

Hegemony Conditions in the Coproductio Cinema of Latin America: The Role of Spain

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The Spanish have been able to capitalize on their geographic and linguistic location in respect to Latin America. . . . Language is an asset for them.

Javier Protzel, former director of the
Peruvian National Cinematography Institute, 2003–6

The story of Latin American international film coproduction begins with a Spanish intervention, as does a large part of Latin American history. Thus, it started in 1931 with the establishment of the First Congress of Hispano-American Cinematography (*Primer Congreso Cinematográfico Hispanoamericano*) held in Madrid, Spain. The resolutions reached in this meeting regarding coproduction were revised and expanded in a second meeting, the First Hispano-American Cinematography Competition (*Primer Certamen Cinematográfico Hispanoamericano*) held in Madrid in 1948.¹ This last meeting gave rise to a number of coproductions between Spain and Latin America—such as *Bella la salvaje* (Raúl Medina, CU/ES, 1952). However, by 1948 film coproduction was already a common practice among the countries of the subcontinent, particularly between Mexico and Cuba.² This is not surprising since Mexico—and to a lesser extent also Argentina—had the most prosperous film industry of the subcontinent during the 1940s and 1950s. This was the so-called Golden Age for Mexican cinema. From 1948, collaborations in film productions between Mexico, Cuba, and Spain started booming.

Nowadays, almost all Latin American countries hold a coproduction agreement, mainly with Spain, but also with other European countries and with Canada. Since the 1940s the interest of Latin American producers in

propelling international film coproduction agreements has increased at an extraordinary pace, particularly with Spain. In the 1940s for instance, only one film was coproduced with Spain; in the 1950s it went up to forty-two films. In the 1960s there were sixty-eight, in the 1970s eighty-four, in the 1980s sixty-six, in the 1990s 126, and between 2000 and 2006 there were at least 201 films co-produced.³ From these figures it is feasible to identify two main periods where film production collaborations between Spain and Latin America significantly escalated; during the 1950s and then again in the 1990s. This essay is focused mainly on the 1990s and the successive decades, as the dependency of Latin American producers on foreign backers has seen a significant increase since then.

Two principal elements were at the root of the upsurge in film cooperation during the 1990s. The first was the emergence of coproduction within television networks during the 1980s, which was extended to film.⁴ The second was the proliferation during the middle of the 1980s and 1990s of multi-lateral film coproduction bodies involving Latin American countries. These organizations are Fonds Sud (a French fund, devised in 1984), Hubert Bals (a Dutch fund set up in 1988), and Ibermedia (an Ibero-American Aid Fund originally conceived in 1989 and ratified in 1997). Of these organizations, Ibermedia is the most active, with 201 films⁵ made in coproduction. The United States has not created a body that regulates long-term film coproduction agreements with Latin America. However, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) has established a partnership with leading film enterprises in the subcontinent such as Patagonik Film Group in Argentina. Thus, Ibermedia and Patagonik are taken here as paradigms of the principal financiers of film coproduction in Latin America.

1. The Financial Backers of Coproduction in Latin America

Ibermedia was ratified during the Ibero-American Conference of Heads of States and Government (Cumbre Iberoamericana de Jefes de Estado y de Gobierno) that took place in Margarita, Venezuela, in 1997. The aim of the Fund is to stimulate the development of the Ibero-American film and media sector. The fund is maintained by a compulsory annual contribution of U.S.\$100,000 from its current fourteen member countries. These countries are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Spain, Mexico, Panama, Portugal, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Spain contributes with approximately U.S. \$2 million a year, making it the major contributor to the fund. Spain also controls the fund; Ibermedia's offices are in Spain, and the majority of the staff running the Fund are Spanish. In addition, a Spaniard, Elena Villardel, runs the Technical Unit of Ibermedia (UTI), which preselects the projects to be funded. Many member countries have become totally dependent on Ibermedia's funding; this is the case of Peru and Bolivia for example. As Peruvian producer Gustavo Sánchez points out

“the starting point to set up a production is Ibermedia [. . .] 90 percent of the coproductions made in Peru, and I think in the majority of Latin American countries, are with Spain.”⁶

Funding film coproductions is the priority for Ibermedia. In 2005 it allocated 86 percent of its budget to this practice, whereas the projects applying for distribution and promotion only received 3.08 percent.⁷ Distribution is the principal challenge facing Ibermedia, and this has been the main problem for the Latin American and almost the entire world’s film industry. But knowing this, why does Ibermedia give priority to coproduction and not to distribution? The monopoly of the screens by the majors seems a good starting point to begin answering this question. It is well known that North American distributors have maintained a hegemonic position in the global film system since around 1906, achieving its consolidation by the end of First World War.⁸ As film theorist Michael Chanan points out, this occurred when distributors realized that it was more profitable to rent the copies of films to exhibitors than to sell them. In his words, “This change-over laid the basis for subsequent market domination by the North American distributors. They became the majors because they had understood that control of distribution is the dominant position in the industry.”⁹ Thus, to compete with the majors and to find a loophole in their tight distribution network represents an extremely difficult challenge for Ibermedia.

The shortage of distribution funds available through Ibermedia mainly affects Latin American producers. The reason is related to the different means of film distribution used in Latin America and in Spain. In Latin America, films are mainly distributed in film theaters; this becomes the major revenue for a producer to recover production costs. In Spain, however, films are partly financed by—and mainly sold to—television companies. There are two further advantages that Spanish producers have over their Latin American counterparts. Firstly, within Spain, there are the subsidies offered by the Spanish Ministry of Culture, called the Third Way (*Tercera Via*) in which Spanish producers are given back 33 percent of the investment they put in the film. This policy includes the category of coproduction. The second incentive is within Europe and includes projects such as Eurimages Fund (set up in 1988), the Media Programme (established in 1991), and Europa Cinemas (created in 1993).¹⁰ In addition, one of the greatest advantages Ibermedia offers to Spanish producers is the access to cheap labor in Latin America. Through coproduction, Latin American producers gain the possibility to at least continue making film. But Ibermedia is not alone in its interest in Latin America; this is where the MPAA comes into the equation. The so-called permanent three-pole circulation,¹¹ also called the “triangle system,”¹² may serve to explain how the Latin American film industries seem to have been organized from abroad. One pole is represented by the United States of America, with the consolidation of the hegemonic *locus* of Hollywood. Another pole, where the magnet and the battleground seem to be placed, is Latin America.



Ibermedia Panel during the 12th Festival of Latin American Cinema (12a Mostra de Cinema Llatinoamericà), Lleida, Spain, March 2006. *From left to right:* Gerardo Herrero, producer and director of Tornasol Films; Leonor Benedetto, Argentinean film director and actress; Martinell Alfons, director of Cultural and Scientific Relations from the Spanish Foreign Office; Elena Villardel, director of the Technical Unit of Ibermedia; Jose María Morales, producer of *Wanda Visión*. From *Latin America in Co-production* (Libia Villazana; UK/PE, 2007).

And the transatlantic pole is embodied by Europe. As Paulo Antonio Paranaguá states, “The competition between Europe and the United States has been present since the introduction of cinema in Latin America, at the end of the nineteenth century.”¹³ Nowadays, Latin American film production is led—to a great extent—by Spanish coproductions. At the same time, film distribution is monopolized by one of the *major* neo-colonizers of the Third World: the United States of America, through organizations such as the MPAA. By establishing partnerships with local film production houses in Latin America and elsewhere, the MPAA obtains surplus profit from the box office receipts. As indicated by Michael Chanan, historically, the excess in revenues earned by the export of North American films—mainly Hollywood productions—is what, to a great extent, has helped to secure the hegemonic position of North American distributors in virtually the entire world film industry.¹⁴ They also reap substantial benefits from, for instance, local or multilateral subsidiary schemes. This is a practice long exercised within Europe as a loophole in the European protective measures erected against North

American films after the First World War.¹⁵ The Argentinean company Patagonik Film Group benefits from a partnership of this type.

This is one of the leading production enterprises in Latin America, having produced the majority of recent box office successes such as *Evita* (Alan Parker, AR/US, 1996), *Nueve reinas/Nine Queens* (Fabián Bielinsky, AR, 2000), *El hijo de la novia/Son of the Bride* (Juan José Campanella, AR/ES, 2001), *Todas las azafatas van al cielo/Every Stewardess Goes to Heaven* (Daniel Burman, AR/ES, 2002), to mention only a few. The founder and president of Patagonik is the Argentinean Pablo Bossi, who currently owns only 10 percent of the group. The hegemonic position of Patagonik is explained by its partnership with the following:

1. *Buena Vista International*, the distribution branch of Walt Disney Company. Buena Vista owns 30 percent of Patagonik.
2. *Telefonica Media*, the media branch of one of the largest telecommunication companies in the world, Spain's *Telefonica*. *Telefonica Media* holds a 30 percent share of Patagonik.
3. *Artear Argentina*, the audiovisual enterprise of the group Clarin, one of the biggest multimedia groups in Latin America. Artear owns 30 percent of Patagonik.¹⁶

The configuration of Patagonik is exemplary of the aforementioned battle between Europe—especially Spain—and the United States to dominate the Latin American market. However, this is a friendly battle—as demonstrated by the case of Patagonik—thanks to the presence of Buena Vista International and Telefonica Media. It seems that there is a concealed partnership between Ibermedia and Patagonik.

Ibermedia is credited with having funded numerous films produced by Patagonik. Some films backed by Ibermedia in the coproduction category are also listed as Patagonik productions. This overtly suggests that Patagonik coproduced these films, in one way or another, with Ibermedia. Patagonik is a non-independent production company because it is partly owned by Disney's distribution branch Buena Vista International. To be eligible for the Ibermedia Fund, a film project must first be Ibero-American, and second, it must be represented by an *independent* production company. Therefore, it must not have any connection with the majors nor with any company linked to a TV distribution network.¹⁷

When I asked Elena Villardel (UTI) why Ibermedia has repeatedly granted financial support to Patagonik projects, she blamed the Argentinean Film Institute (INCAA). The film institutes of the member countries are responsible for checking whether the production companies that apply to Ibermedia are independent companies or not. Thus, according to Villardel, what has been happening is that large companies such as Patagonik create a production company with another name, which certainly seems independent.

This is the name that appears in the application sent to Ibermedia. Therefore, no one is aware of the connection between this newborn production company and Patagonik. If Villardel's thesis is correct, then, through this procedure, Patagonik has been granted loans from the Ibermedia Fund on at least five occasions. These films include:

In 2001:

- *Kamchatka* (Marcelo Piñeyro, Oscar Kramer/Patagonik Film Group/Alquimia Cinema/TVE/Via Digital, AR/ES, 2002)
- *Todas las azafatas van al cielo/Every Stewardess Goes to Heaven* (Daniel Burman, Patagonik Film Group/BD Cine/TVE/Canal + España/Wanda Films/Wanda Visión, AR/ES, 2002)
- *La puta y la ballena/The Whore and the Whale* (Luis Puenzo, Patagonik Film Group/Historias Cinematográficas Cinemania/Wanda Visión, AR/ES, 2004)

In 2002:

- *Hermanas/Sisters* (Julia Solomonoff, Patagonik Films Group/Cruz del Sur Zona Audiovisual/Video Filmes/Tornasol Films, AR/BR/ES, 2005)
- *El juego de Arcibel/Arcibel's Game* (Alberto Lecchi, Patagonik Film Group/El Puente Producciones, AR/ES, 2003)

It is relevant to note the participation of the Spanish production companies Wanda Visión and Tornasol Films in the production credits of some of these five films—two of the largest production companies in Spain. The representatives of both companies are well connected with Ibermedia. They have shared the panel with Ibermedia's authorities when Ibermedia has given presentations at film festivals. This was the case in the 12th Festival of Latin American Cinema held in Lleida, Spain, in 2006.¹⁸ Thus, they are thoroughly familiar with Ibermedia's regulations. They know that if Patagonik is involved in a production, it must not receive financial support from Ibermedia because it is not an independent company. Ibermedia might need to answer some questions in this regard.

But perhaps one of the most open debates arising in Latin America within the practice of coproduction—on the part of the filmmakers and producers but also on the part of scholars—is related to the aesthetic value of those films made with Spain. A great number of these films suffer—in one way or another—from social de-contextualization. However, drawbacks like this could be avoided with a sensitive revision of the coproduction regulations. What is needed is legislation capable of recognizing the economic and cultural differences between Latin American countries and Spain. The difficulty is whether Spain would be willing to accept such a proposal and under what conditions.

2. Developing Coproduction Formulas in the Cinema of Latin America

Ibermedia is regulated by the Latin American Film Coproduction Agreement (Acuerdo Latinoamericano de Coproducción Cinematográfica), created on the 11th of November 1989 in Venezuela and approved and signed by the members of the Ibero-American Integration of Cinematography Agreement (Convenio de Integración Cinematográfica Iberoamericana).¹⁹ The Agreement has been subject to various adjustments due to the ambiguity of its clauses. However, these revisions have only incorporated a few changes, which do not respond to structural modifications. Its Fifth Clause has been the most problematic, and as a result it is the one undergoing constant revision. It refers to the compulsory technical and artistic cooperation between the coproducing countries. In the 2000 revision the Agreement increased the number of required artistic participants from three or four in the 1989 version to four or five. This means that if a film is based in a Latin American country and coproduced with Spain, it must incorporate a total of four or five Spanish personnel in the production. Thus, a film under this regulation has to include: two actors (playing a main and a secondary character); technicians (two technicians could replace the lead character); and an author (meaning the director, music composer, scriptwriter, director of photography, artistic director, sound recordist/mixer, editor, etc.).²⁰

In the same 2000 version, a rather ambivalent point was also introduced in the Fifth Clause with reference to the financial backers. It states that a financial producer can only participate with a maximum of 25 percent of the overall production cost. Although on the surface this seems to offer more alternatives for coproduction contracts, it is hardly used in practice, given that the foreign participation needed by Latin American producers normally exceeds 50 percent.²¹ The proposed 25 percent is therefore virtually invalidated in the subcontinent. Furthermore, not even the Spanish cinematography legislation (outside of Ibermedia) could assist Latin American producers regarding the financing of the coproduction clause. To be eligible for coproduction financing, a film needs to have a minimum budget of U.S. \$1.6 million. As producer Gerardo Herrero pointed out during the Ibermedia conference in Lleida, “How many Latin American films reach this budget if they are not financed by the MPAA?” Also, as Emilio Moscoso, the executive secretary of the Peruvian Institute of Cinema (CONACINE), told me, “Did you know that a film such as *Titanic* costs U.S. \$200 million? With that amount of money, how many Peruvian films can be made? A single North American film like *Titanic* is equivalent to twenty years of Peruvian cinema, making twenty films a year.” In other words, one Hollywood blockbuster such as *Titanic* equals 400 Peruvian films. Thus, a dream budget for one Peruvian film is U.S. \$500,000.

In 2005 another revision of the Fifth Clause was made.²² This time the modifications introduced to the Clause respond to an attempt, it would seem,

to level out certain asymmetries (mainly those pertaining to the participation of actors and technical personnel) between the member countries of Ibermedia. However, the rationale of these modifications is an example of the disavowal of the two diverse dimensions in which Spain and Latin America operate. The principal focus of this rationale is the clarification of the terms *participación* [participation] and *aportación* [contribution]. These terms are applied throughout the Agreement indiscriminately and in a particularly confusing manner in the Fifth Clause of the 1989 version. According to the reinterpretation made in 2005, “participation” refers to monetary or financial participation in a coproduction, while “contribution” refers to the one portion of that participation which pertains to the compulsory inclusion of creative personnel. The very first paragraph of point one of the Fifth Clause prompts this misunderstanding. It states that “[i]n film coproductions the proportion of the contribution of each coproducer would range from twenty (20) to eighty (80) percent per film.”²³ The 2005 amendment clarifies that the term “contribution” in this context means that “the percentage of the contribution of each coproducer should be made according to the professional elements to which he/she is contributing regardless of their cost.” However, what triggers the contradiction is what comes next in the second paragraph of point one: “The contribution in terms of creative personnel, technicians and actors, of each country coproducing should be proportional to their investment.” But before specifying where exactly the contradiction lies, I shall quote once more the effort of the amendment to clarify it.

Although it seems that there is a contradiction, there is none. To connect the contribution with the investment implies that both should be calculated using the same criteria. Hence, in order to compare “contribution” with “investment” [participation] the contribution of personnel should be translated into monetary units; that is to say, it is necessary to establish the cost of the contribution of the elements [personnel] of each coproducer.

The complexity lies within the second paragraph, where the cost of the contribution is translated into monetary participation. It confirms the impossibility of isolating the areas “contribution” and “participation” insofar as the first determines the second. Thus, “the cost of the contribution of the elements [personnel] of each coproducer” (which in the case of Spanish actors and technicians includes wages—according to Spanish rates—accommodation, and flight tickets) controls the percentage of each coproducer’s investment in the film. With a lengthy explanation, this amendment offers rhetoric that results in a nonsolution to the distinctive asymmetries that exist among Ibermedia’s member countries.

In 2006 further modifications were introduced to the Latin American Coproduction Agreement. The changes include the call for projects in all of the categories twice per year instead of only once, support for documentary films, and the introduction of international sales, also called *delivery*. This

delivery category offers U.S. \$30,000 to finance the materials required by international markets and televisions.²⁴ This last initiative is particularly ineffective for Latin American producers. As stated in its eligibility section, it requires producers or distributors to present a contract verifying the previously arranged sale of the film either to television channels or to international companies. In Latin America, television channels do not frequently buy either local films or those from other countries of the subcontinent. It is equally inaccurate to assume that international sales are part of the selling mechanisms utilized by, and ultimately available to, Latin American producers. The recently created category of *delivery* openly excludes the majority of independent Latin American producers from applying. Thus, it has been devised for Spanish producers.

Contrary to its stated purpose, which is to “aid” national production in the subcontinent, this compulsory cooperation has brought to the fore the multiple inequalities that exist between Latin American countries and Spain. It has served to make extremely visible to Latin Americans their level of economic dependency, and to Spaniards their economic and technical advancement over the subcontinent. In addition, although Ibermedia gives loans to coproductions organized between Latin American countries without the involvement of Spain, the tendency is to coproduce with Spain. Spanish producers bring to the productions more financial and technical resources. Spain is also attractive to Latin American producers, since it is seen as the gateway to Europe.

The majority of the coproductions set up between Latin American countries and Spain—and supported financially by Ibermedia—are based in Latin America. As Pedro Pastor, Spanish producer of the film *Mariposa Negra/Black Butterfly* (Francisco Lombardi, PE/ES, 2006) told me: “it is more expensive to film in Madrid than in Lima.”²⁵ As a result, although the majority of these productions’ personnel are Latin Americans, these films must include the required four or five Spanish personnel. The results of these cooperations vary according to the agreement reached between coproducers when devising the coproduction contract. These films become problematic when the incorporation of Spanish actors, for instance, is forced within a script, when the justification of the presence of a Spanish actor in a script responds purely to the fulfillment of a requisite specified in the coproduction contract by one of the financiers of the film. In short, these films become problematic when the Spanish accents make visible the mechanisms of coproduction within a film.

In this respect, three formulas could be drawn from those films coproduced between Latin American countries and Spain.

Formula 1: The presence of Spanish actors is justified in a script by making them address the fact that they were born in the Latin American country the film is based in, although they were brought up in Spain. They finally decide to go back to their roots or to stay in Spain.



Francisco Lombardi during the shooting of *Mariposa Negra*, Peru, August 2005. From *Latin America in Co-production* (Libia Villazana, UK/PE, 2007).

That is the case of films such as:

Bajo la piel/Under the Skin
(Francisco Lombardi, PE/ES/DE, 1996)

Here, Ana Risueño—a Spanish actress—plays the role of a Peruvian doctor. However, as she does not speak like a Peruvian but like a Spaniard, she excuses her accent saying that she lived for many years in Spain because her parents are Spanish. This is the literal and obvious presence of a Spanish intervention in a Latin American film in which a message is openly delivered: the presence of a Spanish backer.

However, in this particular case, the presence of a Spanish actor has also a symbolic dimension, which conveys the playful arrangements that Latin American directors exercise over the coproduction legislation. In order to detail the symbolisms of Risueño's presence in this film, we ought to introduce briefly the Andean myth of the Pishtaco. As a character, the Pishtaco is represented as a monster, not so much in appearance as in behavior. It represents the *gringos*,²⁶ white people who arrive in the Andean communities to open the belly of the natives to extract the fat from their body. This fat is sold to Europe and the United States, because it has great value over there. Thus,

Andean people live terrorized because of the possible arrival of the Pishtaco.²⁷ In colonial times the myth referred to the actions taken by the *conquistadores* toward the natives. Then, later in history, during the industrial boom of the nineteenth century, it was believed that this fat served to lubricate machines. Thus, it became extremely valuable again to the industrialized world. Over the centuries the Pishtaco has metamorphosed, shifting from the representation of local and foreign perpetration of severe forms of exploitation. In the words of the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa: "They looked for human fat so that the bells of the churches would sing better, the tractors roll more smoothly, and nowadays, even to pay off the foreign debt."²⁸

The story of the film *Bajo la Piel* takes place in the town of Palle, located on the northern Peruvian coastline, which is home to the pre-Inca civilization called the Moches. Decapitation and the tearing out of the insides of their victims, in the style of the Pishtaco, was a common sacred practice for the Moches.²⁹ In the film, Captain Percy Corso (José Luis Rodríguez Barahona) is in charge of unraveling the mystery behind a series of murders that unfold in the evocative style of the Moches. He, together with pathologist Marina (the Spaniard Ana Risueño) and anthropology professor Catalino Pinto (Gianfranco Brero) are the central characters of the story around which the crimes revolve. Percy falls passionately in love with Marina. She is responsive (in a ritualized fashion Percy and Marina consummate their relationship on a Moche sacrificial stone). However, she soon reveals her desire to be with Gino Leyva (Diego Bertie), the spoiled but beguiling son of the town's mayor. Gino could easily be mistaken for a European because of his features and white skin color. Percy responds with revenge, murdering his rival. In so doing, he discloses to the audience, but not to the characters of the film, the mystery behind the decapitations. At first glance, as in many of Lombardi's films, the social and political issues are in the background and what prevails is a story focused on passion and revenge. However, on closer examination, this film clearly mixes a reinterpretation of the Pishtaco myth. This time, it is personified by the Creole through the character of Percy Corso, with the representation of the *gringo*—a Spaniard in this case—as the galvanizer and reminder of the Pishtaco's evil instinct.

The presence of Marina as Spanish reinforces the revival of the ghost's violent past. It is hardly by chance that the film's plot begins to unravel what is under the skin at the very moment Marina presumably makes love with Gino. The jealousy provoked in Percy galvanizes his desire to recover his identity as Pishtaco. Thus, Marina's cultural identity serves to symbolize, albeit in a disguised and tamed fashion, the continuum of the historical violence that is still present, waiting to be deterred. Moreover, Marina's enactment orchestrates the stereotypical features of the bearer of knowledge who as a result is deemed trustworthy. She, as the representation of western science (a pathologist), provides the first clues to solve the crimes. She finds the DNA blood sample that is on the Moche's razor blade in the museum. This

clue points directly to the other bearer of knowledge and history in the story, a native one, however, the anthropologist Professor Pinto. He is consequently blamed for the crimes and ends up hanging himself.

In like manner, the pregnancy of Marina summarizes the kernel of symbolism of her presence in this film. Marina's presence conjures up and entrenches the long-lasting idea of Spain as being *la madre patria* (the mother country) of the new world. She reinforces simultaneously the circular return to colonial times, the rebirth of a new era, of a new world.

Formula 2: Spanish actors imitate the local accent of the Latin American country where the film is based. Here, there have been successful results as well as failed attempts.

No se lo digas a nadie/Don't Tell Anyone
(Francisco Lombardi, PE/ES, 1998)

The above film is exemplary of both scenarios. The results of the two Spanish actresses participating in the film, Lucía Jiménez (as Alejandra) and Carmen Elías (as Maricucha), are rather divergent. Alejandra is a young student who strives to "cure" her fiancé Joaquín (Santiago Magill) from his "queer illness." Her performance as a "local" or native is considerably convincing. However, the performance of Elías falls rather within the second scenario. It may suffice to quote the Peruvian film historian and critic Ricardo Bedoya to describe the role Elías plays as a high-class Peruvian lady:

Everyone in Peru knows the ways of behaving and the body language of such characters in Lima. Besides, this film talks precisely about these typical Liman characters and when one watches the film, one doesn't recognize this character in our society. So, how do you explain this? Why is the typical "pituca limeña" performed by a Spaniard? This, of course, implies the presence of a foreign backer.³⁰

Formula 3: The reason for the presence of Spanish actors—with Spanish accents—is left unclear or is self-evident in a script.

Examples of this convention can be found in the following two films:

Luna de avellaneda/Moon of Avellaenda
(Juan José Campanella, AR/ES, 2004)

This film does not offer any explanation relating to the presence of the character Don Aquiles (José Luis López Vázquez) who in the film keeps his Spanish nationality.

El crimen del Padre Amaro/The Crime of Father Amaro
(Carlos Carrera, MX/ES/AR/FR, 2002)

Here, the Spanish actor Sancho Gracia plays the role of a Spanish priest, Padre Benito Díaz. In Latin America there is no need to justify the presence of Spanish priests, as they have been present since colonial times.

The various ways of excusing the Spanish accent are feasible on an occasional basis, but if it becomes the rule, the formula for coproduction, then these films are prone to become a pantomime for Latin Americans. The instance of Carmen Elías's performance is all but too obvious. Despite the drawbacks of the compulsory participation of Spanish actors, one may well assume that Latin American producers could take advantage of the coproduction regulations by attracting cinema-goers with well-known Spanish film stars. Carmen Elías, a well-known actress at least in Spain, illustrates again this point. In this way, the films could increase their intake through box office sales in the national market. Unfortunately, as Zalvidea suggests, this is not the case:

If, say, Penelope Cruz comes to participate in a coproduction with Peru, her presence doesn't necessarily make a big difference in enticing people to cinemas. Perhaps this film would increase its intake by 5 percent. It is useful to have her in the film because you can sell it better abroad [. . .] the problem is that instead of sending Penelope Cruz, Spanish producers send to Peru "Penelope Gomez" who is unknown.³¹

However, should these effects on the aesthetic of a film be a concern? In this respect, Julio García Espinosa, director of the Cuban International School of Film and Television San Antonio de los Baños, points out:

We know that our first duty remains that of making Latin America visible. Our countries are invisible countries. A country without an image is a country which does not exist. Death in a country without an image is less painful than a death in a country which has its own image. For that reason any film, whether experimental or not, is welcome if it makes us more visible.³²

Espinosa supports, to a certain extent, the international film coproductions organized via Ibermedia inasmuch as they have made it possible to sustain the film production chain in the subcontinent, and certainly in Cuba. Coproduction has also been said to enhance the skills of local technicians. However, Espinosa later added: "the coproduction experience between Cuba and Spain has been disappointing. Those who coproduce are almost always seeking to reach a wider market. The type of coproduction which has worked is that between Latin American countries."³³ These coproduction complications are by no means exclusive to Latin America. Coproduction agreements started booming in the late 1940s in Europe. According to the economist Thomas Guback, "the first coproduction agreement was signed by Italy and France in October 1949."³⁴ However, what is special about Latin America is the clear disadvantages that these types of coproductions—in the way they have been practiced via Ibermedia, for instance—bring to the film industries

of the subcontinent. In this respect, there is a need for a call to revise the Latin American Film Coproduction Agreement.

There is another aspect to account for in relation to the inclusion of Spanish actors in a coproduction between Latin America and Spain, namely the wage differential. A Spanish actor, who appears for ten minutes in a coproduced film based in Latin America, for example, earns many times more than the main character of the film, who is Latin American. The reason for this is related to the two different wage scales established for Spain and for Latin American countries. Thus, the wages on both sides seem fair within their geographical domain, but this fairness vanishes when Spanish actors are brought to a Latin American–Spanish coproduction. That said, this does not seem to have been a major or at least an openly voiced concern so far. The inconvenience might arise where a producer, in this particular case Gerardo Herrero, establishes contracts with Argentinean actors who are also legally Spanish and have been hired using their Spanish nationality. By so doing, Herrero saves a great deal of money and logistical hassle for the production. He doesn't need to arrange and pay for the flight tickets, the accommodation and general expenditures involved in the inclusion of Spanish actors in a film based in a Latin American country. Argentinean actors, on the other hand, get the opportunity to participate in those international coproductions. But one question remains: will these Argentinean actors be remunerated as Argentinean or as Spaniards? This is for the producers to decide, as there is no current regulation on this aspect. According to Herrero, he has submitted a proposal to the Spanish Ministry of Culture entailing the exclusion of the compulsory participation of Spanish actors in a coproduction, while maintaining the cooperation in terms of technicians. However, the Ministry of Culture has not yet agreed with Herrero's proposal.

3. The Perspective from Inside Latin American Borders: The Coproduction Story Returns to Spain

Perhaps it is time to look at the Latin American side of this story. What is the response of Latin American governments toward the dependency of many Latin American film productions on the Ibermedia Fund? As we have seen, the support of Latin American governments for their film industries is deficient—and critically so in Peru. Thus, despite the fact that most Latin American countries have well-devised cinematography laws (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela to mention just a few) that could efficiently encourage their film industry, these don't seem to be fully implemented. Spain seems to be reaping considerable advantage, at least in Peru, from the careless attitude of the Peruvian government toward its national film industry. According to the former Director of the Peruvian National Cinematography Institute (CONACINE), Javier Protzel, the Peruvian Congress is currently revising the new cinematography law. This law, introduced by CONACINE

in 2003, establishes the application of a tax of 1 percent on cable TV. The funds obtained from this will be used to finance national film production, distribution, and exhibition. However, Protzel points out:

I am a little bit pessimistic, from the point of view of the realities that the government approves the proposal of 1 percent. Why? Because here [in Peru] it is not Ibermedia but Telefonica from Spain, which is an extremely powerful company, that has an enormous influence in the country, unfortunately.³⁵

The coproduction story returns to Spain. The decision on the application of the 1 percent proposal to cable-TV companies does not depend entirely on the Peruvian Congress. “It depends on the *goodwill* of Telefonica,” as the Executive Secretary of CONACINE, Emilio Moscoso, told me.³⁶ In Peru, Telefonica owns a successful cable-TV business, Cable Mágico. With the Spanish economic capital in the form of Telefonica and Ibermedia, Spain exercises a great deal of influence on Latin American film industries, and certainly in Peru.

In addition, the Spanish state maintains great control over Telefonica.³⁷ The economic invasion of this company in Latin America could be read in reality as the Spanish economic postcolonial reoccupation—at arm’s length—which takes the form of global enterprises such as Telefonica and Ibermedia. The *modus operandi* of Telefonica seems to echo the mechanisms utilized by the United States to exercise control over Latin America. Wherein the extraction of maximum profits, regardless of the impoverishing consequences this mining brings to the neo-colonized countries, leads their investment. There is no hidden containment of Telefonica’s great share in the subcontinent’s market; quite the contrary, this is overtly and proudly exposed on their Web site. This aggressive economic encroachment is achieving progressively the oligopoly of a variety of sectors in Latin America (and monopoly in some cases such as Peru). Telefonica’s so-called aid programs (such as *ProChild Foundation* and its Web advertisement “+25,000 Latin American children have been educated”) call for a neocolonial discourse. As Kwame Nkrumah points out in his essay *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*:

Imperialism simply switches tactics [. . .] This means, so it claims, that it is “giving” independence to its former subjects, to be followed by “aid” for their development. Under cover of such phrases, however, it devises innumerable ways to accomplish objectives formerly achieved by naked colonialism. It is this sum total of these modern attempts to perpetuate colonialism while at the same time talking about “freedom,” which has come to be known as *neo-colonialism*.³⁸

To be able to associate the practice of coproduction between Latin American countries and Spain with notions of neocolonialism, we need to resemble once more Nkrumah’s approach on the term. He warns that “the methods of neocolonialists [. . .] operate not only in the economic field, but also in the political, religious, ideological and cultural spheres.”³⁹ Thus, we cannot be deceived by

the commonly used term neocolonialism as referred more insistently to the United States simply because it has succeeded in propelling a global economy. Nowadays, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Europe is clearly exercising a crucial role within the capital monopoly of key industries in the developing countries. Thus, it does not seem feasible to continue placing Europe more exclusively within the postcolonial analysis and excluding it from the neocolonial sphere. It was not excluded in the 1960s when the term neocolonialism was first coined by Kwame Nkrumah, even though Europe was still recovering economically from the impact of the Second World War and Spain was under the orthodoxy of General Francisco Franco.

In contrast to Telefonica, the Ibero-American Aid Fund, Ibermedia, manifests its neocolonial discourse in a rather subtler manner—subtlety is one of the chief inherited features of neocolonialism.⁴⁰ Spain has become a faultless example of what the term neocolonialism embodies. Spain marches into Latin America with its economic and cultural troops, just as the United States has done since 1823—when President James Monroe with the assistance of his astute secretary John Quincy Adams launched the Monroe Doctrine. Ibermedia has enormously succeeded in exposing its double discourse, which becomes apparent when there is a fracture within what Gramsci called “common sense”; that is, “the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become ‘common’ in any given epoch.”⁴¹ In an Ibermedia conference held in Lleida, Spain, in 2006, Elena Villardel gave a five-minute presentation on the aims and achievements of the Fund. In her talk, she offered a promotional video to expand and reaffirm her statements. The video was made originally for the 15th Ibero-American summit of heads of state and of government in Salamanca, Spain, in 2005 (XV Cumbre Iberoamericana de Jefes de Estado y de Gobierno). The video is a short documentary based on interviews of some of the most acclaimed Latin American and Spanish directors and actors who have benefited from the loans of the Fund. At first glance, and because the video is edited at a fast pace, the content of the interviews indeed seems to attest to Villardel’s words and figures. Her discourse demonstrates that Ibermedia is the way forward in film production in Ibero-America. However, upon close examination, one realizes that many of the Latin American interviewees, and even some of the Spanish ones, did not refer directly to coproduction or to Ibermedia. Instead, they generally stressed the need to continue making films as well as asserting the importance of cinema as a communicative tool for their nations. This was the case of Francisco Lombardi (Peruvian director), Arturo Ripstein (Mexican director), Silvio Caiozzi (Chilean director), Sandro Gracia (Spanish actor), among others interviewees. Lombardi gives the first “testimony” in that documentary—as he is one of the Latin American filmmakers who has coproduced the most with Spain. What Lombardi really said in that promotional video was the following:

Cinema portrays, collects ways to speak and to feel; it testifies, imagines, reproduces but also invents; it questions, generates critical awareness, produces emotions but also invites to think and over and above all these things, cinema is an extraordinary vehicle of communication.

Some of the directors such as the Chilean Silvio Caiozzi even remarked on the need to focus on promotion and distribution, which is where Ibermedia precisely fails. In his words:

The public knows immediately about Hollywood films even before they are made. One is aware of these films perfectly well through the enormous amount of money that Hollywood spends on promoting their movies globally. So, everyone starts talking about those films although they do not exist, and yet the event is created, without knowing if those films are good, bad or mediocre. In that respect, we have a brutal disadvantage. Latin America can make a brilliant film and nobody knows about it.

In this documentary, the Spanish actor Sandro Gracia also implicitly warns about what has become one of the chief criticisms of coproduction. He highlighted the tendency to create story lines bearing in mind the compulsory elements that need to be included in a coproduction. This brings as a consequence what the Spanish film director José Luis Borau has stated: “nowadays, a coproduction is not organized to make a film, instead the film is invented to justify a coproduction.”⁴²

The Latin American colonial legacies are evidenced in the oblique discourses of these directors interviewed for Ibermedia’s promotional video. The video displays a clear displacement in the discourse of these interviewees—regardless of their nationalities—suggestive of the question Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asked in the 1980s, “Can the subaltern speak?” Even if they do, their words seem to have been decontextualized, misplaced, silent.⁴³ This perhaps helps to answer the following questions: Why have the Latin American countries participating in Ibermedia not endeavored to negotiate changes in the Agreement to their advantage? Why have they signed the Agreement without major hesitation? The Latin American Film Coproduction Agreement of 1989 and its successive amendments were signed and approved by the representatives of every member country of Ibermedia. This acceptance could be attributed to the recognition of dependency of some Latin American film industries, in which, without the Spanish financial backing—either through Ibermedia or independent Spanish producers—film production would considerably decrease in the subcontinent. This plausibly received initiative could also mean the recognition by Latin American countries of the importance of uniting their efforts with Spain against the screen monopoly of North American distributors. Thus, acknowledging that they are not capable by themselves—neither is Spain, and arguably, nor are both blocs united—of defeating the MPAA. However, the favorable reception of

the Latin American Film Coproduction Agreement might not necessarily mean that there is no recognition of the disadvantages that coproduction with Spain has brought to Latin American producers, especially in terms of commercializing these films. A short conversation with them on the topic would suffice to confirm this. But to be able to “take active part in the creation of the history of the world”⁴⁴ includes the ability to speak, even if this entails only a temporary fracture in the culturally constructed world. The aforementioned agreeable position of many Latin Americans displays first the uncovering of a particular knowledge; second, the difficulty of speaking so as to take part in a historical process; and third, the complexities of subverting by public utterance the historical taxonomy of the constructed world.

Latin American governments not only need to stop supporting unfavorable regulations to their countries, but also to promote incentive measures so as to uplift the depression and paralysis that embraces many film industries of the subcontinent. In the case of Peru, for instance, how can we explain that the highest authority of the Peruvian cinema—the director of CONACINE—has a monthly salary of U.S. \$230?⁴⁵ How is it possible to understand that the Peruvian cinematography regulation is currently kept to 15 percent and that the governments have somehow protected themselves from any claim against this situation by launching a “Budget Law” which says that when there are not enough funds, the state does not have to keep to the law.⁴⁶

Perhaps the generally unfavorable conditions for Latin American countries propelled by international coproduction negotiations are compensated by the many other benefits that this practice offers to the cinema of the subcontinent. Without the support of Ibermedia, for instance, the director Francisco Lombardi would have not been able to produce the quantity of films he has made thus far. Furthermore, by continuing to direct and produce films, Lombardi has acquired substantial experience in the field. Coproductions have also received significant gratitude for being a vehicle, albeit deceptive in many cases, of international visibility (in Espinosa’s sense) of those cultures depicted in those films. So, what is, then, the complaint of Latin American producers and directors regarding coproductions with Spain? Which clauses are Latin American producers up against? As a report launched in 2006 by the Fundación Carolina on the evaluation of film cooperations between Latin American countries and Spain states, “The real growth of an industry does not only happen when it is capable of increasing its production [I shall add, or its visibility], but also when it is able to raise its sales.”⁴⁷ Two main resolutions would, arguably, start restoring harmony to both industries. First, is to establish a market share that would open up more possibilities for Latin American producers to recoup their investment and make profits. Here, the Spanish market share needs to be part of the coproduction contract. The second resolution is to abolish the compulsory participation of actors unless it enriches and it is already part of the story. The exchange of Spanish technicians offers a rather different story, as it brings with it an unavoidable teaching-learning

dynamic that is valuable to both Latin American and Spanish technicians. Furthermore, the complaints in a coproduction of this fashion tend to come from the Spanish side, as the lack of resources in Latin America frequently makes their work difficult. Thus, they need to “latinamericanise”; in other words, to work in the Latin American way, with only the essential elements.

However, as Aram Aharonian, director of the Latin American TV Channel TeleSUR, points out, “here the story has not finished, it has only just begun.”⁴⁸ Latin American film industries have seen a glimpse of hope through a recently launched film market devoted to motivate the export of Latin American films. Since the late 1990s the majority of Latin American governments have been attempting, once more, the integration exercise of the subcontinent. Alternatives such as the newly launched Mercosur Film Market (MFM) in Argentina are examples of the eagerness of Latin American film industries to break the bond with neocolonial discourses.

The Mercosur Film Market (MFM) was created as a meeting point so that the MERCOSUR⁴⁹ (a regional trade pact signed in 1991 between the countries of the Latin American Southern Cone), Latin America, the European Union, and Asian markets may have a framework for their business rounds and agreements. The MFM resulted partly from the positive findings of a report launched in December 2004 by the Argentinean Ministry of Production and Economy. The report presents a study on the cultural industry of the country and a large chapter is devoted to examining the strengths and weaknesses of Argentinean cinema. One of the strengths was the significant potential for the export of Argentinean cinema. The report also remarked on the variety of films, their average quality, and their possibilities to compete with international prices, which has been demonstrated since 2002.⁵⁰ These findings, together with the interest shown in the cinema of the region by big international distributors and international TV chains, partly propelled the creation of a film market for regional production. Miguel Pereira, the president of the 20 Mar del Plata Film Festival, crystallized this project in March 2005 during the festival. Thus, the Mercosur Film Market was established. This is the first film market as such in the subcontinent—with the exception of the one created by the Havana Film Festival during the 1980s, which was short-lived—with considerable potentialities to assist the film and media industries in Latin America. The MFM is also controlled by Latin Americans.

Although in its first stages of development, the Mercosur Film Market can be seen as the way forward to improving film distribution and to broadening the possibilities of international film coproduction in Latin America. Its fast-growing success reaffirms what Kwame Nkrumah said, “Quite obviously, therefore, unity is the first requisite for destroying neo-colonialism.”⁵¹

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