Documenting Internationalism: The Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos as a Cultural Extension of Cuban Foreign Policy

Vella V. Voynova
CUNY Hunter College

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Documenting Internationalism: The Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos as a Cultural Extension of Cuban Foreign Policy

by

Vella Voynova

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History, Hunter College The City University of New York

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Thesis Sponsor:

December 21, 2016
Date

Professor Mary Roldán
Signature

December 21, 2016
Date

Professor Manu Bhagavan
Signature of Second Reader
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I was inspired to write my thesis about the Cuban Revolution and its effects on Cuban film culture after taking Professor Roldán's class on modern Latin America in my first year at Hunter College. I decided to explore the international elements of Cuban film production while working on a paper about Cuban internationalism for Professor Bhagavan.

I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Roldán and Professor Bhagavan for the many helpful comments and suggestions that guided this thesis. I am also grateful to Professor Roldán for being incredibly generous with her time and for providing me with materials from her personal library throughout the research and writing process.
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the connection between the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos and the Cuban Revolution's internationalism and argues that it made ICAIC documentarians, their methods of production, and their documentary films a valuable asset to Cuban foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s. An analysis of ICAIC's most successful and critically acclaimed internationally themed documentaries produced in those decades, supplemented by close readings of interviews with and articles written by ICAIC documentarians, most notably Santiago Álvarez, support that argument by revealing how the documentary filmmaking process and ICAIC's participation at international film festivals were acts of cultural diplomacy that fostered solidarity between revolutionary Cuba and other nations. In the 1960s, the films addressed the United States' hostility towards the Revolution, endorsed armed Third World liberation movements, and portrayed Cuba as a revolutionary vanguard for the Third World. They were dynamic and militant in tone and promoted a socialist Third World that was independent of the major socialist powers, the Soviet Union and China. In contrast, the 1970s documentaries showcased Cuba's political and economic alignment with the Soviet Union, the thaw of Cuba's isolation in the Western Hemisphere, the growth of Cuban humanitarian aid programs to the Third World, and Cuba's military intervention in Angola. For the most part, these films focused on diplomacy over militancy, although Cuba then had the resources and confidence to successfully engage in a military conflict on another continent. In both decades, filmmakers visualized Cuba as part of an international reality and as a state whose culture, demography, politics, and geography allowed it to straddle many currents of internationalism. Through their work, they encouraged Cuban citizens to feel solidarity with the people and nations whose struggles they presented onscreen, while transmitting Cuba's official stance on
global issues to foreign audiences and generating cultural ties between Cuba and other nations. These efforts made ICAIC an important contributor to Cuban foreign policy as a promoter of internationalism, solidarity, and the Revolution's advancements in both areas, at home and abroad.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter I: Film in Cuba, Cuba in Film: 1897–1959 .................................................... 9
  The Cuban War of Independence .............................................................................. 9
  The Spanish–American War .................................................................................. 11
  The Rise of Hollywood ....................................................................................... 17
  Political Unrest and Oppositional Film .............................................................. 22
  Nuestro Tiempo, *El Mégano*, and Revolution .................................................. 28

Chapter II: The Documentary ...................................................................................... 33
  Fernando Birri and the Documentary Film School of Santa Fe ...................... 33
  The Soviet Union, Propaganda, and Dziga Vertov ........................................ 34
  Docufiction and the Social Documentary ......................................................... 39
  Italian Neorealism .............................................................................................. 40
  Free Cinema, *P.M.*, "Words to the Intellectuals" ........................................ 42
  Cinéma Vérité and Direct Cinema ..................................................................... 44
  Chris Marker, Joris Ivens and Combat Cinematography ................................ 46

Chapter III: The 1960s: Militants and Cultural Guerrillas ...................................... 48
  Confronting the United States ............................................................................. 48
  ICAIC, OSPAAAL, and Cuba's Poster Movement ........................................... 60
  Guerrillas in Vietnam, Laos, and Guinea .......................................................... 61
  Eulogies for Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara ..................................................... 68

Chapter IV: The 1970s: A Humanitarian Third World Power .................................. 74
  Relations with Salvador Allende's Chile ............................................................. 75
  Uniting the Eastern Bloc and the Third World ................................................ 83
  Cuba in Vietnam ................................................................................................ 87
  Military Victory in Angola ............................................................................... 91

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 97

Appendix A: Political Cartoons, Posters, and Film Stills ........................................... 101

Appendix B: Film Sources ....................................................................................... 104

Bibliography ............................................................................................................... 106
INTRODUCTION

I became interested in Cuban cinema after watching Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*, 1968) for an undergraduate course on Latin American cultural history. The film is a production of the Cuban Institute of Art and Cinematographic Industries, el Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, also known as ICAIC. At the time, I had a more limited knowledge of Cuba and I expected ICAIC films to be blatant propaganda tools for Fidel Castro's regime. To my surprise, the film featured a protagonist conflicted about the Revolution and his role in the new Cuban society. The general tone is one of constructive criticism towards both the Revolution and the citizens who were ambivalent about the revolutionary process. I was moved to learn more about ICAIC and Cuba's success in creating a national film industry from scratch, particularly the prospect of doing so during a time of enormous social and political change. As a graduate student, I thought back to ICAIC and began to consider it as a topic for my Master's thesis. While doing preliminary research, I noted that many early ICAIC productions were documentaries and newsreels touching on global issues and calling for international solidarity between Cuba and the other socialist and Third World countries, and I became curious as to whether any connections existed between Cuba's internationalism and its national film industry.\(^1\) The more I researched, the more I became convinced that these connections did exist and that ICAIC provided vital institutional assistance for Cuban internationalism, a significant aspect of the Revolution's foreign policy.

In this thesis, I will be using the terms "internationalism" and "solidarity" to discuss both the content and the purpose behind ICAIC's internationally themed documentaries. I define

\(^1\) While "Third World" is a problematic term nowadays, I use it in this thesis the way it was used in Cuban articles, films, and speeches from the Cold War era — to refer to the former colonies and underdeveloped countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.
"internationalism" as transnational cooperation that aims for shared economic, social, political, and cultural progress. In Cuba in the 1960s and 70s, there were several intersecting internationalisms. The Revolution linked Cuba to countries like Vietnam, Algeria, Guinea, and Angola, where nations were fighting for their independence and for social and economic change. As a socialist state, Cuba was also affiliated with the Eastern Bloc, China, Chile, and others seeking a moral alternative to capitalist imperialism. A large Afro-Cuban population that still retained linguistic and religious elements of their ancestral cultures allowed Cuba to tap into the Black internationalism of the 1960s and appeal to those suffering from racial injustice in the United States, as well as to nations still facing the threat of white domination, most notably in Angola in 1975. Meanwhile, Third World internationalism brought Cuba into a community of nations spanning Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which found common ground in their colonial pasts and their present-day battles against underdevelopment and neocolonialism.\(^2\) ICAIC documentaries visualized revolutionary Cuba as a state whose culture, demography, policies, and geography allowed it to straddle these internationalisms and to be a vanguard for international solidarity. I use "solidarity" to refer to mutual support that stems from a moral sense of social justice and common struggle, rather than material and national self-interest. In this thesis, I argue that ICAIC's documentarians fostered international solidarity through their films as well as through their methods of production, thus aiding Cuban foreign policy in the 1960s and 70s.

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\(^2\) Dependency theory holds that underdevelopment is a consequence of colonialism and imperialism. While the metropoles industrialized their economies by exploiting colonial resources, the colonies did not industrialize because their economies were centered on the export of primary goods for manufacture in the metropoles. This difference in economic development led to present-day developed and underdeveloped countries. Neocolonialism is the developed countries' postcolonial dominance of the underdeveloped countries' economies through capital investment. For example, before the Revolution, Cuba was a former Spanish colony dominated by the United States and most of its land was used to produce sugar. Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 25-27, 46.
ICAIC filmmakers and crews celebrated Cuban independence and promoted cultural ties between Cuba and other nations, reinforcing those ties by publicizing other nations' struggles and actively participating in the liberation movements and labor efforts that they filmed abroad.

Due to the timing and Cold War context of ICAIC's inception in 1959, it would be convenient to credit the growth of Cuba's national film industry to the influence and assistance of the Soviet Union. However, film was a presence in Cuba well before the Revolution and the early influences came from the West.³ Lumière, the French company that had introduced film to Cuba in 1897, started out as the major player, and was later surpassed by its French competitors Pathé and Gaumont.⁴ Following its independence from Spain in 1898, Cuba was occupied by the United States until 1902, drawing the two nations together politically, economically, and culturally. After World War I disrupted European production and allowed the U.S. to take over the international film market, Hollywood dominated Cuban film culture for the next several decades. These were the formative years of a newly independent Cuba and, as the country went through profound changes during the transition from occupation to self-government, cinema grew into a national pastime.

Not only did Hollywood productions fulfill many countries' demand for film, they became the new standard - especially in underdeveloped countries such as Cuba, which, unlike many in Europe, did not have their own national film industry to fall back on. Hollywood films that featured Cuba as a setting reflected the United States' view of Cuba as the Isle of Self-Indulgence, where alcohol, drugs, gambling, and prostitution could be consumed without limits, and, due to Hollywood's vast foreign market, those views were disseminated to audiences around

³ In this thesis, "the West" refers to the industrialized countries that espoused capitalism and democracy during the Cold War, and which owed their cultural and economic development to colonialism and imperialism.
the world. From the rudimentary clips of Cuba's War of Independence against Spain, shot by foreign correspondents, to the Hollywood movies made in the years before the Revolution, the fate of Cuba's cinematic image was primarily in the hands of outsiders. In these circumstances, a national film industry was a means to both enrich Cuban culture and to remedy Cuba's image problem by constructing an authentic Cuban image and projecting it to domestic and foreign audiences. At the outset of the Revolution, film was also a tool that allowed the new regime to control the narrative and to challenge the accusations made against it by counterrevolutionaries and hostile governments. As John D. H. Downing affirms, "the production of one's own images is a fundamental component of national autonomy." ICAIC is a seminal institution because its creation marked the first time that Cuba had a national film industry to produce its own images, and it was unique in the Western Hemisphere because it was a government-subsidized film industry at that.

Describing the era preceding the Revolution, Louis A. Pérez writes, "Havana exuded modernity...Modernity specifically implied a condition of material progress based on consumption, convenience, and comfort." This was evidenced by Havana's movie theaters, which were among the first in the world to have sound and air conditioning. By 1933 there were sixty-two radio stations in Cuba, putting it behind only the United States, Canada, and the Soviet Union. Cuban radio advertised U.S. products, while U.S. corporations sponsored many of Cuba's news and music radio programming. In 1950, Cuba was the first Latin American country to air television programs; by 1958, it was fourth in the world in number of T.V. channels, behind the

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8 Ibid., 286.
U.S., England, and Canada. Many Cuban T.V. personnel received their training in the United States before returning to work in Cuba, while U.S. advertisers were a strong presence in Cuban television. Cuba did suffer from underdevelopment, but its proximity to the United States, and its value as a market for American products, ensured that at least the urban parts of the island had modern, up-to-date media infrastructure. To borrow a phrase from Professor Roldán, Cuba was a Third World country living a First World experience. After the Revolution, the new regime had the immense advantage of having a modern mass communications system and a ready audience at its disposal.⁹

Fidel Castro, born in 1926, was part of the generation of Cubans that experienced the rise of media and mass communications in a Cuba closely linked to the United States. He has spoken about how he grew up watching American movies: "Like everybody else, I also liked films, the Westerns, and what's more, I took them seriously... All the boys would watch those movies."¹⁰ As a young man, he perceived the influence of radio when he listened to the politician Eduardo Chibás denounce the unscrupulous Cuban government on his radio program. After Chibás killed himself on air, Castro unsuccessfully requested his radio slot, intending to speak against President Fulgencio Batista. However, Castro did express his views through a daily fifteen-minute program, which reached Havana and some nearby areas.¹¹ When he led the attack on the Moncada barracks in 1953, his plan was to occupy the radio station in Santiago, rebroadcast Chibás' last speech, and call for a Cuban general strike.¹² Years later, Castro and the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra appealed to the Cuban population, and inspired leftists in the Caribbean and

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⁹ The United States, Canada, and the Soviet Union had 625, 77, and 68 radio stations, respectively. Ibid., 331-5.
¹¹ Ibid., 86-7.
¹² Ibid., 168.
the northern parts of South America, through Radio Rebelde. Clearly, Castro's understanding of media was central to his political interests well before 1959. After the Revolution, he continued to use the media to his advantage with many filmed and televised public appearances as head of state.

Although the first cultural ordinance of the revolutionary government was the creation of ICAIC in March 1959, the origins of the Institute can be traced further back to a cultural society, Nuestro Tiempo, formed in the early 1950s, that included ICAIC's future director and Castro's personal friend, Alfredo Guevara, as well as some of Cuba's most prominent revolutionary filmmakers. Nuestro Tiempo maintained ties with the guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra, which formed the basis for the future relationship between the film institute and the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces. On January 14, 1959, Ernesto "Che" Guevara opened a military cultural school, which operated the army's film department; on March 20, that school became ICAIC.

From the beginning, documentaries and newsreels made up the bulk of ICAIC production because they were more economical to make than fiction, which requires sets, scripts, costumes, and actors. Documentary production was also seen as the fastest way to simultaneously jumpstart the Cuban film industry while also introducing the Cuban audience to revolutionary ideals. It was an effective strategy because the documentaries evidently appealed to the domestic audience: in the 1970s, ICAIC discovered that a sizeable portion of viewers went to the movies specifically because they wanted to "see the new Álvarez [documentary]" that preceded a

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feature, rather than to see the feature itself. Through these documentaries, ICAIC informed its audience about issues as varied as Cuba's solidarity with Vietnam in its war against the United States and with African Americans' fight for civil rights; its shifting relationship with the Soviet Union; its regard for Salvador Allende in Chile; and its active support for development in the Third World by means of civilian and military aid. In the process of informing, these documentaries visualized Cuba and its citizens as part of an international scene, thus agitating the audience to express the solidarity that was being communicated onscreen. Many of these films were exported abroad and shown at international film festivals to great acclaim, acting as instruments of foreign policy and cultural diplomacy by transmitting Cuba's official stance on these issues to foreign audiences. In the 1960s, this was realized through films that responded to U.S. hostility towards Cuba and expressed support for armed Third World liberation movements, which opened an onscreen space for a socialist Third World that was reliant on, but independent of, the Soviet Union and China. In the 1970s, the documentaries reflected Cuba's strengthened relationship with the Soviet Union, as well as the break in Cuba's isolation from Latin America and the growth of its aid programs to the Third World. While the 1960s films were a militant call to action, the 1970s films were more likely to express Cuban internationalism as a humanitarian and diplomatic project, although that was the decade when Cuba engaged in a full-scale military intervention in Angola.

All but two of the documentaries I examine in this thesis are available online. I was unable to access Madina Boe and Tercer mundo, tercera guerra mundial (Third World, Third World War) and so used detailed accounts of the filming process and the films' content from articles in ICAIC's official journal, Cine Cubano. I mostly discuss films directed by Santiago

\[15\] Ibid., 19.
Álvarez, Cuba's best known and most prolific documentary filmmaker. Despite his pedigree, it was not a deliberate choice to focus on Álvarez. I chose the films for their transnational content, their presence at international film festivals, and their appearance in sources from the time period. My intent was to select films that dealt with events and issues that were major concerns for the Cuban revolutionary government and that reached both Cuban and foreign audiences, which indicates their diplomatic potential. *Cine Cubano* is an indispensable resource for any work on Cuban cinema. It was common practice for ICAIC to host debates and roundtables between filmmakers and artists, and to publish the transcriptions in *Cine Cubano*. In addition to film, the journal also discusses culture and politics. A reader perusing the pages of issues from the 1960s and 1970s is likely to find articles on upcoming Cuban productions and foreign films alongside articles on Marxism or the Vietnam War. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the films and *Cine Cubano* are my own.
CHAPTER I: FILM IN CUBA, CUBA IN FILM: 1897–1959

THE CUBAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Film arrived in Cuba at quite an international moment in the island’s history, in the midst of a War of Independence against Spain and the imminent intervention of the United States on its behalf. On January 24, 1897, Gabriel Veyre, an agent of the pioneering French filmmakers, the Lumière Brothers, presented the new Cinématographe Lumière, a film and projection device, to crowds in Havana. Lumière's agents were instructed to produce as well as to exhibit films when on assignment abroad, so as to stock up the company's growing film collection with footage from the faraway countries they had visited. That way, Lumière could simultaneously advertise the Cinématographe to foreign audiences and acquire new films for their domestic audience all in one trip. The tone for the Cuba films was set when Veyre secured his entry into the island by making an agreement to shoot propaganda shorts in Spain's favor. These brief films projected colonial authority through typical military iconography, such as images of Spanish troops marching. Some weeks later, Veyre filmed the first movie ever produced in Cuba, Simulacro de incendio (Fire Drill). Running several minutes long, the film shows residents of Havana (all non-professional actors) enacting a scene of firefighters at work. The film has a static quality that gives the impression of watching photographic stills of Havana, interrupted by brief footage

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16 Cuba had been under Spanish rule since 1492, interrupted by a brief British occupation in 1762.
18 The Cinématographe had already premiered in Mexico, Paris, and London. On February 13 and April 10, respectively, the Edison Company’s Vitagraph and another North American version called the Biograph were also shown off in Havana. Michael Chanan, Cuban Cinema, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004): 47.
20 Ibid., 10.
of the firefighters running and climbing ladders. Simulacro de incendio and Veyre’s other shorts made a profit from Cubans’ desire for entertainment and provided Lumière with footage of Cuba that they could then use for the company's promotional gain.

It is striking that even in those first days when film technology was so new that each use of it was, in essence, an experiment, it was already being used for commercial and ideological purposes. Lumière made money by exhibiting films in Cuba and intended to make more from the footage shot there, while Spain's propaganda shorts are an early example of film being wielded for political purposes, before the medium had even become established as an art form. These early Cinématographe films also prefigure two ongoing conflicts in post-revolutionary Cuban cinema: the struggle to reclaim the state's image from the exoticizing gaze of Western production and the fight against seemingly innocuous, but in actuality politically charged, imperialist aesthetics that reinforced the country's underdevelopment. All the same, one can imagine the awe that overcame those in Havana who witnessed the introduction of this new technology and records mention viewers' excitement in seeing their neighbors and surroundings onscreen.

The following year, 1898, the Cuban actor José E. Casasús managed to obtain the exhibition and transportation equipment to go on a mobile cinema tour of the country, introducing Cubans outside of Havana to the wonders of movies. Casasús also became the first Cuban to make a film, El brujo desapareciendo (The Disappearing Warlock), and built the first Cuban movie theater, the Floradora. Just as with Veyre's showings in Havana, the sense of escape and the thrill of seeing filmed reality for the first time were no doubt heightened by the

22 García Osuna, The Cuban Filmography, 10.
23 Ibid., 10-11.
intensity of daily life in wartime Cuba, and the new theater stimulated Cuban demand for film.\footnote{24}

**THE SPANISH–AMERICAN WAR**

The war with Spain made Cuba something of a mainstay in early cinematic endeavors because its developments provided filmmakers with ample material and because, in the United States, yellow journalism had already piqued the public's interest in the conflict, which intensified after the U.S. became involved and began the Spanish–American War in 1898. That year, the American Edison Company filmed *Cuban Refugees Waiting for Rations* in Tampa, Florida.\footnote{25} This short is not only an early example of documentary, but one of the earliest examples of so-called “misery porn” (both within the film, as well-to-do Americans are filmed observing the downtrodden Cubans, and outside of it, for the viewers who are observing through the screen and identifying with those being filmed in the act of observation) and, although not filmed in Cuba, a case in point of the way that film could affect a nation's image.\footnote{26}

The description from the Edison films' “war extra” catalog is revealing:

A group of escaped reconcentrados, saved from the fate of starvation imposed by the Butcher, Weyler. They stand in line waiting, each man with his tin dish and cup. One expects to see just such men as these, after the centuries of Spanish oppression and tyranny. As they come forward, their walk, even, is listless and lifeless. The picture affords an exceedingly interesting racial character study. At one side stands a group of officers from the camp nearby, accompanying

\footnote{24}{When "actual reality" is captured on camera, it becomes "filmed reality." The individual behind the camera selects which aspects of "actual reality" become "filmed reality." Afterwards, an editor who can reorder or eliminate parts of the footage as they see fit further selects the “filmed reality”. Minus reenactments and the like, a documentary is different from fiction film because it is "filmed reality" of unscripted events, which really happened and involved real people. This gives documentaries credibility, especially with viewers who might not distinguish between "actual" and "filmed reality" and take documentary film for factual objective truth, rather than a filmmaker's interpretation of truth based on the "actual reality" he or she was able to film. This is part of what makes documentary film a powerful propaganda tool.}

\footnote{25}{García Osuna, *The Cuban Filmography*, 80.}

\footnote{26}{I learned about the term "misery porn" from Professor Roldán, who recommended the work of Colombian filmmakers Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo. Their 1977 film *Agarrando pueblo (Vampires of Poverty)* is a parody of Western filmmakers whose documentaries exploit Third World poverty for the visual consumption of Western audiences. Empathizing with suffering allows these filmmakers and audiences to feel morally absolved, without actually doing anything to alleviate the suffering.}
several ladies who are seeing the sights.\textsuperscript{27} At less than a minute long, the film still manages to perpetuate a negative racial stereotype of Cubans, casting them as an “other” people whose agency has been corrupted by Spain and requires saving by the United States. This view of Cuba was prevalent in U.S. media outlets of the time, especially in papers that ran political cartoons to garner public support for the U.S. entering the war. John J. Johnson has pointed out that, in these early sketches, Cuba was typically represented as a pale woman with Caucasian features.\textsuperscript{28} This damsel-in-distress image was consistent with wartime discourse that justified the U.S. intervention as an act of saving Cuba from Spain so that the island could have freedom and self-government. However, once U.S. troops were on the ground, they found Spanish officers to be more "civilized and honorable than the [Cuban] patriots" and media depictions of Cuba began to feature dark-skinned figures.\textsuperscript{29} Once Cuba was independent, the American public had to be convinced that there were valid reasons for the U.S. to continue its presence in the country, and Cuba was portrayed as being incapable of proper self-government without U.S. guidance. Cartoons from this period characterize Cuba as an infant, a black child, or a black man, caught misbehaving or being incompetent.\textsuperscript{30} These cartoon images parallel the moving images in shorts like \textit{Cuban Refugees Waiting for Rations}, and, considering that they were circulated in newspapers on a regular basis, their content primed U.S. audiences to interpret the shorts in a way that was negative towards Cuba. There is also an exploitative quality to presenting the misfortune of another group of people as a "sight” to be gaped at or studied, as \textit{Cuban Refugees Waiting for Rations} does. The

\textsuperscript{27} "Cuban refugees waiting for rations," YouTube video, 0:48, posted by "LibraryOfCongress," October 4, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJCKYGrUPSI. Text can be found in video description.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 164.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 123-35, 143, 165-9, 217.
camera amplifies the power imbalance in favor of the observer because he or she is able to
capture footage of the subject's suffering and potentially controls the footage's distribution, as
well as the context in which it will be presented.31 In the film business, the balance of power
tipped in favor of the developed countries that could afford to gaze from behind the camera.

In the same year as when Edison filmed Cuban Refugees, Theodore Roosevelt and his
voluntary cavalry, the Rough Riders, arrived in Cuba accompanied by Edison Vitagraph
operators. Among them were Albert E. Smith and J. Stuart Blackton, who filmed a number of
battles and combined the footage into the shorts Fighting with Our Boys in Cuba and The Battle
of Santiago Bay. The latter depicts the face-off between the U.S. and Spanish navies and is
notable for being marketed for its authenticity despite being filmed in New York City. In fact,
Smith and Blackton were already sailing back to Florida when the United States triumphed at
Santiago de Cuba. Upon their arrival in New York, reporters clamored for footage of the battle,
which had become front-page news. Eager to please, Smith and Blackton lied that they had
indeed filmed the battle, forcing themselves into a corner. They faked the footage in their office
using model ships, water tanks, and special effects as basic and makeshift as dispersing the
smoke from a cigar and using alcohol-dipped cotton to set off traces of gunpowder.32

Crude by today's standards, these were among cinema’s first experimental forays into

31 Susan Sontag has written about the camera's power to exploitative by photographing suffering: "Social
misery has inspired the comfortably-off with the urge to take pictures, the gentlest of predations...Gazing
on other people's reality with curiosity, with detachment, with professionalism, the ubiquitous
photographer operates as if that activity transcends class interests, as if its perspective is universal." Susan
32 Chanan, Cuban Cinema, 42-3. Edward H. Amet also faked footage of the battle by filming model ships
in a Chicago bathtub, and lying that he captured the footage with equipment that allowed him to film at
nighttime. Sara Calvo and Alejandro Armangol, El racismo en el cine, Serie Literatura y Arte (Havana:
Departamento de Actividades Culturales Universidad de la Habana, 1978), 27, quoted in Michael Chanan,
Cuban Cinema (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 44. In the same vein, George
Méliès used a fish tank and a ship cutout to film the short The Explosion of the Cruiser Maine, again
linking Cuba to early ventures in film.
Garcia Osuna, The Cuban Filmography, 10-11.
special effects. Not only were they innovative for their time, but the effects also succeeded in convincing audiences that the footage was authentic. Perhaps it says something about the public’s desire for spectacle or about how unformed and unrefined the audience’s gaze yet was in the early days of film technology, but viewers eagerly accepted the faked footage as real. *The Battle of Santiago Bay* is both a cautionary tale about the manipulation of the image and a testament to film’s potential to galvanize the masses and to convert even shoddy documentary footage into spectacle for consumption. Describing the New York audience's reaction, Albert Smith wrote:

Pastor’s and both Proctor houses played to capacity audiences for several weeks. [We] felt less and less remorse of conscience [about faking the footage] when we saw how much excitement and enthusiasm were aroused by *The Battle of Santiago Bay* and the thirty-minute-long *Fighting with Our Boys in Cuba*. Almost every newspaper in New York carried an account of the showings, commenting on Vitagraph's remarkable feat in obtaining on-the-spot pictures of these two historical events.³³

Smith's remorse reveals that he and Blackton had ethical doubts about misleading the audience and, more importantly, that these doubts were all too easily erased by a favorable audience reaction. Smith seems to have deduced how influential and compelling film could be when it was perceived as a truthful representation of an extraordinary moment of reality.

Despite their officially stated location and the conflict on which they were centered, *Fighting with Our Boys in Cuba* and *The Battle of Santiago Bay* were not filmed for a Cuban audience nor did they showcase the hardships or military efforts of the Cuban patriots. Rather, they glorified American resolve in the face of the enemy and an American victory that achieved weak and oppressed Cuba’s freedom. Based on Smith’s account, it can be inferred that this filmic projection of national strength struck a chord with an audience already weaned on yellow

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journalism fueled by sensational tales of the happenings in Cuba. For many, possibly all, of these viewers, it would also have been their first time seeing U.S. troops onscreen, which may have added some patriotic fervor to the "excitement and enthusiasm" described by Smith. U.S. filmmakers and press profited successfully from spinning Cuba’s situation in a way that left out the Cubans themselves, while the U.S. public consumed these images as truth and spectacle.

Regarding the influence of technology on the formation of "the public" as those who consume the images and messages of media and mass communication, Jesús Martín-Barbero writes, "Mass was transformed progressively from an active state - the agitated and noisy public of local fairs and villages theaters - to a passive public, spectators of a culture now transformed into spectacle to be gazed at by a silent and overwhelmed mass."34 Fairs, theaters, circuses, and music halls - these venues offer a live entertainment that is in constant dialogue with the audience, whose members are also in dialogue with each other by virtue of seeing and hearing each other react. The performance is happening in the moment, which means that viewers' reactions inform, and may even modify, the performance, as well as the reactions of other viewers nearby. This means that each live performance is unique and that everyone is to some extent aware that they are participating in the event because it is part of their actual reality. In contrast, a film is a finished product, removed from actual reality, and presented to audiences on a screen, typically in a darkened movie theater. In a movie theater, the experience becomes more individualized than the collective live entertainment experience because in most cases the audience cannot see each other's individual reactions in the dark and most choose to comply with the rule to remain silent during the show. Even in situations where the audience is encouraged to react and to comment during the screening, they cannot engage with a film in the way that it is

possible to engage with and modify a live theater performance.\textsuperscript{35} According to Walter Benjamin, because of this, film "put[s] the public in the position of the critic, but...at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one...the distracted mass absorbs the work of art."\textsuperscript{36} This harkens back to the "silent and overwhelmed" mass described by Martín-Barbero, who modifies his argument by saying that "the receiver in the communication process is not simply a decoder of what the sender has put into the message but is also a producer of meaning."\textsuperscript{37} These theories apply to the screening of \textit{The Battle of Santiago Bay}, which found a receptive audience that not only consumed the film as a true record of a historical event, but also, through their enthusiasm about the U.S. naval victory onscreen, gave the film new meaning as a depiction of American power and superiority.

The dynamics between the filmmakers and the film, and the audience and the film, raise interesting points. Clearly, documented footage is not objective or true simply because it is a moment of actual reality that has been captured on film. Filmed reality can be manipulated or selected for in a way that distorts or misrepresents its truth; for example, making it appear as if American soldiers were the only ones who were bravely fighting against Spanish troops in Cuba, as Smith and Blackton did. This supports the concept of film as an inherently ideological and political medium because it is always subject to the filmmakers’ leanings and because it always offers the audience the filmmaker’s version of reality. In the case of documentary, a filmmaker selects which parts of reality to capture and edits the resulting footage into film. If viewers

\textsuperscript{35} The theater experience can be collective. In South Asia, for example, it is normal for the audience to comment on and discuss the film during a screening. In the United States, \textit{The Rocky Horror Picture Show} and, more recently, \textit{The Room}, have inspired midnight screenings where audiences talk to the screen and perform alongside the films.


\textsuperscript{37} Martín-Barbero, \textit{Communication, Culture and Hegemony}, 2.
passively consume a documentary without questioning the truth of the filmed reality onscreen, they are receiving a filmmaker's version of truth without analyzing how the filmmaker has interpreted that truth. This affects how viewers produce meaning from the messages onscreen. When they judge a film on its aesthetics, without questioning the filmmaker's motives or identifying the ideologies behind the messages, they lend more power to the iconography projected in a picture like *The Battle of Santiago Bay*. In a profit-driven system, countries that do not have the resources to project their own filmmakers' work are forced to supply their markets with foreign productions, which means that their national audiences will consume foreign ideology and iconography at the movie theater. This makes film a uniquely useful medium for transmitting a set of national values across international borders, particularly if the state in question has consolidated a national film industry and if the recipient state lacks one. In the years leading up to the Revolution, Cuban attempts to finance a national film industry were short-lived and disappointing.

THE RISE OF HOLLYWOOD

In 1906, the Cubans Francisco Rodríguez and Enrique Díaz Quesada started a film distribution firm, the Moving Pictures Company. By then, José E. Casasús had opened the first Cuban movie theater and film had become both a lucrative business and a popular pastime on the island. Although urban areas had the most access, the proliferation of theaters and mobile cinema tours brought film to the interior. Two years later, Spanish circus owners Pablo Santos and Jesús Artigas founded the distribution company Compañía Cinematográfica Habanera, embodying the cultural transition described by Martín-Barbero. Santos and Artigas financed many of Díaz Quesada’s movies until his death in 1923. Díaz Quesada, the Father of Cuban Cinema, produced the oldest surviving Cuban documentary, *El Parque de Palatino (Palatino Park)*, in 1906, which
showed the goings on at a Havana amusement park of the same name. While he produced an extensive catalogue of movies, (some subsidized by the Cuban government, showing an early attempt at cultivating a national film industry) a warehouse fire destroyed every negative besides *El Parque*. Many of these were scenic shorts, which were screened for entertainment and were used by tourist companies to advertise Cuba, or promotional shorts on topics like sugar.

However, Díaz Quesada also shot films that touched on Afro-Cuban culture and issues, such as *La campaña o Salida de tropas hacia Santiago de Cuba durante la guerra racista* (*Deployment of Troops Towards Santiago de Cuba During the Race War, 1912*) about the 1912 revolt in Eastern Cuba when black Cubans massacred white farmers and were then themselves violently suppressed by the Cuban National Army. He also shot *El capitán mambí o libertadores y guerrilleros* (*Captain Mambí, or Liberators and Guerrilleros*), based on the War of Independence; *La manigua o la mujer cubana* (*The Cuban Woman*), about women’s role in the War of Independence; and *Inauguración de la estatua del general Maceo* (*Inauguration of General Maceo's Statue*), about President Mario García Menocal. These films were made with the National Army's support and the president himself gave approval for a film about the War of Independence. In these early years of the twentieth century, Cuba was experiencing increased racial tensions, a recent wave of European immigrants, many of whom held anarchist ideals, and popular dissatisfaction with the corrupt government and its subservience to the United States. The extent of institutional support for Díaz Quesada’s patriotic and historically themed movies suggests that Garcia Menocal was aware of citizens' unease with the direction in which the country was moving, and realized that there might be political gain in aiding projects that

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40 Ibid., 15.
boosted Cuban nationalism, especially projects in a sector with as high a public demand as film.

Cuban independence from Spain and the fallout of World War I aligned Cuban trade and prosperity with those of the United States.\textsuperscript{41} The expansion of transportation, especially railroads, and communication, like with the new Havana-Key West telephone cable, solidified the economic relationship forming between the two countries, which affected all businesses.\textsuperscript{42} The U.S. presence, through its proximity, products, and advertising, conveyed American values and ideas and became an inescapable feature of Cuban life. Film was no exception; in fact, cinema's popularity and the new demand for Hollywood movies arguably made film the most effective means through which Cubans consumed “the American way of life.” Due to World War I's debilitating effects on European production, European movies had become definitively few and far between in Cuba and Hollywood dominated the market by 1916. The Caribbean Film Company began distributing U.S. films, while an American, Alexander Kent, opened Cuba's first theater chain, exclusively screening Universal films.\textsuperscript{43} The number of U.S. movies a theater showed began to be seen as a measure of hipness and the sizable North American community in Cuba further increased the demand for Hollywood movies. Americans also became the owners of the larger movie theaters and entered into business with U.S. distributors.\textsuperscript{44} This meant that U.S. companies had effectively assumed control of the production, distribution, and exhibition of the Cuban film market.

\textsuperscript{41} “Forty percent of the farms and 55 percent of the mills were in the hands of US companies. US investors also controlled 90 percent of Cuba’s telecommunications and electrical services and half of the country’s railroads, as well as significant portions of the banking, cattle, mining, petroleum, and tourist industries.” Aviva Chomsky, \textit{A History of the Cuban Revolution}, 46.
\textsuperscript{42} Louis A. Pérez Jr., \textit{On Becoming Cuban}, 282.
\textsuperscript{43} García Osuna, \textit{The Cuban Filmography}, 16; Pérez, \textit{On Becoming Cuban}, 283.
\textsuperscript{44} The Cuban film market was “dominated by the Caribbean Film Company (Paramount), Liberty Film Company (Fox), Universal Film Manufacturing Company (Universal).” United Artists of Cuba arrived in 1921, MGM in 1923, and First National Pictures in 1925. Pérez, \textit{On Becoming Cuban}, 283.
As Michael Chanan explains, in a capitalist profit-driven market, control of film distribution translates into near total control of the film industry, and the first to catch on were U.S. distributors. In the 1920s, U.S. distributors began renting instead of selling films to exhibitors, deriving several waves of profit from one film. Renting not only raised distributors' surplus profit, it also lessened the financial risk for producers, who had to recover negative costs of production, and exhibitors. However, distributors were crafty and introduced techniques such as block booking, which essentially forced exhibitors to pay more for a package of unwanted films because they included a film that was actually in demand. The higher the profit for distributors, the more investment they attracted; the more investment they attracted, the easier it was for them to establish control of the market. Also in U.S. distributors' favor was that the United States had become the largest film market in the world, allowing U.S. producers to recover negative costs with domestic audiences alone and making foreign film markets the destinations for surplus profit. U.S. distributors could then afford to underprice U.S. movies abroad, making them more profitable for foreign exhibitors. This system made it incredibly difficult for filmmakers and producers in other countries to compete with Hollywood in their own domestic markets. It was seemingly impossible to recover negative costs of production, let alone compete for the surplus profit that would attract investors to finance upcoming projects. In a country like Cuba where, at the time, capital and industrial conditions hindered the development of a significant national film movement, it was more practical for local businesspeople to profit from film as exhibitors, while leaving the production and distribution to

45 Chanan, Cuban Cinema, 72-76.
47 Chanan, Cuban Cinema, 76.
foreigners. On the opposite end, a country with a solid national film industry, such as the U.S., was capable of producing enough material to distribute and satisfy audience demand both at home and abroad, recover negative costs, and attract investors with surplus profit. And demand for film was only growing in Cuba where, between 1912 and 1920, the number of movie theaters tripled to more than 300 and offered a seating capacity of 150,000 for a population of three million. By 1919, the major Hollywood studios had offices in Havana, indicating how lucrative the Cuban film market had become.

In 1923, the British Consul-General in Havana observed Hollywood's infiltration of the Cuban film market:

> The proximity of the United States is almost fatal to the films of other countries…British prices are said to be too high…Advertising is intense. Theater owners and others have only to run over to Florida (some 96 miles) or even up to New York (60 hours) to see the latest films and purchase them on the spot, and most of them have agents and correspondents in the United States who send particulars of all new films and report on their suitability for the Cuban market.

Note that the Consul-General appears to have been surveying the Cuban market to see if it would be favorable to British film, illustrating the importance of foreign markets to a profit-driven film industry. In 1926, an American distributor spoke to the Harvard Business School about the industry’s methods for creating profitable foreign markets for Hollywood films and for countering foreign attempts to build national film industries:

> We are trying to do that by internationalizing this art, by drawing on old countries for the best talent that they possess in the way of artists, directors and technicians, and bringing these people over to our country, by drawing on their literary talents, taking their choicest stories and producing them in our own way, and sending them back into the countries where they are famous…Out of every dollar received, about 75 cents still comes out of America and only 25

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48 Ibid., 285.
cents out of all the foreign countries combined... Of course, the profit is in that last 25 percent.\textsuperscript{51}

This shows that higher-ups in the U.S. film industry understood foreign markets to be crucial for the kind of surplus profit that would attract financial backing, and that they made a concerted effort to ensure that foreign markets could not supply their own public’s demand, even going so far as to appropriate their local talent in order to tailor American productions for foreign consumers. As mentioned above, while they depended on these foreign markets for their surplus profits, U.S. distributors had a conveniently large market at home, which allowed them to rent abroad at astoundingly low prices to the further detriment of local industries.\textsuperscript{52} These are the challenges faced by filmmakers and producers in underdeveloped countries who attempt to compete in a capitalist market driven by the profit motive. Even if all local producers had access to the equipment and funds necessary to make a motion picture, it would be extremely difficult for them to recover the negative costs were they to charge the necessary fees in a market where Hollywood films were being distributed at bargain basement prices.\textsuperscript{53}  

**POLITICAL UNREST AND OPPOSITIONAL FILM**

Cuba in the 1920s was also marked by social and political conflict, including widespread strikes, protests, and even bombnings. By the end of the decade, life on the island had become so

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{53} An interesting comparison to Cuba is Argentina, which had 1,425 theaters in 1936, the most in Latin America. In 1933, the studios Argentina Sono Films and Lumiton were founded, and Argentinian cinema did very well in the domestic market. Still, it faced stiff competition from Hollywood. While Argentinian studios had to recover the entire cost of production from their domestic market, Hollywood only had to recover distribution costs in Argentina. By 1935, Hollywood had cornered the Argentinian market and Paramount, Metro, Warner, Fox, Columbia, Universal, and United Artists had offices in the country's major cities. Argentinian studios "were unable to secure a distribution system that guaranteed them a percentage of the gross receipts. Forced to sell films to distributors on a flat-fee basis and lacking any protectionist assistance from the government, they remained severely undercapitalized." Matthew B. Karush, "The Melodramatic Nation: Integration and Polarization in the Argentine Cinema of the 1930s," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 87, no. 2 (2007): 298, doi: 10.1215/00182168-2006-131.
chaotic that President Gerardo Machado felt it necessary to create a film department to produce documentaries espousing the government’s views on current events.\textsuperscript{54} The intelligentsia began to encourage Cuban nationalism and to speak out against U.S. imperialism while the University Reform Movement produced outspoken leaders who promoted radical ideologies, like Julio Antonio Mella, founder of the Cuban Communist Party. In 1928, Mella gave his opinion on film in Latin America when writing about Soviet cinema for a Mexican publication:

\begin{quote}
The public, accustomed to the bourgeois style of the yanqui film, will not be fully able to appreciate the proper value of this effort from Sovkino…It would be asking as much of them to comprehend the proletarian revolution after hearing about it through the cables of United Press, or the revolutionary of our own country and our national characteristics through the interpretations given them by Hollywood.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

Mella’s words show a keen awareness of how a particular film model perpetuates a particular ideology and aesthetic, and how the continuous consumption of one model over others conditions an audience’s taste to the point where anything deviating from that model becomes displeasing. In a capitalist market, this is yet another challenge for filmmakers in underdeveloped countries whose profits depend on pleasing audiences accustomed to the dominant Hollywood model, all while working with smaller budgets and more limited resources than their Hollywood counterparts.

In the 1920s, the demand for sugar fell and prices crashed, forcing a bank holiday and dealing a severe blow to the Cuban economy, which relied on sugar exports.\textsuperscript{56} In response, local entertainment capital steered towards radio, a low-risk investment because Cuba was already one of the most developed radio markets in Latin America.\textsuperscript{57} Like film, radio required paying for

\textsuperscript{54} García Osuna, \textit{The Cuban Filmography}, 21.
\textsuperscript{56} Chomsky, \textit{A History of the Cuban Revolution}, 28.
\textsuperscript{57} Chanan, \textit{Cuban Cinema}, 92.
U.S. technology; however, Cuban producers could do the rest of the work relatively cheaply and recover the cost. In comparison, cinema required much more financial backing and, in addition to U.S. technology, the Cuban film market depended on U.S. distributors and producers. An exception to this pattern was the Cuban filmmaker Ramón Peón. Twentieth-Century Fox had hired Peón to direct Spanish-language versions of their movies in the 1930s, after the advent of sound, but before the technology for dubbing. At home in Cuba, he managed the seemingly impossible task of negotiating financial backing for cinema, which he used to buy equipment and to direct movies for his new company, Estudios Golden Sun Pictures. He also co-founded and produced some movies for the Pan American Pictures Corporation with a Hollywood-affiliated American, Richard Harlan. After a stint directing cheap melodramas in Mexico, Peón returned to Cuba. In 1938, he tried once again to start a production company, Pecusa, which closed in 1942 after managing to make two hits. Following Peón, there were no noteworthy attempts to create a Cuban film industry. In the following decades, the closest thing to a national cinema would be Mexican and Cuban and, sometimes, Argentinian and Cuban coproductions. Even in these films, the actors and directors were typically not from Cuba, but hailed from the coproducing country. In 1952, President Carlos Prío Socarrás made an attempt to stimulate the growth of a national film industry by setting up a film finance bank and commission, which had permission to advance producers up to 33% of the production costs. However, this was still not enough to generate the necessary profits to recover negative costs, which created little incentive for local investors and producers, and most of the benefits went to coproductions with other countries. 

The 1930s were an era of political turmoil for the island, leading to some momentous events, including the general strike against Machado and his resignation in 1933 and the repeal

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58 Ibid., 82-87.
of the Platt Amendment in 1934, which was also the year of Sergeant Fulgencio Batista's coup against the progressive, pro-labor government of President Carlos Manuel de Céspedes y Quesada. Céspedes' program for economic and agrarian reform threatened foreign economic interests and, in a move to protect its investors, the U.S. encouraged Batista's coup and recognized his U.S.-friendly regime.\textsuperscript{59} Popular opposition found expression in leftwing political parties and film. In 1939-1940, the Partido Socialista Popular, the Popular Socialist Party, or PSP, began screening its first newsreels, many produced by individuals like José Tabío, who would go on to join ICAIC. In the early 1940s, Tabío founded a production company, Cuba Sono Films, administered by Cuban communists, to produce militant and current-events-oriented documentaries for union meetings.\textsuperscript{60} In 1941, Cuban communists started another company, Blue Ribbon Films, for the purpose of distributing government-banned Soviet films.\textsuperscript{61} This was a turning point in Cuban cinema, marking the beginning of a political film movement focused on producing oppositional content and spreading its message with disregard for the profit motive.

Significantly, 1941 was also the founding year of Nelson Rockefeller's Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, tasked with promoting democracy and capitalism in Latin America. Established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the OIAA was supposed to "provide for the development of commercial and cultural relations between the American Republics" in part by "formulat[ing] and execut[ing] programs in cooperation with the Department of State which, by effective use of governmental and private facilities in such fields as the arts and sciences, education and travel, the radio, the press, and the cinema, will further the national

\textsuperscript{59} The Platt Amendment, the condition for the U.S.' withdrawal from Cuba in 1902, had given the U.S. final say in Cuba's foreign and economic policies, the right to protect U.S. property in Cuba by military means, and the right to build coaling and naval stations in Cuba. Chomsky, \textit{A History of the Cuban Revolution}, 24; on Batista's coup, see 31-2.
\textsuperscript{60} Chanan, \textit{Cuban Cinema},103.
\textsuperscript{61} García Osuna, \textit{The Cuban Filmography}, 28.
defense and strengthen the bonds between the Nations of the Western Hemisphere."  

The OIAA came to be because, during World War II, many in the Roosevelt administration were wary that the Axis powers would exploit Latin America’s economic situation for military and political gain. The OIAA was divided into two branches encompassing economic and psychological warfare, the second having separate departments for radio, press, movies, film, science, and education. The film department produced movies for both Latin American and U.S. audiences; the former were meant to showcase the U.S. as a better ally than the Axis by emphasizing U.S. power and the virtues of "the American way of life" of democracy and capitalism, while the latter presented Latin America as an interesting region to study or visit and a good market for U.S. investment. The concurrence of the OIAA’s films and the Cuban communists’ efforts at film distribution (as well as Nazi and Allied film propaganda in Europe) reflects how sophisticated the grasp and appreciation of the political influence of cinema had become since the days of Albert E. Smith.

In 1945, the United States Department of Commerce published this analysis of the Cuban market:

The market potentialities for the sale to amateur users in Cuba of United States motion-picture cameras and projectors are fair. It is estimated that upon termination of the war about $3,500 worth of 16mm sound projectors and $2,400 worth of silent 16mm projectors can be sold. Sales

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of 8mm motion-picture cameras are expected to be somewhat higher.66

While not a huge profit, it was significant enough for the Department to consider Cuba as a test market for new advancements in media for the United States. The figures reflect the impact of the amateur cine aficionado movement and the cine clubs that were spreading through the island as equipment and technology became more accessible to the public. Many of these amateur films were political or militant in nature and expressed the filmmakers’ disillusionment with the Cuban government and political climate, in the vein of the newsreels screened by PSP.67 Others were more aesthetic and informational, focused on short subjects or activities, and were usually the work of Cubans who were wealthy enough to afford the equipment and the leisure time to film for recreation. Interest in filmmaking grew enough that the intellectual and cultural scholar J.M. Valdés-Rodriguez began teaching a film studies course at the University of Havana, one of the first in the world.68

Throughout the 1940s, Cuban political strife escalated into violent confrontations. Many such scenes took place at the University of Havana, where Fidel Castro was studying law. In April 1948, Castro and others went on a school trip to a Latin American students' conference in

67 Postwar Italy saw a similar boom in cine clubs, with the Communist Party being the first political party to have a film division and the Catholic Church and the Italian government becoming involved in the film industry to curb the spread of films that promoted leftist ideals. In 1944, the Belgian priest Felix Morlion, who worked for the service that would eventually become the CIA, began to assist the Catholic Church in fighting communism. The cine clubs pushed him to respond by creating the Cineforum, where film debate could remain centered on Catholic values. Appropriate Hollywood films were often featured. Meanwhile, the left-wing cine clubs were circulating Soviet films to agitate intellectuals, workers, and peasants, and neorealist filmmakers were rebelling against the establishment. The Italian government intervened against these associations, but not against the Cineforum. Authorities on either side of the Atlantic were becoming aware of film's potential to both mobilize and placate, and were determined to keep their public "passive." Daniela Treveri-Gennari, Post-war Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests (New York: Routledge Advances in Film Studies, 2009), 63, 83-4.
68 Chanan, Cuban Cinema,100.
Bogotá. The Cuban group had scheduled a meeting with Colombian Liberal leader Jorge Gaitán; however, Gaitán was assassinated the day before the meeting was to take place. Castro and the other Cubans, including his friend and future head of ICAIC, Alfredo Guevara, participated in the popular riots protesting the Colombian Liberal leader's death that came to be known as the Bogotazo. The event left a huge impression on both Fidel and Guevara.69 As background, it gives insight into the political characters of the two men who went on to lead and reform the country and its media; both exhibited a willingness to actively participate in another nation's political struggle if they considered its goals to be socially just.

NUESTRO TIEMPO, EL MÉGANO, AND REVOLUTION

In the 1950s, cinema continued to grow in Cuba.70 By 1955, the island had 550 movie theaters and more than 500,000 Cubans made a weekly ritual of going to the movies, adding up to annual revenue of $92 million. Large plantations and mills even had their own movie theaters to accommodate the harvest season and some private clubs had their own exclusive theaters. Cuba’s theaters were some of the first in the world to switch to sound in the late 1920s, to install air-conditioning in the late 1940s, and to use the latest Cinerama technology in the mid-1950s.71 García Osuna writes that even the smaller theaters were made to appear sophisticated through hip architectural design and decoration: "These were not your run-of-the-mill corner movie theaters. They were designed and built in the modern 'International Style,' ...[they] were air-conditioned and featured comfortable seats, excellent acoustics and delicate indirect lighting." Urban theaters

69 Ibid., 105-106.
70 Whereas in developed countries, like the United States and Great Britain, television had reduced movie ticket sales, cinema was safeguarded in Cuba because only the wealthier sectors of society could afford the luxury of television. Television would affect Cuba’s ticket sales in the 1980’s. Julio García Espinosa and Dennis West, "Reconciling Entertainment and Thought: An Interview with Julio García Espinosa," Cineaste 16, no. 1-2 (1987-8): 21.
were displays of comfort and modernity, indicating the significance that the entire movie-going experience held in Cuban society. The exceptions were the theaters in the interior, which were often converted buildings and lacked modern amenities.\textsuperscript{72} The disparity between urban and interior facilities hints at the stark inequality that made Cuba receptive to calls for revolution.

While there was no national industry, the oppositional film movement that had taken off in the 1940s continued to grow. In 1950, students at the University of Havana founded a radical cultural and art society that they dubbed \textit{Nuestro Tiempo} (Our Times) with the goal of bringing art to the people without relying on government institutions. Many future ICAIC members belonged to Nuestro Tiempo, including Alfredo Guevara, Julio García Espinosa, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and Santiago Álvarez. Their film efforts culminated with \textit{El Mégano} (1955), directed by García Espinosa and Gutiérrez Alea, which condemned the exploitation of Cuba’s coal workers. The film shows the workers doing grueling physical labor and having occasional moments of relaxation. When they show up to collect their pay, the overseer refuses them their money and hands them a credit slip instead. The workers express their outrage to no avail and go home empty-handed as cheerful, wealthy Cubans wave to them from a passing boat. The sharp difference between the unkempt, tired workers and the affluent passengers is etched onto the frustrated face of a man who angrily crushes the credit slip in his fist.\textsuperscript{73} \textit{El Mégano} was screened at the University of Havana and its oppositional ideas led Batista’s forces to interrogate García Espinosa.\textsuperscript{74} The government released him in exchange for the film, but, fortunately, a copy was

\textsuperscript{72} García Osuna, \textit{The Cuban Filmography}, 32-33.


\textsuperscript{74} Due to its association with the PSP, the society was already under surveillance by the Military Intelligence Service and the Office for the Repression of Communist Activities. Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, \textit{To Defend the Revolution}, 47. Nuestro Tiempo was an offshoot of the cine club movement and Batista’s efforts to curb the society are reminiscent of the Italian government's clampdown on Italian cine clubs.
made in haste.\textsuperscript{75}

The dissatisfaction expressed by Nuestro Tiempo was prevalent among the student body at large. In 1953, a year after Batista’s second coup, student anti-government protests forced the shutdown of the University of Havana.\textsuperscript{76} On July 26 of the same year, Castro led the raid on the Moncada Barracks, which backfired and resulted in his imprisonment. The plan for Moncada had entailed taking over the means of communication – radio – and using it to mobilize Cubans to partake in a popular uprising against the regime.\textsuperscript{77} As a guerrilla in the Sierra Maestra, Castro continued to use media to his advantage; in 1957, Herbert Matthews of the New York Times published an interview with Castro, complete with photos from the Sierra Maestra, contradicting Batista’s wishful claims that Castro was dead and his movement was fading. The photos of Castro damaged Batista's credibility and improved the guerrillas' reputation with the public.\textsuperscript{78} The following year, Castro and the guerrillas began using Radio Rebelde to challenge Batista and rally Cubans to their cause. The endeavor was so successful that Radio Rebelde's reach stretched beyond Cuba and to the rest of the Caribbean and northern parts of South America, leading some to call it "the BBC of the Latin American Left".\textsuperscript{79} Throughout their time in the Sierra Maestra, the guerrillas maintained contact with Nuestro Tiempo. Gutiérrez Alea made visits to have discussions with Che Guevara about the place of culture in the Revolution, laying

\textsuperscript{76} García Osuna, \textit{The Cuban Filmography}, 35.
\textsuperscript{77} Chanan, \textit{Cuban Cinema}, 111.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 113-4.
\textsuperscript{79} Carlos Forment of the New School for Social Research mentioned this information at the 2016 Janey Annual Conference in Latin American Studies.
the groundwork for the eventual construction of a government-backed national film industry.\textsuperscript{80}

On January 1, 1959, the guerrillas defeated Batista and rebel forces entered Havana. Only two weeks later, on January 14, Che Guevara opened a cultural school for the military, the Dirección de Cultura, which employed Santiago Álvarez, who would become Cuba’s foremost documentary filmmaker, and operated the Rebel Army’s film department. Alfredo Guevara authored Law 169, through which the Dirección became ICAIC.\textsuperscript{81} Law 169 gave ICAIC the authority to sign agreements with national and international institutions and assigned it responsibility for the administration of ”pedagogical activities,” including conferences and cine clubs. A publisher, ICAIC Editions, was set up to publish the journal \textit{Cine Cubano} and other film-related writing, and the Cinemateca was founded to store films and to promote ICAIC.\textsuperscript{82} ICAIC’s first credits were provided by the newly founded National Institute of Agrarian Reform; afterwards, it received annual funding from the state budget and any net income went to the treasury from which the budgets were dispensed.\textsuperscript{83} In 1960, the revolutionary government expropriated the film distribution and production companies and, in 1965, they expropriated the movie theaters, giving ICAIC full control of production, distribution, and exhibition of film in Cuba.\textsuperscript{84} ICAIC was now in charge of creating both a national Cuban film industry that was at once revolutionary and authentically Cuban, and of cultivating a national audience to appreciate a cinema that would no doubt greatly differ from the Hollywood model they had grown accustomed to. The revolutionaries were now behind the camera and free to define Cuba's image on their own terms, for their own purposes. Through ICAIC, a united film industry

\begin{footnotes}
\item[80] Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, \textit{To Defend the Revolution}, 49.
\item[81] Ibid., 50 ; Chanan, \textit{Cuban Cinema} 119.
\item[82] Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, \textit{To Defend the Revolution}, 51.
\item[83] This system became unsustainable after the economic crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Chanan, \textit{Cuban Cinema}, 88-9, 121.
\item[84] García Osuna, \textit{The Cuban Filmography}, 39.
\end{footnotes}
unencumbered by the profit motive, Cuba would project a national image of revolutionary consciousness that extended beyond its borders in the spirit of international solidarity.
CHAPTER II: SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE CUBAN REVOLUTIONARY DOCUMENTARY

The documentary emerged as a genre in the early twentieth century and inspired many filmmakers whose work set the stage for ICAIC's documentary productions. Some were invested in social change or in denouncing the current conditions in their nations, while others wanted to capture the essence of everyday life and transform it into art. By the time of the Revolution, a range of film and theory directly and indirectly influenced Cuban documentarians and informed the ways in which they portrayed their new national reality and its international vision. A closer look at some of these documentary film movements sheds light on the motivations of documentary filmmakers and of the power and implications of documentary film, which in turn provides context for the development of the Cuban revolutionary documentary model.

FERNANDO BIRRI AND THE DOCUMENTARY FILM SCHOOL OF SANTA FE

Revolutionary Cuba was not the only Latin American country where filmmakers were experimenting with different forms and styles as they defined their national images, fought against Hollywood and commercial conventions, and exposed their viewers to societal contradictions. Like several of his prominent Cuban colleagues, the Argentinian Fernando Birri had studied film at the Centro Sperimentale in the early 1950s, where he got his start in documentaries and even assisted Cesare Zavattini and Vittorio De Sica. In 1956, back in Argentina, Birri – a figure of the New Latin American Cinema movement that started in the late 1950s and encompasses revolutionary Cuban cinema – founded the Documentary Film School of Santa Fe with the goal of producing films that were “nationalist, realist, critical, and popular” based on the principle of “learning by doing.” Birri had actually envisioned a school for fiction

85 Julianne Burton, "Interview with Fernando Birri," Cinema and Social Change in Latin America, ed. Julianne Burton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 4-5. ; Fernando Birri, “For a Nationalist,
film, but the Argentine situation convinced him otherwise:

What was needed was a school that would combine the basics of filmmaking with the basics of sociology, history, geography, and politics. Because the real undertaking at hand was a quest for national identity, an identity that had been lost or alienated by a system of economic and political as well as cultural hegemony established by the dominant classes in concert first with Spanish colonizers, later with British investors, and most recently with agents of the United States. This need to seek out a national identity was what prompted me to pose the problem in strictly documentary terms. It is my belief that the first step to be taken by an aspiring national film industry is to document national reality.  

Cuba, undergoing the drastic changes of a revolution, not only needed to “seek out a national identity” that embraced its uniquely national traditions and its new radical transformations; but the number of changes, the scope of their significance, and the rapidity with which they were happening generated a trove of material for documentarians. In a 1963 interview for Cine Cubano, Birri explained that a documentary should expose the reality that has been obscured by those who hold cultural hegemony; otherwise the documentary becomes part of the structure of underdevelopment. This vision of the documentary film as a cultural weapon with the power to undo hegemony was fitting for a country like Cuba in the 1960s, in the midst of Revolution and the formation of a new national cinema.

THE SOVIET UNION, PROPAGANDA, AND DZIGA VERTOV

Decades before the Cuban Revolution and ICAIC, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, then head of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and future head of the Soviet Union, nationalized the Soviet film industry on August 27, 1919. His intention was to replace the existing profit-driven industry with a government-backed cinema that would uplift Soviet

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87 Burton, Cinena and Social Change, 5.
workers and inculcate these citizens with proper Marxist values. Lenin's ideas complemented those of Russia's avant-garde who had supported the Russian Revolution and anticipated that its victory would fuel artistic innovation in the region by removing economic barriers and upending the social order. In its first decade, the government did support the avant-garde, providing filmmakers with access to equipment and facilities, and maintaining a critical but relatively tolerant attitude towards films it disapproved of.

For Lenin, cinema was the ideal transmitter of propaganda at a time when the Revolution was still fresh and the Soviet Union was still defining what it meant to be Soviet for a culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse population. He famously told the Soviet People’s Commissar of Education, A.V. Lunacharsky, “You are considered the protector of the arts. For that reason, you must bear firmly in mind the fact that to us, film, of all forms of art, for us, is the most important.” Besides being accessible to even illiterate Soviet peasants, the ease with which film could be reproduced allowed it to penetrate the more isolated parts of the Union’s incredibly vast territory. Indeed, Lenin’s 1922 Directive on the Film Business stressed that, “Special attention should be given to organizing film showings in the villages and in the East, where they are novelties and where our propaganda, therefore, will be all the more effective,”

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88 It is important to note that we are not born knowing the things we associate with citizenship. This is especially relevant in the first years of a revolution which not only demand that individuals adjust to a new definition of what constitutes proper citizenship under a new political order, but also force them to unlearn what defined citizenship in the past.
89 Lenin's was actually the second nationalization of a film industry, after the nationalization decree passed by the Hungarian Councils’ Republic in April 1919. Antonín J. Liehm and Mira Liehm, *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film After 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980): 34. The government's permissive attitude towards art shifted dramatically in the 1930s when Stalin assumed control and avant-garde was declared suspect. Under Stalin, film was confined to socialist realism. Ibid., 36-39. The Soviets' concerted effort to reach and win over their most isolated citizens calls to mind the mobile cinema tours used by Cuban showmen in the years before the Revolution and parallels the network of mobile cinema units that ICAIC would use to bring film to peasants in Cuba’s interior. Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, 32.
90 Italics added. Liehm and Liehm, *The Most Important Art*, 34.
and instructed that “A definite proportion should be fixed for every film-showing programme: a) entertainment films…b) pictures with a special propaganda message.” Lunacharsky later wrote that Lenin believed revolutionary Soviet filmmaking must begin with the newsreel, that “if you have a good newsreel, serious and enlightening pictures, it doesn’t really matter if you show some worthless film with them of a more or less usual type to attract the public.”

Film scholar Michael Chanan has observed that bourgeois and revolutionary ideologies attribute different purposes and qualities to propaganda. In the former, propaganda is almost synonymous with misinformation. The term is typically used in a negative sense because it is associated with manipulating the public for political gain. On the other hand, revolutionary ideology associates propaganda with didacticism rather than misinformation. Revolutionary propaganda "uses...demonstration and example to teach revolutionary principles, and dialectical argument to mobilize [viewers]." Revolutionary propaganda aims beyond changing public opinion to conform to state policies; it aims to agitate viewers, to raise their consciousness so that they feel compelled to participate in society and history in a way that has traditionally been reserved for elites. (Especially in a revolutionary society where policies are dictated, influence over popular activity and behavior holds more weight than influence over public opinion.) Whereas bourgeois propaganda conceals its purpose by purporting to be objective and factual, revolutionary propaganda is usually more ideologically overt. It claims basis in fact, but does not

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92 Ibid. Quoted in Footnote 1.
ICAIC also shared the early emphasis on newsreels, with Santiago Álvarez’s weekly newsreel being one of the first programs established by the Institute. Santiago Álvarez, “'5 Frames Are 5 Frames, Not 6, But 5': An Interview with Santiago Álvarez,” Cineaste 6, no. 4 (1975): 17.
feign objectivity or neutrality. This is not to say that these ideologies and propaganda models are exclusive to each other, but to illustrate that each ideology is conducive to a distinct propaganda model.

Although there were many innovators in the early days of Soviet film, Dziga Vertov is most relevant to this thesis for his contributions to the documentary form, while working for an emergent film industry for a revolutionary government. Vertov’s kino-glaz (“film eye”) theory posited that the camera is most useful when recording the truth about life and he resolved to produce material in such a way that the finished film exposed audiences to a deeper truth about the content of what they were seeing onscreen. Vertov believed that the key to this was to edit footage so that "frames [were] thematically organized so that the whole is also truth", and he often accomplished this by ordering the frames to create juxtapositions. This was the premise for his documentaries and his Kino-Pravda (“film-truth”) newsreel series. When he began working in the 1960s, Álvarez, Cuba’s foremost documentarian and original head of ICAIC’s newsreel department, was often compared to Dziga Vertov by film scholars and critics for his creative editing, minimal verbal commentary, and use of sound and captions. Like Vertov, Álvarez expressed that careful editing was crucial to making effective revolutionary cinema because it allowed the director to question, instead of merely report, reality and to analyze the conditions that made said reality possible. Both filmmakers believed that the ideal juxtaposition of images could expose contradictions in reality and jolt viewers out of passivity. Thus,

95 In fact, Vertov was so consumed with presenting truth that he was outspokenly against fiction film and called it “the opium of the people,” "a fatal weapon in the hands of the capitalists,” and "bourgeois screenplay fairy tales." Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 74.
filmmakers had a responsibility to not only show but also to interpret reality in order to expose unexamined or ignored truths and to raise viewers’ consciousness about societal contradictions. Viewers would then be more inclined to actively participate in the revolutionary process that would supposedly eliminate these contradictions. Despite the similarities in their work, Álvarez had not seen any of Vertov’s films prior to working on his own newsreels and documentaries, which implies that - like ideologies and propaganda models - a revolution, as social and political context, is conducive to a certain documentary model.

After their revolutions, both the Cubans and the Soviets prioritized documentaries and newsreels over fiction film. On a practical note, it was financially sounder, especially for a fledgling industry, to work with found or natural footage, to shoot on-location rather than in the studio, and to not have to worry about scripts, costumes, or actors. These projects received material, institutional, and political support because the right documentary films were projections of truth that not only countered what the revolutionaries perceived to be the false images and glossy escapism disseminated by Hollywood and all commercial cinema, but also contributed to the consolidation of an authentic national identity and culture by raising viewers' revolutionary consciousness. Films had the potential to convey the meaning and ideals of a revolution, and the added authority of truth that documentaries had, since they were filmed reality as opposed to fiction, made them a most suitable medium for reinforcing a revolution’s victory and existence. Documenting and projecting the existence of a revolution in and of itself was a powerful tool

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96 Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, 222.
97 Santiago Álvarez: “As for Dziga Vertov, that is a question I’m asked in every interview but I must say that there is absolutely no influence of Vertov in my films. In fact, when I first started making films I hadn’t seen any films by Vertov. It is true that the reality Vertov experienced is similar to the one we have experienced and it is this reality, perhaps, which is the common denominator of our films.” Santiago Álvarez, "‘5 Frames Are 5 Frames, Not 6, But 5’", 18.
against the undermining efforts of counterrevolutionaries and hostile governments.

**DOCUFICTION AND THE SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY**

At the same time that Vertov’s newsreels and documentary features were conceptualizing the documentary in the Soviet Union, the American Robert Flaherty was developing his own take on the documentary in the West. Beginning in the 1920s and continuing well on into the 1940s, Flaherty filmed extensive footage of local people in “exotic” places. He employed nonprofessional local actors as documentary subjects and devised narratives based on their traditional lifestyles and customs, resulting in films that combined some authentic and valuable ethnographic documentary material with fiction. Flaherty had his subjects act out entire scenes, which were sometimes anachronistic in content, for the benefit of the film and for the Western audiences who were fascinated by these exotic traditions. His most famous works are *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Moana* (1926), the latter being the one that inspired John Grierson to describe it as a “documentary”, the first time the word was used in regards to film. Although Flaherty’s style is exactly what ICAIC and its filmmakers wanted to avoid, given that they were firmly against the inaccurate and exoticizing way that U.S. cinema so often portrayed Cuba and other Latin American countries, his work influenced future documentary styles that developed in the West and presented a different take on the kind of truth a filmmaker should strive for in a documentary.

In the late 1920s and into the 1930s, Grierson was also making waves as a documentarian and grappling with some of the same ideas that colored the work of Vertov and Flaherty. His films were among the first social documentaries and the basis for the British Documentary Film

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Movement that aimed to educate citizens about the various benefits and disadvantages of democratic society and the plight of the poor. Grierson made a distinction between “a method which describes only the surface value of a subject, and [a] method which more explosively reveals the reality of it. You photograph the natural life, but you also, by your juxtaposition of detail, create an interpretation of it.”

“Juxtaposition of detail,” in other words, rearranging the footage so as to create context for the images, reveals Grierson to be closer to Vertov, and later on to Álvarez, in recognizing that a documentary’s contribution to the public should be an analysis, rather than a mere display, of reality. Unlike Vertov and Álvarez, Grierson was working in a capitalist, democratic context; perhaps his focus on "interpret[ing]" the conditions that led to social problems led him to see objectivity as a false ideal because a creator's political and emotional biases are inescapable.

ITALIAN NEOREALISM

Postwar Italian neorealism was an avant-garde movement that also blurred the boundary between fiction and documentary and had a significant influence on emerging Cuban cinema. Besides the fact that some of ICAIC's most renowned filmmakers trained at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, where they observed neorealism firsthand, Cuban filmmakers were partial to the movement because they noted similarities between Cuba and postwar Italy.1 After the destruction of World War II and during the recovery period that followed, poverty forced Italian filmmakers to make the most out of limited financial and technical resources. That, and the aspiration of a talented group of directors to move beyond commercial Italian cinematic norms, resulted in material that challenged the country's film


101 Recall the parallels between the Cuban and Italian cine club movements, mentioned in the footnotes of Chapter I.
establishment. Prior to this, Fascist Italian cinema had consisted mostly of films that were inspired by contemporary Hollywood genres and promoted fascist-approved conservative morals and behaviors. The neorealists abandoned these standards in favor of depicting the harsh reality that confronted citizens of a postwar, post-fascist nation struggling to rebuild itself. Polished and technologically sophisticated aesthetics, studios, and movie stars gave way to on-location filming with nonprofessional actors. Similarly, ICAIC filmmakers rebelled against the bourgeois reality of Hollywood aesthetics in order to portray the reality of Cuba’s underdevelopment, as experienced by ordinary Cubans. This was not a neutral or objective portrayal of reality, but a critical reflection that questioned (and thus prompted viewers to question) the structure of a national reality where so much hardship and poverty went unacknowledged by the elite. In both the Cuban and Italian contexts, the desire to show what life was like in the national reality, unfiltered by bourgeois notions of how life should be or escapist happy endings, was helped along by the urgent feeling many had that this reality needed to change.

The grittiness of neorealism, as well as the on-location shoots, nonprofessional actors, and 16mm film equipment, added a documentary-like touch to these fictional motion pictures. Neorealism’s influence can be seen in El Megano, which had a screenplay based around the punishing conditions of the lives of charcoal workers and featured actual charcoal workers in the film. It was more politically aware than what was typical of Italian neorealism and artfully exposed Cuban inequality and its effects on marginalized families, as well as the exploitation that workers suffered at the hands of landowners. Made in 1955, El Megano was a sign of the consciousness that would mark ICAIC’s fiction and nonfiction cinema, as well as the socially-minded documentary exposés of New Latin American Cinema, like Fernando Birri’s Tire dié and

Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva's *Los Chircales*. Neorealism’s influence on the Cuban film industry is evident in the first issue of ICAIC’s film journal, *Cine Cubano*, which includes an interview with neorealist screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, who advised Cuban filmmakers that, “Now it is necessary to make films about the Revolution, about its spirit, its message.”

FREE CINEMA, *P.M.*, "WORDS TO THE INTELLECTUALS"

Free Cinema, another postwar movement, was young British filmmakers’ rebellious response to feeling stifled by the economic and aesthetic standards of the British film industry. Like neorealism, Free Cinema "freed" itself from stars and studios in favor of unknown casts and on-location shoots in industrial neighborhoods, and the films centered on working-class themes and scenes of everyday life that went ignored in commercial cinema. The goal of nonfiction Free Cinema was to document authentic reality, on the premise that the filmed image could be taken for truth as long as it was footage of something real that the filmmaker had observed. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea discussed Free Cinema in a 1960 article for *Cine Cubano* (in the same issue that reported Free Cinema filmmaker Tony Richardson would be visiting Cuba) and commended it for placing authenticity above technical perfection, but reminded filmmakers and spectators alike that the plain fact of an individual artist behind the camera, with their own individual sensibilities and agendas, negated the possibility of a truly objective reality onscreen.

The most notable Cuban example of Free Cinema is Sabá Cabrera Infante’s controversial 1960 documentary, *P.M.*, made independently of ICAIC and originally shown on television. *P.M.* documents a section of Havana nightlife sans narration or captions, featuring mostly black

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103 In addition to Julio García Espinosa, future ICAIC members Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, José Massip, Alfredo Guevara, and Jorge Haydu worked on *El Megano*.
104 "Una entrevista con Cesare Zavattini" *Cine Cubano* 1, (1960): 41-2.
105 I was not able to access the *Cine Cubano* issue in question, this is a synopsis of Michael Chanan's description. Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, 186-188.
and mulatto Cubans, a demographic the Revolution claimed to have liberated from the vices promoted by capitalist imperialism. However, they are shown relaxing in an unrevolutionary manner by indulging in alcohol and sexually permissive behavior.\textsuperscript{106} Cabrera Infante attempted to get a theater exhibition license for \textit{P.M.}, but ICAIC confiscated the film and, in May 1961, decided that public exhibition would be delayed because it was "far from being a correct vision of Cuban existence in its present revolutionary phase," and Cuba's Commission for the Study and Classification of Films criticized it for "divert[ing] the attitude maintained by the Cuban people against the cunning attacks of counterrevolutionaries and the dictates of Yankee imperialism."\textsuperscript{107} Castro had just proclaimed the Revolution to be socialist and the U.S. had just tried and failed to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs on April 16, 1961 – a move the Cuban government had been anticipating since the Eisenhower administration had broken off diplomatic relations on January 1 of the same year. In these circumstances, \textit{P.M.} was perceived to be irreconcilable with the Revolution at a moment when its existence was in a precarious state, still consolidating and fending off external threats.\textsuperscript{108}

Cabrera Infante and his team were furious at what they saw as censorship and an attack on artistic freedom, provoking a debate that resulted in three cultural conferences in June 1961, culminating with Fidel’s landmark speech, “Words to the Intellectuals”, and his verdict, “Within the Revolution, everything. Against the Revolution, nothing.” Fidel’s speech acknowledged the rights of non-revolutionary artists to create, but maintained that the Revolution "has its right to exist, and no one shall oppose the right of the Revolution to exist" and that “no one can rightfully

\textsuperscript{107} Gordon-Nesbitt, \textit{To Defend the Revolution is to Defend Culture}, 153-4.
\textsuperscript{108} Chanan, \textit{Cuban Cinema}, 132-141.
claim a right against the Revolution [because it] signifies the interests of the entire nation.”

Neutral art that ignored the Revolution and art that pointed out contradictions in the Revolution, but was suggestive of how they could be resolved for the betterment of revolutionary society, was tolerable; however, art that showed unrevolutionary content and only served to diminish the Revolution — like *P.M.* — was unacceptable. Castro's critics interpreted the speech as a totalitarian attack on creative freedom, while his supporters considered it a defense of the Revolution, which helped artists through institutions like ICAIC that worked to eliminate economic obstacles to the creative process. Years later, Santiago Álvarez echoed his words:

> Our objectives as filmmakers are the objectives of the Revolution, what the Revolution asks of us. If we are responsible revolutionary artists, it is because we are part of the revolutionary process in our country – we are not on top of a mountain or in any ivory tower, we have a responsibility towards the revolutionary process because we are part of it.¹⁰⁰

Filmmaking had its role in the Revolution, but it was to be based around the betterment of Cuban society, which in socialist Cuba was defined as a steadfast progression towards revolutionary ideals, rather than the fulfillment of individual artistic aspirations that potentially infringed on the Revolution’s right to exist. The P.M. episode and Castro's guidelines make it clear that the revolutionary government took film and its impact on Cuba's revolutionary image very seriously, and that those ICAIC productions which were released, especially those submitted to international festivals, reflected and were in line with government policies.

CINÉMA VÉRITÉ AND DIRECT CINEMA

On the heels of Free Cinema, and around the same years as the Cuban Revolution, the cinéma vérité and direct cinema movements sprang up in Europe and North America,

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¹⁰¹ Álvarez, “‘5 Frames Are 5 Frames, Not 6, But 5’: An Interview with Santiago Álvarez,” 18.
respectively. Both owed their development to technological advancements, such as portable tape recorders and 16mm cameras that were light enough to be carried around, which facilitated filming in difficult locations and capturing in-the-moment footage of the documentary subject. In 1960, Jean Rouch originated the movement with *Chronique d’un été’* (Chronicle of a Summer), subtitled “cinéma vérité”, meant to be a translation of Dziga Vertov’s term “kino pravda”, or "truth cinema." The documentary features Paris’ Latin Quarter intellectuals, including Régis Debray, who would go on to teach philosophy at the University of Havana and, in 1967, would be captured in Bolivia for working with Che Guevara. Unlike their Soviet namesake, Rouch and his ilk were compelled by *immediate* reality and considered any extensive interference with the resulting footage an interference with the essence of said reality. Documentarians were encouraged to openly participate in their films by directing and interacting with their film subjects on camera because a documentary that openly acknowledged a filmmaker's presence and direction was closer to actual reality.111 Cinéma vérité’s U.S. counterpart, direct cinema, also focused on documenting authentic reality and similarly believed that the more immediate the footage, the more accurate and truthful the onscreen image. Unlike cinéma vérité, direct cinema prescribed that documentarians should be passive observers and refrain from interacting with and directing subjects' actions and conversations. These filmmakers also championed minimal editing because they believed that it interfered with the material's truth. In 1961, Richard Leacock (a communist member of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee) and Albert Maysles, proponents of direct cinema, traveled to Cuba to film footage for *Yanki No!*, an ABC documentary about how Latin Americans viewed the United States. While the footage may have shown the direct, *immediate* reality of the Revolution, Leacock and Maysles had to concede to an

anti-Castro commentary that was not in line with their communist views in order for the film to air on television, exemplifying that immediacy alone is often insufficient for communicating the filmmaker’s version of reality.\textsuperscript{112}

### CHRIS MARKER, JORIS IVENS AND COMBAT CINEMATOGRAPHY

Two foreign filmmakers who forged genuine artistic bonds with ICAIC were Chris Marker from France and Joris Ivens from the Netherlands. Both were film essayists who avoided the nonintervention style of cinéma vérité and direct cinema. In 1961 — the same year that Leacock and Maysles shot footage for \textit{Yanki No!} — Marker filmed what many Cubans at the time regarded as the most honest portrayal of their Revolution, \textit{Cuba Sí!}, which includes interviews with Castro and calls out the U.S. on its Cuba policy.\textsuperscript{113} Ivens, a major player of the early Dutch film industry, was a fervent believer of film’s humanitarian potential and shot much of his work in war-torn countries in support of revolutionary liberation movements. In 1960, he was invited to Cuba to film a documentary about the Revolution and ended up making two. \textit{Carnet de viaje} (\textit{Traveller's Notebook}) presents the progressive changes in education, culture, and healthcare initiated by the Revolution, and everyday people mobilizing around these efforts. The second film, \textit{Cuba pueblo armado} (\textit{An Armed People}), personally requested by Fidel Castro, features the People’s Militia in an armed struggle against counterrevolutionaries.\textsuperscript{114}

In 1961, Ivens returned to Cuba to serve as an ICAIC advisor. At the time, the Cuban government was on alert about a U.S. invasion and Castro realized that such an event would be an invaluable opportunity for a visual record of U.S. aggression towards the Revolution. Castro personally approached Ivens to provide emergency film training for around fifty members of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[112] Chanan, \textit{Cuban Cinema}, 193.
\item[113] Ibid.
\item[114] Ibid., 197.
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guerrilla Rebel Army. In a secured hacienda and lacking vital equipment, Ivens spent two months training his students in combat cinematography. A carpenter among them used an old Eyemo camera as a prototype to make twenty-five wooden camera models. The students used these to “film” imaginary footage, which they described to the class. Besides laying the foundation for strong ties between ICAIC and the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces, Ivens' lessons are remarkable because they gave the military a say in the construction of Cuba's national image. Military cameramen filmed through combat and captured authentic footage of interventions abroad and invasion attempts at home, which was then made available to ICAIC for the onscreen projection of Cuba's military power. Over the next two decades, ICAIC documentarians created and projected images of a successful revolution that, in solidarity with all oppressed people, would go out of its way to fight against imperialism and underdevelopment at home and in the rest of the Third World.

115 Ibid.
117 Unlike contemporary embedded journalism, which has drawn criticism for putting reporters in danger and making them too dependent on the military for access this did not involve cameramen accompanying the military during conflicts. Ivens was asked to train the Rebel Army so that, if necessary, military personnel could film during armed conflict.
CHAPTER III: THE 1960s: MILITANTS AND CULTURAL GUERRILLAS

ICAIC is not just a cultural institution, but also a government-subsidized industry that represents the world onscreen in a manner loyal to the ideology of the Cuban Revolution. It makes sense then that ICAIC documentaries are reflective of the Cuban government's ideas and policies from the period in which they were made. The 1960s were a crucial time because the Cuban government was compelled to prove that the Revolution could survive and persist against the military and economic threats of the United States, and that it could be a vanguard for other revolutions in the Third World. Cuba was also interested in conciliating the Soviet Union and China in order to maintain a strong and united socialist camp that would safeguard revolutionary movements in smaller nations. ICAIC’s militant documentary films, particularly the work of Santiago Álvarez, reflected Cuban foreign policy by responding to U.S. hostility and demonstrating solidarity with nationalist Third World armed struggles to overthrow imperialism. Critical events like the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, and emblematic figures like Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh, became film subjects that made visible Cuba’s international alliances and motivations. Both in content and production, ICAIC’s 1960s documentaries reinforced the idea that revolution and solidarity could overcome imperialism.

CONFRONTING THE UNITED STATES

While most of these documentaries use minimal narration, their viewpoints are explicit and their ideologies overt, which Álvarez has defended by defining "objectivity" in documentary as a “false pretext that is used to fool people.”\(^{118}\) In the 1960s, Cuba had to contend with counterrevolutionaries and North American economic interests who were actively trying to undermine the Revolution, and the mood was anything but objective. Of the period, Álvarez later

noted, “You must remember that from the very beginning our revolution was menaced and blockaded and because of that state of constant aggression, constant war, our cinema had to be consistent with that reality. We couldn’t make films that didn’t deal with that reality, that situation we lived in.”¹¹⁹ The situation in 1961 was that tensions between Cuba and the U.S. had been running high and the Cubans correctly feared a U.S. invasion. CIA planning for Playa Girón and the assembly of an army of Cuban exiles had started by March 17, 1960.¹²⁰ That October, responding to Castro’s nationalization of U.S. properties, President Dwight D. Eisenhower declared a U.S. economic embargo on Cuba and, in January 1961, Eisenhower severed diplomatic relations with the island. After the U.S. succeeded in persuading the Rio Treaty states to condemn the Revolution, Castro outlined his global vision in a landmark speech in support of Revolution in the Americas and beyond, stating that it was “the duty of oppressed and exploited nations to fight for their liberation; the duty of each nation to make common cause with all the oppressed, colonized, exploited or attacked peoples, regardless of their location in the world or the geographical distance that may separate them.”¹²¹ His words express the importance of internationalism to maintaining Cuba’s independence from the very real threat of a stronger, larger, wealthier, and better-equipped neighbor to the North. Cooperation with other nations offered the Revolution security and legitimacy, which could make it more difficult for the U.S. to justify its hostility, while the export of revolution could divert U.S. attention from Cuba and split it between many movements at once, giving each revolution better odds of success.

On April 15, 1961, U.S. B-26 bombers raided Cuban airfields and, on April 17, the CIA’s

¹¹⁹ Álvarez, “5 Frames are 5 Frames, Not 6, But 5” 18.
¹²⁰ Chomsky, A History of the Cuban Revolution, 77.
mercenaries landed at Playa Girón, only to be crushed by the Cuban militias and the Revolutionary Armed Forces within three days. Having known that an invasion was on the way, Castro had just announced that the Cuban Revolution was socialist, moving Cuba definitively towards the Soviet Union and the socialist camp. Awareness of the invasion had also prepared ICAIC for the opportunity to film the attack and expose U.S. belligerence. In the end, they were able to film something even more significant for the Revolution — Cuba’s defeat of the United States. Describing the experience, ICAIC director Alfredo Guevara wrote, “When President Kennedy financed and sponsored…the aggression against Cuba in April of last year, our cameramen and directors, the technicians and executives of ICAIC, we became militias, our cameras accompanying the armed people in the defense of our country, and in the midst of bullets emerged a documentary that will be eternal: Muerte al invasor.” Guevara’s likening of the film crew to a militia says something about the sacrifice and risk involved in obtaining this footage and equates filmmaking with combat, which casts the finished product as a visualization of both a cultural and a military victory. On the ideological front, capturing and exposing the truth about the invasion was as essential to a defense of the regime as armed militias. It empowered Cuba to project its own version of events so as to garner support from those who sympathized with its predicament. Beyond that, the film projected Cuban strength and independence and served as a warning against any future attacks on the Revolution.

Muerte al invasor (Death to the Invader), produced by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Santiago Álvarez, only fifteen minutes in length and released in 1962, was indicative of the success that would follow for Álvarez and ICAIC’s documentary productions, as well as of the cultural diplomacy and solidarity that revolutionary Cuba was capable of achieving through

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cinema. The film begins with a Cuban family mourning a relative killed in the April 15 airport bombings, followed by the camera panning over more mourning families, hospitalized victims, and dead bodies. Then begin scenes of actual combat: planes dropping bombs, soldiers shooting at the enemy and operating tanks, soldiers being carried away on stretchers, and cannons being set off. Music typical of U.S. Western-genre movies plays over the footage of the defeated mercenaries marching in surrender, hands on their heads. Shot down U.S. planes are discovered to have false Cuban insignias. The narrator announces, “In less than 72-hours, the armed people crushed the mercenaries’ invasion attempt…Playa Girón: where North American imperialism suffered its first defeat in Latin America.” An image of dead exiles on the shore is followed by footage of Cuban militia waving their weapons in the air before a roaring crowd in Havana.123

_Muerte al invasor_ was one of the films selected to represent Cuba at the 1962 International Leipzig Documentary and Short Film Festival in the German Democratic Republic. José Lopez, a cameraman from the Cuban delegation in Leipzig, recounted, “The Cuban documentaries had a great reception, and there was a noticeable, powerful emotional impact on the audience, especially with _Muerte al invasor._”124 By proclaiming the victory of the Cuban people over the capitalist superpower, the film connected with the other socialist countries that had sent delegations to Leipzig and forged cultural ties between spectators who, although sharing the same ideology as Cuba, belonged to different cultural and political contexts.

A notable moment from Leipzig was the discourse between the Algerian and Cuban delegations. Algerian documentary filmmaker Lakhdar Hamina told the Cubans he was

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interested in screening *Muerte al invasor* for Algeria's National Liberation Front.\textsuperscript{125} Julio Simoneau, another Cuban cameraman in Leipzig, informed ICAIC that he was very impressed by Algeria’s documentaries and that the two delegations were planning on exchanging each other’s work.\textsuperscript{126} This was especially significant because it signaled the growth of Cuban and Algerian relations in the coming year. The Cuban government sympathized with Algeria's struggle for independence from France, which they saw as not unlike their own struggle for political and economic independence, and they admired Algeria’s first president Ahmed Ben Bella, who made the grand symbolic gesture of visiting Cuba during the Missile Crisis despite President John F. Kennedy’s appeals to him not to do so. In 1963, Cuba sent a contingent of medical volunteers to Algeria — its first of many such ventures — and, in October of that year, sent volunteer fighters, tanks, and weapons to assist Algeria against Morocco in the Sands War. While the volunteers returned to Cuba, the military equipment was gifted to Algeria. This was Cuba’s first intervention in Africa and, in subsequent years, Algeria was often the middleman between Cuba and the Latin American countries that had cut off diplomacy with the island.\textsuperscript{127} Documentary film seems to have bolstered the alliance between these countries as works like *Muerte al invasor* showed them to have a common enemy, imperialism, and a common interest, the overthrow of imperialism in the Third World.

Cuba also confronted the U.S. by exposing the dissonance between its professed ideals and its reality, the most glaring example of this being racism. In 1965, Álvarez produced one of his most popular and critically acclaimed newsreels, *Now*. At a brief six minutes, this commentary on the racist treatment of African Americans moved audiences in Cuba and at

\textsuperscript{126} Amelia Iglesias, “Entrevista con los camarógrafos cubanos”\textsuperscript{45}.
international film festivals, and efforts were even made to screen it in the U.S.\textsuperscript{128} The opening credits, played over a photo of a conference between Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Lyndon B. Johnson, list the cast as “North American Blacks and Police.” The sole narration is Lena Horne’s song “Now” (the lyrics are also shown in Spanish subtitles), which was banned in the U.S. for fear that its lyrics, which called on activists to mobilize for civil rights now, would encourage black listeners to riot. After some photos of civil rights activists, the screen fills with a close-up of a black face and the head of Abraham Lincoln appears in each of the pupils. The face fades, while the two heads merge together and the Lincoln Memorial appears onscreen. The rest of the newsreel is a montage of photos and video footage of U.S. civil rights protests, showing both black and white participants, and the violent reaction of U.S. law enforcement. The images are arranged to fit the music; the camera pans over the photos and zooms in and out according to the rhythm of the song. At the end, a series of shots fire and bullet holes form the word “NOW!” onscreen.\textsuperscript{129} The use of American music and visual material gave Álvarez’s message a touch of irony that was only amplified by including the gaze of the U.S. president who took a giant step towards racial equality by ending slavery. This also implied a decline in U.S. leadership by suggesting that Lincoln would have been disappointed by the lack of civil rights for African Americans, which created common ground between them and Cubans, who also suffered from the policies of the U.S. government. Álvarez's use of images of both black and white activists reinforced this vision of solidarity against the U.S. government by showing that even those U.S. citizens who held a privileged position in their society had misgivings about their government's

\textsuperscript{128} “American Documentary Films attempted to import both the Cuban [\textit{Now} and films on Indochina] and the East German films; both attempts ended in seizures by US customs.” Erik Barnouw, \textit{Documentary: A History of the Nonfiction Film} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 275.

actions. The frenetic energy, the editing paced to the rhythm of the soundtrack, and the (lack of) length impressed upon viewers the urgency for action and mirrored the dynamic and mobilizing atmosphere of ICAIC's early years. *Now* visualized what many in the socialist camp identified as U.S. hypocrisy: condemning revolutionary regimes for their curtailment of freedom and human rights, while not respecting those rights within its own borders.

In an issue featuring Lena Horne on the cover, *Cine Cubano* announced that *Now* had won the first place Golden Dove at the 1965 Leipzig Festival, making it the second consecutive year that Álvarez had won the award for Cuba and ICAIC. It also won first place or special jury prizes at film festivals in Chile, Ireland, Italy, and Spain — countries that did not belong to the socialist camp and were not unfriendly with the U.S. Evidently, interest in Cuban cinema surpassed ideological borders and, at least in the film and leftwing communities, audiences were receptive towards the work. Ugo Casiraghi, the famed Italian critic, praised the short as having “a construction of 'fantasy' that doesn’t obey the construction of the documentary film.” Cuban documentaries were finding acclaim abroad based on their originality and artistic merit, not simply their ideology. Yet, a work as polemical as *Now* could not have attracted this much positive attention without opening conversation about the topic it covered.

Making the short was Álvarez's act of solidarity with victims of U.S. racism. The footage he used in *Now* was sneaked to him by American friends and he drew on his own experiences for inspiration. He had traveled to the U.S. in 1939 and worked as a dishwasher and in the mines in Pennsylvania and, some time later, had a brief stay at Columbia University.

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133 Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Nonfiction Film*, 124.
It was here in the United States that I started to become politically conscious and when I went back to Cuba I became a communist. American imperialism is the greatest promoter of communism in the world. In fact, it was my experiences here that form the roots of *Now*, my film against racial discrimination in the U.S....It all came back to me one day when I was listening to a song called “Now” sung by Lena Horne – it’s a melody based on an old Hebrew song by an anonymous author. When I started to work on the film at ICAIC, that background, that experience, helped me – I used all the hate I had felt against discrimination and brutality.134

In this response, made to an American magazine, Álvarez insinuated that Cuba was a much more egalitarian and progressive society regarding race than the United States. While colonialism and slavery had left a legacy of racial inequality in both countries, Cuba had banned racial discrimination and had been officially dedicated to overcoming racism since becoming independent.

It was not the first time that a Cuban figure had taken advantage of U.S. race relations and expressed solidarity with African Americans in a way that enhanced Cuba’s image. In 1960, Fidel Castro attended the United Nations and reacted to the negative treatment received by the Cuban delegation by moving the entourage to the Hotel Theresa in Harlem. Nikita Khrushchev, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Jawaharlal Nehru were among the politicians who visited Castro at the hotel, while Harlem residents enthusiastically came out to show their support. In his speech to the U.N., Castro compared Cuba to Algeria and the Congo, Mobutu Sese Seko to Batista, and condemned the West’s tolerance for the racist regime in South Africa.135 It was an effective way to boost Castro's image and, by extension, the Revolution. In the early 1960s, New York’s African American Congressman Adam Clayton Powell spoke favorably of Castro and “perceived [his] immense popularity with both African Americans and New York’s growing Latino

134 Álvarez, “5 Frames are 5 Frames, Not 6, But 5,” 17.
population.”

Manning Marable, who founded the Institute for Research in African American Studies, wrote, “No white political leader would ever come close to receiving this kind of approval from literally every sector of the African American community…Only Nelson Mandela of South Africa surpassed the moral authority and political credibility that Castro could claim within black America.” In his Second Declaration of Havana in 1962, Castro scrutinized the sincerity of Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress plan for Latin America by questioning the lack of progress in the U.S.:

And to the Black? What “alliance” can the system of lynching and brutal exclusion of the Black offer to the fifteen million Negroes and fourteen million mulattoes of Latin America, who know with horror and rage that their brothers in the North cannot ride in the same vehicles as their white compatriots, nor attend the same schools, nor even die in the same hospitals? How are these disenchanted racial groups going to believe in this imperialism, in its benefits in any “alliance” with it which is not for lynching and exploiting them as slaves?

Two years later, Che's speech before the U.N. compared the Cuban Revolution to Africa's fight against Western imperialism and neocolonialism. He encouraged "all free men...to avenge the crime committed in the Congo" and declared that "the Cuban delegation extends greetings to the peoples...oppressed by white colonialist minorities", eliciting a strong response from the black delegates at the General Assembly. After his U.N. appearance, Che embarked on a three-month tour of Africa to meet with nationalist heads of state and leaders of liberation movements, with the goal of "enlisting Ben-Bella's support for...a union of Third World nations...aimed at

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combating imperialism and colonialism.\textsuperscript{140} Che's and Castro's vision of Cuba as the co-leader of an international union based on a Third World identity indicates that they already perceived Cuba to be a global revolutionary vanguard and that they saw an independent Third World as the source of significant support for that role. Also telling is their focus on Africa, which signals a shift in Cuban foreign policy. By 1964, the Castro regime saw Africa as the best option for exporting revolution. Several Cuban attempts to influence Latin American politics had failed, while the African states were newly independent, or fighting for their independence, and susceptible to dramatic change.\textsuperscript{141} Further, Cuba's black population — more than most in the Western Hemisphere, with the exception of Brazil and Haiti — had retained elements of African culture, such as the Yoruba language and the worship of African deities.\textsuperscript{142} These existing connections formed the basis for solidarity between Cuba and black Africa. Actively reaching out to African nations and boasting a large Afro-Cuban population with an affinity to Africa gave Cuba a higher ground from which to rebuke the U.S. for the racist treatment of African Americans and for condoning neocolonialism in Africa.

In reality, while the Revolution was officially committed to eradicating racism and its reforms had improved the quality of life for many in the Afro-Cuban community, the situation was far more complex than what a side-by-side comparison with the U.S. revealed. Carlos Moore cites Castro's clamp down on overtly African religious ceremonies, African festivals, and black fraternity societies as indicative of a new era of revolutionary racism and alleges that the

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\textsuperscript{141} Gleijeses, \textit{Conflicting Missions}, 28.
\textsuperscript{142} This was largely due to the fact that Cuba abolished slavery relatively late, in 1886, and most of these slaves had been imported in the 19th century. Chomsky, \textit{A History of the Cuban Revolution}, 25.
\end{flushright}
race liberation rhetoric was a tool to promote the Revolution and to show up the United States.\textsuperscript{143} Regardless of motivation, the revolutionary government took advantage of the Black internationalism of the 1960s, which encompassed the Civil Rights Movement and African nationalist movements, to confront the U.S. and to show solidarity with African Americans and African nations and the circulation of a newsreel like \textit{Now} assisted these endeavors.

Álvarez took on the entirety of American political culture in \textit{LBJ}, released in 1968. It begins with photos of Lyndon Johnson’s daughter’s wedding interspersed with pornographic Playboy images. A graphic of a slot machine rolls the letters L, B, and J, before rolling three skulls. Cue to images of Johnson as a cowboy, and footage from a Western film of cowboys “heroically” approaching and massacring Native Americans. A photomontage of Johnson with Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy, and John F. Kennedy, reveals that the letters rolled by the slot machine are not only Johnson’s initials, but also correspond to the names of major American political figures who happen to be linked to Johnson. The rest of the film is divided into three chapters. Capítulo Jack shows portions of the president’s fatal appearance in Dallas and Johnson's swearing-in ceremony; Johnson is shown wearing a grandiose knight helmet, the satirical image that became the film’s poster. Capítulo Luther is a photomontage of black life and poverty in the U.S., prominent African American figures, like Malcolm X and King, and White Power rallies. Capítulo Bob focuses on the assassination of Robert Kennedy.\textsuperscript{144}

\textit{LBJ} satirizes the noble perception the U.S. superimposes on its leaders and the everyday violence inherent in imperialism. Casting Johnson in the role of cowboy — so iconic of America and the Western genre popularized by Hollywood — before showing the film footage which,

\textsuperscript{143} Carlos Moore, \textit{Castro, the Blacks, and Africa}, 98-101.
without any narration, implies that the cowboys were not brave frontiersmen, but murderers, is both a takedown of Johnson and a deconstruction of the United States’ projected image. Álvarez is not necessarily blaming Johnson for the murders of the chapters’ namesakes, but he is asserting that Johnson’s political career is the result of a system heavily dependent on violence.

The film shows that imperialism is not just the violence committed by strong countries against weak ones. Imperialism permeates to the point that these strong countries commit violence within their own borders, against their own citizens, against their own presidents. In Álvarez’ own words:

> It could be said that the American government is the director of these films. I just make selections of their photographs or movies, of their songs, of their actions. *LBJ* – an 18-minute documentary – is a montage, a brief synthesis of the violence in the United States. I began with the Westerns, the violence against the Indians, then against the Blacks, then against Vietnam. Through films, books, magazines, TV, Americans are made to believe that they are superior, it’s an education of violence and prejudice. *LBJ* (there’s a photograph from an American newspaper of “Johnson the Cowboy”) is a symbol of North America for the Third World. The violence develops in a straight, ascending line, and the apogee of this violence is the assassination of its President.  

*LBJ* kicked off the Cuban Film Festival, a weeklong ICAIC retrospective in London, in the summer of 1969. While Álvarez’s work may not have been distributed in the U.S., it was being screened and he was taking audience questions in a Western capitalist country that was also one of the United States’ closest allies. London’s National Film Theatre called the Cuban Film Festival the biggest box office draw of all of its international film series yet, and the lines were said to be stretching out of the theater. This is yet another example of how film festivals provided ICAIC with opportunities to present Cuban views to foreign audiences, without being restricted by politics or ideology.

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146 Ibid.
ICAIC, OSPAAAL, AND CUBA’S POSTER MOVEMENT

In the late 1960s, after the Revolutionary government had gained some stability and U.S. attention was increasingly occupied with Vietnam, Cuba was able to more freely act on its principles of Third World internationalism and solidarity. Castro declared 1966 the Year of Solidarity and, that same year, Havana hosted the Tricontinental Conference, which led to the founding of the Cuban non-governmental Organization of Solidarity of the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, with the purpose of fighting imperialism and promoting socialism and communism in the Third World. OSPAAAL was credited in many of ICAIC’s internationally filmed documentaries and it published a magazine, *Tricontinental*, that included solidarity-themed posters with many of its issues. Cuban poster production had already been flourishing as a way to market the new national film industry and ICAIC even had its own silkscreen workshop to print posters for its films.\(^\text{148}\) Posters proved to be a speedy and practical way to access an audience, especially in a country of Cuba’s size, and *Tricontinental* put the method to use on a global scale. Reaching eighty-seven countries, and printing posters in English, French, and Arabic, in addition to Spanish, it was the “most effective worldwide poster distribution system ever.” ICAIC posters also sold nationally and internationally and, considering the subject matter of the documentaries, many of them were complementary to the solidarity work being done by OSPAAAL.\(^\text{149}\) The posters were constructed in collage style with simple, often surreal, block color images that conveyed a film’s ideological message and matched the surreal photomontage of films like *LBJ* and *Now*. Their distinct style made them popular collectibles and their reproductions are still sold to tourists in Havana.\(^\text{150}\)

\(^{148}\) Lincoln Cushing, *¡Revolución! Cuban Poster Art* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003), 7.

\(^{149}\) Ibid., 10-11.

The year 1967 was dubbed the Year of Heroic Vietnam in the Cuban calendar. At the Tricontinental Conference in April, Che called on others to emulate the Cuban and Vietnamese examples: “America, a forgotten continent in the last liberation struggles, is now beginning to make itself heard through the Tricontinental and, in the voice of the vanguard of its peoples, the Cuban Revolution will today have a task of much greater relevance: creating a Second or a Third Vietnam, or the Second and Third Vietnam of the world.” Che's speech identified the Cuban Revolution with the entire Third World before an audience of African, Asian, and Latin American delegations. Cuba being a socialist country close to the Soviet Union, this invited others in the socialist camp to identify with the Third World and see its national struggles for independence and development as part of a larger struggle for revolution. It also hinted at an effort to create space for a Third World socialism that could negotiate with the Soviet Union on equal footing. The need for this became apparent after the Missile Crisis, when Premier Nikita Khrushchev's failure to consult with Castro over the withdrawal of the missiles revealed the Soviet Union to be more concerned with peaceful coexistence with the U.S. than with the Revolution's security.

The Year of Heroic Vietnam was also the year of Álvarez’s first trip to Asia, where he and his crew collected footage for what were to become two acclaimed documentaries, *Hanoi martes 13 (Hanoi, Tuesday the 13th)* and *La guerra olvidada (The Forgotten War)*. Upon his return, Álvarez spoke to *Cine Cubano* about the filming conditions and his vision for each of the projects, making readers privy to ICAIC's production methods abroad, which were as militant and political as they were artistic and creative. In order to accurately portray the Vietnamese and...
Laotian struggles, Álvarez and his cameramen captured both the ordinary moments of daily life and the urgency of living in a war zone, which they accomplished by continuing to film through unexpected periods of combat.

We had the “luck”…of arriving in Hanoi to be present and to film on Tuesday, the 13th of December, the first bombing of the city…It was 2:50 in the afternoon when the first bomb sounded. More than 200 North American airplanes carried out the bombardment of Hanoi. Above our heads, roared the engines of F-105s and “Phantoms”…In these moments, Hanoi’s sky was covered by thousands of black, smoking specks, indicating that Hanoi’s antiaircraft defense was precise and efficient. The 12 downed planes confirmed it. That day, the Yankees bombarded one of the most modest and populated neighborhoods…Iván Nápoles, our cameraman, captured nightmarish scenes of children searching for their parents and of parents searching for their children.152

These were not second-hand recollections gathered through interviews with Vietnamese, but moments observed firsthand by the Cuban filmmakers. As in Guevara’s description of filming Muerte al invasor, the crew became cultural guerrillas of sorts whose contribution lay in capturing the truth of the sacrifice and bravery of the guerrillas and workers against the military might of the Yankee imperialists. Álvarez's motivation for the film was clear:

[It] will be called Hanoi, martes 13 de diciembre. In it, I will reflect how a small country works and lives under bombardment, and that, in the end, it will win, of that we are certain. The Yankees can destroy thousands of roads, bridges, factories, houses…hours after the destruction, the Vietnamese will rebuild thousands of new roads, new bridges, new schools, and their rice fields will produce more rice than before. The help we can offer them will never be enough.153

Álvarez's praise for the Vietnamese communicates the fraternity and common ground that existed between these two countries, whose revolutions challenged the hegemony of the two superpowers, and expresses that this film was meant to be a testimony to the fact that it was possible to live, rebuild, and produce under bombardment as long as the people maintained their faith in their eventual victory. The film was not only promoting solidarity between two Third World revolutions, it was also reassuring the Cuban public that they too could endure U.S.

153 Ibid., 14.
aggression.

_Hanoi martes 13_, released in 1968, begins with a display of colorful Vietnamese art as a narrator recites some text from Jose Martí’s children’s book, _La edad de oro (The Golden Age)_ , about the Anamite people, their pride and accomplishments, and the French takeover of their land. The inclusion of Martí — Cuba's revered internationally-minded independence leader who, in the 1890s, had called for Latin American solidarity in the face of U.S. imperialism — casts solidarity with Vietnam as a natural progression of Cuban internationalism. Álvarez switches to contemporary Vietnam, where workers collaborate on fishing and farming and spend time with their families. Abruptly, American planes are seen flying overhead, prompting the Vietnamese to stop working and grab their weapons. The text “We turn hate into energy” appears several times, intercut with more footage of workers digging large holes while others are seen making large, hollow, concrete cylinders and inserting them into the ground — they are building makeshift bomb shelters. These visuals of preparation and defense are juxtaposed with visuals of battle. A montage of burned and disfigured Vietnamese children, dead bodies, American prisoners-of-war, and coffins draped in American flags ends with a striking portrait of Lyndon Johnson, with a cut-out photo of coffins in place of a forehead. The documentary concludes with the colorful art seen in the beginning and the end of Martí’s text: “The poor Anamites fought and returned to fight.” Again, Martí lends authority to Cuba’s contemporary support for Vietnam. The end credits thanking the newsreel and documentary studios of Hanoi for their collaboration evince that the Vietnamese were included in the production as more than just the subjects of the documentary, which speaks for an effort on ICAIC’s part to give other nations control over their

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own image.\textsuperscript{155}

\textit{Hanoi martes 13} won the Golden Dove at the 1967 Leipzig Festival and the Cuban delegation received many requests for copies of the documentary from spectators interested in distributing it in their own countries. Afterwards, ICAIC received cables from critics and filmmakers about their support for the work of Santiago Álvarez from places as varied and as far from the socialist camp as Sweden, Japan, and even the United States.\textsuperscript{156} Most likely, the favorable reaction stemmed from backlash against the Vietnam War as much as from admiration for the film. Either way, this is a testament to the exposure and cultural exchange that film festivals offered. In addition to screening and swapping projects with colleagues, filmmakers also created personal and professional bonds that could potentially raise awareness for each other’s projects outside of and after a festival. For films like Álvarez’s, festivals were also a chance to broadcast the everyday struggles of common people in the Third World and to project Cuba’s intention to combat the system that perpetuated these struggles.

Álvarez’s words to \textit{Cine Cubano} about Laos are an interesting example of how intertwined film and politics were at ICAIC. Readers of the official film journal could flip through the pages of an issue expecting to be informed about geopolitical issues just as much as they were about new fiction productions or famous European actors:

I want to clarify that the war currently being fought in Neo-Lao-Haksat is unknown, or unknown far from Indochina, even in Cuba…North American imperialism, using the most refined methods of modern warfare, has for months been systematically bombarding the liberated zones of Laos, morning, day, and night, without a break…Its people have been forced to move to the caves of the mountains. Hospitals, schools, workshops, everything is found in the caves…The people of Laos, like those of Viet-Nam…will triumph in spite of the soothsayers who have no faith in the fight of the underdeveloped and small countries.\textsuperscript{157}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{157}Manet, “De Hanoi a Haksat,” 16-17.
\end{itemize}
Like his thoughts on Vietnam, this commentary reinforced the victory of all underdeveloped countries and, by extension, Cuba, just as much as it expressed support for Laos.

*La guerra olvidada* begins with a sequence of notable events from Laos’ fight for independence, including footage of battles and explosions. A narrator announces that, “In the liberated zone of Laos, opium was prohibited, hooliganism was banned, women were given the same rights as men,” implying that revolutionary leadership had overcome the trappings that imperialist exploitation had imposed on the country. A brief recording shows Castro announcing that the U.S. is bombing Laos as well as Vietnam. The rest of the film consists of footage from Álvarez’s trip, alternating between scenes of war and the goings-on inside caves where Laotians took sanctuary. The war imagery is familiar (planes dropping bombs, mushroom cloud explosions) but the cave segments, which Álvarez touched on in his interview, are remarkable. In the caves, Laotians are seen watching film projections, forming reading circles, printing newspapers, making speeches, and discussing military matters by lantern and chalkboard. A makeshift cave hospital has been set up — doctors perform procedures and visit patients, a woman gives birth and the newborn squirms while being cleaned up.158 Viewers understand that the Laotians’ resourcefulness will see to it that the next generation lives on to fight for the country’s independence. The image of life emerging in this center of resistance, and the projection of this image at festivals in front of foreign audiences who may not even have been aware of this war, was a powerful way for Álvarez and ICAIC to publicize the crimes against Laos.

Two more documentaries about guerrilla struggle were Julio García Espinosa’s *Tercer mundo, tercera guerra mundial* (*Third World, Third World War*) and José Massip’s *Madina Boe*.

The directors, who filmed in Vietnam and Guinea, respectively, wrote about their experiences for *Cine Cubano*. *Tercer mundo, tercera guerra mundial* (1970), filmed at the very end of the 1960s, shows the destruction that the U.S. was inflicting on Vietnam and presents the war as one of the greatest resistance movements in modern history. García Espinosa’s account illustrates how film relations between Cuba and Vietnam developed over the years that saw the success of ICAIC’s documentary work:

> The President of the War Crimes Commission, who is also the President of the Supreme Court of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, comrade Fan-Van Back, extended an invitation to Cuba, proposing that a group of Cuban filmmakers make a film about the genocide that the Yankees are committing in Vietnam…It was a great honor to be offered this possibility to visit Vietnam and it has been a duty to film and denounce the genocide that the North Americans are committing, systematically and unrelentingly. The Vietnamese comrades made it possible for us to see places never before visited by foreign film delegations. We are very grateful for all of the attention and accommodation we had throughout our work process.\(^{159}\)

Presumably, previous ICAIC productions that showed Cuba's strong solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle, and gave that struggle a platform before international audiences, encouraged the Vietnamese to invite ICAIC to film their liberation movement. Based on García Espinosa’s experience, it appears that the Vietnamese had considerably more trust in ICAIC than in other foreign filmmakers who came to document the war, and that they were active collaborators in the production of *Tercer mundo, tercera guerra mundial*.

*Madina Boe* (1968), directed by José Massip, focuses on the revolutionary struggle in Portuguese Guinea. The setting alternates between a guerrilla camp and a guerrilla hospital that exemplify the collaboration and resourcefulness of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). At the hospital, the presence of a white Portuguese doctor on staff serves to remind viewers that governments do not necessarily speak for their citizens and that the Third World has allies even in the countries whose policies keep it underdeveloped.

Massip pays tribute to the cultural and spiritual traditions of Guinea (which would have resonated with those Afro-Cubans who still practiced their ancestral customs) by presenting the rituals that the guerrillas performed before battle, and closes the documentary with the guerrillas going off to fight. Prior to the release of the film, Massip described his experience of filming in Portuguese Guinea and of becoming invested in a heretofore-unfamiliar cause:

You can lose your life. We have heard it from the mouths of veterans of Boe, we have seen it in the torn apart bodies in the hospital at Boké…I have felt it…remembering that night at ICAIC, in 1967, after the Tricontinental…Amílcar [Cabral] and his poetic passion bringing to light his country and its fight, when so-called Portuguese Guinea was still not much more to me than an extravagant name and I never dreamed that its soil would be under my feet.\textsuperscript{160}

The filming process was yet another example of an ICAIC crew actively engaging in the risks of another nation’s fight for independence. Filming through combat necessitated that the film crew be integrated with the column and included in battle plans, which were likely to fall apart in the heat of the moment:

Our plan was simple: to find, as soon as possible…the location from which to film the attack; to commence filming as soon as the first shot was heard; to withdraw before the last; to meet again at the medic’s camp with the rest of the column…For his part, Bari [a PAIGC member] had given an emphatic order that would not be followed: nobody should shoot from the hill where filming would end…the heavy Burunova machine guns, installed near the side of the hill, would open fire only in the case of the enemy finding us, thus ensuring our withdrawal.\textsuperscript{161}

If observing the guerrillas firsthand allowed Massip to identify with a conflict on another continent, seeing them on screen prompted viewers to do the same. Bridging distances with newfound understanding laid the groundwork for Cuban public support for movements like the PAIGC, which represented an important advantage to a revolutionary government with ambitions to devote a significant part of its foreign policy to the Third World.

Through these productions, Cuba was acquiring legitimacy in regards to its ability to


\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 80.
realistically and effectively portray the people and armed forces behind Third World liberation movements. When the city of Tashkent celebrated its first Film Festival of Asia and Africa, “[t]here was the name of a country, neither African nor Asian, yet [which] has made an African film: Madina Boe on so-called ‘Portuguese’ Guinea; and two Asian films: Hanoi, martes 13 on Vietnam and La guerra olvidada on Laos.”¹⁶² The revolutionary Third World internationalism asserted by the Cuban government's rhetoric and policies was bolstered by cultural initiatives like documentary filmmaking and the screening of Cuban films at international festivals. For the guerrillas of these liberation movements, seeing themselves in a foreign production and knowing that others in faraway parts of the world were watching their struggles must have been an invaluable boost to morale, in the same way that media exposure had encouraged the Cubans in the Sierra Maestra.

**EULOGIES FOR HO CHI MINH AND CHE GUEVARA**

Themes of Third World solidarity and internationalism were expressed in two widely admired eulogies by Santiago Álvarez, 79 Primaveras (79 Springs, 1969) and Hasta la victoria siempre (Until Victory, Always!, 1967). These documentaries drew on the idealization of their subjects, Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara, two men whose governance and revolutionary zeal had made them emblematic of communist and socialist revolution and Third World independence. As guerrilla leaders and political figures, they embodied the sacrifice, tenacity, and convictions that were essential to successful revolution, and the projection of their images doubled as the projection of revolutionary victory.

79 Primaveras documents the life of Ho Chi Minh (who died at age 79). The opening credits announce that the film studios in Hanoi cooperated with ICAIC and supplied the archival

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footage for the film; this includes clips of Ho putting on sandals, writing, and speaking to his people, as well as significant moments in his political life, such as the founding of the Vietnamese Communist Party and the Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu. Footage of a Cuban singer performing in front of clapping Vietnamese children is juxtaposed with a sequence of the Vietnamese in battle, mushroom clouds, and photos of burned Vietnamese children, which ends with the caption, “They began to kill in order to win.” After a clip of American soldiers holding a Vietnamese by the hair and beating him with a rifle, another caption reads, “And now they kill because they cannot win.” Segments of anti-war protests in the United States are followed by footage of U.S. soldiers taking souvenir photos with their Vietnamese victims. Footage of Ho's funeral shows bawling Vietnamese children and many world leaders, including Castro, among the mourners. After images of American protestors burning flags and draft cards, captions read: “Don’t let disunity in the socialist camp darken the future! We will build a homeland ten times more beautiful.”163

In addition to expressing admiration for Vietnam and condemning U.S. aggression, 79 Primaveras visualized the international bonds of socialism (Cuban singers in Vietnam, world leaders paying respects to Ho Chi Minh) and called for the protection of those bonds from disagreements from within. The divergences between the Soviet Union and China threatened to be consequential for the independence and survival of the smaller socialist countries and Cuba, being only 90 miles away from the United States, was wary of the possibilities of a weakened and divided socialist camp. Che’s speech at the 1967 Tricontinental Conference in Havana called out the Sino-Soviet split and explicitly stated that the two countries should feel guilty about what

their rivalry could mean for the ongoing conflict in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{164} As Arne Westad explains, Chairman Mao Zedong’s example gave other Third World leaders the confidence to present and defend visions of socialism and communism that differed from the Soviet Union’s, and it presented opportunities to play the major communist powers off of each other when asking for aid.\textsuperscript{165} However, Maoism accused Khrushchev of “social imperialism” and gave the Chinese an incentive to negotiate with the U.S. in a manner that could impede national liberation movements that were heavily reliant on the Soviet Union. Such accusations and fragmentations risked dividing the radical Third World not only on a regional and national level, but also within individual communist and socialist parties.\textsuperscript{166} These divisions would only make it easier for the U.S. to exploit power struggles in its own favor.\textsuperscript{167} While these ideas were not enunciated in \textit{79 Primaveras}, which like most of Álvarez’s documentaries lacked narration, the figure of Ho Chi Minh, whose movement inspired international solidarity and whose country was so symbolic of the suffering inflicted by modern imperialism, lent extra significance to the call for socialist unity made at the end of the film.

\textit{Hasta la victoria siempre} was impressively made in less than forty-eight hours after Castro personally requested that Álvarez compose a visual accompaniment to his eulogy for Che Guevara. Projected for the first time on October 18, 1967, on a massive screen in front of hundreds of thousands at the Plaza de la Revolución in Havana, it begins with a montage of

\textsuperscript{164} “And the guilt also applies to those who maintain a war of abuse and snares – started quite some time ago by the representatives of the two greatest powers of the socialist camp.” Guevara, “Message to the Tricontinental.”
\textsuperscript{165} Odd Arne Westad, \textit{The Gobal Cold War} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 158.
\textsuperscript{166} This became a problem during the 1965 Cuban intervention in the Congo. Che’s column, obviously allied with the Soviets, had to contend with pro-Chinese guerrillas. Moore, \textit{Castro the Blacks, and Africa}, 154.
poverty, rough labor, and underdevelopment in Latin America, particularly in Bolivia, where Che had just been killed and where, years before, he had become politically conscious.\footnote{José Massip, “Che en el cine,” \textit{Cine Cubano} 47, (1967): 5.}

Segments show Che immersed in the activity of Cuban workers and in the Sierra Maestra with Castro and other guerrillas, followed by recent newspaper headlines announcing the presence of guerrillas in Bolivia. Che's 1964 speech at the U.N., which condemned imperialism and mentioned Algeria, Vietnam, Laos, and the Congo, plays over photos of Latin American political demonstrations. His speech at the 1965 Non-Aligned Conference is also shown. “Marcha del Guerrillero” plays over more footage of Che and brings the documentary to an end.\footnote{“Santiago Alvarez - Hasta la victoria siempre (1967),” YouTube video, 19:21, posted by "Matias Nicolas Holgado," October 8, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bqaz08RX6_4.}

By the time of his death, Che had become a symbol of internationalism and revolution. Born in Argentina, he embarked on a tour of South America as a young man and was deeply affected by the poverty he witnessed. Eager to fight imperialism and neocolonialism, he moved to Guatemala to support the progressive government of President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán and witnessed its overthrow by a CIA-sponsored coup. Che then fled to Mexico, where he met Fidel and Raúl Castro, and decided to join their 26th of July Movement to topple Batista. As a member of the revolutionary government, Che served as president of the Cuban National Bank and as Cuba's Minister for Industry and he represented Cuba on tours of Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe, and at the United Nations. In his writing, Che developed his philosophy of "the new man" who was driven by morality and altruism rather than material incentives. His adventurism and devotion to the revolutionary cause inspired him to lead clandestine military interventions with guerrillas in the Congo and in Bolivia; both were failures and the second led to his death, which resonated with the many who saw him as a crusader for the world's exploited people. In a
piece about the film, José Massip cited a *Newsweek* article describing Che as the person most admired by U.S. students, many of whom held vigils and hung “CHE VIVE” (CHE LIVES) posters around university campuses the day after his death. Prompted by the sudden loss of Che and emphasizing the heroic circumstances of his death, *Hasta la victoria siempre* elicited an emotional response from the thousands watching its first projection at the Plaza. This highly charged moment of mourning must have had a unifying effect on Cuban viewers, while raising awareness for Che and the Revolution's ventures abroad from those who saw it at international film festivals.

The films described above maintained the success of the Cuban Revolution, while also promoting the internationalism and solidarity that the government saw as central to its long-term independence, especially after the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Cuba ridiculed the U.S. as the hegemon neighbor to the North that spouted empty rhetoric about freedom and democracy while it exploited and bombarded smaller, weaker nations and blatantly disregarded its ideals within its own borders by denying African Americans their civil rights. Documentaries and newsreels shattered the idealized image the U.S. promoted of itself, the image that Hollywood projected around the world and which had been the main source of Cuban cinematic entertainment for decades preceding the Revolution. While the Soviet Union became the new hegemon that seemed to ensure Cuba’s survival, the Missile Crisis signaled that Cuban foreign policy could not rely solely on this relationship. The Third World offered Cuba the opportunity to export and defend revolution beyond its borders, to foster international solidarity against imperialism, to lessen the U.S. military threat by forcing it to contend with more radical Third World governments, and to form alliances that lessened Cuba's dependence on the Soviet Union.

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170 Massip, “Che en el cine,” 8.
Some of these films' productions made ICAIC crews temporary, but genuine, participants in the struggles they documented. ICAIC actively performed solidarity with these movements during filming, then raised awareness for them by projecting the films in Cuban theaters and at international film festivals. In the process, ICAIC cultivated an image of Cuba as the revolutionary vanguard that stood up to the United States and stood in solidarity with the Third World.
CHAPTER IV: THE 1970s: A HUMANITARIAN THIRD WORLD POWER

In the 1970s, ICAIC documentary productions continued to depict Cuba as a vanguard in solidarity with the socialist camp and the Third World, while also reflecting how that role adapted to Cuban foreign policy developments. If the 1960s were characterized by militant idealism, the 1970s were about taking practical measures towards much-needed stability. Although the revolutionary government had become established and its reforms had generated a class of skilled professionals as well as the growth of the Armed Forces, its economic mismanagement raised questions about how to continue to finance the Revolution. In 1970, Castro set a national goal for a 10-million-ton sugar harvest, hoping that collective volunteer effort and popular participation would resolve the Revolution's economic problems. The harvest fell just short of the goal and pushed the government towards Soviet-style bureaucracy and economic administration. Joshua Malitsky observes that this sort of slowdown is symptomatic of a consolidated revolution and leads filmmakers to see "the dialogue, the everyday, the banal detail." Malitsky adds that the changes in the documentary work at ICAIC in the 1970s are comparable to those that occurred in Soviet documentaries of the late 1920s. This shift is particularly obvious in Santiago Álvarez's work, which was again the most prolific in the category of internationally themed documentary film. John Mraz similarly argues that Álvarez veered from the quick, non-linear montage reminiscent of Dziga Vertov's early work, towards a slower, lengthier direct cinema style "as the result of the increased institutionalization... and the adoption of the Soviet socialist economic model wholesale."

Strengthened ties with the Soviet Union and the failure to spread revolution through guerrilla warfare in the 1960s led the

174 Mraz, "Santiago Álvarez: From Dramatic Form to Direct Cinema," 146.
government to contain its militancy in the early 1970s, especially after Salvador Allende's rise in Chile showed that socialism could prevail through democratic means. Allende reestablished diplomatic relations with Cuba, which began Cuba's process of breaking out of isolation in the Americas. Cuba continued to support Vietnam and other Third World countries by expanding the civilian aid missions begun in the 1960s and through Castro's efforts to unite the Third World and the socialist camp. Most impressively, Castro made the bold decision to send troops on a successful military intervention in Angola, demonstrating Cuba's revolutionary power and global influence. Each of these developments was documented and projected by ICAIC filmmakers who contributed a visual component to the Cuban narrative of a revolutionary country committed to the principles of internationalism, solidarity, and the advancement of the Third World.

RELATIONS WITH SALVADOR ALLENDE'S CHILE

Santiago Álvarez's Cómo, Por Qué y Para Qué se asesina a un General (How, Why and for What Reason is a General Assassinated?, 1971) documents how Chile's right wing, with CIA assistance, assassinated General René Schneider Chereau in order to stop the rise of Salvador Allende, backed by the leftist Popular Unity coalition, in the country's 1970 presidential election. Allende's Marxist ideals had made him unpopular with the military, but General Schneider was openly opposed to a coup in the event of Allende's victory. The CIA supplied a group of Chilean officers with funds and weapons, to be used to stage the kidnapping of General Schneider so that the event could be blamed on Allende supporters.¹⁷⁵ On October 22, 1970, the operation failed;

¹⁷⁵ “CIA Cable Transmissions on Coup Plotting, October 18, 1970: These three cables between CIA headquarters in Langley, VA, and the CIA station in Santiago address the secret shipment of weapons and ammunition for use in a plot to kidnap...General Rene Schneider.” ”CIA, Cable Transmissions on Coup Plotting, October 18, 1970,” National Security Archive, The George Washington University, http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB8/docs/doc27.pdf. ; ”To sum up the situation between the election on September 4 and the inauguration on November 3, there were some important elements in both the military and political establishments which perceived that Allende should not be allowed to bring
René Schneider, son of the General, laments that violence seems to be central to capitalist society and tells the camera:

My father was Commander in Chief of the Chilean army at a time when a group of leftist parties won an election and set the country on a radical transformation. The Chilean army has always had a tradition of respecting the law, respecting the people...In this instance, this legality served the people, served the interests of this coalition of parties, that had triumphed through the law...My father was personally and publically committed to respecting the verdict.

A clip of the elected Allende shows him explaining that, "between July and October, 5,300 North Americans came to Chile, as tourists, journalists, intellectuals...But among them were people from the CIA. Thirty Cubans, contrarevolucionarios, gusanos." The young Schneider's statement against capitalist violence and Allende's allegations about CIA gusanos prompted Cuban viewers who remembered Playa Girón to identify with Chile's predicament of moving towards socialism in the United States' backyard. In a reenactment of General Schneider's murder, several men follow a moving car, shots are heard, and a man appears to shoot directly at the camera. Those accused of the crime, among them former general Roberto Viaux, and those presumed involved,
such as U.S. Ambassador to Chile, Edward M. Corry, are shown going about their lives in Chile or ducking from photographers as they are being detained.

Álvarez films the Head of the Catholic Church in Chile, Monseñor Raul Silva Enriquez, who calls the assassination an act of terrorism: "In the country's history, there have been three incidents of terrorism...the third is this last one. We are a country of democratic law...I believe that socialism has enormous Christian values and that, from many points of view, it is more rewarding than capitalism...I think that we are very close to creating a society the Church would want." This once more links Cuba and Chile as two Latin American countries subjected to U.S. aggression because their policies posed a threat to U.S. business interests. Footage of Chileans mourning at General Schneider's funeral procession is followed by that of celebrations at Allende's inaugural ceremony, underscoring that political terrorists cannot undermine the will of the people. The camera catches a banner of Che in the crowd, reinforcing the connections thus far established between Cuba and Chile.

The film ends where it begins, with a photo of a naked woman, this time facing the audience, and the text:

The CIA has deliberately propagated its own legend of OMNISCENCE, OMNIPRESENCE, and OMNIPOTENCE to frighten the defenseless. Many times, it is blamed for things it did not participate in, although on many occasions it participates in events where it appears to be absent...the overthrow of Arbenz in Guatemala was directed by the CIA...President Kennedy and his brother...Ben-Barka and Lumumba...WERE ASSASSINATED BY THE CIA. However, despite its dozens of computers, micro-cameras, U-2 planes, and mercenaries...THE CIA OUTRIGHTLY FAILED AT PLAYA GIRÓN AND HAS FAILED IN CHILE. The assassination of General Schneider misfired at the CIA in its sinister political objectives. Of course, it will continue [building] new planes and plotting new crimes.176

According to the Cuban critic Mario Rodriguez Aleman, the naked women — found material from "Playboy" — represent the two faces of the CIA: the first, resting in nature, is "apparent

innocence", while the second, directly confronting the viewer with her nudity and meeting the viewer's gaze, "throws off the mask that covers up the CIA's activities." The use of found footage from American sources to critique the U.S. and send a political message, the graphics, and the juxtaposing images are reminiscent of Álvarez's work from the 1960s, which used montage to provoke his viewers into actively analyzing the material onscreen. However, the film's stretches of observational filmmaking of historical events and recorded statements indicate a change in Álvarez's style towards direct cinema, as noted by Mraz and Malitsky.

Rodríguez Alemán's critique appears in the same issue of Cine Cubano that features a statement of collaboration between Chile Films and ICAIC, in which they pledged to screen each other's productions, and interviews with Chilean filmmakers, including Chile Films director Miguel Littin. In Chile, Cómo, Por Qué y Para Qué se asesina a un General was initially prohibited by the somewhat conservative Committee of Cinematographic Censorship, but was later released. Perhaps as Allende's presidency advanced it became less controversial to show a film that exposed corruption associated with the past administration; or perhaps Chile Films, a more liberal institution in partnership with ICAIC, was eventually able to sway the censors.

Released in 1972, Álvarez's De América soy hijo y a ella me debo... (I am a Son of America and I am Indebted to Her) was a documentary of a very different format from what viewers had come to expect from the filmmaker and it built on the stylistic choices of Cómo, Por Qué y Para Qué se asesina a un General. Prior to this film, Álvarez had worked with one or two

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colleagues during shooting; for *De América soy hijo* he selected nine associates, including multiple camerapersons, hinting that he envisioned a large production. Running at three hours and fifteen minutes, the film is not a straight departure from the frenetic montage, surreal imagery, and careful juxtaposition of the 1960s, but it is a distinct contrast to the work produced up to then. While those 1960s touches remain, they are not the focal point, but the frame for an extensive record of Fidel Castro's November 1971 tour of Chile, after Allende re-established diplomatic relations with Cuba. The title quotes José Martí, linking one venerated and internationally minded Cuban leader to another. There are the familiar attacks on the U.S. and its corporate interests in Latin America, often expressed through American texts and political cartoons, as is Álvarez's way. There are also historical sections that provide information about Chile, the U.S. role in the Spanish-American War, and the exploitation of colonial labor at the Minas Gerais and Potosí mines, which had generated tremendous wealth and financed Europe's cultural and industrial development. Still, the real substance of the film is the person of Fidel Castro. Everywhere he visits, enormous crowds of Chileans throng to greet him and the cameras capture their energy. People are climbing to the tops of trees and fences to get a better look, throwing their arms in the air and shouting, "Fi-del, Fi-del!" During his speeches, which provide the narration and structure for the film, he gesticulates emphatically and modulates his tone and volume to convey the weight of the ideals behind his words. He is portrayed as a charismatic personality who is comfortable around ordinary people and has a knack for making his audience laugh. In one particularly memorable clip, Castro jokes back and forth with an older woman in the crowd and invites her up on stage, where she takes the mike to express her admiration for him. Álvarez also includes the mundane moments when Castro fiddles with his microphone, sifts

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sand at an industrial site, or adjusts seating positions. The takeaway is that he is relatable, one of the people.

In his speeches, Castro preaches solidarity ("Viva Cuba y viva Chile, brothers in revolutionary liberty!") and mentions the similarity of the two countries' flags, telling the Chileans that, in Cuba's first War of Independence in 1868, the Cubans raised a flag that was practically identical to Chile's. He assures the crowds, "I see the revolutionary process! Chile is making history!" Álvarez includes footage of the Organization of American States voting, presumably to expel Cuba, and follows it with the caption, "The wall that the United States, through their servant, the OAS, wanted to erect between Cuba and its Latin American brothers is collapsing resoundingly," and the headline, "Cuba Defeated the Gringos, the Isolation is Over." The film’s many segments of camaraderie between the two leaders, including the ending where Castro claps enthusiastically as Allende addresses the Chilean crowd, support that statement.\footnote{181}

Whereas Muerte al invasor celebrated a military victory over the U.S., De America soy hijo highlights triumph through diplomatic means. Jorge I. Domínguez writes that Castro's tour of Chile signified his new belief that "conventional diplomacy rather than support for revolution...would serve the same historic goal: defiance of the United States," and this is in line with the film's message that the U.S.-led isolation of Cuba would be overcome by solidarity with its Latin American neighbors and by support for socialist reform through the democratic process, as in Chile.\footnote{182} According to Álvarez

The most impressive moment was when Allende and Fidel talked in the final act, which

\footnote{181} \textit{"De América soy hijo...Y a ella me debo (Santiago Alvarez, 1972)}," YouTube video, 2:04:43, posted by "pedrobcordero," July 8, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P575W6sthVM.

summed up Fidel's visit. Two men, representing two Latin American people, united in thought and objective, without either one renouncing their histories. It reminded me of the history of our people, when the wars of independence were carried out by men of different characters, different personalities. I think one of the most important risks of Fidel's trip is to establish that it is possible to achieve common objectives of fighting imperialism, and to advance towards something greater in the defense of our people, by starting from the honest decision of two people from two different political realities and histories.\textsuperscript{183}

In other words, the film and the tour are testaments to international solidarity and the potential for revolutionary progress in the Third World, if nations choose to collaborate despite their differences. \textit{De America soy hijo} not only documented, it also recreated the act of diplomacy between Castro and Allende for all of the Cubans who could not attend this tour. Many of those Cubans saw the film, which was "simultaneously released in seven theaters [in Cuba] and there were still long lines of people, and they had full houses for two months."\textsuperscript{184} It was also exhibited in Chile and was well received, on the basis of reports from Chile's Ambassador to Cuba. Chilean officers, in Havana to commemorate the 26th of July anniversary of the Fidel Castro-led attack on the Moncada Barracks in 1953, viewed the film at ICAIC and reportedly "enjoyed it more than the Cubans," indicating that the film's themes were compelling to audiences in both countries.\textsuperscript{185}

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\textit{El tigre saltó y mató, pero morirá...morirá... (The Tiger Jumped and Killed, but It Will Die...It Will Die..., 1973)} is a tribute to Chilean singer-songwriter and activist Victor Jara, and all of the victims of the torture and killing that followed the 1973 coup that overthrew Allende. A return to form for Álvarez, the work is a 16-minute montage of found material structured around the music of Victor Jara and Violetta Parra, another Chilean singer and folklorist. José Martí's poetic text precedes footage of tanks patrolling Chilean streets and soldiers holding book
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\textsuperscript{183} Casaús, "Conversación con Santiago Álvarez," 85.
\textsuperscript{184} Álvarez, "5 Frames are 5 Frames, Not 6, But 5," 20.
\textsuperscript{185} Casaús, "Conversación con Santiago Álvarez," 90.
burnings, which is followed by a photo sequence of the shocked civilians who now lived under the unelected regime of President Augusto Pinochet. Footage of Jara performing on the streets is interspersed with the image of a naked man slung across a swastika, alluding to both Jesus and fascism. Captions read, "They broke his arms...to silence his guitar. They broke his skull...to turn off his thoughts. They left him to bleed to death to drain his rebellion...and finally...they hung him to punish the image of a son of the people...noble, innocent, sincere, indomitable, and pure."

A sequence of armed forces violently abusing civilians in Puerto Rico, Brazil, Colombia, the United States, Indonesia, and Aden reminded contemporary viewers that Chile was not an isolated case, but belonged to an international context, and that the people's victory against the tiger of fascism depended on international solidarity. The film was a tribute to Jara as much as it was a tribute to Chile and all nations living under modern fascism. It visualized the break of a significant chapter in the Cuban Revolution, the warm relations with Allende's Chile.

However, the network established between ICAIC and Chilean filmmakers in 1971 continued in other forms. Acclaimed Chilean director Patricio Guzmán's award-winning documentaries *The Battle of Chile: Part I* (1975) and *The Battle of Chile: Part II* (1976) were filmed in Chile, but finished in Cuba, after Pinochet's dictatorship made it impossible for the production team to continue working in their home country. Guzmán recalls that the crew "reunited in Europe and recovered everything. [Then] we received ICAIC's proposal of solidarity, to assemble the film in Cuba. The film is the result of international assistance...it was edited in Cuba thanks to solidarity and it's being distributed thanks to solidarity." ICAIC,

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187 Guzmán also thanks filmmaker Chris Marker, the director of *Cuba Sí!*, mentioned in Chapter II, for supplying his team with some of the necessary equipment to shoot the film.
living up to its own institutional ideals, assisted a group of fellow Third World cineastes and
together they reached the international public, accomplishing the double task of promoting the
Cuban government's principle of solidarity against U.S.-backed oppression and publicizing the
injustice being perpetuated in Chile to audiences around the world.

UNITING THE EASTERN BLOC AND THE THIRD WORLD

Another lengthy 1972 documentary directed by Álvarez in a more direct cinema
approach, Y el cielo fue tomado por asalto (And the Sky Was Taken by Storm), recounts Fidel
Castro's tour of Eastern Europe and Africa that same year. As Rodríguez Alemán explains,
Álvarez eschewed a chronological structure for a political one, in order to fully express the
internationalist character of Castro's tour and the value of solidarity. In two hours, the film
chronicles Fidel's visits to Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, the Soviet
Union, the German Democratic Republic, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Algeria — a compilation of
massive, cheering crowds; apparently close rapport between Castro and foreign leaders; and
most notably, Castro's speeches about the benefits of socialism, the greatness of the socialist
countries, the future of the Third World, and the internationalism that held everything together.
The film begins with the following text: "Nobody is born American, Chinese, Russian or
Hottentot, Scientist or Artist, Good or Evil. He learns to become all of these things...What is
nationalism? Chauvinism? It's individualism, egoism, hatred among peoples...What is
internationalism? It's love among men." Through these grand questions and answers, Álvarez
establishes the documentary's objective, which is to promote international solidarity between all
revolutionary societies, on all continents. By underpinning the film with excerpts from Castro's
speeches and the receptions held in his honor, Álvarez presented Cuba as the vanguard its

188 Mario Rodríguez Alemán, "Y el cielo fue tomado por asalto" Cine Cubano 84-85, (1973): 79.
revolutionary leadership had always aimed for it to be. In Eastern Europe, Castro is greeted by cultural performances and given tokens of appreciation, such as a special juridical honor from Czechoslovakia's Karlovy Vary University, and his speeches extoll the socialist progress he sees in each nation. A narrator provides historical background information and praises these countries for their long struggles against Nazi or Ottoman oppression, which led to their independence and allowed them to build socialist societies. In Africa, Castro stresses each nation's fight against colonialism, the rich national cultures they have been able to develop despite their long colonial pasts, and that they are Cuba's brother countries who can always count on Cuba's support. Regardless of the country he finds himself in, Castro's speeches advocate international solidarity and support for Vietnam.\textsuperscript{189}

A typical segment is the stop in Poland, where Castro visits Warsaw's José Martí and Che Guevara Schools, where children shout, "We will be like Che!" He speaks in front of crowds carrying Cuban flags to whom he says, "The world of tomorrow must be the world of solidarity, the world of internationalism, the antithesis of what mankind has known till now," and Álvarez punctuates the speech by including a glimpse of a banner of Che hanging from a school building and a sign in the crowd reading, "Students of the Third World salute you, Fidel!" For the typical Cuban viewer who had never been to Poland and was unfamiliar with its culture, the people's appreciation for Cuba's national heroes, who embodied internationalism in defining moments of Cuban history, and their enthusiasm over Castro and the Cuban flag served as visual cues to the ties that apparently already existed between the two nations, especially when they appeared in the background of Castro's idealistic speeches. The presence of "Third World Students" is also

indicative of the transnational networks for mutual assistance in areas such as education that had already been established between the socialist countries. When walking through a concentration camp, Castro remarks to the Poles that it reminds him of "the genocide the Yankees are committing in Vietnam" and his similar comments in other countries, through Álvarez's editing, cast him as a sort of Third World ambassador to the Eastern Bloc. Typical of his speeches is this snippet from Hungary:

Today's generation of Hungarians, Cubans, Soviets, Bulgarians, from countries that have already made their social revolutions and are working to consolidate their economies and to create advanced socialist societies, live in the middle of a world where there is still much suffering and exploitation. We are referring to the people of Latin America, the people of Africa, the people of Asia.

The speeches selected by Álvarez not only show how Castro brought the Third World to the fore in the Eastern Bloc, but also how he actively boosted ties between Cuba and other Third World countries. The film visualizes this as Cuba's natural responsibility or, as Jesús Díaz interprets, "Linking Africa and Western Europe through our origins and American history, being part of the socialist camp and the Third World, Marxist-Leninists immersed in a process of decolonization, led by one of the most uninhibited revolutionary figures of this century, [Cuba was], without a doubt, meant to play a bridging role in the long and difficult process of building a new culture."  

In the early 1970s, Cuba's civilian aid programs, which had begun with a medical mission to Algeria in 1963, flourished as an integral component of Cuban internationalism. Cuban doctors, teachers, technicians, and construction workers who volunteered provided services for free or very little charge to their host countries. This was of particular value in Africa's newly independent nations, from where many skilled professionals had fled after decolonization, and Y

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el cielo is notable for spotlighting these humanitarian missions — in one Algerian audience, a group holds a banners saying, "Cuban Medical Delegation Greets Commander in Chief!" The Algerian crowds are some of the most eager to see Castro and it is no doubt due to Cuba's history of civilian and military assistance to the country, as well as to how outspokenly supportive the Cuban revolutionaries had been of Algeria's fight for independence. In Guinea, Castro proclaims, "This place has one merit above the rest. Not the beauty of these buildings, but the fact that they were built with the cooperation of the youth from our two countries. The fact that they were built with means, resources, and in record time." These segments reflected both Cuba's resolve to overcome global underdevelopment and its newly expanded role in the Third World, that of a friendly nation and an option for assistance apart from the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

The end brings the film full circle with the text: "What is Marxism? Marxism is life. Science for the sake of life, and the heavens were taken by storm..." superimposed over images of battles, portraits of Marx and Lenin, and Castro's speech to the Soviet audience: "Long live proletarian internationalism! Long live the friendship between the Soviet people and the Cuban people! Long live the Soviet Union! Patria o muerte! Venceremos!" This was a highly significant statement to end on in 1972, the year that Cuba joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. After a crisis in relations that led to Soviet sanctions in 1968, and the letdown of the 10-million-ton harvest in 1970, the Cuban leadership had been forced to acknowledge that distance from the Soviet Union would be destructive to Cuba's long-term economic stability, which already had to withstand the U.S. embargo. Cuba continued to be an

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independent actor, but became more accepting of Soviet hegemony in the socialist camp. Soviet advisers were assigned to Cuba, Cuba took on aspects of the Soviet economic model, and the two nations signed trade agreements. Cuban documentaries were a fixture at film festivals in Leipzig, Karlovy Vary, and Moscow; to make a documentary explicitly endorsing Cuban-Soviet relations was the filmic counterpart to Castro's diplomatic tour of the Eastern Bloc.

At the 1973 Karlovy Vary Festival, as per tradition, the first group that the Cuban delegation had an exchange with was the delegation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. After discussing each other's films and Vietnam's ongoing struggle against imperialism, the conversation turned to Castro's tour of the socialist countries and how this act of solidarity had had a stirring effect on the Vietnamese people. If this was the reaction of a country not included in the tour, and if the crowds in *Y el cielo* are any hint, the film must certainly have made an impression on the African and Eastern Bloc audiences who would have had the most to identify with onscreen.

CUBA IN VIETNAM

Vietnam — so present, yet not featured, in *Y el cielo fue tomado por asalto* — is the subject of Álvarez's 1975 work *Abril de Vietnam en el Año del Gato* (*April in Vietnam, in the Year of the Cat*). The product of another Álvarez trip to Vietnam, the documentary explores the state of the nation's revolution while also providing information on 4,000 years of Vietnamese history, in two hours of running time. Álvarez breaks up political and historical footage by inserting clips of traditional Vietnamese musicians, dancers, and paintings. He recognizes

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192 Cuba had criticized the Soviet Union for prioritizing peaceful coexistence with the United States over helping revolutionary armed struggle in other countries, and for its relations with Latin American governments that were unfriendly to Cuba. The Soviet Union was irritated by what they saw as Cuban adventurism and a growing closeness to China. The crisis was resolved after Fidel Castro endorsed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Dominguez, *To Make the World Safe for Revolution*, 73-85.

Vietnam as a nation rooted in one of the earliest civilizations that, because of its strategic location, has been in a constant state of resistance against foreign invaders. French colonization led to widespread drug and alcohol abuse and the poor treatment of Vietnamese women, now U.S. bombing was terrorizing the people. There is war footage, although not as extensive or as graphic as in Álvarez's 1960s documentaries about the conflict. Rather than focusing on armed struggle, the film highlights the diplomacy between Cuba and Vietnam and the impact of Cuban aid. Scenes of workers' lives testify to the Vietnamese's determination to never stop working, despite the ongoing bombardment of their industries.  

A Vietnamese official tells the camera, "We are very content to see that in the cause of socialist construction in the North, the Cuban volunteers are helping us do important work. These are flowers of Cuban-Vietnamese perseverance." Castro lands in Vietnam, where the crowd greets him with a large Cuban flag, and he makes a speech praising Cuban-Vietnamese relations as the camera focuses on enlarged side-by-side photos of José Martí and Ho Chi Minh. Just as he did in the Fidel-focused documentaries, Álvarez uses these visual cues to strengthen the message of solidarity in Castro's speech. Next, the ICAIC crew visits Dong Hoi, one of the most heavily bombarded cities during the war, where Cuban volunteers have helped Vietnamese workers build a hospital and an external clinic. Álvarez shows the volunteers receiving their mail from home, subtly communicating to viewers the distance and sacrifice that Cuban workers were willing to make on the basis of solidarity and revolutionary principle. In Hanoi, Cuban and Vietnamese construction workers are building the Hotel Victoria together. A Cuban volunteer

tells the camera, "These compañeros are very hardworking and they learn very quickly."

As the film shows, Vietnam was one of the nations that benefitted from Cuba's civilian aid programs in the 1970s. In 1972, when U.S. bombing was especially severe, Cuba sent a medical mission to North Vietnam. The following year, 1,000 workers and technicians arrived to help rebuild the country.\(^{196}\) When detailing his crew's experience of shooting footage for future ICAIC productions, director Miguel Fleitas mentions that he and his staff worked alongside the people they filmed: "We did rough labor side by side, repairing dikes in the Hanoi neighborhood Ba Dinh."\(^{197}\) Fleitas also filmed a Cuban instructor teaching Vietnamese agricultural workers how to artificially inseminate a cow and a group of Cuban doctors who were treating wounded patients at a hospital.\(^{198}\) Like the crews that filmed the guerrillas in the 1960s, these ICAIC personnel were not there to merely document the Vietnamese, but to participate in their struggles. This active engagement is what pushes Abril de Vietnam, and the other ICAIC documentaries filmed in Third World countries discussed in this thesis, past the point of "misery porn" and into the realm of solidarity. In fact, Cuba was so invested in Vietnam's success that the government had offered to send volunteer fighters; Vietnam would only accept civilians.\(^{199}\) Abril de Vietnam documented the positive results of these efforts and also showed that they were acknowledged and appreciated by the Vietnamese, who held the Cubans in high regard. A Vietnamese official tells the camera, "I would like to warmly salute the grand leader of the people of Cuba, a great friend of the heroic people of Vietnam, Compañero Fidel Castro, and also Raul Castro...and the Cuban nation, and all Cubans, and the heroic brotherly armed forces of Cuba. Every day, with certainty, Cuba and Vietnam advance on the path to victory." The

\(^{196}\) Ibid.
\(^{198}\) Ibid., 14, 24.
\(^{199}\) Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions, 376.
Secretary of the Vietnamese Workers' Party also expresses "profound gratitude to the Soviet Union, China, and the other socialist countries. To the international workers' movement and communist movement...for their precious help." The film ends with a recording of Che speaking about Vietnam's independence in 1963, Castro telling the Vietnamese that humanity will remember their efforts, and a quote from Ho Chi Minh: "Nothing is more precious than independence and liberty."

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, ICAIC filmmakers frequently asserted that revolutionary cinema was intimately linked with solidarity and militant internationalism in the pages of Cine Cubano. In the case of Cuba and Vietnam, filmmakers simultaneously documented and generated solidarity through cinema. When Vietnamese screenwriter Tran Hieu Minh visited Cuba in 1972, he reported to Cine Cubano that ICAIC films about the war were being exhibited in the liberated zones of South Vietnam and that these shows provoked emotional expressions of solidarity from the audience. In the same issue, Alfredo Guevara stated that ICAIC's commitment stretched beyond filming in North Vietnam; Vietnamese films were being translated for Cuban theaters to foster "more solidarity" between the two emerging national industries. The year before Abril de Vietnam was made, Miguel Fleitas visited a Hanoi documentary studio and reported that the workers there showed a great interest in Cuban film, particularly in Santiago Álvarez's, which they knew and admired. Vietnam stood as an example of how longstanding cultural diplomacy could contribute to deep-rooted solidarity between Cuba and a culturally and geographically distant nation.

MILITARY VICTORY IN ANGOLA

*La guerra en Angola (The War in Angola)*, a collaboration between ICAIC and the film department of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces and directed by Fleitas in 1976, documents the events of Angola's War of Independence and Civil War.²⁰³ Fleitas uses the historical trajectory of the conflict to structure the film, beginning with the founding of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA), and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the fall of the Portuguese empire.²⁰⁴ Relevant texts and map graphics inform viewers about the major events they are witnessing onscreen, such as when Cuba sent military instructors to assist the MPLA in October 1975.²⁰⁵ Footage from an MPLA camp shows Cubans training the fighters in how to properly position and handle weapons and equipment. The Soviet Union had agreed to send this material aid, but it would have had little impact if the Cubans had not been there to instruct the MPLA in how to use the arms and machinery.²⁰⁶ The Cuban instructors first fought with the MPLA on October 23, 1975; on November 4, after South Africa had attacked Angola, Castro launched Operation Carlotta and sent Cuban troops to assist the MPLA on the assumption that not sending reinforcements would ensure Pretoria's victory. It was a rushed decision, owing to the MPLA's precarious position, and made with very little discussion between the Cuban

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²⁰⁴ The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola, and the National Union for the Liberation of Angola were led by Agostinho Neto, Holden Roberto, and Jonas Savimbi, respectively. Cuba and the Soviet Union backed Neto's MPLA.
²⁰⁵ The Cubans had already begun training the MPLA in the Congo in 1965. "From 1966 onwards the Cubans staffed training schools for the MPLA in Congo-Brazzaville and organized the reentry of MPLA troops into Angola proper, on a dangerous journey across territory held by Neto's deadly enemies, Zaire's Mobutu and Holden Roberto of the FNLA." Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 212.
²⁰⁶ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 265-266.
leadership, much less any negotiation with the Soviets. Cuba was the only country to send its armed forces and, between 1975 and 1976, 36,000 Cuban troops were stationed in Angola.

Fleitas includes Castro's closing speech to the First Party Congress in Havana, given on December 22, when he first announced that Cuban troops had joined the MPLA:

And that is why the imperialists are irritated with us...Some of them wonder why we help the Angolans, what interests we have there. They are accustomed to thinking that whenever a country does something, it is in pursuit of oil, or copper, or diamonds, or some other natural resource. No! We are not after material interests; logically, the imperialists do not understand this because they are exclusively guided by chauvinist, nationalist, and selfish criteria...We are fulfilling an elementary international duty when we help the Angolan people...We do not remain passive when we see an African people, a sister people that the imperialists all of a sudden want to swallow up, and that is brutally attacked by South Africa.

Castro's reasoning and its inclusion in the documentary casts Cuba's participation in the war as an altruistic act, building on Cuba's image as a selfless vanguard willing to sacrifice its limited resources for other underdeveloped countries in the international fight against imperialism. Fleitas also devotes attention to civilian aid by interviewing Cuban physicians working at a medical center with the MPLA's People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA). The camera watches as they help a bandaged Angolan fighter regain his ability to walk. Considering that only 30 doctors stayed behind after Portugal pulled out of Angola, the physicians were an invaluable component of the Cuban effort. Presenting their impact onscreen reinforced that Cuba was performing its international duty and strengthened Cuba's brand as a humanitarian Third World power. This altruistic image provided Cuban leaders and filmmakers with a rebuttal for valid critiques about Cuba's policies and their portrayal onscreen.

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207 Ibid., 269, 305-6.
208 Domínguez, To Make the World Safe for Revolution, 1.
In an interview with Álvarez, the American journalist John Huddy asked, "[In [Hanoi martes
13] there were very moving pictures of children with their faces shot off. If Cuban bullets and
bombers do that to African children, would you make a documentary on it?" To which Álvarez
responded:

No. Because Cuban bombs are not aimed at African children. The bombs dropped by U.S. pilots
on Hanoi were...We sent 1,000 doctors and 1,000 teachers to Angola. Because Portuguese
colonialism —the dictator Salazar that the U.S. and France helped so much — left 87% illiteracy
in Angola...In all the territories they had enslaved. We send doctors, teachers, and soldiers -
because soldiers are also needed. We send what we do not have! We are still a people under
blockade. We need medicine. But we send medicine to Africa. We need more doctors in Cuba,
but we send doctors to Africa. That is the kind of bullets we shoot at African children.211

At the 1978 Belgrade Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, Cuban Foreign Minister Isidor
Malmierca rejected the comparison between Cuban support for liberation movements and U.S.
support for those movements' opponents:

That would mean distorting the meaning of history and accepting that the social systems that
those two forces represent are equal...It would mean putting on an equal footing those who
supplied modern weapons of all kinds to the Portuguese colonialists and those who aided the f
ighters who opposed them...Suffice it to say that when...the United States was getting ready to
attack Cuba militarily...the mass media under their control clamored hysterically that Cuba should
reject all extrahemispheric aid.212

The Cubans firmly saw themselves on the moral side of history and, through institutions like
ICAIC and OSPAAAL, they could produce media and images to support that view and to
counter critics.

In the film, on-the-scene war footage highlights the potential human cost of Cuban
endeavors, both by the Armed Forces and the film crews. By projecting such images, ICAIC set
Cuba apart from the major revolutionary powers, the Soviet Union and China, whose assistance
to liberation movements and revolutionary governments came with conditions. Of course, the

211 Gordon Adams, "Cuba and Africa: The International Politics of the Liberation Struggle: A
Documentary Essay," Latin American Perspectives 8, no. 1 (1981) 112. Stable URL:
212 Ibid., 113.
Soviet Union ensured Cuba's economic survival and Soviet weapons and funding made Cuba's actions in Angola possible. Still, the Cuban government acknowledged Soviet help and respected Soviet leadership while taking an active role in the Non-Aligned Movement and making independent foreign policy decisions about the Third World. Jesús Díaz's words quoted above, regarding how Cuba's historical reality made it uniquely qualified to play a bridge between the socialist countries and the Third World, are strongly applicable to the situation in Angola. Cuba's status as a Third World country active in the Non-Aligned Movement, its cultural and historical ties to Africa, and its being able to send black troops to fight with the Angolans made it possible to intervene without provoking Angolan concerns about its motivations. A white, industrialized superpower like the Soviet Union would have undoubtedly caused worry about neocolonialism or a communist takeover.

In 1979, Cine Cubano interviewed the Portuguese Angolan writer, Luandino Vieira. An MPLA member since 1959, Vieira served as Chief of the Department of Revolutionary Orientation of the MPLA's Workers' Party, as director of Angola's national television broadcaster, and as director of the Angolan Institute of Cinema. He credited Cuban filmmakers with encouraging the development of Angolan film culture and specifically endorsed *La guerra en Angola*:

> [During the war,] there were comrade combatants and international filmmakers that came to make movies in collaboration with Angolans. Behind each camera, next to each foreign director, we put an Angolan. That is to say, we used this teamwork as a sort of training. The most important films made with international collaboration during the second war of liberation were those of the Cuban comrades. *La guerra en Angola* presents the most important material about the war and is the...

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213 "[When we decided to launch Operation Carlotta in Angola], at no point did we count on any eventual Soviet 'protection'...Although the Soviets were not consulted on Cuba's decision to send troops to Angola, they did later decide to provide arms for the creation of the Angolan army, and they responded positively to certain of our requests for military materiel throughout the war. There would have been no possibility of a successful outcome in Angola without the political and logistical support of the USSR after that [first] triumph." Castro and Ramonet, *My Life*, 322.
strongest interpretation of imperialist aggression.\textsuperscript{214}

He also had this to say about \textit{Cine Cubano}:

\begin{quote}
It is a sort of bible that circulates among young filmmakers in Angola. In it they find new information about cinematography, they see Latin American filmmakers' points of view, they learn what problems film faces in underdeveloped countries, and it encourages them. We see the value and importance that Cuban cinema's ideological formation and internationalist position have for our cinema. Our cinema was born out of internationalism; I want to take this opportunity to salute Cuban and Latin American filmmakers, on behalf of Angolan filmmakers...One day, I would like a meeting between Latin American and African filmmakers...to discuss the most efficient ways to combat imperialism through cinema. \textsuperscript{215}
\end{quote}

Vieira's praise is evidence of the far reach that ICAIC had, both through its films and publications, to communicate Cuban and other Latin American cinematic visions. In the same manner that Cuban doctors, workers, and military instructors made their services and knowledge accessible throughout the Third World, ICAIC's cameramen and writers passed on their expertise and information to their counterparts in the countries where they had the opportunity to film. More than that, Vieira's words are a testament to how far ICAIC had progressed: from a nascent film industry, to an inspiration to filmmakers in a newly independent country on the other side of the Atlantic.

ICAIC productions from the 1970s show a Cuba that is strengthening diplomacy with the socialist camp and breaking out of isolation in the Americas, and that has the capability, as well as the confidence, to engage in a full-scale military intervention overseas in order to help a Third World liberation movement. Even more far-reaching were the medical and technical missions that distributed Cuba's skilled professionals at the service of other Third World countries that were fighting to overcome underdevelopment. Through the very process of intercontinental filmmaking and the distribution of the resulting documentaries, ICAIC projected an image of

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 167.
Cuba as a humanitarian power selflessly fulfilling its fundamental international duties and as a vanguard for solidarity between the socialist countries and the Third World.
CONCLUSION

Before the Revolution, film was something Cuba readily consumed, but rarely produced. The revolutionary government founded ICAIC to develop a national film industry that would project an authentic, self-defined, Cuban national identity to both domestic and foreign audiences. The documentary films discussed in this thesis, as well as others, found success at home and impressed audiences abroad at international film festivals in the socialist, Western, and Third World countries. While it may be said that festivals attract niche audiences, they expanded ICAIC’s reach to viewers in different nations and continents and of varying political ideologies. ICAIC was in a position to repair the "distorted" image many had of revolutionary Cuba with the government-sanctioned image of a nation under siege from the powerful United States, yet still defiantly declaring its solidarity with the Soviet Union and with the oppressed people of the world in the 1960s; then to a nation that spread its human and military resources throughout the Third World to help nations in greater need, without consideration for its own material interests, in the 1970s. From nations requesting that ICAIC document their struggles, to Cuban filmmakers throwing themselves into the struggles that they documented, diplomacy was intrinsic to the filmmaking process.

ICAIC’s documentaries and related art, such as the silkscreen posters, presented Cuba as a small Third World nation capable of exerting an international influence and fostering solidarity on a global scale. In both content and production, the documentaries showed professional cooperation between nations and apparent fraternity and respect between film crews and film subjects. They visualized a foundation for solidarity by establishing that Cuba and other countries found themselves in similar situations; whether that meant building socialism, resisting imperialist violence and exploitation, or securing political and economic independence. Some of
these countries were also redefining their national images through their own emerging national film industries, and their filmmakers gained experience and assistance by collaborating with ICAIC.

Given that in the 1970s Cuba was actually in better military and economic shape to actively assist liberation movements in other nations than in the 1960s, I expected to see an increase in military action and even more aesthetic energy in 1970s productions. Instead, I found that in the 1970s the films became longer, more observational, and slower-paced and moved away from the urgency and incitement of the previous decade. While Fidel Castro does not make many appearances in the 1960s documentaries, Santiago Álvarez's 1970s films valorized Castro as a compassionate leader admired throughout the world and they portrayed his foreign policy as a series of moral decisions to assist other Third World countries, mostly through civilian aid, even when doing so went against Cuba's self-interest, and as an effort to bridge the distance between the Third World and the socialist camp. *La guerra en Angola*, a war documentary, did show the events of the battlefield in a central way, but it gave just as much attention to Cuba's altruism and the cooperation between Cuba and Angola. War and violence were most noticeable onscreen in the 1960s, from the aftermath of Playa Girón, to the air raids and burned faces in Vietnam and Laos. Perhaps the pervasive fear of attack in the 1960s had given way to a sense of relative security in the 1970s, which made space for observational documentaries that, while effective, lacked the aggressive tone of the shorter, more experimental works like *Now* and *LBJ*, or the indignation of a film like *79 Primaveras*.

I was also surprised to find that the Soviet influence on ICAIC was not as thorough or as substantial as I had expected. Cuba had an evolved system of media and mass communication prior to the Revolution and its alliance with the Soviet Union. It was the French that introduced
film to the island and the U.S. that dominated the Cuban film market by steadily gaining control over production, distribution, and exhibition for several decades after World War I. Cuba's leading revolutionary filmmakers trained in Italy and the U.S. in the years before the Revolution and Joris Ivens from the Netherlands advised ICAIC in its early years. The obvious similarities between the documentary styles of Santiago Álvarez and his Soviet counterpart, Dziga Vertov, were not due to exposure, but to similarities in circumstances and objectives. Both filmmakers were revolutionary men interested in promoting socialist ideology and they wanted to make films that encouraged audiences to participate in society, both as alert viewers and as political actors. The Soviet Union did contribute by providing funds, equipment, and films that eased the effects of the U.S. embargo on ICAIC and its film supply and by partnering with ICAIC for a number of coproductions.²¹⁶ My assumptions speak to a larger tendency that many have to forget that, prior to the Revolution, Cuba was occupied by and then closely aligned with the United States for over five decades. As shown in Chapter I, this led to Hollywood's control over the Cuban film market, which shaped Cuban viewers' tastes and expectations to conform to the Hollywood film model and the values it promoted. After the Revolution broke the alliance, U.S. foreign policy decisions, such as the economic embargo and the invasion attempt at Playa Girón, continued to impact Cuba. The ever-present threat of military confrontation made it necessary to mobilize the Cuban public in defense of the Revolution and against the United States. ICAIC's films exposed Cubans to revolutionary values and countered the positive image of the U.S. that had been perpetuated by Hollywood. The U.S. was heavily criticized in ICAIC documentaries, notably in Álvarez's work, which drew from American found materials. The Soviet Union influenced Cuba in the 1960s, but came to have a greater impact in the 1970s when Cuba began to emulate the

²¹⁶ Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, 177.
Soviet economic model. Closer ties between Cuba and the Soviet-dominated Eastern Bloc were documented in *El cielo fue tomado por asalto*.

Film is accessible to viewers regardless of their education and literacy levels and ICAIC's mobile cinema network carried it to citizens living in the remote parts of the island. As a medium, film is easy to reproduce and relatively easier to preserve in comparison to, say, an OSPAAAL poster, which enables film to resonate with viewers well beyond the time and location of its initial release. The revolutionary government understood film's potential and founded ICAIC to harness it for revolutionary purposes. For the internationally themed documentaries discussed in this thesis, that entailed involving viewers in an onscreen reality that situated the Cuban Revolution in an international context, but from a Cuban perspective. These films visualized international solidarity by documenting how revolutionary Cuba — through leaders like Fidel Castro and Che, the Armed forces, ICAIC, and volunteers — not only aided foreign liberation movements, but also bridged the cultural and geographic distances between itself and its allies. Based on their reception at home, we can speculate that these documentaries motivated some of their Cuban viewers to perform solidarity as depicted by, for example, volunteering to work abroad or attending ICAIC and going on to document Cuba's future endeavors. Considering the critical acclaim and interest that these documentaries attracted from film communities in other nations, they must have contributed to a national sense of pride in the Cuban Revolution, its achievements, and the way it had managed to elevate Cuba as a significant international actor. This encouraged Cuban citizens' commitment to the Revolution and promoted solidarity between Cuba and other nations, which made ICAIC and its documentary filmmakers invaluable assets to Cuban foreign policy during the Cold War.
APPENDIX A: POLITICAL CARTOONS, POSTERS, AND FILM STILLS


Figure 3. Havana nightlife. Source: P.M.

Figure 4. A civil rights activist. Source: Now.

Figure 5. ICAIC’s poster for *Hanoi martes 13*. Source: MoMA exhibit, "Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America 1960-1980."

Figure 7. A negative still of Ho Chi Minh.  
Source: 79 Primaveras.

Figure 8. Che addresses the Tricontinental Conference.  
Source: Hasta la victoria siempre.

Figure 9. A Vietnamese peasant guerrilla.  
Source: Hanoi martes 13.

Figure 10. A Cuban construction worker volunteering in Vietnam.  
Source: Abril de Vietnam en el año del gato.

Figure 11. Fidel Castro in Chile.  
Source: De América soy hijo...y a ella me debo.
Figures 12. Fidel Castro resting after a game of basketball with Polish university students. Source: *Y el cielo fue tomado por asalto*.

Figure 13. A crowd in Guinea greets Fidel Castro. Source: *Y el cielo fue tomado por asalto*.


Figure 15. A cannon being fired during battle in Angola. Source: *La guerra en Angola*.
APPENDIX B: FILM SOURCES

1. Simulacro de Incendio

2. Cuban refugees waiting for rations

3. Parque de Palatino

4. El Mégano

5. P.M.

6. Muerte al invasor

7. Now

8. LBJ

9. Hanoi, Martes 13

10. La guerra olvidada

11. Tercer mundo, tercera guerra mundial
12. Madina Boe

13. 79 Primaveras

14. Hasta la victoria siempre

15. Cómo, Por Qué y Para Qué se asesina a un General

16. De América soy hijo...y a ella me debo

17. El tigre saltó y mató, pero morirá...morirá

18. Y el cielo fue tomado por asalto

19. Abril de Vietnam en el Año del Gato

20. La guerra en Angola
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