

# South American Cinematic Culture



South American Cinematic Culture:  
Policy, Production, Distribution  
and Exhibition

By

Miriam Ross

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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by Miriam Ross

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CAACI	Conferencia de Autoridades Audiovisuales y Cinematográficas de Iberoamérica: Organisation for Audiovisual and Film Councils in Iberoamerica
CALA	Consejo del Arte y La Industria Audiovisual: Government funded Audiovisual Film Council in Chile
CNC	Centre National de la Cinématographie: Government Funded Film Council in France
CORFO	Corporación de Fomento de la Producción: The Chilean Economic Development Agency
FIAPF	International Federation of Film Producers Associations
IIPA	International Intellectual Property Alliance
IMCINE	Instituto Mexicano de Cinematográfica: Government Funded Film Council in Mexico
IMDB	Internet Movie Data Base
INCAA	Instituto Nacional de Cine y Artes Audiovisuales: Government Funded Film Council in Argentina
RECAM	Especializada de Autoridades Cinematográficas y Audiovisuales del Mercosur: Reunion of Cinematographic and Audiovisual Authorities of Mercosur and Associated States
UNESCO	United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation



## INTRODUCTION

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, cheap DVDs had become ubiquitous, multiplexes had widened the scope and variety of material they were screening and film festivals were increasing their presence across the annual calendar. There had, apparently, never been a better time to engage with 'world' cinema. Why then, could I not encounter any South American films? A handful would appear amongst film festival catalogues or in special programs but these were few and far between. When in South America, I experienced the wide spectrum of cinematic works emerging from the continent's diverse peoples and cultural experiences. I also realised that film funding and production was increasing. Returning to the UK, however, I struggled to find traces of this prolific cinematic culture. It was clear that problems of exhibition and distribution remained. Movie-theatres in South America were saturated with US products and many promising directors were struggling to get their films into exhibition spaces, making it difficult to get their second, let alone third or fourth, film made. Governmental bodies were frequently celebrating national achievement in filmmaking but local audiences remained without access to the cinema of the region. Although films travelled abroad and interesting transnational networks were emerging, there were not always significant gains for the cinematic activity back home. More often than not, international audiences were ignorant of the variety of films that were being produced. This situation was taking place in a century of increased global connectivity and at a time when cheaper production, distribution and exhibition costs were supposedly democratising access to cinema. Nonetheless, there were policy makers, gate-keepers, intervening agents and other persons that were, and still are, determining the access that filmmakers and audiences have to cinematic culture in the region. The result is a regional cinema that is vibrant and diverse yet, at the same time, struggling to gain recognition and strength.

These features of contemporary South American cinematic culture are not systematic processes that work in a vacuum but are instead the result of intervention from various agents working in interlinking fields. From the initial stages of production through to exhibition and later stages of distribution and film conservation, a number of interests are at work.

These range from commercial investment in this high-cost area to cultural investment in creating, adding to and maintaining an artistic heritage. There is thus value in uncovering the major contributors and the roles they play. For example, how do the persons involved in cinematic culture interact with processes of deterritorialization and transculturation that affect filmmakers and their work and where are they situated within activities and discourse that attempt to reaffirm national cinemas and regional frameworks? By questioning cinematic culture in this context it is possible to focus, not simply on a body of cultural products or the practice of film-viewing, but on the manner by which a collective notion of cinematic activity is given meaning and circulation by a wide variety of perspectives and interests. Furthermore, one can understand that cinematic culture is formed through the way in which cinematic activities operate in relation to particular locations and socio-cultural moments. These are complex relations as cinematic culture is both highly localized, with viewing often taking place amongst a relatively small number of spectators in a fixed site, and highly globalized as film products travel routes of transnational distribution. Contemporary activity is also the result of specific historical processes that have brought cinematic culture in South America to its present position. Although there is not one agent or organisation that controls the way in which these elements come together, a central question can be asked which is: who has ownership of South American cinematic culture? Is it the practitioners and policy makers who produce the cinematic works; is it the distributors and exhibitors who determine the way the films may circulate; or is it the audiences who decide how and when to engage with the material they receive? These questions raise subsidiary queries such as how do organisations and persons intersect and compete when trying to gain a hold on cinematic culture; what kinds of access to local cinematic culture are South American publics allowed; and which discourses and conditions are applied when international and national agents and organisations have an input into South American cinema?

By choosing to examine South American cinematic culture in this way I am not seeking to deny the importance of the individual cinematic text, but I would like to argue that there is a need for an overview of the region to more fully appreciate the way in which films become part of a living cinematic culture. For this reason, it is worth considering the multiple and interlinking factors that constitute and continuously develop cinematic practice. Although South American works are often bundled together in the wider framework of Latin American film history (Wood, 2008; Shaw,

2003; Pick, 1993, Hart, 2004), there are factors shared by South American nations, such as involvement with the Mercosur trade block, cultural traditions stemming from Andean communities and relationships with European settlers, that are not necessarily evident in Central America or the Caribbean. For this reason, rich detail emerges when the distinct but overlapping practices in South American cinema practice are examined. The Southern countries do not contain a homogenous unity and the disparity between nations, such as the economically depressed Bolivia and the more financially stable Chile, highlights and exasperates the extent to which different social experiences are undertaken. Furthermore, there are internal divisions within the nations, meaning that an urban, elite, cinema-going practice diverges greatly from the experiences of rural communities and their access to cultural works. However, there is a complex and nuanced discourse of nationalism and regionalism in South America that plays a part in the majority of cultural activity, whether it is in the hands of policy makers, film producers, distributors or commercial exhibitors. This discourse frequently brings a sense of unity to cinematic culture in South America even when flows of globalizations and deterritorialization play a significant part.

To bring to light the subtle ways in which the interaction between national, regional and global frameworks takes place, I have chosen to focus much of my examination on four countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru. Each of these countries spatially border one another, share similar languages (including the dominant language Spanish), and have a number of shared policies and agreements. Each country also has filmmakers and practitioners that fight through public debate, legislative activism and film activities to support their nation's cinematic culture even though there is a great difference between Argentina's annual film output (which exceeds seventy films) and Peru and Bolivia's output (that is closer to four or five films a year). There is border-crossing practice between these nations and there is also a simultaneous international outlook that allows cinematic culture to engage beyond its local vicinity. It would be impossible to separate out their cinematic practices and analyse them country by country as there is such a wide amount of overlapping and shared tendencies. However, they do have some distinct attributes that are worth outlining to give an overview of the contemporary situation.

## **Argentina (population: 39.9 million)**

*Film Industry:* Of the four countries, Argentina has the most established film industry with a history of sustained production and strong national distribution. It had a successful 'classical' period throughout the 1930s and 1940s and although it suffered under a number of repressive military dictatorships and financial crises, there has often been a substantial annual output of films. It was a key player in the New Latin American Cinema movement of the 1960s and 70s and found success with what was called the New Argentine Cinema wave of the 1990s. It has two strong film festivals, the Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival and the Mar del Plata International Film Festival in which commercial, independent and experimental Argentine films are exhibited. There are various film schools, particularly in Buenos Aires, that offer training in film production and aspects of the industry. 74 national films were premiered in 2006 yet it has to be recognized that only a small number of these gained critical and public attention with 8 films gaining 86% of the box-office receipts for national films. Like many countries, US dominance exists at the box-office with an 83% share going to North American films in 2006 (Recam, 2008). There are increasing numbers of multiplexes, particularly in western-style shopping malls, and the majority of these exhibit a small number of national films. Many larger bookshops and record stores sell Argentine DVDs alongside US films and other world cinema works.

*State Support:* The state-funded National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA) is long established and highly visible in Argentina. It offers support to producers and filmmakers and also runs festivals and events to promote Argentine cinema. Although some films are made independently of INCAA the majority of commercial and international successes are produced with some aspect of support from this institution. INCAA helps to uphold and regulate the country's cinema law and runs a number of cinemas aimed specifically at exhibiting national films and other Latin American or arthouse works.

*Independent Production and Distribution:* Argentina has a relatively strong independent film network and there are a number of politically-motivated grass roots organisations that show film screenings to local communities. They normally operate out of non-commercial or illegal spaces and have strong links to documentary and experimental filmmakers in Argentina and in other Latin American countries. Other non-commercial but established cultural centres, particularly in Buenos Aires,

run programs of Latin American or Argentine film. Although piracy is illegal there are still a number of regular stalls and markets where it is easy to obtain pirate copies of both international and national films.

### **Bolivia (population: 8.9 million)**

*Film Industry:* Bolivia is one of the least economically developed countries in South America and the film industry reflects this in the lack of resources and funds available for filmmaking. It played a substantial part in the New Latin American Cinema movement, mainly through the work of Jorge Sanjines in the 1960s and 1970s, but has never had a sustained commercial film industry. There has, however, been increased production in the last few years with four or five films produced annually and in 2006 *Quien mato a la llamita blanca* (2006) broke all previous box-office records to become the most successful national film on record. Large numbers of the population claim indigenous/Andean heritage and this is reflected in the identity and non-Spanish language used in many films. A small number of film schools exist that provide training not just in La Paz but in Santa Cruz and Cochabamba as well. There are a relatively small number of movie-theatres in Bolivia meaning that there are few spaces for exhibiting national films. As opportunities to work on 35mm are rare, many filmmakers are making use of cheap digital technology for film production.

*State Support:* Conacine Bolivia is the state-funded national film institute and provides support in both the promotion of the national film industry and the regulation of the country's cinema law. It has funds available to support film projects and the majority of films produced in Bolivia are made with some type of support from the institute though funds are limited and dependent upon reimbursement following commercial success. There is also a national cinemateca that, although officially a private organisation relying on donations and philanthropic support, is the legal depository for all works filmed within Bolivia. It plays an important role in supporting contemporary national film through festivals and screenings as well as preserving the heritage of national film. The cinema law does support a screening quota system by which movie-theatres are obliged to exhibit a number of national films but there has not been any success in implementing or making use of this system.

*Independent Production and Distribution:* There are a number of independent video makers making use of cheap technology to film shorts

and documentaries. There is little formal space for exhibition of their work although cultural centres such as the Alianza-Frances run festivals and programs that allow national and independent works to be screened. Piracy is prevalent to the extent that it is not commercially viable for stores to stock DVDs as cheap pirate copies can be bought for a fraction of the price on almost any street corner. Although the majority of pirate DVDs are copies of US films, it is common for national films to be available on the street during their cinema run.

### **Chile (population: 16.4 million)**

*Film Industry:* Chile is the most economically stable of the countries under study yet has not had a sustained film industry. This is mainly due to the severe censorship and constrictions placed on the film industry during the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990). Although Chile hosted the Viña del Mar festival in the 1960s that announced the political drive of the New Latin American Cinema Movement, the majority of Chilean filmmakers were forced into exile with the onset of the dictatorship and this led to the production of Chilean cinema outside of the national industry. In recent years there has been increased production, concurrent with the reopening of film departments in the major universities (that were closed by the dictatorship) and this has led to around 12 national productions annually. There are increasing numbers of multiplex cinemas in western-style shopping malls and Chilean films can gain limited distribution in these cinemas around the country. There are few older films released for sale on DVD but stores are beginning to stock contemporary Chilean films.

*State Support:* The National Council for Culture and Arts was divided into subsections in 2005 and this led to the creation of the Consejo del Arte y La Industria Audiovisual (CALA) that regulates and provides support for all audiovisual production in Chile. Cinema is seen as a key part of audiovisual production and is supported by laws to promote production and dissemination. The new audiovisual council brought together funds from various bodies such as the business orientated Corporación de Fomento de la Producción (CORFO) and Pro-Chile that had previously provided different levels of support. In 2007 the national cinemateca was opened with the main aims of preserving cinematic heritage and providing exhibition space. One of its most important tasks is to reclaim archive material as large amounts of film were destroyed by the dictatorship, stored in hiding or processed overseas.

*Independent Production and Distribution:* Almost all films produced in Chile gain the support of the National Council yet the proliferation of new film schools means that some independent and experimental films are made. There are also film groups working from indigenous communities, such as the Mapuche groups in the South, to make politically orientated documentaries. Culture centres and universities provide spaces for screening national films and other arthouse works. Piracy is far less prolific than in other South American countries yet it is still relatively easy to buy copies of contemporary national films through illegal street vendors.

### **Peru (population: 28.7 million)**

*Film Industry:* Peru has had problematic political and economic development which is reflected in the lack of resources and funds available to filmmakers. There have, however, been a small number of films produced each year from the 1970s with many of these being made as coproductions. Each year, increasing numbers of shopping malls are built with movie-theatres attached yet there are still large rural areas with no access to the cinema and populations that do not speak Spanish as a native language. US films tend to dominate the cinema screens but some national productions manage to find exhibition in these spaces. At the same time, it is rare to find other Latin American films exhibited in the commercial movie theatres.

*State Support:* Conacine Peru was created along with a new cinema law in 1994 to support and regulate the Peruvian film industry. Although there is a legal mandate for the state to support cinema production and to create a national cinemateca and library relating to national cinema, the government repeatedly fails to provide the funds that are promised within legislation. In 2008, the film council announced that it was going to consolidate Peruvian film archives in the Museo Nacional but it acknowledged this was going to be a lengthy task.

*Independent Production and Distribution:* There are grassroots organisations, frequently with a political imperative, working to create independent productions, mainly documentaries. These groups often work in rural areas and with indigenous communities, with the aim of screening films as part of an education project. Filmmakers tend to rely on culture centres and universities in Lima to screen copies of national films and provide programs of Latin American work. Piracy is extremely prolific with

established markets and stores selling pirate copies yet it is still possible to buy some legal DVDs in upmarket stores in urban areas such as Lima.

Although it is clear from this account that there are national specificities in the cinematic culture of each country, the overlap between practices and activities is extensive. It is within the overlap that some of the most dynamic and complex expressions of a regional cinematic culture take place, particularly as it simultaneously interacts with national and global concerns. Furthermore, it is through examination of the repeated activities and processes that patterns emerge which point to the central persons and organisation involved in shaping the way cinematic activity is undertaken. While this work is complex and multifaceted, it can be organised into four major competing and complementary interventions at work in the region: state and institutional involvement, commercial industry, international interests and alternative practices. Each of these interventions plays a part in using one or more of the practices of production, distribution and exhibition to develop South American cinematic culture and, more often than not, attempts to engage with national, regional and global circuits.

Chapter One introduces the first of these interventions by examining *state and institutional involvement* in the construction of cinematic culture. While traditions of transnational practices and global circulation have taken South American films beyond country borders, the beginning of the twenty-first century has witnessed continuing state interventions at the level of production and exhibition. The construction and reaffirmation of cinema laws and cultural policy in recent years highlights increased levels of state intervention in contrast to other industries in which products are allowed de-regulated circulation through free-trade networks. While it has been rightly noted that cultural policy is not a particularly new phenomenon (Johnson, 1996; Martín-Barbero, 2000; Miller and Yudice, 2002), late-twentieth and early twenty-first century policy has particular relationships with global economies. In South America, state organisations promote works of culture from stages of production through to distribution with deference to both national signifiers and the international context in which they may eventually be received. Often it is a less than organic process when the national context is imposed upon works through a range of policy initiatives such as funding, tax-breaks, import and export laws, exhibition quotas and official awards. Because policy is normally written into law in South America and has strong legislative frameworks, the first chapter makes use of this aspect to examine the specific legal conditions in



which cinema is produced as well as the way in which various types of cinema are prioritized and promoted through state legislation.

While much policy has a remit to support contemporary production, another significant factor of state involvement is the way in which institutions and organisations develop an historical trajectory through their emphasis on film heritage and the nation's cinematic past. Policy is aimed at the creation and maintenance of archives and 'cinematecas' (national film theatres) which consolidate and stabilize national cinematic formations in the present. In this process, taxonomic collections are developed that can be theorized in much the same way as museums. At stake is the way in which they prioritise certain cinematic works in their national formations even when there is a remit to open up public access to the wide variety of the country's cinematic heritage. Often, it is within this area that state involvement has the greatest power to exert a national influence rather than recognise the multifaceted transnational processes that are involved in the production of films in the archives and cinematecas' collections.

In contrast to the processes of determining the nation's historical continuum, state engagement with regional networks throw into relief the extent to which any nation can contain culture within its own borders. Through a number of networks and cross-country agreements, South American nations attempt to share funding initiatives, transfer expertise and knowledge and open up trade routes for film products. Regional identity is negotiated by nation states that have a degree of self interest in retaining and reterritorializing national heritage and cinematic production but can also benefit culturally and economically from reciprocal programs such as those fostered by Mercosur and the Iberoamerican CAACI. At times, the official discourse accompanying these programs recognises the cultural gains that are brought about by transnational cooperation but frequently there is an attempt to distinguish the national cinematic work as a contained project which interacts with rather than develops from the international context.

Complementing the paradoxical interplay between an international and national outlook, this chapter turns towards one of the perpetual debates of national film theory: how can the state fully incorporate the diversity within its nation, taking into account the varied identities and communities that come together in creating a shared cinematic culture (Dissanayake, 1994; White, 2004; Higson, 2000; Crofts, 2002)? Any overview of a national cinema raises questions about whether it is possible for the

country's various subjects to be encompassed by types of cultural policy that are working as much to sustain a commercial industry as to promote cultural practices. In South America this is a particularly pertinent issue as there are many indigenous communities who are marginalized by mainstream cultural practice even though they have a history of contributing to national heritage. The countries I examine each display examples of state mechanisms that attempt to incorporate their disparate communities but actual practices often underscore the difficulty of reaching their aims. An understanding of the limits of policy is thus as important as the potential that cultural policy and state intervention have for cinema in the region. With regards to the way in which cinematic practice will develop in the future, each of the factors addressed in this chapter are particularly significant as the extent to which policy plays a part in film production and circulation is unlikely to decrease in the coming years. In line with many nation-states, cultural industries in South America are now as important economically as the 'durable' goods industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2002:1). For this reason, the attempts by government bodies and organisations to play a determining role in this state of affairs cannot be underestimated.

Their efforts are, however, met by a strong commercial sector that controls much of the audiovisual flow within the region. I would like to argue that a cinematic text needs to be seen in order to enter into cinematic culture and, for this reason, much of the second chapter's focus on *commercial industry* is an investigation of the various forces at work in allowing a cinematic text, or a body of cinematic texts, to gain circulation and thus form part of a living culture. While studies on the meaning found within texts can disregard their industrial constitution, an understanding of the wider arena that constitutes cinematic culture, and the way films become accessible to publics, needs to take into consideration the commercial flows that allow films to be seen. This perception does not deny the importance of non-commercial circuits of exhibition and dissemination but instead recognises that much of the collective experience of film in South America is determined through contact with routes of commerce. Guiding these processes are the frequently overlooked distributors, sales agencies and similar organisations. I have paid particular attention to these groups in this chapter as their roles underpin significant portions of global film industries but there is little documentation of their work outside of trade magazines.

These distributors and sales agents interact in formative points of the route from the film as craft to its emergence as available culture and often act as gatekeepers that direct the public's access to local and regional works. It is unsurprising that the radical South American filmmakers of the twentieth century tried to bypass their commercial exploitation of film by screening directly to film clubs and supportive groups (Solanas and Getino, 1987; Sanjines, 1979; Littin, 1988). Nonetheless, the twenty-first century witnesses a continuation of their influence and few films reach large South American audiences without these intermediaries. Complementing their work is that of the South American exhibitors. Much more than simply agents that negotiate the entry of films into a public space, exhibitors work within site specific criteria that reveals the way in which cinematic culture is not created uniformly within a singular exhibition location but takes place simultaneously between commercial venues, in which profit drives programming, and arthouse or cultural centres, in which other considerations can be prioritised. Furthermore, examination of these sites unpicks the extent to which the cinema-going experience is conditioned by the socio-economic and geographical placement of specific movie-theatres. There is little neutral ground on which to screen a South American film.

Towards the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, there was hope that digital-screening technology would make direct distribution and access to films from small industries easier. There were expectations that filmmakers could circumvent the agents who favour Hollywood films or the cinematic works that follow its style. However, the way in which distribution in South America continues to be tied up with notions of commercial ownership and traditional routes of circulation, links to the findings of critics such as Saskia Sassen (2002). She critiques the way that new communication technology allows global capital to be directed and used from almost any point in the world yet there is a continuous reiteration of cities (particularly established metropolises) as financial centres in which hierarchical and spatial inequalities are reaffirmed. It is a process that is highlighted by one of the main issues of film distribution: the fact that Hollywood continues to dominate the global sphere and the majority of DVD sales in foreign countries pertain to US films. Of equal importance is the way this issue applies to the internal working of South American cinematic culture because urban, city-based, directors often find it easier to gain distribution than rural or regional projects speaking from the margins. My exploration of the way digital screening technology is being used in South America is thus as much a

mapping of contemporary events as it is a mapping of the possibilities that are not realised.

Although I dedicate substantial analysis to the theatrical exhibition of cinematic work – the point at which films are often accorded the greatest cultural placement and prestige (Harbord, 2002; Kendrick, 2005) – the final destination in the film object's route (its arrival in the home) is also given attention. Taking into consideration the demise of VHS sales in the region, DVD has become the format of choice for experiencing and accessing South American cinema products, particularly those that only have short runs in the movie theatre and rarely find space on television channels. Although DVD sales follow similar routes to 35mm film circulation, the way in which certain works are given longevity in this format means they are a significant factor in the engagement of publics with cinematic culture. The processes involved in the commercial exploitation of DVDs (as with the commercial exploitation of 35 mm film) frequently deterritorialize films from their starting point in a local cinema culture and thus throw into relief the attempts by state organisations to reterritorialize and develop cinema practice in the region.

At this stage, it is possible to understand the way that fissures emerge between the desires of state organisations that wish to contain and enact national signification within local film products and a commercial industry that gains more from cooperation with transnational networks. Complicating matters further is the intervention of internationally oriented groups from funding bodies to film festivals and film companies looking for global coproductions, each of whom set their own agendas when intersecting with the global circulation of film or the desires of the state to protect national culture. Chapter Three investigates these *international interests* and the entangled manner by which they have a part in South American cinematic culture. Often their practices add to the cinematic culture of South American countries and their own country of origin, allowing processes of transculturation to take place. Coined by Fernando Ortiz in his work on Cuba in the 1940s, transculturation is an attempt to explain reciprocal processes of cross-cultural adaptation (see Hernández, 2005). Although work in this field has remained mainly within Latin American studies it has been taken up by scholars such as Mary Louise Pratt (1992) who have broadened its scope to include the way cultural meeting has taken place in various post-colonial sites. In particular, she highlights the importance of 'contact zones': the discursive sites in which different cultures come together and adapt to one another. The use this

concept has for my analysis of South American cinema lies in the way in which it allows sites of power to be interrogated and the exact processes that take place in transnational exchange to be uncovered. Rather than assuming that border-crossing processes will have a straight-forward effect on cultural practice, transculturation examines the complex ways in which producing and receiving culture are conditioned by the interactions that take place. Through this perception it is possible to understand the way in which South American cinematic culture is bound to a place of origin - often the nation in which it originated - but continuously reaches out beyond that boundary through interaction with foreign production.

The examples I give of international coproductions and the varied inflections with which they operate, feed into a well documented body of transnational film practice from the early twentieth century to the present day (Falicov, 2004; López, 2002). Not so profusely examined in existing literature are the varied organisations that fund South American cinematic practice through a paternalistic and altruistic approach. Organisations such as UNESCO have a stake in supporting minority cultures that are seen as under threat from processes of globalisation. When engaging with South American cinema practice, they are often better placed than state organisations to support peripheral and marginalised groups with indigenous heritage. At the same time, there are other international bodies associated with film festivals that are involved in funding a broad range of South American films. The discourse they use in their own publications and practices firmly situates South American film industries within the Third World and, in this way, their transcultural approaches are tempered by the power balances that condition many post-colonial transactions.

Framing and constituting their interaction with South American films are the film festivals in which they are situated. As film festival studies have shown, festivals can have a determining power over the reception of texts (Stringer, 2001; Nichols, 1994; deValck, 2007). The way cinematic works are received and constituted within international film festivals can then go on to affect their placement within a localized cinematic culture. In the twenty-first century there is a core centre of film festivals that determine the attention which is placed upon certain films while festivals and films at the periphery go largely unacknowledged. This phenomenon leads to Thomas Elsaesser's suggestion that 'certain films are now being made to measure and made to order, i.e., their completion date, their opening venue, their financing is closely tied in with a particular festival's (or festival circuit's) schedules and many filmmakers internalize and target

such a possibility for their work' (2005: 88). Even when South American films do not anticipate film festival exhibition in their production processes, they do frequently rely on festivals for visibility, funding opportunities and distribution contacts and thus enter into transcultural contracts that are determined by the power that festivals hold over the global film circuit.

While the various international organisations examined in Chapter Three appear to take South American cinematic culture beyond national boundaries, the practices they promote often interact with the state organisations and commercial interests that have been outlined in the two previous chapters. What links these organisations and agents together is the way in which their practices channel discourse of official and regulated cinematic culture. Each film that is supported and each distribution and exhibition moment that is produced falls within formal and authorized networks. However, within South America, publics do have access to cinematic works and exhibition and distribution contexts that fall outwith the jurisdiction of official organisations but are nevertheless part of the lived cinematic culture of the region. There are various organisations and activities that take place at a grassroots level. They are unendorsed, often illegal and thus provide the *alternative practices* that I examine in my final chapter.

In considering alternative practice, the work of piracy is given particular attention because activities, from distributing illegal DVDs to providing free movie collections online, are fundamental to the way in which film products are circulated in contemporary South America. This mode of distribution is often as important as legal forms in determining the types of cinematic works available to and perceived as meaningful to local communities. Equally important are the grassroots organizations that create sites for exhibition, often with politically orientated filmmaking in mind, that circumvent official or commercial networks. Their practices involve taking over space so that they can provide accessible cinema to local communities free from commercial intervention. Within these two practices the home viewing context and the desire to participate in public exhibition are satisfied in a manner that interacts with official modes of cinematic culture yet engages audiences distinctly.

The issue of access to cinema that these activities highlight also draws into question the role of the internet and the various technological tools that are provided for developing a continuous cinematic culture that is available to

South American publics. When looking back at the public meeting sites of eighteenth century Europe, Habermas (1989) made claims for a discursive meeting space - the public sphere - that allows citizens to engage in critical debates dealing with topics of public importance. He was optimistic that this space could be achieved in contemporary society in a way that permits cultural and political participation. Using these ideas in the twenty-first century, many scholars concur with Todd Gitlin's (1998) point that technology has in fact led to a plurality of public spheres and that the democratic potential is hampered by larger socio-economic conditions. Nonetheless, these factors do not diminish the importance of examining how citizens involve themselves in cultural discourse and the necessity for understanding the complexity of public engagement through technology. The interaction that South American cinema has with internet sites such as IMDB and Youtube displays the potential for democratic discussion of cinematic texts and allows a public sphere to develop with regards to cinematic culture. Providing important platforms for a community-level collective understanding of local cinema, the flows of information in these interactions are not often made visible in 'official' discourse.

This 'official' discourse (aside from the work done by UNESCO) also falls short when dealing with the issue of indigenous identities in cinema practice and cinematic production amongst indigenous communities. The large numbers of indigenous communities in South America are not often considered in discourse surrounding cinematic culture or even in academic overviews of the cinema of the region (Himpele, 2008; Schiwy, 2008). To date, there is only limited consideration of how indigenous communities are represented (or not represented) within cinematic works and, specifically, within feature-length films. The focus on indigenous filmmaking is often on short films and documentaries as these form the wider body of audiovisual works made within indigenous media practice yet this factor often puts the works outside of wider discourses on cinematic culture that concern themselves with feature-length fiction films. For this reason, it is necessary to situate indigenous cinema practices within the wider scope of cinematic activity in the region to see the extent to which they are engaged in a South American cinematic culture. This chapter thus interacts with some of the primary concerns developed in the prior chapters but also allows space for the less-documented and less well known aspects of South American cinematic culture to emerge.

Through analysis of the various intersecting strands and interests, it becomes clear that there is a constant tension within contemporary South American cinematic culture between the national, the regional and the global, particularly when individuals or organisations attempt to influence or take charge of certain cinematic practices. However, this tension also acts as a bridging point that frequently brings together the diverse organisations and activities at work in the region. Understanding and documenting their work is not an easy task. As Torrico, Gomez and Herrera point out with regards to Bolivia:

No se tiene en el país, hasta el momento, información sistematizada sobre los procesos empresariales que organizan la producción o importación, la distribución, comercialización y difusión de productos culturales de consumo masivo (1999:2).

*In this country we don't have, as yet, systematized information on the business processes that organize the production and importation, or the distribution, commercialisation and dissemination of mass cultural products.*

In a similar point, Pablo Perelman and Paulina Seivach state that in Argentina

A pesar de la importancia de las actividades de la industria cinematográfica en el país y en la ciudad de Buenos Aires e incluso, de la contemplación de sus especificidades en la legislación, hay muy poca información económica sistematizada, actualizada y confiable (2003:9).

*In spite of the importance of the cinema industry's activities in the country and in Buenos Aires, including the specifications demanded in the legislation, there is very little economic information that is systematized, up to date and trustworthy.*

Nonetheless, it is possible to triangulate the wealth of rich data that emerges from the region so that an in-depth and complex picture of South American cinematic culture can emerge. In my investigations and research I relied on information from a variety of sources, often taken and compiled from statistical sites such as [boxofficemojo.com](http://boxofficemojo.com), wider institutional sites such as [Recam.org](http://Recam.org), and aided by first-hand observation, academic papers and personal interviews. At times inconsistencies arise but these are often the signposts which point to the complexity of the interlinked processes and networks that constitute and continuously redevelop cinema in the region. What I am keen to emphasise is that fluid processes take place between the nation-state organisations, commercial intermediaries,



international agents and alternative practices in a way that does not allow the implementation of simple dichotomies such as National and Global, First and Third World or Art and Industry but instead invigorates the possibilities and potential of contemporary South American cinema.

## CHAPTER ONE

### STATE AND INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Within cultural spheres, there is a tension between the grouping together of South American cinemas as a regional entity and the national specificity which comes from each country's cinematic output (Wood, 2008). Although various film movements in the twentieth century, most notably the New Latin American Cinema movement, appeared to stimulate a continent wide identity in film practice, the nation frequently resurfaced as an important signifier (for example King, 1990; Pick, 1993; Shaw, 2003). Underpinning this tension is the way that consideration of any film industry outside of Hollywood traditionally works within rhetoric of the 'national' cinema. However, this concept is in continually contested terrain. Scholarly work displays a sense of unease with attempts to distinguish what exactly the national is and how it can be represented on screen when modern day states commonly incorporate diverse identities and disparate communities. It is also true that as geographical distances appear to shrink through the links produced by contemporary capital and telecommunication flows, films often circulate through global circuits and diasporic communities unconnected to national concerns. Nevertheless, attempts to grapple with the concept of a national cinema are useful, particularly as it is a term that resurfaces not only in academic research but in film journalism, marketing materials, state legislation and film festival discourse. One of the more constructive definitions for an understanding of cinematic culture lies in White's claim:

I propose a definition of national cinema, then, that pays as little attention as possible to the degree with which films themselves engage with national identity. When trying to assess whether a group of films actually constitute a national cinema, two sets of questions must be answered. The first is: does the group of films come from a community reasonably considered to be a nation? The second is: does the group of films constitute a diverse output, and can one find their feature, documentary, and non-commercial sectors? (2004: 224)

His outline has concrete practical application that avoids some of the trickier debates concerning the problem of deciding how to constitute a national identity, particularly as he looks at groups of films rather than individual works. What I believe needs to be added to this claim is the matter of distribution and exhibition. For films to exist as part of a national context there must be a place for them to be seen and recognized by groups of people that are greater than a select number of film festival visitors, journalists or academic scholars. In the majority of cases at the beginning of the twenty-first century this means cinematic exhibition or DVD distribution.

Importantly, the issue of recognizing and promoting national cinematic works, including the exhibition and distribution of films, is a concern taken up by state organisations that have an investment in producing some kind of national label. Although different countries around the world have varied levels of government involvement, almost all South American countries have state organisations that are paying increasing attention to cinematic culture. Particularly important is the extent to which government involvement and support has been increasing in the twenty-first century against predictions that increased global capital would weaken the function of the state. It is a process that can be considered in light of Arjun Appadurai's claim that 'it needs to be pointed out that "deterritorialization" generates various forms of "reterritorialization."' (2003: 345) Understanding the flux between deterritorialization and new processes of reterritorialization gives important insight into the way in which state input into cinematic culture is not merely a continuation of early twentieth century modernity projects (Lopez, 2000; Martin-Barbero, 2002) but a specific intervention into modes of audiovisual production and circulation at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Gabriela Martinez points out that

although culture and national identity remain significant in the elaboration of new audiovisual laws, ideals of modernization and development no longer provide the central component for the creation of these cultural policies. [...] To a large degree, nation building has moved backstage as ideas of globalization shape both state discourse and individual filmmakers' aspirations of gaining access to global markets. (2008: 1)

Adding to Martinez's comments, I would argue that it is not so much that nation building has disappeared in favour of globalisation, but that state intervention is now dealing with a more complex process of adapting and

retaining its hold on cultural production as a response to globalisation and global markets.

Writing in 2004, just as Chile introduced its first cinema law, the director Silvio Caiozzi stated

a lo largo de más de 5 décadas, los cineastas, actores, técnicos del audiovisual, e incluso periodistas han propuesto la necesidad de una legislación de fomento al cine y al audiovisual como necesidad imperiosa para que un país, alejado como el nuestro, se dé a conocer y aprenda a conocerse. De cuán importante es vernos reflejados en el gran espejo que es el cine para corregir nuestros defectos y sentirnos orgullosos de nuestras virtudes. Y para proyectar nuestra imagen al mundo entero intercambiando valores artístico-culturales; y así consolidar una imagen de país que nos permita relacionarnos con presencia y fuerza incluso en el intercambio comercial de nuestros productos. (2004)

*at the end of more than 5 decades filmmakers, actors, audiovisual technicians, and even journalists have proposed the necessity for legislation promoting cinema and audiovisual media as an imperative necessity so that a country as distanced as ours can know and learn to know itself. It is important to see ourselves reflected in the great mirror that is cinema to correct our defects and feel proud of our virtues and to project our image to the entire world, exchanging artistic-cultural values. And in this way we can consolidate an image of the country that permits us to relate ourselves with presence and force, including the commercial exchange of our products.*

Caiozzi's statement highlights a sentiment of support for state intervention in cinema yet there is also the sense that what is at stake for the national cinema is not just the interest of filmmakers or policy makers but the interaction of the cinematic works with a wider public. This sentiment was echoed in the words of Jorge Alvarez, the Vice President of INCAA in Buenos Aires during 2003. He noted that

sabemos que la expresión audiovisual es memoria y espejo, lazo de unión entre nuestros compatriotas y entre todos aquellos con quienes nos unen vínculos sanguíneos, históricos y culturales. (cited in Anon, 2003: 187)

*we know that audiovisual expression is memory and a mirror, a link which unites our countrymen and all those with whom we share historical, cultural and blood ties.*

Caiozzi and Alvarez's thoughts intertwine with a desire that is noticeable in state-sponsored film councils across the world, namely to increase access to their national cinema within national boundaries and abroad.

Confirming this perspective, Antonella Estévez notes that

en el contexto de una economía abierta como la que se plantea a principios de los 90, el cine puede ser una herramienta para presentar en el resto del mundo a Chile y sus riquezas culturales. Son estas razones las que impulsan al Estado a involucrarse en el financiamiento del cine nacional a principios de los 90. (2005: 74)

*in the context of an open economy, such as the one which was introduced at the beginning of the 90s, cinema can be a tool to present Chile, and its cultural treasures to the rest of the world. It is for this reason that the state began to involve itself in financing the national cinema at the beginning of the 90s.*

There is thus a complex desire to hold onto and promote a bordered 'national cinema' yet also project this cinema into a space where it can interact with external international elements.

## **Section 1: Cinema Laws and Legal Intervention**

One of the most common ways in which South American states attempt to formulate national cinematic practice is through legal forms of intervention. They act in a similar way to a number of countries around the globe that have cultural policies ranging from regulation on media and communication ownership to support for small folk art traditions. In an international context, cultural policy came together with increased governmentality from the seventeenth century onwards to produce attempts in the nineteenth century to educate citizens (McGuigan, 2003; Miller and Yudice, 2002). Although this was not a straightforward procedure replicated worldwide, Miller and Yudice (2002) chart the way in which it took place in Latin America when advocates of state intervention, such as Domingo F Sarmiento in Argentina and Andrés Bello in Chile, implemented methods for creating ideal citizens in the nineteenth century. While the policies were aimed at nationalising the country's culture, they often followed European models and ignored or formed prejudice against indigenous cultural practices. Within this process certain types of high art were privileged through a belief in their ability to produce a better and also governable citizen. It was a practice that persisted in Latin America during the early twentieth century when cultural policies

continued to support elite artistic practices (Stanziola, 2002). In line with the work of David Morley and Kevin Robins this can be understood as typical of the nation-building project: 'Monolithic and inward-looking, the unitary nation state has seemed to be the realisation of a desire for coherence and integrity' (1995: 188-9).

Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, there was increased recognition of the need for diversity within culture. This followed identity-politics movements in the West from the 1970s that included feminism and calls for racial and sexual equality, as well as movements particular to South America that sought the recognition of indigenous subjects and cultural practices (Brysk, 2000). South American countries now promote themselves as multicultural and nations such as Chile have reformed their cultural policy to reflect this (Miller and Yudice, 2002). While the representation of communities within the nation may not be fully inclusive, as will be discussed later in this chapter, these claims of multiculturalism imply a different type of national formation from that which Morley and Robins critique and have implications for the way in which cinema practice is supported.

At the same time, it is important to state that the move away from overbearing policy aimed at creating homogenous citizens did not necessarily lead to the demise of cultural policy or its impact on cultural practice. Rather, South American film industries gained strength throughout the latter half of the twentieth century precisely because cinema was supported by government policy (Johnson, 1996). For many audiovisual practices in South America at the beginning of the twenty-first century, policy in the form of government support and funding provides the only means for continued existence, distribution and exhibition.

While cultural policy can be understood as a vital support mechanism for South American cinema it is worth observing the way that strategies are provided by legal frameworks, instigated by governments, meaning that policy is as much a process of requirement and regulation as that of incentive and enticement. Each of the governments in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru has a specific audiovisual law that was created recently, such as Chile's introduction of Ley 19.981 in 2004, or else updated in the prior decade.<sup>1</sup> The key aims of each law are similar, mainly the creation of

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<sup>1</sup> Ley no. 24377 (Argentina, 1994); Ley No. 1302 Reglamento a la Ley (Bolivia 1993); Ley No. 26370 Reglamento a la Ley (Peru 1996).