,000 Euro loan from a French bank, which he describes as a highly risky scheme: "[N]ever in my life had I had so much money in my hands, and I took it without knowing how I was ever going to give it back" (2015). On the other hand, many professionals were involved as a reault of personal enthusiasm for the project, and the director believes the film received such goodwill "just on the basis of pursuing the Guatemalan film industry I believe we are all craving" (2015: min. 2:13). Bustamante extends his description of the film's production stating "the task of placing monetary value on all that voluntary work undertaken within the film is a serious one [that eventually had to be faced], as the French co-production team managed their own numbers and wanted their counterparts to match those financially" (2015b: min. 3:57). The film's funding started with the Central American scheme that granted a small sum for the basic post-production, while it shared the first cut of the film with key people from international film festivals; in Bustamante's words:

> It all started with Cinergia. Through Cinergia very important people from international film festivals could see the film, these people started to

> follow the film and speak about it more when we got to San Sebastián, which really was the catapult for us, and people came to see the film because they were curious about "Central American" film. (2015a, min. 13:22)

The detailed work on digital sound and image was financed with the investment from the aforementioned team. After postproduction, the cost of making the film is calculated to have been around US $500,000 (Bustamante 2015: min. 5:13), matching gross revenue of US $295,157 from the global box office ("Box Office Mojo," 2017). The collaborative production model resulted in the film being the most successful case of an art-house Central American film to date. Besides the Alfred Bauer at the Berlinale Festival, more than fifty awards are now part of *Ixcanul*'s accolades (Cortés Pacheco, 2018). Such prizes gained access for this film to numerous film festivals in four continents, which in turn resulted in global distribution through academic and commercial video on-demand platforms as well as via DVD release in eighteen territories. [96] The film was shown in Guatemala, where it had around 9,000 commercial spectators in six weeks, as well as 2,500 teenagers from various ethnicities on a two-month tour sponsored by the United Nations Population Fund (Sánchez, L. *E-mail with Lisandro Sánchez*, Personal Communication 09/12/2017). It was screened in five theatres in Costa Rica for four weeks, attracting 6,618 viewers (Avellán Troz, K. *E-mail with Karina Avellán Troz*, Personal communication 04/07/2016).

Although it is uncertain how many Kaq´chikel speakers have seen the film (Sánchez, 2017), its success – which is unprecedented compared with any previous Central American film – has positioned the Mayan plot as an influential cultural reference for the region. This demonstrates the ways in which material obstacles were overcome through the use of film funds and festival distribution, since no other Guatemalan film – made in any language – has won so many prizes.

Originally conceived as the story of a Kaq´chikel character, *Ixcanul* was inspired by an anecdote told to Bustamante's mother – which he asserts is true – in the area around

[96] The distribution ranges across five continents which is unusual for most Central American films: Turkey, Mexico, Former Yugoslavia, Japan, US, Italy, Middle East, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Greece, China, Norway, German speaking Europe, Australia, Vietnam, Puerto Rico, by *Film Factory*, Guatemala by *La Casa de Producción* and Central America (with the exception of Guatemala) by *Pacífica Grey* (Avellán Troz, 2016).

the Atitlán Lake Basin, when she was working as a health professional in the 1980s (Bustamante 2015: min. 8). The real life María requested anonymity, but agreed for the story to be told as she thought it was not just her story, but that of many Mayan women (Bustamante 2015: min. 9). *Ixcanul*'s plot is structured in three acts that build into both the portrayed conflicts: the first shows María's attentions towards and attraction to Pepe (18), a young day labourer who is always talking about going to the United States, a place with money, gardens, houses and cars; while her parents have arranged her engagement to the farm manager, Ignacio (34), the coffee farm's administrator, a widower and father of three children. The first act starts chronologically, when both women are breeding the hogs they would then prepare for the meal in Ignacio's honour for the engagement ceremony; it focuses on María's split attention, her brief relation with Pepe, and ends when she is intercepted by Ignacio on her way to follow Pepe as he leaves the village. The second act demonstrates the limitations language and illiteracy place on the main characters. It shows the development of María's pregnancy and how her parents deal with this new circumstance: María asks her mother for help and at first Juana tries to make her abort the foetus, yet when they do not succeed, they try to hide the pregnancy from Ignacio. The middle act ends when María collapses after being bitten by a snake in an attempt to expel the reptiles from the harvested field. The venomous incident takes her, still pregnant, to a hospital in the city, which composes the third act – the episode of the baby's disappearance: from the deceit at the hospital to María's acceptance and wedding to Ignacio. This last episode is also the real María's story, while the previous two are additional fictions plotted by Bustamante in collaboration with the cast and which, I would argue, are inspired by the community's collective memory and oral heritage.

For *Ixcanul*'s production, once the script was written, the crew first arrived to the Atitlán Lake Basin and attempted to hold a casting session in a K´iche community[97] only to find out that few women would be allowed by a man – be it their brother, husband, son or father – to travel to the cinematographic setting at the Pacaya Volcano, 150 kilometres away from the Lake's communities, and remain alone on site

[97] Within the distinction of Mayan communities in Guatemala it is worth mentioning that despite a systematic attempt to narrate K´iche´s and Kaq´chikels as enemies, they both hold the same cultural root and marginality. The K´iche community outnumbers the Kaq´chikel by almost 2 million speakers, having around 2.3 million in total. Both communities see themselves as Maya, despite their distinct languages.

for the weeks needed for filming. Bustamante highlights how important it was to acknowledge this patriarchal stance in the filming and scripting process as "the film is precisely about that" (Bustamante, J. *Q&A with Jayro Bustamante UCL,* Personal Communication 17/10/2015). María Telón, an actress at the Kaq´chikel community theatre who had previous on-camera experience in the film *Polvo/ Dust* (Hernández Cordón, 2012) and happened to be a widow, thus a *free woman*, became the guide for the next casting session with a different indigenous community.

In terms of the linguistic obstacles that had to be overcome, every aspect of the film's structure and dialogue was negotiated between the technical crew (particularly the writer/ director) and the performers. A crucial feature of these negotiations was the film's title, as the word *Xcanul* means "the internal voice of the mountain that is boiling and looking for eruption" in Kaq´chikel. It could have been written as a naked noun but Bustamante decided to add the *Ix*, as it is the feminine prefix in the language so it really means the "female internal voice of the mountain that is boiling and looking for eruption", or the female volcano (Pitney, 2016). Furthermore, Bustamante explains that the film's language went through a detailed crafting process since he first wrote the script in French when he started looking for funds in France (Bustamante, J. *Q&A with Jayro Bustamante UCL,* Personal Communication 17/10/2015), before translating it into Spanish in order to work in Guatemala. It was after the crew did the casting that one of the actors then translated this script into Kaq´chikel (Bustamante, J. *Interview with Jayro Bustamante*. Personal Communication. 18/10/2015).[98] The fourth step was to offer the lines to the actors who would then consider them and say them on their own terms, before finally transcribing this version so it was available for the cast and crew to memorize (Bustamante, J. *Interview with Jayro Bustamante*. Personal Communication. 18/10/2015). This process took three months and resulted in the cadence of the performances: the actor's speech and pace, which is slow and constant, the silence with which they answer questions that are crucial for the plot and the conviction with which they perform the tasks that relate them to nature all establish a rhythm far from the common speed associated with urban Guatemala, and particularly those sites traversed by motors, digital technology or electronic devices. Moreover, the meaning given to natural cycles – lunar, harvests, pregnancies –

[98] The director explains his deficiency in Kaq´chikel language, arguing that even though he learnt it through his nanny as a child, she would have stopped him from speaking it as everyone else would celebrate when he spoke French in addition to Spanish (Bustamante 2015).

highlights the prevailing circular logic of the community we see on screen. The world depicted in the film is carefully protected from the world we understand as *Western*, as it encapsulates the characters in the village at the skirts of the volcano. A single cemented road appears slowly through a tilt shot at minute 40 (see *Archipelagoes and Constellations*, 2019, min. 12) when the frame is following María, using a wide angle shot as she tries to run after Pepe and is caught by Ignacio. At the end of the story, the roads to the hospital and the hospital itself unveil a *Western* world rather distant from the Maya diegesis and to which Juana, Manuel and María have no access.

The indigenous cast stages the specific references to the Mayan cosmovision. Juana prays to the deities (earth, wind, water, volcano) for her home, work and daughter, engaging in a prayer to the spirits, thanking them for all the blessings. Later, the Mayan priest thanks the sky-earth cited in Mayan documents, the best preserved of them being the *Popol Wuj*. The *Popol Wuj* is a collective transcription of various tales describing Mayan origins, the *sky-earth´*s cosmogony (the K´iche way of saying "world" [Tedlock, 1985: p. 12]) and the mythical elaboration of the K´iche´s migration. It describes how the Hero Twins, Junajpu and Xb´lanke, defeat the lords of Xibalbá – '*the place of fear* in K´iche' (Arias, 2012: p. 91) – who had thought of themselves as a false or weaker moon and sun (Colop, 2008: p. 15). The Hero Twins are on their way to harvesting the corn seeds from which humans originate; Xibalbá is "simultaneously the place of death as well as the space underground where life germinates" (Arias, 2012: p. 92). Despite the challenges of finding written references for the film's representation of the Mayan cosmovision given the meagre bibliography of Mayan writings, I argue that the collective memory represented in the film connects to the best-preserved Mayan document. *Ixcanul*'s plot is intertextual with the Hero Twins' story, where they succeed in overcoming obstacles their dual fathers had previously failed and thus outwit and destroy the lords of Xibalbá (Arias, 2012: p. 91). Just like the Hero Twins, María undergoes a series of trials to gain her family's right to maintain their jobs on the farm. The trial is revealed in the narrative first as a way for her to gain freedom, away from an ambiguously unwanted pregnancy, and then through the cleaning of the earth by ridding it of the snakes that affect the harvest. A key code within the story are the lunar cycles Juana mentions twice to María. As a transcription of ancient collective memory and knowledge, Colop foregrounds how the *Popol Wuj* describes "the Orion, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor constellations leaving proof of the Mayan mathematic knowledge of time" (2008: p. 17). Despite her

illiteracy, Juana's knowledge of the lunar cycles comes from the oral transmission of that same heritage once transcribed as the books (*Wujs*) as "weaving", itself a metaphor for "social fabric" (*Popol*) (Arias, 2012: p. 90). This interpretation of the hieroglyphs and pictography drawn around 1550 to 1555 in Santa Cruz del Quiché shows that "employing a Latin alphabet […] became the foundational manifesto of resistance for the *Mayab* communities who had survived the destruction of their cities and their culture, the rape of their women, and the enslavement of their men, and in the fifty years following the [encounter with the Spanish newcomers], they lost approximately six-sevenths of their total population" (Arias, 2012: p. 92).

In this assertion Arias also reminds us that "[t]hose who survived were forced to accommodate their understanding of the world to new cultural realities alien to their beingness" (2012: p. 92). This cultural shift brought *ladinos* to the heart of the Guatemalan hierarchies (Arias, 2012: p. 88); nonetheless, Mayan memory remains alive through oral patrimony and this cultural inheritance is represented by Juana's dialogue, speech and rituals. The first spiritual intention, described previously as the volcano offering, represents Juana's traditional/ learned practice; however, the most consistent register by which the cast stage its culture's vitality is through the use of the Kaq´chikel language.

Language appears as the key to decipher Juana and María's voice and it drives the film towards a cultural debate as the words and syntax of Kaq´chikel vary from one group of speakers to another. The writer/ director explains his understanding of Kaq´chikel is rather limited, as his own Nana prevented him from practicing it, fearing he would be discriminated against. In a second example he also underlines the reversal of this situation due to the film's success: María Telón's children, having distanced themselves from the Kaq´chikel language, as they feared inheriting the discrimination derived from the racism intrinsic to the history of the indigenous language, started to reconsider practicing their native language once they experienced the film's success (Bustamante, 2015). Moreover, language reveals the characters' cultural belonging and world view. Throughout the entire film this belonging is expressed by way of the main language spoken and it demonstrates the political questions surrounding it. The dialogue between María and Pepe in the first scenes evidences this: while María asks Pepe why he would like to go to the United States, he describes the wealth of that *other* space. When he highlights the importance of learning English in the utopian country, María timidly says "you'd better learn Spanish before thinking about

English", advice to which Pepe answers with the rigid dictum: "it's because of people like you this country is stuck". The brief discussion between the lovers exposes the political discourse around language practice: while they see their mother tongue as insufficient, María interprets Spanish as a language of promise, whereas Pepe fixes upon the idea of jumping directly to the next hegemony.

3.5.3 The subaltern's journey and voice

Since the 1980s, critiques and analytical tools derived from postcolonial theory have offered innovative analyses of capitalism, modernity and European colonialism on the one hand, and, on the other, some of the boundaries around which national belonging or nationalism has been conceived (Mendoza, 2016b). The focus has switched from the ambiguous 'imagined community' to the social and economic circumstances that mandate the various aspects of colonial and capitalist domination. Gayatri Spivak's 1983/8 influential essay on this topic, "Can the subaltern speak?" discussed the ambiguous nature of this rhetoric when enunciated through language or categories using a Eurocentric perspective. Spivak's theory expounds on the notion, or even the possibility, of whether the subaltern has a voice and, in particular, the catch-22 situation whereby if the subaltern achieves a voice, he/ she ceases to be a subaltern at that point. This discussion is particularly relevant within film studies, as Mette Hjort argues, since the transformative effect of globalisation on the international motion picture industry has had other significant implications for the nature of national film industries and film policy as the traditional binary model that pitted an essentially commercial, free-market and internationally oriented industrial model (Hollywood) against a culturally-informed and state-subsidised model (European national cinemas) has been superseded by a "new international division of cultural labour" (Hjort & Pietre, 2007: p. 9).

The disregard of the international division of cultural labour is key to understanding why the struggles for representation within intellectual, economic and cultural (filmmaking) history have become invisible. The characters from cultures that occupy the wrong side of the labour division have been historically poorly represented, if at all. *La Casa de Producción* reverses this exploitation by bringing resources to a community hitherto deprived of filmmaking funds and technical practices.

Twenty years after Spivak's proclamation, the Latin American modernity/ decoloniality movement reconfigured this discussion of subalternity and staged it in the context of Latin America (Quijano, 2000: p. 210). This is not a minor detail: the coloniality of power and its theoretical frame transported the focus from the metanarratives of English and French colonialism to their Portuguese and Spanish equivalents, where much of the colonial repression had been based on the explicit exigency that the allies of the colonial powers would switch religion, language and thus ideology. Throughout the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, race would determine – and be central to the question of – who had access to full rights; this exploitative relationship continued within the republics that were formed in the nineteenth century and a system of exclusion emerged.[99] Coloniality's premise was to separate the human from the supposed non-human and determine those who were to be exploited from those who were protected from that exploitation (Mendoza, 2016a). Quijano pinpoints two crucial aspects that influence the notion of the *other*: on the one hand, the control over workforce and production means that "all forms of unpaid work were to be ascribed to the colonized *races*" while, on the other hand, all paid endeavours, jobs or services are given to the "colonizer's race" (2000: p. 208). The film stages this type of epistemic and social violence inasmuch as it portrays the peasants' vulnerability within the coffee plantation; it also points towards Manuel and Ignacio as the middlemen, who are themselves indigenous, whereas the farm owner, presumably a *ladino*, does not even appear in the film. Direct labour exploitation coupled with the systematic destruction of written memory provoked the vulnerability portrayed by *Ixcanul*'s characters, as they are deprived of the tools to stage their demands.

While colonisation may be defined by military facts, coloniality stands as a concept in an epistemological dimension (Mendoza, 2016a). It is the mental framework that prevails and continues to reproduce power relations centuries after the material conditions have ceased to exist. The coloniality of power maintains its dominating

[99] Quijano describes the concept of race as "literally an invention" (203) quoting his own work, Jonathan Mark´s and José Carlos Mariátegui´s: "The […] category of color […], just like the invention of the particular category *white,* requires exhaustive historical investigation. […] [T]here is no trace of these categories in the chronicles or other documents of the first hundred years of Iberian colonisation in the Americas". To support the idea that racism started with European migration to the American continent Quijano points out: "[D]espite those who would become *European* in future knew the future *Africans* since the times of the Roman Empire and even the Iberians were more or less familiar with them long before the Conquest, they never thought of them in terms of race before the apparition of America. In fact, race is a category applies for the first time to the 'Indians' and not to 'blacks'" (2000: p. 203).

agency long after colonialism has been eradicated, profoundly permeating the consciousness as well as the social relations of all subjects involved (Mendoza, 2016b). As Arias states:

> Coloniality of power means the production of identities based on race, conjoined with a hierarchy between European and non-European identities in which the first have oppressed all others, together with the construction of mechanisms of social domination designed to preserve this historical foundation and social classification. (2012: p. 110)

Both postcolonial and decolonial frames of thought diagnose the epistemic violence intrinsic to occidental knowledge. The former questions the possibility of the subaltern's voice in the context of dialogue between European and Asiatic thought traditions. The latter, however, holds the certainty that the subaltern can speak (Arias, 2012) but can it perform? Can it stage its agency?

3.5.4 María's voice

The fundamental elements of *Ixcanul*'s cinematographic language are how the characters are built, and the most important axis of the characters' interactions is the mother-daughter relationship. The affective relationship between María and Juana is central to the construction of meaning of the film: more than half of *Ixcanul*'s scenes are built on interactions between these two women, including the first and last shots of the film. In most of these scenes, their bodies appear in a medium two-shot, which expresses both women's physical intimacy as well as their interdependence. Juana shows herself as a future version of María, projecting what the young woman will be in twenty years. Through Juana, María learns how to encourage the hogs to breed, work in the field and the kitchen, carry firewood, bring offerings to the volcano and collect the fowl's eggs. María learns how to work and how to talk. The few moments when María is by herself, or with Pepe, her sensuality also arises showing her curiosity and autonomy. The camera portrays her persuasive expressions, as well as her curiosity, in medium close-up shots, while she stares at the breeding hogs, when a travelling shot through the coffee plantation finds her kissing Pepe, laying on the bed while her parents are having sex in the neighbouring bed or picking coffee while flirting with Pepe.

Their daily life on the farm where they work is profoundly linked with nature and Juana guides her daughter, advises her and demands her attention as, for example, when María becomes distracted while praying. Juana is constantly dragging her daughter into conversations and articulates María's gestures and actions by giving them verbal interpretation. For instance, when María worries about upsetting her father due to her pregnancy by Pepe, Juana tries to console her saying Manuel (the father) will overcome his anger when he sees the "boy". A simple nod from María triggers Juana's conclusion: "I don't think so", María says, "Is it because it is a 'girl'?" Juana clarifies and María agrees. "So, you did count your moons," Juana concludes, showing how mother and daughter handle the lunar calendar with dexterity. The treatment of both characters focuses on their knowledge and cultural meanings, removing them from the binaries that could deem them "anti-modern, bounded by place and anachronistic" (Gleghorn, 2017: p. 167). Even if they belong to an enclosed diegesis, they show transgressive knowledge that saves them from the "savage ethnography".

Juana's voice is clear: she expresses her gratitude and she demands and builds contexts and situations verbally. A scene in which this becomes apparent is in the third sequence, in which Juana and Manuel offer Ignacio a meal. The meal gathers both families together in an engagement ritual; Ignacio is there to define the terms of the marriage. Juana does not hesitate to promote her daughter's virtues, which she exhibits as an example of her own merit. The meal is framed in a medium group shot that often portrays María at the end of the table, half smiling at her mother's wit and hidden behind all the toasting glasses; her opinion or point of view is hardly taken into account. This does not seem to bother her, she trusts and follows her mother's will.

Within the context of the family, Juana is a respected voice: "Touch me," she tells her husband when searching for sex while lying in the bed next to their daughter; "I will think of something, as I always do," she says when Manuel worries that they will be expelled from the farm due to María's unfaithfulness to Ignacio. As a character, Juana shows a direct connection between her own thoughts and feelings and the human and social context that surrounds her; however, her communicative drive is frustrated when the injustice they face becomes evident. The relevant authorities do not listen to Juana: the only language she knows, Kaq´chikel, is ignored. Furthermore, her voice is distorted in the translations that Ignacio, the only bilingual character, creates based on her words. No public servant – not the social worker, doctor or lawyer Juana

consults – even considers the need to understand Juana. The characters' monolingual circumstance leaves them vulnerable. The film places that fragility in the *mise-en-scène* which assumes a wider angle to frame the brutal system that maintains oppression. In a three medium shot Juana looks confused in front of the legal authorities: "Will they find the baby?" she asks Ignacio, to which Ignacio answers convincingly, in Kaq´chikel "They are trying". Meanwhile, the lawyer queries "What is Madame saying?", "That she wants to leave", Ignacio answers, thereby distorting Juana's petition to find her granddaughter.

On three different occasions, Juana tries to make her voice heard by these institutions. First, when the social worker comes to confirm – in a census – the sanitary services they have at the farm. On this occasion Juana talks to the state employee assuring them that the house where they are at is her address. The enquiry comes in the middle of a tense moment, as Ignacio has recently been informed that María is pregnant by another man. When asked for an interpretation from Kaq´chikel to Spanish, Ignacio translates Juana´s words "this is our address" into "They are leaving", ambiguously pushing the family away from the farm, without telling them. A second misunderstanding arises when María is in agony owing to a snake bite. Once in the hospital, while María's health is in jeopardy, Juana tries to ask the doctor for her daughter's status to receive only a blunt denial from the health authority; the mother approaches the doctor asking about María's health but she sends her away, neglecting her professional duties based on the premise that she does not understand Kaq´chikel. The third misunderstanding Juana faces is the most serious of all, as it happens when the fake corpse of the baby is found and they go to the legal authorities. Juana pursues support to find the baby while the lawyers threaten her daughter on charges of infant trafficking. In these episodes the language barrier provokes her dependence on Ignacio: if she wants to communicate with the social workers, doctors or lawyers, she must blindly trust Ignacio's dual linguistic ability to honestly interpret back and forth. Ignacio's hidden agenda – all he wants is to marry María and guarantee a stepmother for his three children – triggers the messages' interception as he changes the meaning of what the professionals say to Juana and vice versa. As such, Juana loses agency, and she ends up being oppressed. Her condition as the *other* to the institutions and state resources, becomes the axis of the story.

The way the plot is constructed presents the world to us on María's terms, that is in Kaq´chikel, at her pace, with her music. From the second sequence Juana is presented

to us as a proud witty mother with a profound understanding of natural cycles and corporeal joys. Juana's character expresses her point of view, crucial elements of her consciousness as well as her limitations, particularly those derived from her illiteracy. It is within the performance of this perspective that the *mise-en-scène* portrays the clash between her position as a woman under the weight of patriarchy and racism, while also portraying her agency and, consequently, that of María. That clash is key to the coloniality of power, where those conquered were condemned to live in the place of unbeing, stripped of humanity, rights and self-determination (Mendoza, 2016a). This situation, writes Quijano, disrupted all aspects of indigenous society, including gender, work, colonial authority relations, as well as social reorganization within public and private institutions (Mendoza, 2016b, 2016a). This is the wall that Juana repeatedly crashes into.

Bustamante addresses the performativity of the drama stressing that it is crucial to the task of directing: "The great thing about cinema is that you can't say what the characters think, you have to let them show it on their own terms" (2015c). In this sense, *Ixcanul* contributes to a kind of cinema that breaks from Spivak's description of the subaltern's voice-journey: it never remains solely in the constative and rather jumps forward to the performative act. The translation is performed by the subaltern herself. The character is shown in its vulnerability and limitations while at the same time in its struggle to overcome them. Both the rationale and the methodology used to accomplish the leap from constative to performative is traversed by the "porous dynamic of authorship" (Gleghorn, 2017: p. 172); every scene and dialogue in *Ixcanul* negotiates a structure to serve María's point of view. Throughout the film, María exercises her agency: she smiles, masturbates, searches for Pepe, undresses, packs her bags, digs up the coffin in which her baby is meant to be and finally expresses her opinion at two crucial moments in the film. We see an example of this when, at the beginning of the third act, María is determined to scare away the snakes, risking her life in an act of blind trust of the anecdotes her mother had just recounted. On this occasion, Juana disagrees while Manuel sees an opportunity to solve a difficult problem. Juana ends up giving in to María's will to help even if she is not convinced. It is worth noting that when the snake ends up biting María, Juana is the first to call for the help of science – by means of modern medicine: instead of insisting on a spiritual ritual she quickly sets off to the hospital with her daughter.

Finally, within the construction of the characters, their arc and voice, the last words María pronounces are *jaja' k'a maja(ni) yech*[100], "(s)he doesn't speak yet" and *achike yiruq'ax yich'o ke re* "Who would understand me if I talked like that?" in answer to Manuel's attempt to console her when he says her child must be living in the United States, in a big house with a garden and must by now be talking in English. At the beginning of the film she would only mumble words, always asking rather than affirming, for instance, wanting to know from Pepe if he could take her with him, *kinak'ama' (aw)ik'in?* However, María's last words complete the character's dramatic arc – now she speaks her mind in a style very close to Juana's, choosing to challenge her father when affirming her lost child is a female, cannot speak yet and even if she, did who would understand her speaking English? Manuel's silence while the three lay at the back of the truck on the way back from the lawyer's office to the farm shows he is resigned.

The film starts and finishes with the same medium close-up shot, which shows María while Juana is cleaning her face and placing a cloth flower crown on her head, the first time as a formal dress, the last time as a bride's outfit. The initial medium close-up shot works as a prolepsis of what will happen next. Both women run the farm, breeding, killing and cooking the hogs, and then dressing up for Ignacio. The relationship between María's dress when she is preparing to receive Ignacio and the details of her preparation orient us within the plot's chronology inside the filmic narrative. María's facial expression exhibits cultural submission as it establishes the profile of both characters: Juana is officious and quick, curating her daughter's outfit; María is still and obedient, following her mother's instructions. The last shot of María is framed using the same medium close-up. On this second occasion, however, and given the story we have just witnessed, the emphasis is placed on her defeated facial expression. With the same pantomime, the same framing and the same characters, the story completes a cycle of time. María can speak, and her dramatic arc drives her to do so physically, culturally and even linguistically by the end of the film. *La Casa de Producción* and Bustamante bring her voice into the *mise-en scène* in the same manner as they observe the context in which María's and Juana's voices have clashed against the institutions paralysing them. María's voice gives her speech as she is seen to disagree with the patriarchal establishment. Bustamante manages to convey this

[100] Translated from Kaq´chikel by Raina Heaton.

feeling via a performative stage, leaving it frustrated; the *mise-en scène* allows María to build her agency in an exercise of polyphony where the negotiated meaning remains with Juana and María while it frames the break in the action by a context that no longer depends on these characters. It thus moves the action to the wall against which María collides, portraying this conflict over and over again. The film therefore replaces the question "Can María speak?" and instead enunciates the more telling question: "Are we even capable of hearing her?"

3.6 Creating distance through irony in *Atrás hay relámpagos*

Julio Hernández Cordón has been making films for over ten years. He has presented eight fiction films that stand out as a subversion of the mainstream formulas portraying Mexican, Guatemalan and Costa Rican social realities in a border between documentary and imagination in such a way that the films interrogate the emotional and ethical fissures left among the inhabitants of a post-war space. This style merges with experimental treatments that draw attention to ways of producing evidence about the tension and violence that remains in the Central American context, thereby pointing out how the aggression triggered by those wars has ended in disillusionment. In Hernández Cordón's films the themes and forms complement each other. His post-war trilogy examines the unsolved guilt from confrontations and abuses with racist premises (*Gasolina*), the fatigue derived from contemporary narratives and the inspection of new cultural correlations that strive for solidarity between ladinos and indigenous (*Las marimbas del infierno*), and the dilemma over recounting the traumas of the indigenous population from the perspective of a mestizo in a "self-critical and meta-reflective" (Grinberg Pla, 2018) fictional re-narration of his own documentary *Sí hubo genocidio* (in *Polvo*).

The aesthetic treatment throughout Hernández Cordón's post-war trilogy leans towards minimalism: firstly, it uses a fragmented linearity that, even if it is chronological, demands a particular engagement as it constructs meanings through subtle – and sometimes even poorly lit, blurred or hard to see – visual images. Secondly, these then display a continuous curiosity that searches for urban jargons and Mayan languages which play simultaneously with codes from the ladino and the indigenous cultures – and the cracks in cross-cultural communication between them –

just as it plays with the conventions of documentary and fiction. It portrays the "caesura of the war", as the scholar Grinberg Pla (2018) named it, i.e. a common trauma brought in during the post-war period of Central America's recent history, which has not ceased to produce highly violent contexts that have torn at the heart of Guatemala's social fabric. In this scholar's words:

> [t]he problem is not so much that there are no words, but that words – like justice or democracy – and by extension narrations have ceased to have meaning. Julio Hernández Cordón's cinematographic project on the postwar era –encompassing the three films *Gasolina/ Gasoline* (2008), *Las marimbas del infierno/ The Marimbas of Hell* (2010), and *Polvo /Dust* (2012)– deals with this situation, inspiring considerations of the meaning of life or the lack thereof in a Guatemala affected by the continuation of violence from the war. (2018: p. 205)

The themes of his post-war trilogy clearly deal with social exclusion in Guatemala, the delusion of democracy in the region and what Grinberg Pla describes as a common suffering in the contemporary isthmus: the anomie. This last term, Grinberg Pla argues, can be traced to a double meaning in the Real Academia Española; it simultaneously stands for "'an absence of law' and a 'language disorder that prevents a person from calling objects by their name'" (2018: p. 199). Seized in the context of Central American post-war cultural productions, Hernández Cordón's films contribute to the restoration of a "significant power of language" (2018: p. 205) that can start to reverse and fill the gap produced by this language disorder (anomie).

Most of Hernández Cordón's films were financed by Central American and Mexican institutions. They have been shown in international film festivals such as San Sebastian, Rotterdam or Cannes – within the official selection in the case of the first two and as part of the *Quinzaine des Réalisateurs* for the last one –; these channels are particularly relevant to insert a worldview onto a wider screen and have indeed encouraged active participation from European audiences. The filmmaker's trajectory has prepared the terrain for novel channels of commentary on the filmic text via virtual communities which allow for "new consumer behaviour as a catalyst for the creation of new market niches" (Pardo, 2015: p. 25) as Gubbins, Franklin, Iordanova and Anderson describe is the case for the new way that film is consumed after the technological turn.

The channel opened by Hernández Cordón's previous filmography allowed for an aesthetic relationship that becomes meaningful when seen as "an answer to [an] authentic depiction of life" (Grinberg Pla, 2018: p. 209) – a difficult depiction, a blurred, undefined one based on vital experience as it is traversed by ongoing confrontations. These films mix professional and non-professional actors, who appear as themselves in the plots, re-enacting some of the discussions over how to restate justice, approach memory, or over contemporary mourning processes. Grinberg Pla describes the technique as docufictional ambivalence in the sense that it triggers some of the tensions the actors display and screens the conflict in operation within themselves as well as with the filmmaker. Indeed, as he is an outsider to the conflicts depicted, this raises the question of how the narrative and memory of recent genocides are represented ethically. The films incline towards realism in order to open up new angles of appreciation for a fragmented context that consiers a wider context yet still resists the construction of "a grand narrative" (Grinberg Pla, 2018: 213).

For his 2016 project, Hernández Cordón agreed to work on a script with the themes of migration, the disruption generated by transport apps – such as Uber or Easy Taxi – to the life in the city of San José, and urban tribes – a constant theme in his previous films – with Natalia Arias and Adriana Álvarez, two actresses from Costa Rica. According to Adriana Álvarez (Álvarez, A. & Arias, N. *Interview with Adriana Álvarez and Natalia Arias*. Personal Communication 12/12/2017), who plays the role of Soledad, in a twist of interpretation, Hernández Cordón decided to transform a global anecdote she suggested into a plot that merges two different events in relations between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Álvarez's anecdote concerned the issue of Costa Ricans as migrants in New York and Switzerland, a version of which appears in the dialogue of *Atrás hay relámpagos* at minute 58: it is a brief description of the two ways in which she had been insulted for being a Latin American in the US and Europe; however, Hernández Cordón departs from the angle of Costa Ricans migrating to either space and makes the narrative a more complex and controversial one: the migration of Nicaraguans to Costa Rica. This time Hernández Cordón's treatment presides over two narrative layers that are evident for Costa Rican readers who follow the news and the art scene, a very specific audience in this case.

The first layer deals with the real-life tragic death of Natividad Canda Mairena. Having migrated to Costa Rica at the age of ten, at 25, Canda Mairena broke into a storage unit where the security dogs caught him and tore him to death. The gravity of

the case surfaced when it was proven that the incident happened in front of a security guard and the police squad was present at the time of the accident, but did not intervene. The case was taken to court and the security guard was judged to be complicit in the murder. Canda Mairena was allegedly under the effects of crack when the dogs attacked him, which explains why he was not able to react to the violence. Furthermore, this revelation in the news provoked two different reactions: one heavily based on a toxic xenophobic narrative deeply embedded in the Costa Rican nationalistic discourse that justified the human rights violation on the basis that Canda Mairena had transgressed private property (Bravo, 2015; Solís, 2009). This one was particularly present in social media; and another that, exposed to the violent context, gathered a discourse against hate speech and xenophobia with concerts, manifestations, cultural expositions and also gathered up to a point through social media.

The second layer on which the plot stands, takes the contemporary art installation made by Habacuc in *Exposición No 1* at Galería Códice in Managua as a reference. The installation was made two years after the Canda Mairena incident and comprised of five elements that included an incense burner with 175 rocks of crack and some marijuana, the text "eres lo que lees" ("you are what you read") written on the gallery's wall with dog food and the sound of the *sandinista* hymn played in reverse. These were taken from different social media sources, and a sick dog from the streets of Managua, tied up in a white cube (a room in the gallery), whom Habacuc named Natividad. The responses to the installation were severely critical as many visitors took it that the dog had been purposely starved despite there being no proof of this and nothing in the installation advising viewers to give or take away food or water from the dog (Villena, 2015). The point made was that, if the animal were to die, the responsibility for this would have been shared between the viewers, the gallery and the artist. Moreover the gallery purposely neither denied nor confirmed the possibility of the dog passing away, as the very issue of the dog's life – as an allegory to the life of Natividad Canda Mairena –, as well as the mediatic frame that both events raised were essential to the installation's reading (Villena, 2015: pp. 118-119). The piece motivated a wide mediatic discussion around animals rights and the ethics of bringing living animals to an art work, with over four million persons signing a petition online to ban Habacuc from art galleries (Villena, 2015: p. 90), strengthening the artist's point that the life of Natividad (the dog), who could have been saved by the

installation's viewers, yet was not, was more important from a mediatic point of view than that of the young Natividad Canda Mairena, whose death had also been in the media but had been shown less empathy.

The plot of *Atrás hay relámpagos* consciously pictures two carefree teenagers who are part of a urban cyclist tribe in San José. They are Ana and Soledad, both middle-class teenagers from Costa Rica's capital city. Soledad's grandmother – an absent character agonising in a bed since the beginning of the story – has a storage unit of unused cars that had belonged to different members of the family. It is in this storage facility that both young friends go to look for a car that they can use as a taxi in a project that seems simultaneously naïve and comical. In the trunk of one of the cars they find a decomposed body and, when they check the papers on the body's belongings, they find the ID of a Nicaraguan refugee: Enrique Rodríguez Martínez. This turning point brings them to meet the police – who they call themselves, ignoring the possibility that they might be held responsible for the death –, find Rodríguez Martínez's family in La Carpio, a neighbourhood on the other side of the city known for being predominantly inhabited by Nicaraguans, and, eventually, give their condolences to this family that still ignores the reasons for their father's/ husband's disappearance. This last event plays out as Soledad, Ana, Frank and the other friends from the bicycle tribe bring flowers to Rodríguez Martínez's house showing the Costa Rican flag with the colour of the flowers, without foreseeing the insult this flag brings to the family. Everything the adolescents do seems light and thoughtless, and within the plot the guilt from a death they do not understand slowly surfaces in every character's performance.

The way the characters are introduced establishes a dialogue with different aspects of Costa Rican youth as well as a zeitgeist that appears evident as well as hidden at times. Ana and Soledad are presented in a supermarket, where they dance in front of a security camera and plan the staging of a supposed epilepsy seizure that Soledad will pretend to suffer with which they intend to use to distract the customers. When the security guard enters the scene he confirms that it is the fourth time the girls have put on this act in the supermarket and he tries to pull Soledad's body away from the aisle. As Soledad continues faking the seizure, Ana starts to doubt whether it is not in fact real, as a few customers approach them with curiosity and try to support Ana's pledge for an ambulance and urge the security guard to stop dragging Soledad's body through the aisle. As Ana follows the security guard in front of the other customers, Habacuc,

the artist who made *Exposition 1*, is shown from one of the supermarket's corners making a cameo, pulling a cart with a girl inside in a clear intertext to his artistic work, as the film later shows the main plot is about the life of another immigrant, in this case a refugee from Nicaragua.

Most of what plays out within the supermarket appears like a game: balloons, the cameras that show Ana and Soledad's dance, the products in the aisles. While Ana is introduced as being more down to earth, her relationship with her environment and her life is much more relaxed and outspoken; Soledad seems constantly defensive, she conveys the impression of always fighting to keep her own peace. The story will reveal how she is also dealing with mourning her grandmother's slow death. Both women appear as a mirror of feelings towards their own lives. While Ana seems quieter, Soledad often is shown as sad or angry. Even so, both characters are playful and impulsive.

A third character, Frank, appears as a buffer for both girls. While Natalia Arias (who plays Ana) and Adriana Álvarez (who plays Soledad) are both professional actresses and the film's co-producers, Frank is played by Francisco Matamoros, a local biker. Frank's performance is driven by the actresses' expertise but he plays himself. In real life as in the film, he is the leader of a cyclist tribe and, with the girls being teenagers, plays the desired prey for both of them. He is first presented on his bike, waiting at a bus stop to avoid the rain, where a group of anonymous girls split their attention between his shirtless torso and their phones – a theme that continues throughout the film. Frank is a decisive character as Ana asks him to cross the city in search of Rodríguez Martínez's family, indirectly involving him in the mystery and mourning of the found body. His laid-back personality is brought to the fore as – when Ana gives him the address, explains the issue of the body and asks him to look for the family – his only preoccupation is whether it will rain. Later in the film, as he digs in a quarry to build a bicycle track, the way he places the shovel over the loose earth appears as if he was preparing a grave or burying a body. Nonetheless, the scene in which Frank's character becomes most relevant is part of the story's climax, as it is with his real stroke and falling out of the car the girls are driving that both characters' guilt and unresolved pain explodes. While Ana tries to place Frank's body into the car's trunk – an action that clearly reminds the two girls and the audience of how Rodríguez Mata's body was found –, Soledad disappears, only to be then seen in a cathartic shot

as she drives the bicycle back to the ocean where they had gone to forget what had happened.

3.6.1 Local and global readings

Atrás hay relámpagos (Hernández Cordón, 2017) - as well as the installation and social controversy on which its theme is based – contains two different reading frames: one that anchors its preoccupation in the media currents that operate within Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and a second that observes from a distance, through media networks that operate transnationally, within Spanish-speaking circuits. In his commentary about the installation *Exposición 1*, Sergio Villena observes that as electronic media influences and transforms the production, circulation and reception of art, issues related to authorship as well as decoding are rapidly changing. On the one hand, digitalisation has stimulated the reproducibility of images, allowing that which Walter Benjamin had warned of in terms of art's loss of uniqueness – their "aura" (1935). On the other hand, the fast circulation of audiovisual media has "expanded audiences in vertical terms, in the sense of restricted or specialised audiences within art, to another, more profane public, and in horizontal terms, easily overflowing the national borders and the local contexts of reception, reaching a global scale" (Villena, 2015: p. 24, my translation).[101] Both these operations take place on the platforms given by multiple dimensions, with Villena listing some as nationalism, xenophobia, animalism (for the case of *Exposición 1*), coloniality, the concept of art, et cetera, activating and guiding them within the artistic institution's micro-order while showing the problem of its social relations in a wider context.[102]

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[101] "[H]a ampliado lo [sic] públicos tanto en términos verticales, desde públicos restringidos o especializados en arte hacia distintos sectores que conforman el público profano, como horizontales, desbordando con facilidad las fronteras nacionales y los contextos locales de recepción, ampliándose a escala global" (Villena, 2015: p. 24). In Canda Mairena's case, through *Exposición 1*, Villena argues that the controversy established two different ethical frames, one that condemned a subjective evil ("mal subjetivo"), this one relates directly to the way the general audience reacted to the "dog's wellbeing" and a second one, that questioned the objective or systemic evil ("mal objetivo o sistémico"), one that observes the public´s reaction to the alleged agony and (not proven) death of the dog but disregarded the violence and death of a human. As in the case of the film there is no "dying dog," I argue that Villena's appreciation is confirmed and expanded by the way the film was almost ignored locally as well as globally, as the film confronts the audience with the same human tragedy, but received very little attention.

[102] "Más ampliamente, su novedad consiste en utilizar la indignación animalista, el vitalismo mediático y el activismo artístico para generar friccionesentre múltiples dimensiones (nacionalismo, xenofobia, animalismo, colonialidad, artisticidad, etc.), poniendo en movimiento el microorden del campo artístico y problematizando sus relaciones con el contexto social más amplio" (Villena, 2015: p. 192).

The film does the same, this time with stories derived from the actresses' personal experiences jointly with the filmmaker's imagination and style, – where the representation of urban tribes, as well as a constant attempt to leverage numerous aspects of the historical world into the plot's diegesis – are to meet a global art institution (through the film festivals). In both scenarios the story's context has been absent, as far as I am aware, from the film critiques available thus far (Gallego, 2017; A. Sánchez, 2017; Venegas, 2017).

3.7 The new generation of Cuban filmmakers

Coming from a background of mainly low-budget science fiction – *Red Cockroaches* (2003) and *Corazón Azul* (2018) are inscribed in the science fiction genre – Miguel Coyula had the privilege – and responsibility – of directing a sequel to one of the most widely known and critiqued Cuban films. Both films maintain a style that mixes a documentary treatment with fictional elements and experimental sequences. Both scripts, that of *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Gutiérrez Alea, 1968) as well as *Memorias del desarrollo* (Coyula, 2010), share the same writer, the novelist Edmundo Desnoes, who in turn worked closely with each filmmaker. The process with Coyula was distanced from that with Alea – not only by time, as forty-two years separate one film from the other – but also by the nature of the relationship the writer established with each filmmaker, as with Gutiérrez Alea Desnoes had a generation in common and the link was so tight that "after the work done through the script and the filming, the writer included scenes from the film into the later editions of his novel" (Kabous, 2013: p. 83, my translation).[103] Coyula continues the ironic tone in *Memorias del desarrollo*, stirring a reflection about the Cuban revolution, its protagonists (Castro, Guevara) through the eyes of the same character, the seducer and cynical intellectual, who also dialogues with a lover that represents the Cuban people and/ or their ideals. In the case of the second film this lover is now a US citizen who has a poster of the photo Alberto Díaz (Korda) took of Che in her room and "wants to go to Chiapas to save the world" (Kabous, 2013: p. 19, my translation).[104] Mirroring these women, both Sergios stand in distanced moments of Cuban history, questioning the sense of

[103] "[E]n fusión que después del trabajo sobre el guión y la filmación, el escritor incluyó en las reediciones de su novela escenas tomadas de la imaginación del cineasta. "
[104] "[Q]uiere ir a Chiapas a salvar al mundo."

patriotism and utopia as well as observing and inquiring about the dogmatic constructions of the narrative.

A second relevant contemporary filmmaker is Ernesto Daranas. His best known film *Conducta* portrays characters from Old Havana in an anthropological way. As Antonio Álvarez Pitaluga observes "the film manages to reconstruct the social reality of the majority of ordinary Cubans, a reality that is not always made visible by the media" (2017: p. 24). Daranas' previous features aimed to connect race to the legacy of syncretic religious beliefs based on the polytheistic orisha tradition (as in the case of *Los dioses rotos*) to the social drama of the inhabitants of Cuba's capital city. His films celebrate social progress in spite of 'skin colour' (Álvarez Pitaluga, 2017: p. 88), which is aligned with the aspiration to make representations as inclusive and democratic as the medium can. Daranas, as all contemporary filmmakers, has venture into mixed fundraising schemes, however these went more into the distribution strategies as most of *Conducta*'s budget still came from the ICAIC and the Cuban Ministry of Culture.

During the recent decades, the raise of transnational budgets for Cuban films have been particularly clear in Pavel Giroud's trajectory. It has been systematically noted that the notions of "cinema", "nation" and "cubanía" – the last for the specific case of the island – are mobile and hybrid and, in this sense, 'national cinema' often appears as an aspiration rather than as a *fait accompli*. Since the 1990s, with the fall of the strong governmental support for cinema in the biggest countries, like Brazil or Mexico, co-production has turned into the answer to maintain an active production line in Latin America. According to Anne Marie Stock, "Street Filmmakers like Giroud seek to transform the markers of *cubanía* into cultural currency in the global marketplace; they blend carefully coded "national" elements with transnational signs in order to reach worldwide viewers" (2009: p.170). Giroud's hybrid style merges a wide range of production modes, allowing capital and consumers to rethink the idea of Cuban cinema, adapting it into popular genres that portray the island.

Cremata Malberti, whose film was analysted in the previous chapter, together with Miguel Coyula, Ernesto Daranas, Pavel Giroud, and Patricia Ramos "had the opportunity to pursue formal programs of study or, at the very least, to complete some filmmaking courses and workshops" (Stock, 2009: p. 170). All these filmmakers went through training at the EICTV, which provided them with formal training in which

their "learn[ing] by doing" was institutionally mentored. As Stock observes, "[t]he majority of Cubans who entered the ICAIC in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s learned to make films on the job, mentored by experienced professionals" (2009: p. 170) within another kind of institution that was directly in charge of controlling which films were to be made.

3.7.1 El techo

This is the Street Filmmakers generation, one that, as Stock has noted, differentiates them from the previous generation, in the sense that they had formal training from the EICTV film school but not from the ICAIC, which simultaneously allowed them to learn the craft in a formal way (and not "by doing") and expand production and distribution networks, exploring a previously non-existent transnational reach. Within the group of films made by this generation, the one I find the most relevant is *El techo* (2017), by Patricia Ramos, one of three women filmmakers who had their *opera prima* presented at the *Festival del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* in Havana during the last three years.[105] Ramos's *opera prima* brings the NCL coding into her film language from the very beginning in the way the credits are featured, as thin white lines draw Central Havana's building landscape as if it were a canvas to handle. The rectangles grow on the screen, showing little white windows as a wide shot frames hanging cables and vertical buildings. The animation resembles the opening credits of *La muerte de un burócrata* (Gutiérrez Alea, 1966) or *Se permuta* (Tabío, 1985), where lines scratch the images pointing at the relevant theme. The terraces in Central Havana appear as the chosen space for the plot, where three characters are constructed as a collective force rather than as engaged in an individual struggle. Following the credits the audience is left with transitional images of birds flying in an open sky, with Yasmani looking at them standing on the roof terrace in a counter shot. The sequence establishes a metaphor of an aspired-to freedom that rises from the cement structure that anchors the plot.

[105] Ramos's *El techo* was picked after *Vestido de novia* (Solaya, 2014) and *Espejuelos oscuros* (Rodríguez, 2015). These films came after the Sara Gómez and the *Red de Realizadoras Cubanas* prize was installed as a way to give visibility to female Cuban filmmakers, as no Cuban female director had her fiction selected for the main festival on the island since the 1980s.

The rooftop is read as a sort of analogy for a high spot of evasion or refuge where dreams, nostalgia and games can take place (Riol, 2017). This film critique is reminiscent of the films that recently explored similar locations as a reference for freedom (in *Conducta*, Daranas, 2014) or for youth memories (*Regreso a Ítaca*, Canent, 2014). *El techo* continues both storylines: it inspects ways to pursue freedom to travel, make earnings or build a community while staying in the youth´s living space, allowing the energy of the young to enter the character´s possibilities. Furthermore, *El techo* explores the controversial topic of migration from the angle of mobility rather than escape. The characters all have connections with a world beyond the island as their obsessions pay closer attention to a divide that they try to cross in both directions, going back and forth. From the director's point of view the rooftop is halfway between the exterior and interior as it stands as a space that is more private than the actual street while it still is a part of a house.[106] This is indeed a topic Ramos also treated in the short films *El patio de mi casa* (2008) and *Na-Na* (2003), conveying a kind of limbo she sees in the way daily life in Cuba happens.

None of the three protagonists has a prominent role within the narrative. The point of view is built up from all of them and in this way the film opts for a minimalist plot, one without a central conflict but with various small anecdotes stitched together by place and by a business idea the characters share. The trio is presented through the credits in random positions along the rooftop, changing along the space they share as neighbours and friends. Vito, or Víctor José, is obsessed with Sicily, his grandfather and an Italian tourist, Italian recipes, and heritage. Ana is fixated on her pregnancy, the symptoms of it – the most obvious being her uncontrollable hunger – and the alleged father – although the other characters are more worried than she is – her relationship with her own mother, who is in the United States accompanying her grandmother, and eventually Yasmani. Meanwhile Yasmani starts the plot with an obsession with his neighbour and the doves that he raises. Through the story we see his father, who exhibits depressive symptoms, as he does not want to get out of bed to refrain from spending money.

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[106] When interviewed by the film critic Luis Leonel León for the *Diario Las Américas*, Ramos stated that "la azotea está a medio camino entre el exterior y el interior, porque es mucho más reservado que un exterior, como una calle, y está cercano al interior teniendo en cuenta que es su techo" ("the rooftop is half way between the interior and the exterior, it is a much more private space than an external one, like the main street, and at the same time it is enclosed, as it still is a roof (the part of a private house)") (Luis Leonel León, 2017, my translation).

It is Yasmani's idea to start a pizza business in order to make a living. The three friends open an illicit restaurant and call it "Sicilia Valdés," a word play that blends the title of Cirilo Villaverde's novel written in Cuba in 1839 (*Cecilia Valdés*) and the place where Vito´s grandfather may be from. In doing so, the film utilises the ways Cubans build meaning from terms and identities that come from a cultural legacy, by way of *cubanía,* and the references from an outside world that permeates that other semantic thread. It also reflects on family models and the need to reject or embrace traditional versions of them, as *Cecilia Valdés*'s plot is about a woman who becomes pregnant after sexual intercourse with her half-brother, whose identity she is unaware of as she ignores who her own father is. The story from the nineteenth century portrays the universe of the mixed-race free slaves in Havana before the abolition of slavery (1886). The novel also portrays three main characters – José Dolores Pimienta, a mulato like Vito, Leonardo de Gamboa and Cecilia Valdés, with the last two becoming lovers, before Gamboa leaves Cecilia pregnant to marry a woman more appropriate to his class. In the 1839 novel both men fall for the woman, Pimienta kills Gamboa, as Cecilia ends up in a psychiatric hospital finding her mother. *El techo* rewrites the romantic story as Ana is already pregnant before engaging in the affair with Yasmani and Vito never seems attracted to Ana, in this sense it turns the notions of desire, family links, complicity and friendship into a journey towards imagining new ways of building community.

The syncretic religions that operate on the island are brought to the *mise-en-scène* through the Virgin of La Caridad del Cobre (*virgen de la caridad del cobre*)*,* who is a version of Oxum, the orisha god of fertility, pleasure and beauty. It is Oxum to whom Vito's grandmother prays for abundance. The black deity dressed in yellow is one of the many elements, along with the pizzas, that the three friends bring up and down via ropes.[107] Within the film's ambience the Afro-Cuban religion stands as the sole sign of spiritual practices, placing a distance between itself and previous Cuban films which highlighted Afro-Cuban religious practices always in conjunction with Catholic ones.

[107] In Havana, particularly in Old Havana but also in Centro and Vedado, there are very few buildings with elevators, so many of their inhabitants exchange money, food, keys and other personal belongings through a pulley system using ropes to tie the objects up and transport them up or down via balconies or windows.

While the Cuban government has only a marginal presence in the story, the market, its rules and the represented precarity - common in many films from the post-Special Period - occupy a central spot within the narrative. The concerns about scarcity are staged mainly through the characters' relationship with food. This is a link that builds anxiety, especially through Ana and the fierce hunger caused by her pregnancy, but also in the way that most neighbours ask for pizzas on credit. This last detail is proposed as a comic situation, despite its rough subtext. The government plays the role of a threatening entity, making its appearance only when a neighbour calls them in order to take revenge on Ana, Vito and particularly Yasmani, who is unwilling to give them pizza without receiving immediate payment. It is this refusal to provide food that brings out a rivalry between the neighbours, destroying the social fabric.

Finally, the theme of a neighbour's suicide, a trend also present in certain Cuban films (*Fresa y chocolate*, *Últimos días en La Habana*), is mentioned in the characters' dialogues. This time the suicide is not a failed attempt or a mere threat, but an actual fact. The anecdote matches Yasmani's father's depressive disorder in order to confront the audience in what otherwise would stand in as a comedic scene with a harsh reality of precarious living and capricious orders that traverse every step the characters decide to take. The film stands out as a meeting point of the longstanding themes of *cubanía,* such as the syncretism between the Yoruba religions and Christianity, the building and evolution of models of family with topics that have been central to most cultural productions on the island since the Special Period, such as the sense of outside and inside – in terms of the island as well as in the public/ private sphere – , migration, mobility and scarcity. *El techo* builds a tender, imaginative community, and shows off the concerns of this community while pointing at the threats that the social fabric faces in the honest, clear skies of Havana.

The film was screened in the *Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* (Havana) where Ramos Hernández won the Sara Gómez prize, while it also toured at the *Miami Film Festival* and the Latino Film festivals in New York, San Diego and Chicago and the Austin *Cine Las Americas International Film Festival*, challenging the embargo premises.

*El techo'*s thematic continues the above mentioned concern about an outside world, where Ana's mother lives or where Vito wants to migrate to, and an inside Havana, that continues to offer some interesting - even if not very lucrative - business projects

and community. *El techo* defends a belonging to a territory crossed by *cubanía* in a similar way as *Viva Cuba* did before, although this time the characters are not children and are not bound to a short term, they are indeed already waiting for – and will be in charge of – the next generation. It also explores new ways to build family links, as in *La Yuma*, and in this sense the thematic constellation persists and - in a more optimistic tone than *Últimos días en la Habana* - interrogates the unpredictable future of the island.

3.8 The continuity of digital experimentation

The technological turn has impacted both sides of film production: it has expanded the technological potential of film in order to bring a wide diversity of voices onto the screen in ways that are much more direct, as discussed, in particular, with regard to *Ixcanul* (Bustamante, 2015), and it has provided global and local circuits within which the film stories are able to circulate, allowing for pathways to the audiences which sometimes enable multiple readings, as explored through the analysis of *Atrás hay relámpagos* (Hérnández Cordón, 2017).[108] Cuba offfers a different – and in some senses unique – cinematic landscape since independent cinema encompasses its own particular place on the island.

During the last few decades the rise of transnational budgets for Cuban films have been a major transformative factor in the trajectory of contemporary filmmakers. This trend was mentioned by Fernando Pérez since *La vida es silbar* (1998) in his interview with Daniel Díaz Torres (2001: p. 11), and over recent decades it has become the *modus operandi* of all active filmmakers on the island, including Patricia Ramos Hernández whose film *El techo* toured film festivals in San Diego, New York, Austin, Miami and Chicago despite the obstacles put in place by the *embargo*.

We have noted two movie-making trends in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America in the twenty-first century: (i) one of which is inscribed within the global

[108] An example of the numerous possibilities opened by the technological change in the Caribbean is *Hero* (Solomon, 2018). This global film (as its director describes it) narrates the story of Ulric Cross, a Trinidad born lawyer who was the most decorated ex-service man from the West Indies, during World War 2, to then be recruited by George Padmore, a lead Pan-Africanist, and join the movement the African states underwent to accomplish independence from Britain (CTV News Channel, 2018). Described as a "global film", as it is produced in Canada but shot in Ghana, Britain, Trinidad and Canada. *Hero* takes a story that had been ignored by the official historical narrative and, with professional actors, documentary images and re-enactments of historical events, constructs the journey of a character that falls out of the mainstream narrative.

economy, and (ii) a second type that embraces a discourse about human rights, as well as the artistic expression and production that may support this discourse. Although the latter considers the geopolitical complexities and tries to bring about a critical approach to the tensions within the communities portrayed, by telling the stories created by children, by the LGBTQ+ community, by indigenous, blacks, women and all "others" as perceived by conventional storytellers, the former ignores such complexities. The second type partially escapes the asymmetrical relations inherited by a hypocritical economy that works "across borders" while it profits from the existence of national frontiers and thus gains from "exploiting different national circumstances" (Clavin, 2005: p.430). These fictions reveal the potential for imagination and the staging of concerns, memories and voices, thereby giving agency to the region and in so doing reinforcing the consolidation, or "constellation" of a film movement which resonates with local cultures. The last stage of the communication cycle reaches audiences with diverse interpretative frameworks and thus activates their participation and "active attitude" with respect to the films, as well as the comprehension of these texts, to mention some of the paradigm changes Gubbins summarises (see above), which may sooner or later impact the behaviour of newly created market niches.

However, local resources continue to be scarce on the ground in the support of films that circulate within global circuits. It is ironic, indeed, that the resources once available to produce films regionally – such as Cinergia – have ceased to exist, leaving production solely to continental financial infrastructures, such as Ibermedia, or to funds based in Europe, such as Hubert Bals, or private funding. This erosion of already fragile resources has led to a reduction in the channels available to build cinematographic texts that can be easily "understood" by regional audiences, thereby worsening the gaps which already exist in the economic archipelagic landscape.

While the possibilities for autochthonous expression have widened in order to represent new characters, spaces and themes – as occurred in the case of *Ixcanul* – the channels that allow for the expression of a regional context and are able to directly address an audience mid-way between the local and the global are still few and far between. In the meantime, sustainable pathways that support the funding for this type of film run the risk of falling between two stools, being either diluted on the global circuits or remaining insufficient to cover costs within local funding landscapes.

4. Conclusion

The small number of film productions from the Central American and Hispanic Caribbean countries – even when the great increase of films released in the twenty-first century when compared to the previous century is taken into account – suggests that, despite the promise orginally entertained as a result of the Digital Turn, there are in fact fewer channels rather than more available for the appreciation of Central American and Hispanic Caribbean conteporary film. As the UNESCO numbers and Moguillansky's research on Ibermedia's *modus operandi* show, coproduction and transnational schemes are to this day a "central strategy for all Latin American cinematographies" (Moguillansky, 2019: p. 33). This circumstantial fact, coupled with the shared cultural links between Central American and Hispanic Caribbean countries, have created a constellation of themes and narrative strategies which as this thesis has demonstrated, are visible in its cinematic output. The "need" to systematize film production in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean – by implementing Film Laws that provide legislation on film production as well as providing funding for Film Festivals and Film Schools – is an urgent one, as this thesis suggests, since regional film circulation is crucial to the cultural productivity and transnational nature of this political domain.

Benítez Rojo's fluid understanding of the cultural admixture of the Caribbean sheds light on the axis of this configuration. The solidary associations linking filmmaking in the countries of the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America have led to film festivals being seen as indispensable catalizers for film production across the region. To be officially selected at a film festival brings a number of global and local audiences into direct contact with a director's work, audiences that were previously unreachable; the film festival, indeed, works as a curated display of films that have undergone "a variety of rituals […] and symbolic acts that contribute to the cultural positioning of films and filmmakers in the [global] film world" (De Valck, 2007: p. 37). As we have seen in this thesis, a second configuration is brought about by the regional funding available from organisations such as Cinergia and Ibermedia, which are among the most prominent, funding organisations in the world, running alongside other global initiatives such as the World Cinema Fund, the Hubert Bals Fund and Fonds du Sud. These funding mechanisms are crucial since they privilege narrative structures to suit a predominantly local target audience.

The films studied in this thesis speak to these tensions within contemporary film production in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean. The films studied, for example, in Chapter One – *Viva Cuba*, *La Yuma* and *Princesas rojas* – were all funded by Cinergia, and their narratives are built around an Aristotelian arc and revolve aorund character-driven stories. From Malú and Jorgito's parents who add tension to the children's aspirations to live peacefully in their infancy (and on the island), to Yuma's abusive stepfather and neglectful mother, to Claudia's evasive mother (an escapee ex-guerrilla and inteligentsia supporter), all traditional family structures are shown to be crumbling. The territories portrayed in the films are mobile spaces where the characters expand the narrative frames in order to show off-screen realities such as: (a) the Cuban revolution (in the case of *Viva Cuba*), (b) the precarious economy (in the case of *La Yuma*), (c) the stigmatisation of former guerrilleros (in the case of *Princesas rojas*). The films work constantly to reframing historical memory while negotiating with the mainstream industry's narrative codes. The films analysed in Chapter One provide many examples of how the stories of local people's lives mirror industrial narrative formulas such as the road movie and the sports hero movie in order to reach local audiences via the testival circuit, Ultimately, however, these films fail to hit the mark and fall between two stools, missing the mass audience needed for the Hollywood film while not speaking directly enough to local audiences about the complexities of their autochthonous cultures..

Chapter Two discussed films funded by Ibermedia – *Agua fría de mar*, *Dólares de arena* and *Últimos días en La Habana* – and positioned these films within the legacy of the Nuevo cine latinoaemricano movement; they are works which work consciously with the Art house genre and are "slow, poetic, contemplative" (Romney, 2010). Even though they co-opt an internationalized cinematic idiom, they produce a vision that is nonetheless consistent with a personal voice that registers local spaces, confrontations and pain. Migration operates as a macrotheme in every film, not as a desired destiny but more often as a force that all characters dialogue with; whereas in Dólares de arena and Ultimos días en La Habana the films address this theme in a literal sense, in Agua fría de mar is portrayed more in terms of a state of mind, All three films depict the erosion of traditional institutions such as the heteronormative family, formal economies and ethnic hierarchies. There are question marks about a heteronormative vertical structure, hints about incestuous transgressions are adumbrated, affective relations relevant to the plots stray away from patriarcal heteronorms. The leitmotifs

of migration, the erosion of traditional institutions and skepticism about ethnic hierarchies are treated in a non-direct, angular almost ghostly manner, which echoes the informality that characterised the industry's financial support that led to the production of each of these films. These three films have multiple characters and are inscribed within social conflicts and aesthetics that experiment with mise-en-scène by playing with offshot references and metaphors for the unconfessed or introspective; they exhibit obfuscated voices that enunciate their concerns from within the decentered narrative strategy of a highly "contemplative cinema" (de Luca, 2012: p. 197). This group of films also revitalise the legacy of the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano movement, particularly Últimos días en La Habana which reprises a number of key themes drawn from the work of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea.

Finally, Chapter Three examined three films -- *Ixcanul*, *Atrás hay relámpagos* and *El techo* – as case studies of the formal experimentation that characterized the Digital Turn that arrived with the twenty-first century. These three films brought hitherto unheard voices into the earshot of viewers, allowing them to hear and see new worlds enhanced by digital crispness, as happens in particular with *Ixcanul*. This group of films, however, are testament to a new challenge that has arisen as a result of the Digital Turn, since, despite the increased availability of filmic content provided by the New Media, the films of Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean still continue to find themselves caught between the powerful, ubiquitous and unforgiving conduits of mainstream Hollywood film and local and/or informal outlets which offer insufficient impact for film diretors who desire a more global impact

Since the millenium, more fiction feature films have been produced in Central America than in the entirety of the twentieth century (Harvey-Kattou & Alfaro Córdoba, 2018), while over two hundred fiction films have been made in the Caribbean countries (See Annex 2). As the numbers expand, the themes, treatments and angles behind the stories become more complex and more and more viewers are exposed to the social contexts and realities to which they are geographcally bound. While the most prominent space for filmmaking in the entire region, Cuba, is undergoing a transition that is political as well as aesthetic and technological (Cobo, 2018; Stock, 2010), the rest of the Caribbean countries, as well as the nations of Central America, are experimenting with multiple ways of telling stories that relate to the parameters and anchors of their everyday social lives.

The play between local and global audience perspectives which was established as an urgent issue with the release of *Viva Cuba*, is a theme that has come to haunt the films of Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean. We see how any direct channel to global audiences becomes "scattered" with *Atrás hay relámpagos* as a result of its "local complexity" going "over the heads" of viewers who participate in the circulatory dynamics of international film channels In other words, while the production team of *Atrás hay relámpagos* might have expected an audience that would have appreciated the enunciation in the film of a very specific cultural background, this did not always prove to be the case... It is as if yet another layer of obstruction has been put in place to prevent the director-film-viewer cycle from being completed.

Benítez Rojo's thesis on the Caribbean helps us understand the transnational nature of the region's contemporary filmmaking practices as an example of the contexts that Hjort and Pietre described as part and parcel of the challenges faced by small nations, i.e. those that face "domination, the struggle for autonomy, spheres of influence, and a[n in]balance of power" (2007: p. 6). Benítez Rojo argues that, on the one hand, the Caribbean is the unacknowledged – and, indeed, disavowed – root of modernity in terms of the structural accumulation that the colonial process brought to both Europe and North America, and, on the other, that it epitomises the peripheral condition in general terms and that peripherality experienced by impoverished countries in particular. We have seen in this study that the way the film plots are constructed in those films that veered towards an Art House idiom challenges two complementary notions: firstly, the idea that, because of their separate "nationhoods", the countries of the Hispanic Caribbean and those of Central America are separate from each other, and their respective films express "natinal" ideologies. What prevails within the region is a narrative continuum that is rooted in and exposes the same concerns, the same marginality, the same invisibility and the same de-contextualization in the eyes of global readers.

The Central American armed conflicts, and the social disparities that originally caused them, the disparities and political controls that weigh heavily on the backs of a small part of the population, coupled with the political factionalism of Cuba, have led to a unique filmic cartography in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean. Via the examination of the financing, production, distribution and aesthetics of a selection of films (*Viva Cuba*, *La Yuma*, *Princesas rojas*, *Agua fría de mar*, *Dólares de arena*, *Últimos días en La Habana, El techo*, *Ixcanul* and *Atrás hay relámpagos*) we have

identified the existence of three tendencies in the filmography of Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean: in Chapter One we analysed example of films that are adaptations of Hollywood's formulae and aesthetics, in Chapter Two we analysed films that revitalise the legacy of the *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* movement; and, in Chapter Three we saw examples of films that are beginning to break with canonic legacies in order to explore unprecedented ways of bringing local voices to the screen. While there is much that is positive to learn from the trajectories traced by these films, the challenge remains to determine how to have these films circulate and achieve a global impact.

The three trends studied in this thesis – the Hollywood-inspired, the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano-inspired and the Digital-Turn-inflected – demonstrate the failure of the film industry in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America to sustain a systematic platform which is capable of producing films written from a regional perspective. However, stories, characters and themes portrayed in this set of twenty-first-century films are linked to the region's affective geography and territory (Grossberg, 2012: p. 34), and it should be underlined that this group of films exhibit a coherent continuum in terms of their concerns, their sense of their marginality and spatial appropiations, particularly in terms of the placement and orientation of the region's interior and exterior geographical, political and economical spaces. My hypothesis is that these unique filmic coordinates have the capacity to strengthen regional imaginaries through the impact of the Digital Turn, but it is clear that this possibility is directly dependent on the political contexts that are currently in place – and in transition – in those countries analysed in this thesis.

To this day, all filmic production processes in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean are permeated by transnational finances, professionals trained outside their home countries and distribution networks that operate regionally and globally. Whilst this reality is a global trend, it is experienced that much more keenly in a region that has a history of political relations that are still colonial, framing filmic expressions in regards to the priorities of a "neo-colonial medium" (Harvey-Kattou & Alfaro Córdoba, 2018). The prevalence of overwhelmingly Hollywood-inspired narratives, as noted in Chapter One, are also a consequence of the untested idea that audiences are used to them since the films that are distributed in the region via movie theatres correspond disproportionately (95-98%) to Hollywood productions. Every film examined in this study also portrays stories of unconventional heroes, whether they

be children, teenagers, women, indigenous people, Afro-Cubans or members of the LGBT + community.

The questions raised at the beginning of this study are answered in the sense that the changing infrastructural landscape is shown to have had an impact on (a) how these films are produced, that is, via the precarious existing funding schemes; (b) which audiences they are reaching, namely their availability through new circulation channels that have not yet succeeded in closing the gap between the film and the audience; and (c) the way in which the technological turn to digital forms of support and circulation has affected film practices in the region. Both the NCL and to a major extent Hollywood have played prominent roles in the ways these narratives have evolved. There are the two sides to the economic archipelago: one driven by the political economy and the other whereby economic structures asphyxiate local productions either by drowning the local screens with films distributed by the majors or forcing these local films into local circulation, which rarely surpasses the 20,000 viewer mark.

As we have seen in this thesis, the archipelago is visible in each of the scenarios rehearesed by each film of *cognitariat* filmmakers who meet a hyper-agressive market dictated by the majors, as discussed in Chapter One; the informality and precarity discussed in Chapter Two and the narrowing down of regional channels that in effect de-contextualizes the films described in Chapter Three. In terms of the laws underpinning this archipelagic effect, I point to two cases. Firstly, the Costa Rican Cinema law has been debated in Congress with the aim of its being approved, but this has bee proposed without the addition of the screen quota section. Meanwhile, Guatemala is under an authoritative government that refrains from guaranting material support for the cultural sector, and Cuba is undergoing a radical cultural and economic transition.

The very notion of state, the legal space where a project can materialise, or what Grossberg defines as a "place", is for Central American and Hispanic Caribbean cinema a scattered "archipelago" in the sense that it is made up of disparate notions of political approaches, cultural policies and a wide diversity of ways in which these notions are applied to the historical circumstances of every separate political manifestation (be it a Free Associated State, like Puerto Rico, an Overseas Territory, or a republic). At the same time, the territory, to put it in Grossberg's words, an

updated version of what Anderson called the "imagined community", is a space inscribed in affective reality that emerges as a plural, transnational juncture, a merged diversity of cultures and languages that are connected by a cultural flow that operates in a similar way whenever it confronts the same marginality, invisibility or de-contextualisation – and appropiates and co-opts them. Within the case studies studied in this thesis the macrothemes, exhibit a continuum in terms of their social preoccupations, and the visibility of the cultural minorities that García Canclini points to as demographic majorities. It is precisely at this juncture that a constellation of themes, characters and spaces is built.

Annex 1. Central American Films 2001-2017

Source: María Lourdes Cortés Pacheco

Film	**Director**	**Country, year**	**Award/ selection**
Asesinato en El Meneo	Oscar Castillo	Costa Rica, 2001	
Password. Una mirada en la oscuridad	Andrés Heindenreich	Costa Rica, 2002	
Por cobrar	Luis Argueta	Guatemala, 2002	
No hay tierra sin dueño	Sami Kafati	Honduras, 1986-2002	
Almas de la medianoche	Juan Carlos Fanconi	Honduras, 2002	
Anita, la cazadora de insectos	Hispano Durón	Honduras, 2002	
Mujeres apasionadas	Maureen Jiménez	Costa Rica, 2003	
La casa de enfrente	Elías Jiménez	Guatemala, 2003	
Donde acaban los caminos	Carlos García Agraz	Guatemala, 2003	
Lo que soñó Sebastián	Rodrigo Rey Rosa	Guatemala, 2003	
Caribe	Esteban Ramírez	Costa Rica, 2004	San Sebastian
Las cruces. Poblado próximo	Rafael Rosal	Guatemala, 2005	

VIP. La otra casa	Elías Jiménez	Guatemala, 2007	
Sobreviviendo Guazapa	Roberto Dávila	El Salvador, 2008	
El cielo rojo	Miguel Gómez	Costa Rica, 2008	
Gasolina	Julio Hernández Cordón	Guatemala, 2008	Toulouse
Gestación	Esteban Ramírez	Costa Rica, 2009	
El camino	Ishtar Yasin	Costa Rica, 2009	Berlinale
La bodega	Ray Figueroa	Guatemala, 2009	
La región perdida	Andrés Heidenreich	Costa Rica, 2009	
Tercer mundo	César Caro Cruz	Costa Rica-Bolivia-Chile, 2009	
Amor y frijoles	Mathew Kodath y Hernán Pereira	Honduras, 2009	
Del amor y otros demonios	Hilda Hidalgo	Costa Rica - Colombia, 2010	Busan
Agua fría de mar	Paz Fábrega	Costa Rica, 2010	Rotterdam*
Chance	Abner Benaim	Panama, 2010	

La Yuma	Florence Jaugey	Nicaragua - Mexico - Spain, 2010	Biarritz
Donde duerme el horror	Ramiro y Adrián Bogliano	Costa Rica, 2010	
A ojos cerrados	Hernán Jiménez	Costa Rica, 2010	
Adentro/ Afuera	Jason Nielsen	Costa Rica, 2010	
El último comandante	Isabel Martínez y Vicente Ferraz	Costa Rica, 2010	
El sanatorio	Miguel Gómez	Costa Rica, 2010	
Marimbas del infierno	Julio Hernández	Guatemala, 2010	
Cápsulas	Veronica Riedel	Guatemala, 2010	
Aquí me quedo	Rodolfo Espinoza	Guatemala, 2010	
La vaca	Mendel Samayoa	Guatemala, 2010	
Gerardi	Jimmy y Sammy Morales	Guatemala, 2010	
Un día de sol	Rafael Tres	Guatemala, 2010	
Toque de queda	Elías Jiménez y Ray Figueroa	Guatemala, 2011	

No amanece igual para todos	Francisco Andino, Manuel Villa y Ramón Hernández	Honduras, 2011	
El compromiso	Oscar Castillo	Costa Rica, 2011	
Fe	Alejo Crisóstomo	Guatemala, 2011	
Distancia	Sergio Ramírez	Guatemala, 2011	
El regreso	Hernán Jiménez	Costa Rica, 2012	
Polvo	Julio Hernández Cordón	Guatemala, 2012	
Tres Marías	Francisco (Pako) González	Costa Rica, 2012	
El fin	Miguel Gómez	Costa Rica, 2012	
El Xendra	Juan Carlos Fanconi	Honduras, 2012	
Hasta el sol tiene manchas	Julio Hernández	Guatemala, 2012	
Antología, Mario Monteforte Toledo	Luis K Coronado	Guatemala, 2012	
La ruta de la luna	Juan Sebastián Jacomé	Panama, 2012	
Toque de queda	Javier Suazo Mejía	Honduras, 2012	
¿Quién paga la cuenta?	Benji López	Honduras, 2013	

Princesas rojas	Laura Astorga	Costa Rica, 2013	Berlinale
Puerto Padre	Gustavo Fallas	Costa Rica, 2013	
Por las plumas	Neto Villalobos	Costa Rica, 2013	San Sebastián
Padre	Alejo Crisóstomo	Costa Rica, 2013	
Maya. Donde nace el sol.	Elías Jiménez	Guatemala, 2013	
¿Quién paga la cuenta?	Benji López	Honduras, 2013	
Cuentos y leyendas de Honduras	Javier Suazo Mejía y Rony Alvarenga	Honduras, 2013	
Once cipotes	Tomás Chi	Honduras, 2014	
Italia 90	Miguel Gómez	Costa Rica, 2014	
Muñecas rusas	Jürgen Ureña	Costa Rica, 2014	
Rosado furia	Nicolás Pacheco	Costa Rica, 2014	
Maikol Yordan de viaje perdido	Miguel Gómez	Costa Rica, 2014	
Nina y Laura	Alejo Crisóstomo	Costa Rica, 2014	
Espejismos	José Miguel González	Costa Rica, 2014	

Historias del canal	Carolina Borrero, Pinky Mon, Luis Franco, Abner Benaín y Pituka Ortega	Panama, 2014	
La pantalla desnuda	Florence Jaugey	Nicaragua, 2014	
Malacrianza	Arturo Menéndez	El Salvador, 2014	
Te prometo anarquía	Julio Hernández Cordón	Mexico - Guatemala, 2015	
Ixcanul	Jayro Bustamante	Guatemala, 2015	Berlinale * (42)
Dos aguas	Patricia Velásquez	Costa Rica, 2015	
Presos	Esteban Ramírez	Costa Rica, 2015	
Entonces nosotros	Hernán Jiménez	Costa Rica, 2016	
El sonido de las cosas	Ariel Escalante	Costa Rica, 2016	
Abrázame como antes	Jürgen Ureña	Costa Rica, 2016	
Fuerzas de honor	Tomás Chi	Honduras, 2016	
Kimura	Aldo Rey Valderrama	Panama, 2016	
Salsipuedes	Ricardo Aguilar y Manolo Rodríguez	Panama, 2016	

El paletero	Michael Bendeck	Honduras, 2016	
Amor viajero	Miguel Gómez	Costa Rica, 2017	
Un lugar en el Caribe	Juan Carlos Fanconi	Honduras, 2017	
Medea	Alexandra Latishev	Costa Rica, 2017	
Atrás hay relámpagos	Julio Hernández-Cordón	Costa Rica, 2017	Rotterdam
Welcome to My World	Rafael Tres	Guatemala, 2017	
Cárcel de árboles	Guillermo Escalón y Rodrigo Rey Rosa	Guatemala, 2017	
Pasajero	Jorge Cano	Guatemala, 2017	

Annex 2. Caribbean Films 2001-2017

Source: Personal archive

Film	**Director**	**Country, year**	**Award/ selection**
Las noches de constantinopla	Orlando Rojas	Cuba, 2001	
Nada	Juan Carlos Cremata	Cuba, 2001	
Miradas	Enrique Álvarez	Cuba, 2001	
Miel para Oshún	Humberto Solás	Cuba, 2001	
Lumumba	Raoul Peck	Haiti, 2001	
12 horas	Raúl Marchand Sánchez	Puerto Rico, 2001	
Entre ciclones	Enrique Colina	Cuba, 2002	
Aunque estés lejos	Juan Carlos Tabío	Cuba, 2003	
Cucarachas rojas	Miguel Coyula	Cuba, 2003	
Roble de olor	Rigoberto López	Cuba, 2003	
Tres veces dos	Pavel Giroud/ Léster Hamlet/ Esteban Insausti	Cuba, 2003	
Éxito por intercambio	Miguel Vásquez	Dominican Republic, 2003	
Perico ripiao	Ángel Muñiz	Dominican Republic, 2003	
Red Passport	Albert Xavier	Dominican Republic, 2003	
Dios los cria 2	Jacobo Morales	Puerto Rico, 2004	

Perfecto amor equivocado	Gerardo Chijona	Cuba, 2004	
La cárcel de la victoria: el cuarto hombre	José Enriquez Pintor	Dominican Republic, 2004	
Negocios son negocios	Jorge de Bernardi	Dominican Republic, 2004	
Viva Cuba	Juan Carlos Cremata	Cuba, 2005	Havana Caracol Ícaro
Frutas en el café	Humberto Padrón	Cuba, 2005	
Barrio Cuba	Humberto Solás	Cuba, 2005	Havana Cartagena
Meteoro	Diego de la Texera	Puerto Rico, 2005	
Andrea: la venganza de un espíritu	Rogert Bencosme	Dominican Republic, 2004	
La maldición del padre Cardona	Félix German Olalla	Dominican Republic, 2004	
Viajeros	Carlos Bidó	Dominican Republic, 2006	
Así de simple	Carolina Nicola	Cuba, 2006	
El Benny	José Luis Sánchez	Cuba, 2006	
La edad de la peseta	Pavel Giroud	Cuba, 2006	
Madrigal	Fernando Pérez	Cuba, 2006	
Mañana	Alejandro Moya	Cuba, 2006	

Páginas del diario de Mauricio	Manuel Pérez Paredes	Cuba, 2006	
Viaje de un largo día hacia la noche	Tomás Piard	Cuba, 2006	
Le president a-t-il le sida?	Arnold Antonin	Haiti, 2006	
El clown	Pedro Adorno Irizarry/ Emilio Rodríguez Vásquez	Puerto Rico, 2006	
Ladrones y mentirosos	Pli Marichal/ Ricardo Rodríguez Matta	Puerto Rico, 2006	
Ruido	César Rodríguez	Puerto Rico, 2006	
Lilis	Jimmy Sierra	Dominican Republic, 2006	
Un macho de mujer	Alfonso Rodríguez	Dominican Republic, 2006	
Hit for Six	Alison Saunders-Franklyn	Barbados, 2007	
Personal Belongings	Alejandro Brugués	Cuba, 2007	
La noche de los inocentes	Arturo Sotto	Cuba, 2007	
Camino al edén	Daniel Díaz Torres	Cuba, 2007	
Haïti chérie	Claudio del Punta	Haiti, 2007	
Las dos caras de Jano	Edmundo Rodríguez	Puerto Rico, 2007	
Lovesickness	Carlos Ruíz Ruíz/ Mariem Pérez Riera	Puerto Rico, 2007	

Viejos negocios	Fernando Miniño	Puerto Rico, 2007	
Yuniol 2	Alfonso Rodríguez	Dominican Republic, 2007	
Operación patakón	Nito Nekerman	Dominican Republic, 2007	
Crimen	Etzel Báez	Dominican Republic, 2007	
Sanky Panky	José Enrique Pintor	Dominican Republic, 2007	
El cuerno de la abundancia	Juan Carlos Tabío	Cuba, 2008	
El premio flaco	Juan Carlos Cremata/ Iraida Malberti	Cuba, 2008	
El viajero inmóvil	Tomás Piard	Cuba, 2008	
Kangamba	Rogelio París	Cuba, 2008	
La espuma de los días	Fernando Timossi	Cuba, 2008	
Los dioses rotos	Ernesto Daranas	Cuba, 2008	
Omertá	Pavel Giroud	Cuba, 2008	
Vedado	Asori Soto/ Magdiel Aspillaga	Cuba, 2008	
Hay hombres para todas	Vicente Juarbe	Puerto Rico, 2008	
La mala	Pedro Pérez-Rosado	Puerto Rico, 2008	
Marina	Sonia Fritz	Puerto Rico, 2008	

Al fin y al cabo	Alfonso Rodríguez	Dominican Republic, 2008	
El caballero de la media noche	Jimmy Sierra	Dominican Republic, 2008	
Excexos	José María Cabral	Dominican Republic, 2008	
Ladrones a domicilio	Ángel Muñiz	Dominican Republic, 2008	
Play Ball	Alfonso Rodríguez	Dominican Republic, 2008	
Trópico de sangre	Juan Deláncer	Dominican Republic, 2008	
Lisanka	Daniel Díaz Torres	Cuba, 2009	
La anunciación	Enrique Pineda Barnet	Cuba, 2009	
Ciudad en rojo	Rebeca Chávez	Cuba, 2009	
Moloch tropical	Raoul Peck	Haiti, 2009	
El lenguaje de la guerra	Gazir Sued	Puerto Rico, 2009	
Manuela y Manuel	Raúl Marchand Sánchez	Puerto Rico, 2009	
Miente	José Rafael Mercado	Puerto Rico, 2009	
Cristiano de la secreta	Archie López	Dominican Republic, 2009	
La soga	Josh Crook	Dominican Republic, 2009	
Afinidades	Jorge Perugorría/ Vladimir Cruz	Cuba, 2010	

Molina´s ferozz	Jorge Molina	Cuba, 2010	
Memorias del desarrollo	Miguel Coyula	Cuba, 2010	
Larga distancia	Esteban Insausti	Cuba, 2010	
José Martí: El ojo del canario	Fernando Pérez	Cuba, 2010	Havana * Ariel (México) *
Chamaco	Juan Carlos Cremata	Cuba, 2010	
Casa vieja	Léster Hamlet	Cuba, 2010	
Boleto al paraíso	Gerardo Chijona	Cuba, 2010	
Elite	Andrés Ramírez	Puerto Rico, 2010	
Jean Gentil	Israel Cárdenas/ Laura Amelia Guzmán	Dominican Republic, 2010	
La hija natural	Leticia Tonos	Dominican Republic, 2010	
Fábula	Léster Hamlet	Cuba, 2011	
Habanastation	Ian Padrón	Cuba, 2011	Havana * Lima
Juan de los muertos	Alejandro Brugués	Cuba, 2011	
La piscina	Carlos Machado Quintela	Cuba, 2011	
Vinci	Eduardo del Llano Rodríguez	Cuba, 2011	
América	Sonia Fritz	Puerto Rico, 2011	
Under My Nails	Ari Maniel Cruz	Puerto Rico, 2011	

I Love Bachata	Roberto Ángel Salcedo	Dominican Republic, 2011	
Lotoman	Archie López	Dominican Republic, 2011	
Pimp Bullies	Alfonso Rodríguez	Dominican Republic, 2011	
Chrissy	Marcia Weeks	Barbados, 2012	
Y sin embargo...	Rudy Mora	Cuba, 2012	
Verde verde	Enrique Pineda Barnet	Cuba, 2012	
Se vende	Jorge Perugorría	Cuba, 2012	
Penumbras	Charlie Medina	Cuba, 2012	
Melaza	Carlos Lechuga	Cuba, 2012	
La peícula de Ana	Daniel Díaz Torres	Cuba, 2012	
Jirafas	Enrique Álvarez	Cuba, 2012	
Amor crónico	Jorge Perugorría	Cuba, 2012	
Broche de oro	Raúl Marchand Sánchez	Puerto Rico, 2012	
I Am Director	Javier Colón	Puerto Rico, 2012	
Feo de día, lindo de noche	Alfonso Rodríguez	Dominican Republic, 2012	
La lucha de Ana	Bladimir Abud	Dominican Republic, 2012	
Abo So	Juan Francisco Pardo	Aruba, 2013	
Boccaccerías habaneras	Arturo Sotto	Cuba, 2013	Havana *

Kingston Paradise	Mary Wells	Jamaica, 2013	
Just Another Friday	Michael Brown/ Judith Falloon-Reid	Jamaica, 2013	
¡Qué joyitas! II	Eduardo Ortiz	Puerto Rico, 2013	
200 cartas	Bruno Irizarry	Puerto Rico, 2013	
La espera desespera	Corali Santaliz	Puerto Rico, 2013	
Por amor en el caserío	Luis Enrique Rodríguez	Puerto Rico, 2013	
Reggaeton the Movie	Carlos Martín / Fernando Sánchez	Puerto Rico, 2013	
Biodegradable	Juan Basanta	Dominican Republic, 2013	
Cristo Rey	Leticia Tonos	Dominican Republic, 2013	
El gallo	Juan Fernández	Dominican Republic, 2013	
Mi ángel favorito	Alfonso Rodríguez	Dominican Republic, 2013	
Noche de circo	Alan Nadal Piantini	Dominican Republic, 2013	
God loves the fighter	Damian Marcano	Trinidad & Tobago, 2013	
Venecia	Enrique Álvarez	Cuba, 2014	
Vestido de novia	Marilyn Solaya	Cuba, 2014	
Regreso a Ítaca	Laurent Cantet	Cuba, 2014	

Omega 3	Eduardo del Llano Rodríguez	Cuba, 2014	
La pared de las palabras	Fernando Pérez	Cuba, 2014	Havana *
Fátima o el parque de la fraternidad	Jorge Perugorría	Cuba, 2014	
Espejuelos oscuros	Jessica Rodríguez	Cuba, 2014	
Contigo pan y cebolla	Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti Iraida Malberti	Cuba, 2014	
Conducta	Ernesto Daranas	Cuba, 2014	Havana * Málaga * Lima * Trinidad & Tobago *
Caballos	Fabián Suárez	Cuba, 2014	
Código Paz	Pedro Urrutia	Dominican Republic, 2014	
Dólares de arena	Laura Amelia Guzmán & Israel Cárdenas	Dominican Republic, 2014	Ceará *
Locas y atrapadas	Alfonso Rodríguez	Dominican Republic, 2014	
The Dragon	Asha Lovelace	Trinidad & Tobago, 2014	
Bailando con Margot	Arturo Santana	Cuba, 2015	

Café amargo	Rigoberto Jiménez Hernández	Cuba, 2015	
Cuba libre	Jorge Luis Sánchez	Cuba, 2015	
El acompañante	Pavel Giroud	Cuba, 2015	
La ciudad	Tomás Piárd	Cuba, 2015	
La cosa humana	Gerardo Chijona	Cuba, 2015	
La obra del siglo	Carlos Machado Quintela	Cuba, 2015	
Sharing Stella	Enrique Álvarez	Cuba, 2015	
Vuelos prohibidos	Rigoberto López	Cuba, 2015	
A orillas del mar	Bladimir Abud	Dominican Republic, 2015	
La familia reyna	Francisco Rodríguez	Dominican Republic, 2015	
Esteban	Jonal Cosculluela	Cuba, 2016	
Últimos días en la Habana	Fernando Pérez	Cuba, 2016	Málaga *
El techo	Patricia Ramos	Cuba, 2016	
Ya no es antes	Léster Hamlet	Cuba, 2016	
Ayiti mon amour	Guetty Felin	Haiti, 2016	
Antes que cante el gallo	Arí Maniel Cruz	Dominican Republic, 2016	
Flor de azúcar		Dominican Republic, 2016	

Play the Devil	María Govan	Trinidad & Tobago, 2016	
The Gift Everlasting	Michael Brown/ Judith Falloon-Reid	Jamaica, 2017	
Carpinteros	José María Cabral	Dominican Republic, 2017	
Hero	Frances Anne Solomon	Trinidad & Tobago, 2017	

Annex 3. Film Corpus Availability

Film	Available at
Agua fría de mar	Amazon (DVD) https://www.amazon.es/Agua-Fria-de-Mar/dp/B006T1JD6Q/ref=sr_1_5?__mk_es_ES=%C3%85M%C3%85%C5%BD%C3%95%C3%91&keywords=agua+fr%C3%ADa+de+mar&qid=1558891261&s=gateway&sr=8-5
Atrás hay relámpagos	Vimeo (VoD) https://vimeo.com/ondemand/atrashayrelampagos?fbclid=IwAR0xqI72sdJc6HR0kKO-tCTuX1exxuC1fK4Pq-hhIZjc1bdAi0QT9DOmheY
Dólares de arena	Amazon (DVD) https://www.amazon.es/Dollars-sables-Francia-DVD/dp/B01N7A4BFY/ref=sr_1_1?__mk_es_ES=%C3%85M%C3%85%C5%BD%C3%95%C3%91&keywords=dolares+de+arena&qid=1558890389&s=gateway&sr=8-1
Ixcanul	Amazon (DVD)

	https://www.amazon.es/Ixcanul-DVD/dp/B018YLRKJK/ref=sr_1_1?__mk_es_ES=%C3%85M%C3%85%C5%BD%C3%95%C3%91&keywords=ixcanul&qid=1558890660&s=gateway&sr=8-1
Princesas rojas	Vimeo (VoD)
El techo	Vimeo (VoD)
Últimos días en La Habana	Amazon (DVD) https://www.amazon.es/s?k=%C3%BAltimos+d%C3%ADas+en+la+habana&__mk_es_ES=%C3%85M%C3%85%C5%BD%C3%95%C3%91&ref=nb_sb_noss
Viva Cuba	Amazon (DVD) https://www.amazon.es/Viva-Cuba-OmU-Alemania-DVD/dp/B001GSZA96/ref=sr_1_1?__mk_es_ES=%C3%85M%C3%85%C5%BD%C3%95%C3%91&keywords=viva+cuba&qid=1558891171&s=gateway&sr=8-1

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