

The Movie Industry in the Unification of the Latin American Identity

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Abstract: *this article aims to present the historical and social context of the development of Latin American cultural identity throughout the history of cinema. Proposes the integration of these countries in the search for a visual representative unit, based on events that offer symbolic bases among young audiovisual producers for the construction of Latin American identity in the film industry.*

Keywords: *Communication. Media. Information. Culture. Cinema.*

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Latin American nations are understood as colonies. A colony, by definition, is a set of individuals, who share a nationality, settled in a foreign country. The word foreign, in this case, is used to name everyone and everything that doesn't belong to a group; therefore, the terminology classifies an exclusion of these territories since their first appearance in narratives.

Colonization, however, is an important factor to understand the Latin culture, since its identity was started based on the USA and Europe countries that produced and distributed products during the historical imperialism. Néstor García Canclini, in his article, "*Geopolítica del arte: nociones en desuso*", gives context and points out the problems of the results of this process in the Latin American culture market:

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The inequality in the production, distribution and the access to consumer goods, can't be explained only with cultural colonialism or imperialism (even though these behaviors persists), but with the combination of expansive process, domination exercises and discrimination, nationalist inertia and culture politics unable to act in the new exchange logic. (CANCLINI, 2009, p. 3)⁴

Because of the context, Latin American Culture should be studied from a local perspective, to avoid arguments based on the imperialism and conclusions from a colony perspective. To do that, let's take the subject from a national point of view, is an independent political group, which has a similar position on the cinematographic market and, therefore, are able to share an identity.

Latin countries are composed by several territories, so it's important to understand their cultural process, to find the similarities. They are different states, with an intense immigration history, that has reflected on the process of identity formation in this societies, which now understand their own popular culture as bastards.

The bastard cultures take care of the dirty, the impure, the promiscuous, because they have no recognized father, that's why they are inherited of many fathers and try to imitate everywhere, so they can find an identity or, at least, they own style. The bastard cultures make sense because they know their only mother, the one they love, hate and celebrated simultaneously: the local culture, their own, the one that touched the destiny. (RINCÓN, 2015, p. 32)⁵

By understanding the Latin American culture as a hybrid process, which contains influence from many different fathers, it's possible to establish a bond that leads to the construction of a common identity. However, to enable these nations to expand this development, they have to be understood as a product that should be protected, can be consumed, exported and purchased. To accomplish this, let's use the cinematographic industry.

⁴ Original: "La desigualdad en la producción, la distribución y el acceso a los bienes culturales no se explica como simple imperialismo o colonialismo cultural (aunque subsisten estos comportamientos), sino por la combinación de procesos expansivos, ejercicios de dominación y discriminación, inercias nacionalistas y políticas culturales incapaces de actuar en la nueva lógica de los intercambios."

⁵ Original: "As culturas bastardas dão conta do sujo, do impuro, do promíscuo porque não tem pai reconhecido; por isso são herança de muitos pais e imitam de todas as partes para tentar uma identidade ou, ao menos, um estilo próprio. As culturas bastardas têm sentido porque se sabem filhas de uma só mãe, a que adoram, odeiam e celebram simultaneamente: a cultura local, a própria, a que tocou no destino."

CINEMA AND IDENTITY

When talking about cinema, Hollywood is the strongest market, its movies are constant screening in all types of Latin American medias, and even though this industry expansion has been connected with the advances in technology, it wouldn't be fair to give all the credits to globalization. The "CTRL-V" documentary, direct by Leonardo Brandt, addresses the relation between the large distribution of American (USA) movies around the world, and the First World War period.

Through the symbolism presented as entertainment, films bring with them a cultural perspective of life and a chance to be introduced to the differences and similarities between cultures. When watching a movie, the audience, relaxed in a playful space, is consuming values and ideas, as well as the market that a narrative can represent. The cinema industry of the USA has been exporting the "American Way of Life" across the globe. Octavio Getino, when interviewed for the documentary "CTRL-V", summed up this point with a sentence that said: "the US economy, as well as its politics, would not have the world strength that it has today, if the film industry hasn't existed".

When analyzing the way in which Latin America is represented in American audiovisual products, a dominant presence of stereotypes is identified without great efforts. The use of such narrative mechanisms can be understood as a segregation form of Latin nations, aiming to strengthen the identification with the US culture, weakening the construction of a possible collective identity. In his work, Stuart Hall clarifies this process:

So the first point is – stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes "difference". Secondly, stereotyping deploys a strategy of 'splitting'. It divides the normal acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable. It then excludes or expels everything which does not fit, which is different. [...] The third point is that stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power." (HALL, 1997, p. 258)

Looking through the USA cinematographic history, as well as its political, economic and social consequences, it is possible to realize the dimension of the impact that cinema has in constructing and expanding a nation's identity. For this reason, when considering bastard cultures and their development, it is extremely important to offer a space to national film industries, so they can support the construction of a symbolic structure that precedes the commercialization of audiovisual products.

BRAZILIAN CINEMA

As in other Latin American nations, the history of Brazilian cinema is structured around the foreign market, facing technical, political and economic difficulties for its consolidation. The first films recorded in the country were advertisements, ordered by the government, to promote national agricultural activities. It was only when electricity arrived in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in 1907, that the cinematographic trade began with the installation of fixed cinema theatres and small local productions.

Following the historical course, the First World War paralyzed Brazilian cinematographic production, which was technically dependent of the European market. In 1916, the first subsidiary of an US film industry in Brazil appears. The country was hostage of a commercial treaty, and because of that could only export raw materials and had started to exhibit foreign audiovisual productions exclusively. However, that didn't stop the perpetuation of the new art in the territory, but it made difficult to consolidate a geographical unit and, consequently, a symbolic identity.

From Minas to Manaus, this culture of fleeting and feverish enthusiasm favors the creation, all around, in art schools or cinema studies, and specialized magazines are launched. Decentralizes and effervescent activities in all directions, the creative explosion of silent film don't show geographic, artistic, thematic, strategic or economics unit. The arrival of silent film interrupts everything erasing regionals cycles, eclipsing São Paulo and giving back to Rio de Janeiro its place as capital of cinema. (DESBOIS, 2016, p. 28)⁶

Since then, the development of the Brazilian film industry has been depending on foreigners who arrived in the country, trying to replicate the film formats of the European continent. It was only around the 30s, 40s and mainly 50s that the Chanchada genre gained visibility and presence on the country's screens. Moving away from European art cinema, Brazil begins to move towards a popular cinema that meets the concept of bastard culture presented by Rincón, since the nomenclature of the genre derives from Spanish, while the characteristic soundtrack is based on carnival popular songs.

⁶ Original: "De Minas a Manaus, essa cultura do entusiasmo passageiro e febril favorece a criação, em toda a parte, das escolas de arte ou de estudos de cinema, e revistas especializadas são lançadas. Atividade descentralizada e efervescente em todos os sentidos, a explosão criativa do cinema mudo não apresenta uma unidade geográfica, artística, temática, estratégica ou econômica. A chegada do cinema falado interrompe tudo, apagando os ciclos regionais, eclipsando São Paulo e devolvendo ao Rio de Janeiro seu lugar de capital do cinema."

LATIN CINEMA

According to data collected in 2018 by MRC (Media Resource & Consultancy), the Spanish territory is the strongest producer and distributor of Ibero-American audiovisual products, and so are the documentary, drama and comedy genres, very characteristic of the Latin cinema industry since its beginning. Despite the advances provided by the joint development of these countries, the bastard nations still don't have their own identity and have been basing its cinematographic language in European cinema, just like Brazil in 1916.

In his book “Cine Argentino – entre o possible e o deseable”, Octavio Getino presents the integration of Latin cinema as a way of successfully joining the international market and as a common identity. It emphasizes the necessity of public policies that enable joint production between Latin countries, and a wider distribution of local products. According to Getino, by presenting itself as a collective identity, through cinema, Latin America can gain social, political and economic strength.

Therefore, talk about national cinema in our case is to make it – every day more – of a Latin American cinema, formulated only as a necessity and as a project. This project has, in addition to its inclusive cultural and political score, a vital function for cinema own luck: of its concretion or not, the survival or extinction of the already existing industries depends, as well as the possibility of those others that have not yet been able to sign up. (GETINO, 1998, p. 301)⁷

Despite its troubled history, the Brazilian film industry was one of the most developed in Latin America, sharing eighty-five per cent of productions with Mexico and Argentina. In the context of bastard cultures, these numbers reflect a structure development process with little local integration, and that has not achieved international independence yet. For the global market, Brazilian cinema is a Latin American product.

⁷ Original: “Hablar entonces de cine nacional em nuestro caso, es hacerlo – cada día más -de un cine latino-americano formulado apenas como necesidad y como proyecto Ese proyecto tiene, además de sus alcances culturales y políticos integradores, una función vital para la suerte del propio cine: de su concreción o no, depende la sobrevivencia o extinción de las industrias ya existentes, así como la posibilidad de aquellas otras que aún no pudieron afirmarse.”

CONCLUSION

Imperialism and colonization have left marks that reflect on the film industry of Latin American nations, as well as on their identity. From the raw material, through production and distribution of movies, the predominance of a market that trades, through entertainment, symbols and ideologies of the different fathers of Latin culture is undeniable.

By finding shelter in European parenthood, countries like Brazil, Argentina and Mexico were able to establish the development of their own industry, although in smaller proportions, and are creating a new identity. However, to move away from the concept of colony and to take ownership of nation, the bastard cultures must base that creation on their own mothers.

Belonging to a culture is belonging, roughly speaking, to the same conceptual and linguistic universe, knowing how the concepts and ideas translate in different languages and how these languages can be interpreted to refer to the world or to serve as a reference to it. (HALL, 2016, p. 248)⁸

Following this direction, BRLab (Audiovisual Development Laboratory) is a Brazilian festival that takes place in the city of São Paulo and has been happening for nine years. It is an event dedicated to training independent producers, helping them in the development of scripts, as well as in the acquisition of resources and partners for the production of their movies. Over the course of a week, these directors, selected by professionals from the Latin audiovisual market, participate in workshops and lectures with renowned screenwriters, in addition to various activities that involve the interaction of these young people from different parts of the continent.

This type of Festival presents a proposal that aimed the integration of Latin American audiovisual since its base, through the discussion of the narratives to be written and, consequently, the symbols that will be transmitted by the final product. Encouraging events like this, which make it possible for young producers from different Latin mothers to meet, consolidate the future of cinema in shared experiences, enabling the construction of a joint identity that, naturally, will be seen in the Latin America film industry.

⁸ Original: “Pertencer a uma cultura é pertencer, grosso modo, ao mesmo universo conceitual e linguístico, saber como conceitos e ideias se traduzem em diferentes linguagens e como a linguagem pode ser interpretada para se referir ao mundo ou para servir de referência a ele.”

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