

Armando Bó and Isabel Sarli beyond the Nation: Co-productions with Paraguay¹

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“Yo les robo la patria porque yo me siento argentina y paraguaya a la vez. Me encanta la vegetación, la tierra colorada, lo hospitalario que son todos los paraguayos.”

Isabel Sarli, August 18, 1998– “Menchi,” Telefuturo

In the above quote sex symbol and film star Isabel Sarli highlights the personal connection she has to Paraguay, a nation tightly linked to her work with director Armando Bó. The highly popular sexploitation couple made two official co-productions with Paraguay. Neither of these films received funds from their respective States. As an entrepreneur and independent producer, Bó managed to make co-productions by teaming up with private investors from different nations keen on supporting local film initiatives. Albeit not directly associated with the State, these investors were not entirely disconnected from the State’s political agenda. In this article, I am interested in exploring Bó and Sarli’s co-productions to question the static vision of national cinemas and invite new ways of thinking about interconnections between nations. The case with Paraguay helps me to develop what I see as a dual function of these collaborations in the work of Bó and Sarli: firstly to show how popular cinema has a role in constructing national cinemas beyond the nation, as these films are appropriated by Paraguay and incorporated into its national imaginary. Secondly, I will show the inner workings of co-productions to argue the complicated nature of any discussion

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about power dynamics, as these are not simply top-down strategies and hence involve a negotiation between many players and interests, a cooperation that makes ultimate judgment about power relations almost impossible.

Using Co-productions to Think beyond the Nation

Historically, co-productions have been criticized for their homogenized depictions of popular genres and themes in an attempt to reach greater audiences (Halle, Selznick, Hoefert de Turégano). The following warning found in the conclusion to Thomas Guback's *The International Film Industry*, published in 1969, exemplifies critical resistance to this mode of production gaining prevalence at the time:

...Many of the new international films border on dehumanization... Their shallowness and cardboard characters are camouflaged with dazzling colors, wide screens, and directorial slickness... Films of this genre are not a form of cultural exchange. In reality, they are anti-culture, the antithesis of human culture (199, cited in Betz, 65).

This quotation refers to the European-American and pan-European co-productions made from the late 1950s to the 1970s, a time when not only Europeans were resorting to this mode of production as a way of funding "national" cinemas. The period in question marks the decline of the industrial classic cinemas all over the world, including Hollywood.² Globally, economics forced more international cooperation throughout the filmmaking world. This was happening at all levels from high art films to more popular cinemas. As Mark Betz notes, despite the practice, critics like Guback continued to disregard co-productions for being merely associated with the despised zone of European popular cinema, "commercial betrayals of national cinema" (66). Here, Guback specifically refers to sex comedies, spaghetti westerns, and sexploitation films, popular genres of the period. In his own discussion Betz uncovers the suspect ideology behind this assumption. While many art films of the period were also products of similar funding strategies, critics were quick to tie these co-productions directly to the auteur's single nation, valuing the brand of the auteur while ignoring the funding practices behind their works (Betz, 45-92). What Betz describes gave rise to a two-fold problem inherent in co-production studies, which to some extent still haunts current academia. As I see it two problems exist here: the first has to do with what truly fits into the canon of what is termed "national" cinemas.

Underlying this worry, however, is a second but interrelated issue tied to the question of taste.

The first is an old debate that rests on a vision of the “national” constructed during the birth of the figure of the auteur, when art cinema began to define the nation in its travels through international film festival circuits. Therefore, at this time the national canon came to embrace mostly art films by individual directors and exclude popular and more commercial ventures. Thinking about the term “national” cinema raises many questions since, as Higson clearly argues, discourses of the nation will always repress the complexities of internal differences within nations. Thereby, the process of identifying a film (or canon) as national has a mythologizing and homogenizing function (Higson, 37). Recently, as the term “transnational” has taken a more central role in film studies, this relationship between the national and transnational is further complicated when the “hybridization of film language becomes not only valid but a necessary strategy to construct national narratives, as much as to make them travel beyond borders” (Alvaray 2011, 83). As Luisela Alvaray further describes in her analysis of cross-border and cross-cultural flows in recent Latin American film (2008, 2011), there is an equal shift in Latin American film criticism that is moving away from the 1960s dichotomies of political vs. entertainment and committed vs. uncommitted cinemas (2011, 83). No longer are films seen as either national products or products which have been influenced by the cultural imperialism of European and Hollywood forces. She describes the practice of a more holistic approach that includes the complexities that transnational co-productions can offer to regional and national cinemas. This current finds common ground in seeing how these films, funded privately and publicly, can be read both at the national and transnational levels. While this trend is new and promising for the study of contemporary films, it has yet to impact work on earlier periods of film production in the region, when in fact the practice of co-production was beginning to define national film meanwhile taking the nation into new territories.³ Furthermore, the examples that continue to intrigue scholars, as explained by Alvaray [*Nueve reinas* (Fabián Bielinsky, 1999), *Y tu mamá también* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001), *Ciudad de Deus* (Fernando Meirelles, 2002), and *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006)] – albeit more commercial aesthetically and in some cases made with relatively hefty budgets – are still examples that fall into the categories of art or auteur films, starting off in film festival circuits and being picked up by big distributors thereby reaching greater global markets.

The secondary but interrelated problem of *taste*, I argue, plays an equally important role in ignoring the many possible readings and subject positions that commercial, popular, and ‘bad’ or *paracinemas* can offer. Jeffrey Sconce coins the word ‘paracinema,’ and defines it as a reading strategy that: “represents not

just a challenge to aesthete taste, but the larger fragmentation of common taste culture, brought about by various disaffected segments of middle-class youth" (375).⁴ This 'trashing' of the academy, as he refers to it, has begun to take place as this fan-based group with access to academia raises questions about the role of this 'bad' or *paracinema* and how these play into the nation's film history.⁵ Roger Corman's co-productions with Argentina in the 1980s are an example of *paracinema*. Film critic Tamara Falicov warns of the dangers of these co-productions for they are plagued by unequal power relations between the First and Third Worlds (36) and thus "work counter to the spirit of Argentine filmmaking" (32). Falicov's article seems to fall back into the same dichotomies that Alvaray and Betz depict, accusing co-productions of being a form of cultural imperialism; however, underlying Falicov's conclusions and at the heart of her discussion is "the spirit of Argentine filmmaking," what tastefully can and cannot be included in the national canon. Co-productions may always already enact a type of power relation; yet, by focusing on these matters we ignore the complicated role co-productions can perform within and beyond national industries. I would argue that it is time to surpass questions of taste to include different, popular and even "bad" productions within conceptions of national cinemas to better understand how co-productions function, especially at a time when they were beginning to develop as a crucial and necessary mode of production.

Critics are beginning to look at these *paracinemas* in order to rethink national film histories and interrogate their meaning. Gabriela Alemán examines 'latsploitation' co-productions in Ecuador in the 1960s and 1970s to argue that they are indeed part of Ecuador's filmic past and that they allow us to imagine a different way of reading the cultural history of not only the nation but the continent. She asks of us critics: "What happens with those who not only produce little but reject or ultimately ignore what they produce (97)?" Alemán challenges us to find interconnections between countries through co-productions as an alternative to the static, homogenizing, and mythologizing vision of the nation that national cinemas reproduce. Jeffrey Middents argues that a similar case can be made for Peruvian cinema, which is "characterized neither by the level of distinction, diversity, or ability that defines Argentine cinema nor the absence of tradition that marked Ecuadorian filmmaking" (58). Middents is able to widen the scope of national cinema, and include Luis Llosa's co-productions made with Roger Corman's Concord Pictures as part of Peru's film history. This exercise does not mean that these *paracinema* co-productions ought to be wholly celebrated without any criticism, but instead that nuances in their analysis can lead to more dynamic readings of Latin America's cultural history. The shift I am advocating here is not only acknowledgement of co-production strategies in art cinema, as Betz would sustain, or acceptance of co-productions as new forms of products

engaging the nation and connecting transnationally, as Alvaray would claim. Instead I argue the importance of extending that lens to more popular or “bad” cinemas at a time when this question of co-productions began to displace any clear sense of national film industries. This, as I see it, is a first step to better understanding how co-productions work before probing further the negotiated relationships between different national participants.

Making a Case for Bó-Sarli in Paraguayan Cinema

The history of Paraguayan cinema is even scarcer than that of Ecuador cited above. From the beginning Paraguayan cinema was dominated by a foreign gaze: from the first vistas in 1905 documented by Argentine Ernesto Gunche (who spent some time in Asunción) to the sustained recordings of locales, territory, and history in documentary form by North American, British, Bolivian, Spanish, Belgian, German and many Argentine productions (Cuenca). The first locally-made and produced 35 mm silent film, *Alma Paraguay*, was shot by Hipólito Jorge Carrón, Guillermo Quell, and Agustín Nicolás Carrón Quell as late as 1925. These local pioneers continued to make more silent documentaries throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s. In 1947 Agustín Nicolás Carrón Quell made the first sound film, a documentary commissioned by foreign-based Pure Oil Company. It was as late as 1977 that the first truly Paraguayan feature fiction film premiered. *Cerro Corá* (Guillermo Vera, 1977), as it was titled, was set during the Triple Alliance War and financed by dictator Alfredo Stroessner to promote an ideologically specific version of national history. Like *Cerro Corá*, many locally produced films, particularly documentary, adhered to a similar financial pattern funded mainly by either foreign companies, who were dominating industrial development in the country, or by the State; in other words, these were mainly propaganda films. After *Cerro Corá*, four fictional co-productions were made, each with foreign directors but using local talent and spaces.⁶ The next Paraguayan full-length fiction film shot by local directors was not made until after the end of the Stroessner dictatorship, with the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers beginning in the 1990s and gaining more strength after the year 2000, when digital filmmaking compensated for the challenges of a non-existent infrastructure.⁷

Despite this scarce, discontinuous and uneven history of filmmaking in the nation, foreign productions about Paraguay and more importantly co-productions between Paraguay and other nations help to fill in those gaps. Before *Cerro Corá*, five co-productions were made, all with Argentina, and only four were released.⁸ From this information we can draw some conclusions about these early fiction

films. These were co-productions with Argentina for various reasons: Argentina was the closest nation with a well-developed film tradition, and unlike Brazil, shared with Paraguay historical and cultural similarities such as the use of the Spanish language and the Río de la Plata culture. Furthermore, co-productions in Paraguay don't begin to take place until the mid-1950s, when film industries worldwide were in crisis, a predicament that also hits Argentina. At this time, many studios had to close shop, including the first important studio Lumiton, which closed its doors in 1952. The challenge from TV, which arrived in 1958, and the stagnant local Argentine market, dominated by studios unwilling to change old formulas, made co-productions a viable option for independent producers, such as Armando Bó, who had visions of international release. However, at the time in Argentina there were no official agreements in place and the state did not have an important role in motivating such international collaboration.⁹ For independent producers emerging outside the studio system, co-productions helped alleviate that crisis globally, and allowed the possibility to work with other nations to fund their projects, and thus co-productions would not only increase as a result but also expand into new territories with non-existent industries, such as Paraguay.¹⁰

From this initial list of four co-productions, two are part of the Bó-Sarli franchise; this includes the popular *La burrerita de Ypacarai* (1961), where pirate copies still circulate today in the street markets of Asunción.¹¹ Nonetheless, while other Sarli-Bó films may not have official designation as co-productions, there are three that arguably simulate this strategy: *Sabaleros*, made in 1958, contains Paraguayan actors and is also written by scriptwriter Augusto Roa Bastos. Similarly, *India* (1959) and *Extasis tropical* (1969) are both filmed in Paraguay, with the recently recovered *India* using natives from the Maká tribe. Given that until the end of the Stroessner era in 1989 very few productions and co-productions were made in Paraguay, the central role that the Bó-Sarli franchise had in the development of national cinema becomes apparent.

Yet this appropriation on the part of the nation was not viewed without skepticism. After the premiere of *El trueno entre las hojas*, the duo's first collaboration together and first co-production, press reviews in Paraguay were mixed: some called for beginning something "positivamente nuestro" ("Una experiencia"), while others "no comulgamos en parte con la crítica desfavorable" ("Vimos"). This contradictory reaction stems from the initial controversy after musician Mauricio Cardozo Ocampo writes a scathing report during the shooting of the film accusing it of having bad intentions and lying about the conditions in Paraguay.¹² Bó responds by saying: "El argumento es una cosa bellísima, no hay en su tema ninguna mentira, ni mala intención... Se trata sencillamente de la lucha del trabajador paraguayo por un destino mejor" (Silvero). Cardozo Ocampo be-

longs to the Generation of the Golden Age of Paraguayan folk music, a folkloric and nationalist phase of cultural production whose ideals, to promote sovereign national culture, would clash with the practice of international co-productions. Furthermore, due to his connection with the Stroessner regime, he may have been suspicious of the collaborative role of exiled Roa Bastos, who wrote the script and clearly challenged the ideological position of the regime.

Although very little was officially co-financed by Paraguay, the relationship that began with *El trueno...* extended beyond these films: the team worked with national author Roa Bastos in the first two scripts, and consistently used Paraguayan actors and location shoots throughout the country. Most importantly, Bó incorporated the music of Paraguay, especially that of world-renown artist Luis Alberto del Paraná, who participated in nine of their films. Due to all these connections, Isabel Sarli's image appears plastered on various posters in the small room dedicated to national cinema in the Centro Cultural de la República in the Cabildo. This probably also explains the quote that began this article. Film histories and local film historians all credit the duo's films as part of the national culture.¹³ Unlike the cases of Ecuador and Peru, Bó and Sarli have already been appropriated by the nation, mythologized as part of Paraguay's filmic past.

El trueno entre las hojas as a Co-production

The scripts of *El trueno...* and *Sabaleros* are rich in possibilities as both were written by national author Roa Bastos and then annotated by Bó himself. This provides an opportunity to analyze decisions made before, during, and after shooting the films offering insight into the negotiation that may have occurred between Argentine director Bó, and exiled Paraguayan author Roa Bastos, who wrote the original erotic 1953 homonymous short story and then the script after closely consulting with Bó. However, the participation of Nicolás Bó, the Paraguayan financial backer of the project who was politically sympathetic to the Stroessner regime, would have also been another important influence in the decisions being made.¹⁴

The film is about Guillén, an outsider to the region, played by Armando Bó, who runs away from his past to the depths of the Paraguayan jungle. He finds work in a logging company away from civilization. As soon as he arrives, he witnesses the appalling slave-like conditions of the workers and local indigenous populations imposed by foreign owner, Max Forkel. Quickly, Guillén educates and encourages unity amongst the workers to revolt against the owner. The owner's wife, Flavia, who is played by Sarli, arrives and unleashes the sexual instincts of the workers. Even Guillén vacillates between his desire for Flavia,

who is in love with him, and the collective cause he is leading. Once Forkel discovers who is behind the insurrection, he orders his men to torture Guillén. After Guillén is left to die, Flavia frees him and saves his life. Guillén flees to hide in the local indigenous village until Forkel's men come to burn down the village. This finally prompts the insurrection and, in the midst of the struggle, Forkel kills Flavia for her betrayal before he falls into the river where he, too, will drown. After the uprising, the men return to work in the company, but this time human dignity and freedom are respected. The film ends with a clear hope for the future where men are no longer enslaved in such drastic conditions.

This film has a socially conscious agenda, as expected since Roa Bastos was responsible for the original story and the script.¹⁵ Albeit, the short story required many important changes in order to be shot in Paraguay.¹⁶ Yet, what attracted Armando Bó to the original Roa Bastos story were the erotic elements that erupt throughout its pages. Bó's intention was to stir controversy, already evidenced in his production of *La tigre* (Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, 1953), but this never came to fruition. Furthermore, the creation of the mythology surrounding the shooting of Sarli in the nude scene, bathing in the river, also attests to this intention on Bó's behalf.¹⁷ However, not even Bó imagined that the first Argentine and Paraguayan nude scene to appear on the screen would have such a profound effect. Audience response to the film and huge lineups at the theatres caused Bó to bump up Sarli from third place in the credits to star billing (Martín, 18), making an unknown into the most important pinup of the next few decades throughout Latin America and beyond, but also establishing a trademark that would become common in the other twenty-six films they made together. Sarli, who would become the cleanest woman on screen due to her continuous appearance in water scenes, begins to show many elements that are quickly exploited throughout the duo's career.¹⁸

In my close analysis of the script, as primary material, I found three important changes made by Bó, which will help me understand how these negotiations helped mold the final product. The first two changes involved the national identity of the main characters, Guillén and Forkel, alterations that may in fact refer to the film's status as a co-production. The third change found in the script relates to the representation in the film of the place, and exposes a more complicated story referring to the local politics at the time. Jointly, these changes reveal a more intricate relationship developing in the process of the film's production, which became a sensation and launched the film careers of Sarli as a star, Armando Bó as a director, and arguably the same can be said for Roa Bastos as a scriptwriter.¹⁹

The first noted adjustment between the script and film concerns Guillén's national identity. In the original story, the main character is local Solano Rojas, who is incarcerated after the mutiny and ends up blind from the ordeal, remaining

an overarching specter throughout the narrative.²⁰ In the film and the script, it is clear that Guillén, unlike Rojas, is a stranger, with foreign ideas. The beginning of the film shows a flashback explaining how Guillén lands in the depths of the Paraguayan jungle. In search of a job, Guillén is told of "Paititi," a far away and accursed place up the Rio Ypané, a logging company owned by a "gringo" named Forkel. Many images appear in this flashback scene, of Bó behind bars, an allusion to the idea that he is trapped and has no other choice but to escape to Paititi. While this part of the film makes clear that Guillén is coming from the outside and thus is different from the other men that end up in Paititi, in the original script Guillén's identity is a mystery, only alluding to the fact that he may be from the city where he brings with him new ideas. Yet, Armando Bó, as director, intervenes in the script to clarify: "aclarar identidad de Guillén." This explanation ends up in the final product, the film. In a scene on the boat to "Paititi," another character asks Guillén if he is "paraguayo," and he answers: "Sí, pero criado en Argentina." The clear identification of the main protagonist with both Argentina and Paraguay can be explained in financial terms and may be due to the film's status as a co-production, one that Armando Bó as financial backer and director is quick to emphasize with this modification of the script that appears in the film's dialogue.

The second important alteration to be noted in the writing process of the film is the national identity of the owner, Max Forkel. In the original story, many parties partake in the exploitation of the workers. Simon Bonaví, a Spanish Jew from Asunción, is the original owner of the sugar plantation.²¹ Bonaví leaves his henchman, Eulogio Penayo and Forkel, a blonde engineer who seemed to be German, to run its operations (216). After Penayo dies, Bonaví fires Forkel when he discovers that his wife is disrupting the workers with her sexual escapades. Bonaví sells his plantation to a "yanqui" named Harry Way, a cotton plantation owner from Virginia, who thrives on the challenge to stop a possible strike from taking place. Roa Bastos's short story marks the history of exploitation in Paraguay, spanning from the Spanish invasion of the conquistadores, with their Jesuit and Franciscan missions and economic exploitation of the lands, to the arrival of US exploiters who would find in Paraguay optimal conditions to continue enslavement of workers, a practice no longer tolerated at home.²² Albeit in the case of the story, by adding the figure of a Spanish Jew, Roa Bastos confuses some of that history and may be referring also to more recent communities of settlers from Europe. This complicated history reflected in its intricate manner in Roa Bastos's short story is simplified for the sake of the film, where Forkel is the only owner of Paititi, who speaks a very accented Spanish and is referred to as a "gringo." In the script of *El trueno...* Roa Bastos leaves the meaning of "gringo" open to mean generally foreigner, perhaps implying American but not

necessarily so, as Guillén is referred to as a “gringo” at the beginning as well. Nonetheless, the ambiguity in Roa Bastos’s original script is a point in question for Armando Bó, the director and Argentine financier of the film. In the script, there is another intervention seeking to clarify Forkel’s national identity by inserting: “‘No está mal’, dice en húngaro, cuando observa a la india,” directions from the director, which the actor follows. Hungarian actor Andrés Lazlo plays the role of Forkel. In the film, Lazlo says “meglehetős,” when he admires the indigenous woman who will become his ‘prize.’

At first this appears to be an odd intrusion on the part of Bó. Why would he add a line in Hungarian to a Paraguayan-Argentine co-production? There is no Hungarian funder that he must satisfy. While in both cases nation is key to the change being imposed by the director/producer, the first example clearly identifies the important presence of Paraguay in this “Argentine” film and makes reference to the financial status of the film as indeed a co-production between two distinct nation states. The second example, however, is more complicated and can only be read through the last of the modifications I will discuss.

The final adjustment worthy of note affects the places and industries represented in the film. The original story and the filming location both happen in the center-south region of the country where most of the population lives. However, the script and fiction depicted in the film occur in the north of the country, a significant displacement. The original story arises in the Tebicuary coast of the Department of Guairá, an area close to where Roa Bastos spent many years of his early life.²³ In this version, the industry represented is a sugar plantation, an important crop in the southeastern region of the country with significant historical undertones.²⁴ The film and script, on the other hand, move to the Department of Concepción along the Ypané River and represent a logging company somewhere in the jungles away from the major city of Concepción.²⁵ There is a noteworthy difference between both regions. The central-southern part of the country, particularly the area in the story, is known for its sugar plantations. Furthermore, the northern part of the country, a lowly populated area, is better known for development of the forestry industry, albeit not necessarily the Department of Concepción, more so the Department of Amambay. To complicate even further this distinction, the film was shot in the Department of Guairá, in a place called Estación José Fassardi (close to where the original story takes place). Estación José Fassardi is a town named after the founder of its most vital company, Fassardi and Cia Ltd. Italian owner Fassardi established a forestry company in the area, which existed from 1925-1965, and was at its peak during the shooting of the film in late 1956 and early 1957. In fact, the company cooperated with the production and lent their offices for one of the film’s scenes.

We can deduce that Bó changed the location where the film takes place, and the industry represented, principally because he did not want to offend any of the sugar plantation companies in the area, as there were many. Given that forestry and logging were not that important in the south, the critique would not directly impact Fassardi and Cia Ltd. or other local companies. Especially, while logging was a major industry in the north, not so in Concepción, where the fictional account occurs. Additionally, Bó made Forkel a Hungarian instead of an Italian, emphasizing this very marginal identity in Paraguay with his use of language and taking advantage of the actor's foreign background. The Hungarian community was rather small, if not non-existent. Nevertheless, the fact that Forkel is a foreigner also speaks to the role that foreigners had in the development of industry in the country. The film would be even less direct than the Roa Bastos story when representing exploitation in Paraguay. Bó made sure to keep the authorities, the local companies, and thus his financial backers happy with his choice of "bad guys" in the movie. And yet he still chose to shoot the film in the Department of Guairá, using the location and the offices of an actual logging company.

Curiously, the short story adds another layer of corruption, completely absent from the film version. The government is fully implicit in the problems in the region. The conclusion of the story gives a different, more pessimistic account than that represented in the film. Furthermore, throughout the story there is ample evidence of the complicity of the government in the exploitation of the workers: when Harry Way came, he brought with him re-enforcement backed by the Ministry of the Interior; and Bonaví's henchman, Penayo, had official government status in the plantation (221, 229). Moreover, in the story, after Way is killed, the workers rejoice by cooperating in running the plantation: "...escuadrones del gobierno... venían a vengar póstumamente al capitalista extranjero Harry Way" (240). The level of denunciation that takes place in the story was clearly impossible unless the film was to be shot outside of Paraguay, without Paraguayan funding. Therefore, mention of the government does not appear anywhere in the final script, perhaps after some collaboration between Roa Bastos and Armando Bó. Without such omission, Nicolas Bó would not fund the film as it would have presented a negative image, not just of the nation, but of the government. I would argue that while seemingly auspicious to the local authorities this move away from the critiques implicit in the original story was not complete on Armando Bó's part. Albeit somewhat out of context, Armando Bó and Roa Bastos still denounced the atrocities that were taking place in the region. Perhaps the best indication that they were somewhat successful came as the state managed to still find the film offensive, even after Bó's adjustments,

and thus ordered the following disclaimer to open the movie: “Esta etapa ha sido superada en Paraguay.”

After the production of *El trueno...* Bó-Sarli would access the Latin American and international markets. From this first film, Armando Bó was conscientious of his role in Paraguay, carefully negotiating between a financial backer, who had a vested interest in the portrayal of the Paraguayan State, an exile writer who wanted to expose the injustices of that State, and himself as independent producer in a dying Argentine industry, trying to sell his product abroad. High art, popular, or ‘bad’ co-productions all offer a constructive model of collaboration between countries to question the idea that cinema must be tied to a single nation. As the example of *El trueno...* illustrates, never is this relationship strictly top-down or straightforward, but a dynamic and complex one.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank the following individuals without whose help I would not have been able to finish this article: Manuel Cuenca, José Luis De Tone, Hugo Gamarra, Roque González, and Juan Carlos Maneglia.
- 2 Goity explains that in the 1940s Hollywood was producing on average 400 films, while in 1954 that number dropped to 253 films, and in 1959 to 166 films (391).
- 3 Very few studies have analyzed early Spanish language co-productions with the exception of Laura Podalsky’s article about the negotiation of identity in Spanish-Cuban co-productions made in pre-revolutionary Cuba.
- 4 The work of Sarli and Bó, especially after establishing a relationship with distributor Columbia Pictures, is a clear example of paracinema. *El trueno entre las hojas*, however, may not necessarily exhibit such qualities. In *El trueno...* Bó is emulating European co-productions, which were pushing the limits by including scandalous nude scenes. Nonetheless, critics still marginalized the work of the duo precisely because of their later sexploitation films.
- 5 I am referring here to ‘latsploitation,’ an umbrella term that embraces a range of different production, generic and textual strategies differentiating it somewhat from the common term ‘exploitation’ due to the specifics of the Latin American case (see Rúetalo and Tierney).
- 6 Two films were made with Brazil: *El amante de mi mujer* (Alberto Pieralisi, 1978) and *El toque del oboe* (Claudio MacDowell, 1998). *Tupasy Caacupe-Sendero de esperanza* (José Manuel Gómez y Méndez, 1982) was made with Spain and *Miss Ameriguá* (Luis Vera, 1994) was co-produced with Sweden and Chile.
- 7 Production begins to increase in recent years: *Réquiem por un soldado* (Galia Giménez, 2002) and *Miramenometokei* (Enrique Collar, 2003) are the first films of this new wave. The production climaxes with *Hamaca paraguaya* (Paz Encina, 2006), which won the FRIPESCI prize in Cannes and was similarly recognized at other film festivals. At the moment, *7 cajas* (Juan Carlos Maneglia and Tana Schembori, 2012) is doing well in the film festival circuit.

- 8 The four were: *Codicia* (Catrano Catrani, 1955), *El trueno...* (Bó, 1957), *La sangre y la semilla* (Alberto Dubois, 1958), and *La burrerita de Ypacaraí* (Bó, 1961).
- 9 There was an attempt to create such an apparatus through Uniargentina, a project that never came to fruition (Goity, 370).
- 10 For Argentina, Spain and Mexico were the obvious choices for co-productions, as film industries were equally if not better developed in these Spanish-speaking countries. While collaboration with other Latin American countries such as Brazil, Peru, Venezuela and Chile were also explored (Goity, 376-391).
- 11 In this regard, Bó was a pioneer, as *El trueno...* was one of the first co-productions in this new wave of Argentine films beginning in the late 1950s and gaining strength throughout the 1960s.
- 12 Cardozo Ocampo fervently promoted and consolidated Paraguayan folklore through his own musical oeuvre and work with different cultural organizations. It was no secret that Cardozo Ocampo was sympathetic to the Stroessner regime as he wrote a song, “Ta ipoty ñande reta,” in 1980 praising Stroessner’s leadership.
- 13 In his study on Paraguayan cinema, Cuenca includes the duo’s co-productions as part of the film history of the nation. The short documentary, *La Coca en el Paraguay* (Juan Luis De Tone and Manuel Cuenca, 2006) pays tribute to Sarli and her role in Paraguayan cinema. After *El trueno’s...* premiere in Karlovy Vary, the review in *Variety* says: “Technical aspects are ordinary but acceptable for the first Paraguayan pic try” (Mosk, 7).
- 14 Nicolás Bó, who was unrelated to the director Armando, was an Italian who immigrated to Paraguay during the Chaco War. He was friends with Stroessner and many other military chiefs. After his experience with Armando, he would not be involved in any other film venture; however, his company later expanded into the media industry by starting the newspaper *Noticias* and acquiring TV channel 13 (Miranda, 11).
- 15 Roa Bastos was forced into exile in 1947 and accused of being a Communist subversive because of his work as a journalist for the newspaper *El país*. He lived in Buenos Aires until the *coup d’état* of 1976 and then fled to France where he worked as a professor at the University of Toulouse. He returned to Asunción in 1996 and remained there until his death in 2005 (Weldt-Basson, 3-4).
- 16 In his article about Roa Bastos’ scripts in Argentina, Foster oversimplifies the reason why the collaboration between Roa Bastos and Bó would not continue beyond *Sabaleros*. He suggests that it had to do with the author’s “austere socialist ideology” (36). However, Foster does not take into account that Roa Bastos remained good friends with both Bó and Sarli. Bó’s next film, written by Sergio Leonardo, would be the only other film scripted by someone else; Bó authored the rest of his films. My research indicates that Bó found the collaboration difficult, as the *El trueno...* script would show. His changes were quite severe: he physically cut many of the pages, eliminating whole scenes, and ripping out entire pages, as the numeration reveals; these pages with these scenes are also absent in the film. Bó furthermore adds camera directions and elaborates on parts that he wanted to emphasize, such as the scene where Forkel contemplates a picture of his wife.
- 17 As has been argued elsewhere, the myth concerning Sarli being filmed in close-up nude but unknowingly is somewhat suspect given the angle for the infamous bathing scene (Ruétalo, 205).
- 18 Curiously, the Roa Bastos story describes Forkel’s wife as: “Era una hembra cerrera e insaciable, la versión femenina del mulato” (222). This would be a role that Sarli comes to play in her films during the highlight of her career in the late 1960s.

- 19 *El trueno...* was an initiation into film for both Roa Bastos and Nicolás Bó. The former would go on to write thirteen more scripts, but the latter would never experiment with the film business again.
- 20 Furthermore, the original story had a character named Gabriel, a blonde "arribeño" or foreigner, who came to enlist the workers in the union as he also informed them of what was happening in all the other plantations in the region (225). The film's Guillén can come to be understood as a fusion of Solano Rojo and Gabriel.
- 21 This is a curious distinction that Roa Bastos makes. Most Jews in Asunción are of German descent. There are also migrant Jewish communities from the Middle East and other Central, Western, and Eastern European countries. Therefore, to speak of a Spanish Jew Roa Bastos makes reference to the early explorers that may have been *conversos*, as they, too, were leaving Spain due to the persecution that was taking place. Or alternatively, the author may be referring to the Jewish migrants who went to Paraguay during Nazi-occupied Europe, although these were not Spanish. Either way, this is an odd choice and the story never clarifies this idea.
- 22 Paraguay has been a country plagued by foreign tenure of the land and most of the wealth in the nation. After the Triple Alliance War (1865-1870) the State sold most of its land to foreigners, mainly Argentines, to pay off its war debts. With the arrival of Stroessner, in 1954, foreign investment continued to grow.
- 23 Roa Bastos lived in the small village of Iturbe, where his father worked as administrator on a sugar plantation (Weldt-Basson, 1).
- 24 The Department of Guairá produces the most sugar in the nation with the biggest surface area for cultivation of this crop (Ferreira and Díaz de García, 109-110).
- 25 It must be noted that there is also a rural city in the Department of Guairá with the same name. This leaves the ambiguity of whether Bó chose Concepción on purpose to consciously make further reference to the region in the original story.

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