

Communism in Cuba Through the Lens of Film

Promo:

In this podcast, Amna Arain (UR, Class of '24), Ariel Murillo (UR, Class of '21), Quinn Cowan (UR, Class of '21), Sebastian Cordero (UR, Class of '22), and Zicora Hamilton (UR, Class of '23) discuss communism in Cuba through the late 20th century into the early 21st century through the lens of film. We highlight the intentions behind the films and how it showcases the development of communism through Cuba's history during this era. Aside from the political and public opinion regarding communism, themes such as self-sufficiency, propaganda, racial inequities, the role of international partners, and the relationship of Cuba and the US is discussed. Ultimately, this podcast shows how films can be used as a medium for historical analysis.

A big thank you to Professor Molly Ball and TA James Rankine for giving us the space, support, and feedback to make this podcast possible as well as helping us understand the subject matter in class. Thank you so much!

Transcript:

00:00 Ariel: Hello Everybody, this is history 155, and this is our podcast. My name is Ariel Murillo

Quinn: My name is Quinn Cowan.

Amna: My name is Amna Arain.

Sebastian: My name Sebastian Cordero.

Zicora: And my name is Zicora Hamilton.

Ariel: And today we're going to be talking about Cuban films and the Cuban film industry.

Quinn: I think it's important to first distinguish the different stages of the film industry. Initially, in the 20th century - the time period we are mainly talking about - it started off being controlled by the Soviet Union and heavily influenced by it¹. And then there was a shift after the revolution in 1959.

Amna: Yea, it was right after the Castro-led revolution.

Quinn: And that was actually when the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) was founded.² So, that's a huge shift in the dynamics of the film industry.

¹ Baron, Guy. "How the Cuban Revolution Kickstarted the Country's Golden Age of Cinema." The Conversation, 8 Jan. 2019, theconversation.com/how-the-cuban-revolution-kickstarted-the-countrys-golden-age-of-cinema-109342.

² Jelly-Schapiro, Joshua. "Memories of Underdevelopment: Imaging History." The Criterion Collection, 26 Aug. 2018, www.criterion.com/current/posts/5883-memories-of-underdevelopment-imaging-history.

Sebastian: Yes, I agree, but I would probably say that there wasn't a lot of Soviet intervention before the revolution. [*This is in terms of the relation between Cuba and the US. This is clarified by the question asked later*] If anything, Cuba was more of an ally to the United States before the Cuban Revolution. I would say that it was after the Fidel Castro revolution that there was this partnership, in terms of cinema, between the Soviet Union and Cuba. What do you guys think?

Amna: Yea, I think that the Cuban Film Industry is just interesting in general because to quote, a lot of people call it "irregular" and "uneven", but before 1959, like Sebastian was saying, do you think it was more independent and whatever the directors wanted to say, they felt comfortable being able to, you know, produce it through film?³

Sebastian: I wouldn't necessarily say more comfortable because it was the time of Fulgencio Batista, it was pretty a military dictatorship. So, they definitely didn't have a lot of liberty in terms of art and expression. If anything, I would say that they were more likely to be allies with the United States before the revolution.⁴

Amna: Okay, so very different than what people think of Cuba when they think of it now.

Sebastian: Yea, no exactly. I mean Cuba was known before the Revolution as the place that Americans would go to – pull up to casinos, resorts, and champagne, and drinks, and whatnot. This is actually from a film, but mind that the film was actually created after the Cuban Revolution – and you know there was a lot of controlling the media; the film is *I Am Cuba*, or *Yo Soy Cuba*. And it was a partnership between Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, which was pretty much the film industry that was made in Cuba and was run by the government and partnership with the Soviet Union. And in the film, you can see how they portrayed Cuba before the Revolution as pretty much a paradise island for Americans, I don't know how accurate this was, because it was obviously propaganda, but it definitely leaves you with the thought of 'huh, before the Revolution, Cuba was pretty much not very different from Puerto Rico, a public island for the state.'

³ "Film in Latin America and the Caribbean ." Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History. . Encyclopedia.com. 15 Apr. 2021 <<https://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

⁴ Matuskova, M. (2017). Cuban Cinema in a Global Context: The Impact of Eastern European Cinema on the Cuban Film Industry in the 1960s. UCLA. ProQuest ID: Matuskova_ucla_0031D_15794. Merritt ID: ark:/13030/m5sv2j66. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6vg1k3p8>

Quinn: It's very interesting with that movie you mentioned, Sebastian, how dated that it is now. As a pre-revolutionary concept of Cuba.

Sebastian: Yea, I agree. I mean the movie, *I am Cuba*, is from 1964, but it's definitely interesting. When I watched the movie, I went to do some research about it, and it was directed by Mikhail Kalatozov. The first thing that I thought was that 'this name is not Cuban, what is going on?' It was actually directed by a Soviet person and financed by the Soviet Union; it was propaganda and definitely part of a political agenda.⁵ It was pretty much centered on the change of Cuba, before and after the Revolution, and you can see there are scenes of girls in bikinis going around with champagne glasses before the Cuban Revolution, and the movie contrasts that scenario with the Cuban people living in slums; they look very malnourished and they're mostly people of color, so it's also commentary on the inequality and how mulattos – or black people from Cuba – were getting the bad end of the stick in times of the Fulgencio Batista.

Quinn: That's definitely interesting.

05:00 Amna: Yea, I think that's really interesting that you brought up the racial side of it because, like you were saying, your film was, like you just said, Soviet propaganda, and in a lot of the articles I was reading, it was saying that there was this concept that racism had been solved, magically, when Fidel Castro and the Revolution came – with revolutionary ideas, racism had been solved.⁶ So, it's interesting how your film touched upon the racial segregation, but the film that I watched was *Cecilia*. It came out in 1982, it also actually critiques racial segregation, however, it's after. So, it's a bit more critical of the communist government and got a lot of outrage out of people because it was about an interracial marriage and the struggle that this girl went through because she was biracial.⁷ This came out in 1982, so it was post-revolution.

Quinn: But before the fall of the Soviet Union.

Amna: Yea, so it was an interesting spot.

Quinn: They were pumping out films at that point.

⁵ Matuskova, M. (2017). Cuban Cinema in a Global Context: The Impact of Eastern European Cinema on the Cuban Film Industry in the 1960s. UCLA. ProQuest ID: Matuskova_ucla_0031D_15794. Merritt ID: ark:/13030/m5sv2j66. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6vg1k3p8>

⁶ Starr, T. (2019, April 01). Opinion | Fidel Castro and Communism's FLAWED record with black people. Retrieved May 08, 2021, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2016/12/05/fidel-castro-and-communisms-flawed-record-with-black-people/>

⁷ *Cecilia* (1982 film). (2021, March 01). Retrieved May 08, 2021, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecilia_\(1982_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecilia_(1982_film))

Amna: Yea, this one was really big because to date, it was the most expensive undertaking by the ICAIC, so it was pretty big.⁸

Quinn: And on such a controversial movie.

Amna: Yea no, critics unanimously were just - the director until his death thought it was one of the most amazing films he did, but critiques really were just blown away by it.⁹ Because, as Sebastian was also saying, this film also had a lot of nudity and girls in bikinis on boats with champagne glasses, so that could also be a part of it. But it's interesting how they [the two movies] are so similar, but I mean, obviously, the reaction they must have gotten or the message that was within them is probably really different.

Quinn: One of the films I watched actually received a lot of criticism as well. It's called *Fresa y Chocolate – Strawberries and Chocolate* – and it came out in 1993, which was during the Special Period in Cuba, where they were cutting back on a ton of resources and rations and funding for pretty much everything because they lost support from the Soviet Union - and this film actually takes place before the fall of the Soviet Union so it's interesting that the state sponsored film industry would produce a film criticizing a past version of their regime.¹⁰ Was it the same case in your film? Or was it more of a modern critique?

Amna: At the time, I think it was a modern critique. The film had a direct linkage, I mean they would reference the Cuban Slave Revolution; however, I think the director, who was Humberto Solás, I think he meant it for a social, calling people out on their specific thing.¹¹ But the reason people took it to the government and communism was because Fidel Castro would point to the US and pick out the racism in the US, and this was a time where Cuba was really priding itself on being like 'oh, we're not like the US,

⁸ Cecilia (1982 film). (2021, March 01). Retrieved May 08, 2021, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecilia_\(1982_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecilia_(1982_film))

⁹ Cecilia (1982 film). (2021, March 01). Retrieved May 08, 2021, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecilia_\(1982_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecilia_(1982_film))

¹⁰ Santí, Enrico Mario. "'Fresa y Chocolate': The Rhetoric of Cuban Reconciliation." *MLN*, vol. 113, no. 2, 1998, pp. 407–425. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3251482. Accessed 17 Apr. 2021.

¹¹ Solás, Humberto, and Amanda RUEDA. "Encuentro Con Humberto Solás." *Caravelle* (1988), no. 83, 2004, pp. 137–145. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40854155. Accessed 17 Apr. 2021.

we don't have racism like that.' It's a little different, I think, yours might've been a little more upfront with the criticism, mine might've been a bit more subtle.¹²

Ariel: In *Strawberry and Chocolate*, it was difficult to get this film approved, they had a main gay character, it was not something that would've also been easy in America. It's only recently where you have seen the normalization of gay or LGBTQ characters in widespread media.

Sebastian: Quinn and Amna, so the films that you watched were from the 80s, and even though the Soviet Union was in decline, their foreign policy wasn't as focused on America.

Quinn: Actually, both of my films were after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Amna: Mine was in the 80s.

Quinn: Still during this time, the portrayals and support of homosexual was seen as an anti-authoritarian stance. This movie had a gay protagonist, and then he was also accused of being an anti-communist subversive. This film was also internationally co-produced with Mexico, and so there were influences from other directors. It didn't start as a movie; it was actually a short story which evolved into a play that was performed in Cuba locally that actually acted as a protest of restrictions of the Special Period. The performances of this play, criticizing the regime, during a period where they were cutting funding for everything, this gains international attention. And the play, before it was a movie, won an international award.¹³

Sebastian: That is definitely interesting.

Ariel: I think it is also *Strawberry and Chocolate* that was the first Cuban film that was to be nominated for an Oscar.¹⁴

10:00 Quinn: Yes, it was. I thought it would be beneficial for the Cuban government at this period to be portraying these themes of reconciliation of these characters and a stance against intolerance because their intentions at this point, after the fall of the Soviet Union, is that they need money, and they need

¹² Starr, T. (2019, April 01). Opinion | Fidel Castro and Communism's FLAWED record with black people. Retrieved May 08, 2021, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2016/12/05/fidel-castro-and-communisms-flawed-record-with-black-people/>

¹³ Santí, Enrico Mario. "'Fresa y Chocolate': The Rhetoric of Cuban Reconciliation." *MLN*, vol. 113, no. 2, 1998, pp. 407–425. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3251482. Accessed 17 Apr. 2021.

¹⁴ Murguía, Salvador Jimenez., et al. *A Cuban Cinema Companion*. Rowman & Littlefield Publ., 2020.

international support. And so, they're going to get behind causes that are receiving support all around; this story that turned into a play was receiving support locally and internationally. I saw that as beneficial to the Cuban government at the time who produced this film. This is from the "Shot in Havana" article, that Fidel Castro was screening every single movie that came out of Cuba before it was released.¹⁵ So, all of these movies that are put out are supported by and in some way – directly, I would argue – by the Fidel Castro regime.

Amna: That's interesting how the money aspect can shape that.

Sebastian: Just to connect your movie to Quinn's movie – *Fresa y Chocolate* – I don't know if you guys see it too, but there's this transition period after the fall of the Soviet Union; Fidel Castro was still the leader of Cuba, but they definitely took a different stance in terms of film distribution because *Fresa y Chocolate* was distributed by Miramax films which is an American company. So, Amna, about your movie that was before the fall of the Soviet Union, do you know anything about whether it was distributed by a Cuban agency or was it American or Soviet? And whether you see it as propaganda from the Cuban government or not? Considering that your movie was before the fall of the Soviet Union.

Amna: Yea, so that's a good question. Mine was just a bit before the fall, I do know that a lot of money was poured into this. Like Quinn was saying, there could be a chance that the motivation behind sending this kind of message, about the racial tensions that were happening in Cuba, could be monetary, getting an international reaction. The director was a Cuban film director, so there wasn't international intervention when the film first came out, maybe they were trying to hit a larger audience, it is interesting because all of it was ICAIC and the director was Cuban, so the things that were going into it were totally Cuban. I don't think this one was propaganda, actually this one might have been subtle criticism.

Quinn: You think that there was a shift in the audience of these films that came out of Cuba that occurred after the fall of the Soviet Union? I think there is a shift abroad. They were trying to get support, they needed funds and just like using Miramax to distribute their films, you now see a stronger effort at this period from the Cuban film industry for cooperation internationally when they might not have been importing films from abroad either before this period. That there could have been an increase in films coming in and being screened into as well, I'm not sure.

¹⁵ Fox, Jan. "Shot in Havana: The State Still Controls Cuba's Film Industry, but a Cuban Producer Is Hopeful about Changes Ahead." *Index on Censorship*, vol. 46, no. 2, July 2017, pp. 58–61, doi:10.1177/0306422017716026.

Sebastian: Yes, I agree. I agree, I think that there was definitely a shift, and to contrast your film, *Fresa y Chocolate*, which definitely has more of an International tendency in terms of the market and who was distributing it. I wanted to mention one of the films that I watched called *Tierra Nuestra*, and that film is clearly Propaganda. It was financed by the ICAIC, it was in Spanish, it was a documentary about land. So, *Tierra Nuestra* was definitely a propaganda film, and it was produced in 1959, so pretty much when the Cuban Revolution was happening. It talked about Cuban land and the potential it has and it gives this message of self-sufficiency. The narrator says that we have enough sugar inside the land of Cuba to be completely economically independent from the US - so you can see a socialist or communist message that the documentary tries to portray, I mean it's just propaganda, even though it's called a documentary. Most of the scenes in the film were actually dramatized; for example, the opening scene is the soldiers from the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship, and they are taking out a family of campesinos from their home - and then destroying their home and commodities and the campesinos start wandering off the path. So, it's this very dramatic type of scene that was definitely excess and it's still called a documentary, but it was propaganda, and I think this has a contrast with *Fresa y Chocolate* in the sense that if it's propaganda or not propaganda. Does it serve the Cuban government's purposes or does it not?

15:05 Ariel: I wanted to add that *Tierra Nuestra* was the first film to be produced after the Revolution by the Cuban Film Institute and it was the same director as the director from *Fresa y Chocolate*. So, it's very interesting to his contrast between his earlier work and later work, right?

Sebastian: It was the same director?

Ariel: Yea, it's the same director.

Sebastian: Oh, wow.

Quinn: That's really interesting.

Ariel: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea.

Quinn: I saw the theme of self-sufficiency present itself and in my other film that I watched, *Suite Havana*. And it was marketed as a documentary, and there was no dialogue, the entire thing was basically just film clips of people in their daily life, but they didn't show any hardship and were just filming people like working and shopping and showing like the self-sufficiency of economic and political organization, and so in that way it was propaganda; it also happened after the fall of the Soviet Union

Zicora: And so, who directed that? Was that a Cuban director?

Quinn: It was. It was Fernando Pérez, he went to the University of Havana just like the director of the film Institute and Fidel Castro himself, yeah so, he is Cuban

Zicora: So, it's interesting to see how like a Cuban director would still kind of make a film that's essentially propaganda about their native country, you know?

Quinn: Yea. And I thought it was very interesting as well that they weren't saying anything about it like by not having any dialogue they weren't taking a stance of any kind, except that no one in this community is suffering and the only hardships that I saw in that film were people crying like because someone had died or people crying because there was a plane with their loved ones flying away, which implies that Cuba seems like an utopia which people only ever suffered loss in that way.

Amna: Yea, it's kind of like a really romanticized version of life.

Quinn: And it's interesting that one didn't have an international co-producer - I mean that movie was part of the, you know, Cuban government's narrative of rebranding Cuba to distance itself from the Soviet Union as to gain allies that were before not aligned with the Soviet Union so that they could get money because they need it at this period.¹⁶

Zicora: It's interesting because throughout this class we kind of learned about how other countries brand countries within Latin America as like utopias [romanticizing them] and only depicting universal hardships for a better relation, but then on this side, we kind of have a Cuban director doing that with their own country.¹⁷

Quinn: Yea.

Amna: Do you know how the Cuban population kind of took that film or what their reaction to that film was?

Quinn: No.

Amna: Oh okay, it's just interesting because the other movie I watched, it came out in 1994, so it was during the Special Period in Cuba as well - and it was almost the opposite - it was just about the

¹⁶ Mraz, John G. "Lucia: History and Film in Revolutionary Cuba." *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 5 no. 1, 1975, p. 6-16. Project MUSE muse.jhu.edu/article/488164.

¹⁷ Trumbour, John. *Selling Hollywood to the World: US and European Struggles for Mastery of the Global Film Industry, 1920–1950* (Cambridge Studies in the History of Mass Communication). Illustrated, Cambridge University Press, 2002, books.google.com/books?id=H0aGyzjFBAC&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

relationship between a mother and daughter, and it kind of showed their struggle; the mother was a professor so it's just showing their struggle through whatever time they were going through and how they actually wanted to leave Cuba. A lot of the dialogue within the film is talking about how people want to leave and just go to another place.

Zicora: So, in your film - with the mother and daughter - do you think that the response was like more of this emotional Hollywood-ization kind of making you feel something because of the plot in the relationship, that's why the response was so heartwarming, or was it more of their relation to Cuban life in itself?

Amna: I think the way people talked about it – I think it was a bit more about the relationship to Cuba as well because people really touched on that. People were saying that like ‘I could see myself in this film, I saw myself reflected in this.’¹⁸ Maybe to an international scale, because it met demands at the international market, so maybe in that sense it did play on that Hollywood-ization, but within Cuba, no, it was a very much related [and a relatable] film.¹⁹

Zicora: Oh, okay. Well, my film was *Clandestinos*, and it was by Fernando Perez, and it kind of follows the last days of the Revolution with the Batista, and it's really romanticized, like it's a lot of the fighting and the arguments, but like the main part kind of revolves around a romance between two pamphlet writers and they're kind of subversives, so we watched other films where there were the subversives - the people against the government - and how they were attacked, but it was less kind of attack on them because they stayed secret, and so when we're talking about all this propaganda earlier, I think my film kind of covered the opposite – like the outliers, the rebels within the country itself, and this being Fernando Perez's debut film as a Cuban director, I think it's interesting how you have two people that even went to the same university - because I think he went to the University of Havana as well - so two sides of the spectrum on how they want to represent the country.

20:00 Ariel: And I think that is another interesting topic. When it comes to the writers and the movies, especially when they reach present day, I feel like you said a lot of directors how are they portraying Cuba to the international market, that's one of the main worries of the Cuban institute because tourism is one of the main economic factors after the fall of the Soviet Union; tourism is one of the main things that

¹⁸ Madagascar. (1995, September 13). Retrieved May 08, 2021, from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110427/>

¹⁹ Trumbour, John. *Selling Hollywood to the World: US and European Struggles for Mastery of the Global Film Industry, 1920–1950* (Cambridge Studies in the History of Mass Communication). Illustrated, Cambridge University Press, 2002, books.google.com/books?id=H0aGyzjFBAC&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

helped pick Cuba up – tourism from other countries – so it wouldn't be to the benefit of the Cuban government to have movies that depicted Cuba as an unsafe place or as an uninteresting place, right?²⁰

Sebastian: Yea. What's the date on which your film was released, *Clandestinos*?

Zicora: You said when was it released? 1987.

Quinn: I think it's a very interesting point about the portrayal of Cuba and how that changed over time. In the article "Shot in Havana" this quote from a Cuban filmmaker (Diaz) after the fall of the Soviet Union, "The film institute had no money to spend on film so started to encourage coproductions with international filmmakers. For me this was the worst moment in the history of Cuban film because you had, say, a French-Spanish co-production and they wanted to make something more commercial. The Cuban government just wanted to make pro-revolutionary films but these coproductions were about making a cliché of Cuba – Cuban music, people dancing in the streets, drinking rum, provocative women – which to me was worse. From 1989 to now everything is bad, ... Artistically, I am more proud of my revolutionary years of filmmaking than now."²¹ So he's basically saying it like pointing out and criticizing the shift in a narrative of the Cuban film industry.²²

Ariel: And it also talked about, talking more about Tomas Gutierrez Alea. One of the film that I watched from him was that *La muerte de un burócrata*, "The death of a bureaucrat", which is actually a comedy film that tells the story of after the death of a worker, he is buried with his labor card, as a badge of honor. In the movie they make a whole deal about how he is an exemplary worker and how much he loved communism and the revolution; however, after his death his widow, is trying to get his pension and is told that there's nothing we can do unless you have his worker card, so basically the story talks about his cousin going through a lot of loops of getting his body out of the funeral home and then back into the funeral home, so basically it is very comedic. The director takes a lot of inspiration from slapstick comedy, that age like Charlie Chaplin, so there is a lot of humor that way. How we were talking about it before, I was surprised that such a movie came out that was so critical of the communism government and was allowed to be published in Cuba and internationally. One specific scene is basically there's a huge

²⁰ Guy Baron. "Cuban Cinema, Crisis or Transition? Negotiating a Cultural Tightrope." *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2018, pp. 53–70. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/intejcubastud.10.1.0053. Accessed 17 Apr. 2021.

²¹ Fox, Jan. "Shot in Havana: The State Still Controls Cuba's Film Industry, but a Cuban Producer Is Hopeful about Changes Ahead." *Index on Censorship*, vol. 46, no. 2, July 2017, pp. 58–61, doi:10.1177/0306422017716026.

²² Martin, Michael T., and Bruce Paddington. "Restoration or Innovation? An Interview with Humberto Solás: Post-Revolutionary Cuban Cinema." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 3, 2001, pp. 2–13. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/fq.2001.54.3.2. Accessed 17 Apr. 2021.

fight breaking out outside the cemetery, and you see how a revolutionary guard is just trying to stop the fight, but somebody just throws a brick at him and then he falls down, and he's trying to get up again and then somebody just hits him again, so kind of making fun of the revolutionary guard and basically show them as useless and incompetent. And this movie came out in 1966, so it was just very well in that time period when the Soviet Union was still around.²³

Quinn: I think that the Cuban film industry has always had a loose idea of propaganda, that is not above criticizing their own regime. Here's a quote from the original director of the ICAIC, Alfredo Guevara, who went to the same university - University of Havana - with Fidel Castro, he said, "art may serve as revolutionary propaganda, and it should. But art is not propaganda." and so there's this dichotomy even from the director of the Cuban film industry himself of art and propaganda, which I thought was really interesting.

24:45 Ariel: I know, so I would say that it seems to me that the government is fine with people criticizing their work, especially since it's coming from like these very famous directors, right, because they don't want to lose basically their top directors and have them move to another country and just start directing there, right? So, they had to give leeway to these directors to criticize the government. But I feel that in the same way that they want to criticize their government, but at the same time you can feel that they see it as a way for the system to improve. They don't want to get rid of the system, a lot of these directors, they do believe in communism and they believe in the revolution, they just have problems with it. That's what I felt too watching *Strawberries and Chocolate*, there was that whole thing where one day Cuba could be more free than it is today.

Amna: So, Ariel, is the director for your film Cuban?

Ariel: For *La Muerte de un Burócrata*? Yeah, he's Tomas Gutierrez Alea.

Amna: Oh, okay, it's interesting how you said that it was criticism, but it's more like a citizens'. It's a very different kind of criticism if it was coming from outside the country, it's like a citizen's type [constructive criticism coming from the heart]. That makes sense

Ariel: And then the other film that I watched was *Conducta*, which came in 2004, so it was a very modern film that was made in co-production with a Spanish company, so with this one, that you can definitely

²³Murguia, Salvador Jimenez., et al. A Cuban Cinema Companion. Rowman & Littlefield Publ., 2020.

feel the Hollywood-ization of the movie. It has a pretty straightforward structure and story, basically telling the story about this boy and his mother and the struggles they go through in Cuba. His mother is a drunk and basically, he has to take care of himself and his mother; he has no father, and he's the one that puts food onto the table by basically raising dogs for street fights. And the movie highlights how there's not a lot of movement available in Cuba because there are no private industries allowed, and so this kid has to be creative in order to survive and to feed himself and his mother by raising dogs.

Sebastian: That's interesting, because this film was created in the 21st century, and the main point or theme of this film is not the Cuban Revolution.²⁴ In the other films that we discussed, Cuban films, it is pretty obvious that there is this theme that's always prevalent and always happening in which the story revolves around the Revolution, whereas the film you just mentioned, *Ariel*, is completely different – it has more of a personal, individual story to it, so you can see that slowly there is a shift, throughout the years, the shift towards a more American or like Westernized films and away from the theme of the Revolution.²⁵

Quinn: More like freedom of content matter for filmmakers, we really see that. The ICAIC had censorship and propaganda in support of that, but it did bring a lot of opportunity to filmmakers, to independent filmmakers, and support that they would not have received otherwise - I believe. The director of *Fresa y Chocolate*, before the Revolution, he'd only been able to make a handful of short films, none were full length, over 12 years before the Revolution.²⁶ But once he was back by the ICAIC, he was consistently directing full-length films until the late 90s. And so, I think that even though there was a lot of non-accurate messaging coming out of the film industry, it would have never been possible to make even close to that number of films and have that much of Cuba be seen Internationally.²⁷ It brought a lot, aside from censorship and propaganda, and it brought a lot of opportunity to the film industry that overtime shifted away from the Soviet Union.

²⁴ Fernandez, Alfredo Antonio. "Silbar En Madagasacar: El Arte De Mostrar Ocultando." CUBA FUTURES: ARTS AND CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY CUBA, Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies, 2011, pp. 261–283. <http://cubaproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Arts-and-Culture-Final.pdf#page=251>

²⁵ Trumpbour, John. *Selling Hollywood to the World: US and European Struggles for Mastery of the Global Film Industry, 1920–1950* (Cambridge Studies in the History of Mass Communication). Illustrated, Cambridge University Press, 2002, books.google.com/books?id=H0aGyzjFBAC&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

²⁶ Murguia, Salvador Jimenez., et al. *A Cuban Cinema Companion*. Rowman & Littlefield Publ., 2020.

²⁷ Guy Baron. "Cuban Cinema, Crisis or Transition? Negotiating a Cultural Tightrope." *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2018, pp. 53–70. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/intejcubastud.10.1.0053. Accessed 17 Apr. 2021.

Ariel: Yeah, and also to the point of like censorship a lot of things have been brought up about how it would have made sense in another age, basically you don't need big cameras anymore, you can film from your phone, so like there was a lot of talk about Cuba and how they just recently did legalize independent filmmaking.²⁸ So, the Cuban Film Institute doesn't have the same amount of control that they would have in the past, thanks to these new technologies.

Quinn: Absolutely. And now, in modern-day, what we're left with is a well-equipped film industry that has made the shift to Independent production, which is fantastic.

Ariel: Yea, I would say that there's a lot of fantastic films that came from Cuba and a lot of fantastic directors. Also, I read about how people are talking about how the US embargo itself has affected the Cuban film industry. Because after the fall of the Soviet Union, if there was no embargo on Cuba that would allow basically for more money to come in from America, to basically have Cuban films and more Cuban directors.

30:00 Amna: Yeah, I think what we've seen throughout all these films is just from the beginning, there are great films that came out, and it's not all - since the beginning - it's not all communist propaganda. It's always some circumstance that allows a different variety of films to come, from the beginning - from like the 1980s up until now.

Quinn: So, does anyone have anything they'd like to add or any final thoughts?

Ariel: Oh yeah, I want to mention that I also found in the Shot Cuba article [Shot in Havana], he basically has a website where he directs any foreign film person that wants to come to Cuba and film in Cuba – so he basically has his own film production company and has local crew and local stages, that way you know it has more people come to Cuba, and have more of a film industry, not just for Cuban directors, but people outside of Cuba who want to come and film there.²⁹

Quinn: I think the messaging from the Castro regime changing over time and the shift from like local to international audiences, there are some consistent, like evolutions of the film industry. Also, the barriers

²⁸ Marsh, Sarah. "Cuba Legalizes Independent Movie-Making." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 27 June 2019, www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-cinema-idUSKCN1TS336.

²⁹ Fox, Jan. "Shot in Havana: The State Still Controls Cuba's Film Industry, but a Cuban Producer Is Hopeful about Changes Ahead." *Index on Censorship*, vol. 46, no. 2, July 2017, pp. 58–61, doi:10.1177/0306422017716026.

to entry of the film industry itself reduced overtime, significantly.³⁰ You don't have to be politically aligned in a certain way, you don't have to appeal to censors anymore, which is great.

Ariel: And then hopefully, as we go on, we see more freedom come to Cuba and more independent production and seeing just directors create artworks that they want to do and then tell the stories that they want to tell.

Quinn: Right, and now that independent filmmaking is legal, there are going to be stories coming out of Cuba that weren't able to be told before, and I think that's exciting for the future of The Cuban Film Industry.³¹

Talking about how we want the podcast to be formed

Sebastian: And we can also like be funny if something comes up, something more casual like an actual podcast.

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³⁰ Marsh, Sarah. "Cuba Legalizes Independent Movie-Making." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 27 June 2019, www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-cinema-idUSKCN1TS336.

³¹ Marsh, Sarah. "Cuba Legalizes Independent Movie-Making." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 27 June 2019, www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-cinema-idUSKCN1TS336.

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