

## **Independent Cinema and Globalization: the Case of Paraguay**

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Remote and difficult to know, wreathed in clouds of legend, Paraguay has seemed to invite, or indeed challenge, people of imagination to represent it to the outside world. For many, it has been difficult to pin down with any geographical accuracy, given its location among the broad and erratic rivers and sandbanks in the watery heart of South America. Paraguay's often imprecise borders seemed to vary puzzlingly in the light of Paraguayans' struggles with their neighbours. For Paraguay's greatest novelist, Augusto Roa Bastos, it was 'an island surrounded by land.

(O'Shaughnessy 2009: 15)<sup>1</sup>

This assessment by Hugh O'Shaughnessy, one of the few writers to devote a book to Paraguay, crystallises its situation as one of the least known countries in Latin America. This isolation is largely due to the fact that for much of the twentieth century, the country endured a repressive dictatorship, while in the twenty-first century its progression towards establishing a genuine democracy is far from complete. If Paraguay is known at all, it is because of its repression and corruption, as the 35-year dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner was the longest in Latin America. The seeming impossibility of change in Paraguay led to a consequent lack of representation of the nation in literary, cultural or socio-political studies:

Not one of the multiauthored volumes on democratic transitions that have appeared over the past decade has paid any attention to the country's plight. It was simply given up as a lost cause—so backward and isolated, it was assumed, that it could not even hope to inaugurate democracy.

(Gillespie 1990: 50)

Even after over a decade of supposed democratic rule the problems of corruption, particularly at a political level, endured as Stroessner's Colorado Party continued to play a key role in the running of the country, the military continued to uphold the party's dominance, and public institutions remained corrupt (Hakim 2003: 115). The assassination of vice-president Luis María Argana on March 23, 1999, however, which threw into stark relief the extreme

corruption of the political apparatus, produced the first signs of real change, as the public reacted strongly to the violence and repression that had remained a routine part of their government after the end of Stroessner's rule. The murder was widely attributed to General Lino César Oviedo, who was instrumental in the appointment of Juan Carlos Wasmozy as the Colorado Party's presidential candidate in 1992, despite the fact that Argana had won more votes.

Wasmozy was elected president in 1993, but his relationship with General Oviedo deteriorated to the point that he relieved him of his command in April 1996. In response, Oviedo attempted to stage a coup to oust Wasmozy, but he was forced to back down because the presidency was strongly backed by much of the army and Wasmozy had strong international support. Although Oviedo was nominated as the Colorado Party's candidate in the 1998 elections, his coup attempt led him to be sentenced to ten years in prison by a military tribunal on January 8, 1998. Subsequent president Raúl Cubas pardoned Oviedo, however, an act that led the Chamber of Deputies to hold a vote on his impeachment on April 7, 1999. People gathered in the squares outside Congress to express their support for Cubas' impeachment. A large group of peasants also demanded that their debts to banks be written off. The demonstrators pledged to remain in the squares until their demand that Cubas be impeached was met, with the result that the police moved in, firing plastic bullets and spraying tear gas into the crowds. Tanks blockaded the squares and snipers opened fire. As Abente-Brun observes, the media played a key role in reporting these events:

Throughout the crisis, the events in the *plazas* were covered live on all the television stations. Most radio stations also offered extensive coverage. The nation could see the horror of armed men shooting mercilessly at unarmed demonstrators. The people could see police brutality at its worst. Public indignation spread like wildfire.

(Abente-Brun 1999: 99-100)

It is significant that the pivotal role played by the media in drawing attention to government corruption and repression is recognised here, as, despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles, successive generations of Paraguayan filmmakers have sought to represent their nation's experience and to explore the nature of Paraguayan identity through their work. The almost complete absence of state support or financing for films means that filmmaking has, of necessity, largely been centred on independent, low-budget productions or that Paraguayans have depended on co-productions with countries with

established film industries, such as Brazil or Argentina, to realise their projects. Moreover, given the lack of a national film institute, the vast majority of filmmakers are autodidacts or have studied abroad. This combination of unavoidable reliance on foreign partners and the dearth of opportunities for studying film in Paraguay calls into question the extent to which one can speak of national film in any meaningful way. Moreover, a number of the leading filmmakers that have worked or currently make films in Paraguay are not Paraguayan, while others have left the country, frustrated by the difficulties they have faced there.

Despite the forced condition of being independent filmmakers and the variety of styles that have emerged as a result of this situation, one striking note of similarity in productions over the past decades is their engagement with encroaching globalization, whether in terms of films that speak of economic dependence or marginalization or experimental films that engage with and call into question the cultural hegemony of Hollywood or other mainstream film industries. This chapter begins with a brief history of Paraguayan cinema followed by an overview of the portrayal of Paraguay in non-national productions. It goes on to examine how a number of Paraguayan-based filmmakers interrogate ideas of independence versus globalization using a variety of film genres. Finally, the extent to which this exploration undermines or reaffirms issues of marginalization and autonomy in cultural production is assessed.

### **Paraguayan Film History**

Media censorship was a routine part of life under Stroessner's enduring and extremely repressive dictatorship. Celebrated Paraguayan writer Augusto Roa Bastos spent most of his life in exile for criticizing Stroessner's government, while artists who stayed in the country were silenced: '[P]olitical commentary, critiques of the existing regime and the ruling families, and so-called "immoral" art were censored' (Smith Nash 2002: 11). In his study of journalism in Paraguay, Aníbal Orué Pozzo (2007: 104) asserts that widespread censorship was regarded as normal until 1992, when a new Constitution was written that guaranteed freedom of expression. Journalist Manuel Cuenca, in his 2005 essay

‘El cine en Paraguay,’ notes that while Stroessner undoubtedly stifled any creative or critical filmmaking, he did sanction the *Noticioso Nacional*, which from 1954 screened documentaries to cinema audiences. (Cuenca: 2005) In 1966, the Jesuit Francisco de Paula Oliva founded the Departamento de Ciencias de la Comunicación in the Universidad Católica de Asunción (Maneglia and Schémbori 2001: 35). Moreover, Maneglia and Schémbori’s study makes clear that, despite a complete lack of state support until very recently, Paraguay has produced an extraordinary number of documentaries, features, and shorts, although they add the proviso that:

Sin embargo, la falta de continuidad y la poca difusión, parecen ser las características más importantes del cine paraguayo.

[Nonetheless, lack of continuity and little distribution seem to be the most important characteristics of Paraguayan cinema.]<sup>2</sup>

(Maneglia and Schémbori 2001: 21)

Schémbori and Maneglia are among the many contemporary filmmakers in Paraguay who have spent a number of years attempting to persuade the government to establish a film law to enable them to raise funds by taxing cinemas and television stations for screening national and international films, thus securing seed money for the preservation of national films, the making of new films, and the creation of a national film institute. Another key figure in contemporary Paraguayan filmmaking who is also a co-author of the 2005 draft of the Cinema Law document is Hugo Gamarra. Gamarra is the founder and director of the Fundación Cinemateca y Archivo Visual del Paraguay and also of the Festival Cinematográfico Internacional de Asunción, as well as being a well-known journalist, scriptwriter and director who received a masters in film and television from the School of Communications of the University of Austin, Texas in 1980. The draft document to which these filmmakers contributed makes explicit reference to the urgency of enabling national filmmakers to present a positive image of Paraguay to a globalized world:

In this age of globalisation there is a supreme authority of public power that is the right to one’s own image: it is the sovereignty over our identity and a basic condition for our cultural survival. The affirmation, exploration, recording and diffusion of national identity, our sense of unity and belonging through narrative and non narrative audiovisual expressions and images, in documentary, fictional or experimental genres. If we don’t do this ourselves, it is difficult for others to do it for us and if they do it (by appropriating our scenarios, stories and characters)

it will be even more difficult for them to do it in an informed and respectful manner.<sup>3</sup>

(Gamarra Echeverry 2005: 27)

These words echo those used by Gabriel García Márquez on his acceptance of his Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982 as he recalled the damage done to Latin American identity by the fact that the region's history has largely been written from outside:

The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own, serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary.

(García Márquez 1982)

In a 2009 *Última hora* article lamenting the fact that attempts to persuade the government to pass a Cinema Law have made no progress since the draft was written in 2005, numerous artists again insisted on the importance of this law in enabling filmmakers to represent their nation. As choreographer Alejandra Díaz Lanz puts it: 'Cinema reflects the culture of a people, their way of thinking, feeling and acting, their present and future history.' (Díaz Lanz 2009) The concerns voiced by Paraguayan cineastes about the abilities of others to represent their nation are borne out by the image of Paraguay that emerges from international productions that have used the country as a location.

### **International Projections of Paraguay**

According to Octavio Getino, many North American filmmakers have used Latin American countries as what he terms "el país maquilador (a sweatshop-like country)," taking advantage of exotic locales and cheap labour to produce films that reflect nothing of the local culture (Getino 2007: 64). The few international films that have used Paraguay as a location have not only ignored its history and culture but reinforced its image as primitive, criminal and corrupt. In Roland Joffe's 1986 *The Mission*, Paraguay's Guaraní population, who are not even played by real Guaraní Indians, are portrayed as both helpless and in need of protection from the Jesuits, despite their intrinsic violence, as James Schofield Saeger notes:

In this wilderness, several nearly naked, painted Native American males (played by Onanís of Colombia), carry a priest lashed to a cross to the river, which sweeps him over the falls to his death. How did the

priest offend the Guaraní? Because the movie never says, one inaccurately concludes that customarily killing whites was their nature.

(Schofield Saeger 1998: 65)

Saeger points out that the Guaraní were played by a Colombian tribe and that the film was largely set in Colombia, with the Iguazú falls, filmed from the Argentine side, being the only location related to Paraguay in the film, despite the fact that the film's plot concerns the Jesuit missions in Paraguay in the 1750s and culminates with a re-enactment of the Guaraní War of 1754 to 1756. The decision not to film in Paraguay resulted from Stroessner's previous refusal to allow the crew of the Argentine-Brazilian co-production *Zama* to film churches or public monuments, as well as the fact that some period buildings that the crew had wanted to film had been demolished (Cuenca 2005). Nonetheless, the filmmakers were happy to give the impression that the film was located in Paraguay, and their portrayal of the Western Jesuits as the saviours of a passive, simple people suggests that self-determination is impossible for the Guaraní. In a more recent film, Michael Mann's 2006 *Miami Vice*, Paraguay is represented through the town of Ciudad del Este, which is presented as a drug-ridden den of iniquity. The criminality of Ciudad del Este is further underlined by the fact that it is implicitly put in the same bracket as the other non-US locations in the film Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and Baranquilla, Colombia. While Ciudad del Este is undoubtedly a corrupt and violent city, it is far from representative of Paraguay as a whole, although the fact that no other location is shown would appear to suggest that it is typical of the nation.

Few Argentine films have portrayed Paraguay at all until recently, with the dubious exception of the films of actor and director Armando Bó, which were made in Paraguay in the 1950s and 1960s. Bó took advantage of the country's cheap film stock and exotic locations to make a number of soft porn films starring his wife Isabel Sarli, who became known as the most hygienic actress in film because of the frequency with which she disrobed to take baths (King 1990: 101). While their first collaboration, the 1957 film *El trueno entre las hojas* undoubtedly concentrates on promoting Sarli's charms, its script by Augusto Roa Bastos did address the appalling conditions and exploitation of rural workers.

Twenty-first-century Argentine films such as Adrián Caetano's *Bolivia* (2001) represent a major progression by reflecting the hardships resulting from mass immigration from Paraguay. The film features a sensitive portrayal of the isolation experienced by Rosa, a Paraguayan waitress who forms a friendship with a fellow immigrant from Bolivia. Notably, Lita Stantic, who co-produced *Hamaca paraguaya*, the only Paraguayan feature to achieve international success in recent years, was the associate producer of this film, which presents the difficult situation endured by Rosa in a sympathetic manner. Another Argentine film by the celebrated director of *XXY* (2008), Lucía Puenzo, unfortunately falls once more into patronising and stereotypical depictions of Paraguay. *El niño pez* (2009), adapted from a novel written by the director, deals with an extraordinary and unlikely range of themes:

Toca temas tan distintos como una relación lesbiana que se consume a escondidas, el incesto, la corrupción policial, los conflictos generacionales y hasta el entrenamiento de perros.

[It deals with themes as diverse as a clandestine lesbian affair, incest, political corruption, generational conflicts and even dog training.]

(Lucchini 2009).

The main plot centres on the lesbian relationship between a young Paraguayan woman, Ailín, and Lala, the 15-year-old daughter of the wealthy family Ailín works for as a maid. The child that gives the film its title is the product of an incestuous relationship between Ailín and her father, who live in a forlorn, decrepit village in Paraguay. Having drowned her baby and escaped to Argentina, Ailín proceeds to have sexual relationships with virtually every man she encounters, including Lala's father, but little insight is provided to explain her willingness to engage in these liaisons. Indeed, far from portraying her as the victim of a sexually abusive family background, the film suggests that she is an opportunistic nymphomaniac who ultimately takes advantage of the precocious Lala. The stereotype of Paraguay as corrupt, primitive and hopelessly incapable of progress of any kind is strongly reinforced by this portrayal of the immigrant Paraguayan woman. Unlike Caetano, Puenzo fails to take into account the economic imperatives that lead immigrants to be exploited sexually or financially, and she instead seems to suggest that this is the natural lot of an unintelligent, primitive people.

## Co-Productions and Paraguayan Cinema

Néstor García Canclini's famous question "Will Latin American cinema still exist in the year 2000?" raises the issue of the commercialisation and homogenization of culture in a globalized world, though as King (1990: 254) notes, he is 'too shrewd a critic to espouse a Pollyanna idea of Latin American artists cheerfully bathing in the warm waters of global culture...nor does he fall into a fatalistic vision that the region will remain forever the passive, peripheral victim of shadowy but all-powerful transnational forces.' Hugo Gamarra's involvement in the 1998 Brazilian-Paraguayan film *El toque del oboe* is indicative of some of the problems faced by Paraguayan filmmakers as a result of the fact that they are always the minority partner in co-productions in terms of finance. Gamarra was the screenwriter and co-producer of this project, which focuses on the story of a Brazilian oboe player called Augusto, played by Brazilian actor Paulo Betti, who comes to Paraguay to die.

The presence of non-national actors has become a staple of international co-productions, and is also the subject of some controversy, as these actors are generally paid much more than local cast members, yet it is not it all clear that their presence guarantees greater success for the film. Villanza (2008: 73-76) suggests that the presence of Spanish actors in Latin American films is explained in three ways: they have been born in Latin America but raised in Spain and are returning to their roots; they attempt to "pass" as Latin American by imitating the local accent, or their presence is unexplained or is self-explanatory in the context of the script. In the case of *El toque del oboe*, however, no effort whatsoever is made to integrate the Brazilian character into the story, to the extent that he speaks Portuguese throughout the film while the other characters speak Spanish, while no-one comments on this linguistic mismatch. This is clearly a reflection of the fact that the Brazilians have the majority stake in the project and of the scant importance they give to lending some naturalism to a film set and shot in Paraguay and written in Spanish by Gamarra.

By far the best known film to come out of Paraguay in recent years and the only one to achieve international distribution is Paz Encina's *Hamaca paraguaya*. In 2006, *Hamaca paraguaya* became the first Paraguayan feature to be screened at the Cannes Film Festival. This co production with Argentina,



France and Holland has been widely screened and distributed, and has received several prestigious international awards. Despite this success and the fact that her co-producers gave interviews, which are featured on the DVD, that heralded the film as the start of a film industry in Paraguay, Encina was less optimistic about the changes that the film's success could bring to her country:

El cine en Paraguay es escasa, inconstante, casi inexistente. Creo que ni con *Hamaca paraguaya* puede decirse todavía que exista el cine en Paraguay. A la fecha, somos el único país en América del Sur que no cuenta con un Instituto de Cinematografía.

[Cinema in Paraguay is scarce, sporadic, almost in-existent. I think that not even with *Hamaca paraguaya* can one say that cinema exists in Paraguay. To date, we are the only country in South America without a Cinema Institute.]

(Encina 2008: 331)

Set in 1935 in rural Paraguay, the film is a poetic, almost static account of an elderly couple, Candida and Ramón, who await the return of their son from the Guerra del Chaco. Although the story of the couple's endless wait for their son is extremely simple, its form is experimental, as the conversations between them are heard in off and are not synchronised with the images. Encina explains that the use of this technique was intended to underline the unique operation of time in Paraguay:

Paraguay viene viviendo la misma historia [...] y creo que esto se da porque el hombre paraguayo vive en una eterna melancolía del tiempo pasado. Paraguay constantly relives the same history [...] and I believe that this is due to the fact that Paraguayan people live in an eternal melancholy of past time.

(Encina 2008: 333)

In an interview (Encina 2010), when asked whether the condition of the couple was a metaphor for the situation of the Paraguayan people, who also longed for change, Encina replied simply "Totalmente (Absolutely)." Moreover, she went on to express a fervent desire to capture the history of her country in her films:

Para mí es importante hablar de Paraguay, de hecho, no me imagino haciendo cine de otro país o en otro país, pero no porque hayan pocas películas que representen al país, sino porque es mi compromiso con el país donde nació. Nacer y vivir en Paraguay es algo muy complejo.

[For me it's important to talk about Paraguay; in fact, I can't see myself making cinema about another country or in another country, but not because there are few films that represent the country but because it's my

commitment to the country where I was born. Being born and living in Paraguay is very complicated.]

In the same interview, however, Encina explains that her next project, which was titled *Un suspiro (A Sigh)*, failed to secure co-production partners, largely as a result of the lack of a cinema law, and she has resigned herself to the fact that it will never be made. Citing Baer and Long, Falicov argues that co-productions have increased in recent decades because their global aspect lends film projects cachet and international recognition: “the 1990s and 2000s have seen an outpouring of international co-productions due to their emblematic status as globalized products” (Falicov 2007: 22). This is doubtlessly the case, and the number of co-productions to have been made in Latin America in recent years is extraordinary, but this phenomenon has changed little for Paraguayan filmmakers. Tana Schémbori (2010) welcomes the success of Encina’s film but does not feel that it has led to any change in Paraguay. Leticia Colonel (2010) similarly suggests that the success of *Hamaca paraguaya* and that of Joaquín Baldwin’s *Sebastian’s Voodoo* has had little impact on the local industry:

Sin marco legal ni Ibermedia es imposible que cambien las cosas. Excepciones como éstas seguirán siendo solo eso, excepciones. Paraguay logró visibilidad pero con el estreno de una película cada dos años no basta. [Without an official brand or Ibermedia it’s impossible for things to change. Exceptions such as these will continue to be just that, exceptions. Paraguay achieved visibility but the release of a film every two years is not enough.]

Silvana Nuovo, the co-director of the documentaries *Ogwa* (2006) and *Paraguay fue noticia* (2008) suggests that the change in government may lead to increased cinematic funding possibilities, but she echoes Colonel’s concern that filmmakers will continue to suffer from the lack of a cinema law and the fact that Paraguay is not a partner of Ibermedia (Nuovo 2010). Ultimately, without these internal changes and the establishment of a national film institute, it is difficult to see how the success of individual projects can overcome the extreme infrastructural and economic problems that cineastes in Paraguay continue to experience.

## Globalisation as Theme in Paraguayan Cinema

As mentioned in the opening section, if it is difficult to establish whether a national cinema exists in Paraguay, many filmmakers share the tendency to engage with issues concerning Paraguay's marginalisation in a globalized world. When asked whether the term 'national cinema' was meaningful in Paraguay, given the increasingly globalized nature of cinema practice and the lack of state support for filmmakers, who are from various countries and who have often studied abroad, the responses given by filmmakers were extremely varied. Encina (2010) rejected the idea that a national industry exists, as did Ramiro Gómez (2010), the director of the documentaries *Tierra roja* (2006) and *Frankfurt* (2008). Gómez suggested that it might be possible to talk about a Paraguayan cinema in thirty years' time, but that for now filmmakers should focus on the basics—particularly the establishment of a national film institute. Tana Schémbori (2008) has a more positive outlook, noting that *Hamaca paraguaya* has inspired younger filmmakers to create an auteur cinema and that the diverse and transnational experiences of young filmmakers could lead to a re-definition of the term national cinema. Juan Carlos Maneglia's response also dealt with the question on a more aesthetic level:

Creo que el cine paraguayo es muy particular en muchos niveles, desde su forma de hablar, su luz, sus paisajes, su manera de mover la cámara, hasta sus puntos de interés que hacen que tengan un eje en común.

[I think that Paraguayan cinema is very distinctive on many levels, from its form of speech, its light, its landscapes, its way of moving the camera to its points of interest, which mean that it has a common grounding.]

(Maneglia 2008)

The nature of the engagement of Paraguayan filmmakers with issues relating to globalisation will now be examined with reference to two very different films: Maneglia and Schémbori's fictional short, *Artefacto de primera necesidad* (*Must-have Device*) (1995), and Amoî Cherete's documentary on land conflicts in the north of Paraguay, *Chokokue* (2008).

### ***Artefacto de primera necesidad***

*Artefacto de primera necesidad*, which has been screened at numerous international film festivals and has been awarded prizes from Malta to Oklahoma, reveals much about the situation of filmmakers in marginalised countries. The protagonist is a wealthy woman who is introduced talking on the

phone to her friend as her rather slovenly maid cleans the house. The woman tells her friend that she is well aware that her husband is a philanderer but that she is indifferent to his affairs and wants a lover herself, someone who would satisfy her sexual needs and then leave her alone. As this conversation takes place, scenes from the film *The Beast* showing a huge ape attacking a blonde woman appear on the television screen in her bedroom. Outside in the hall, the vacuum cleaner stops working and the maid looks into the hose in an attempt to fix it, only to be sucked into the machine as it suddenly restarts. Oblivious to this event, the woman goes for a shower, and when she returns to bed the vacuum cleaner appears, initially terrifying her but soon emerging as the powerful but discreet lover she longed for, as the machine moves under the covers and makes passionate love to her. The closing sequence sees the hapless husband enter the bedroom as the machine lurks in the wardrobe.

Even before the establishing scene, *Artefacto de primera necesidad*'s multiple references to film genres and specific films are signalled in the horror film music that plays over the titles. This is followed by the spoof of the shower scene from *Psycho* and the more blatant parody of *Alien* in the defeat of the human by a sinister, superior foreign force represented by the vacuum cleaner. The film is far from a reflection of the idea that countries such as Paraguay are passive recipients of the products of an all-powerful global, mainly U.S. cultural machine, however. As Stam observes, the idea of First World countries unilaterally forcing their media products on a Third World powerless to resist them is simplistic, and it is more accurate to talk about the coexistence of First World and Third World cultures (Shohat and Stam 1994: 31). The film's irreverent and subversive re-casting of the Hollywood films in a Paraguayan context reflects the concerns of artists across Latin America as articulated by García Canclini:

[H]ow to articulate the local and the cosmopolitan, the promises of modernity and the inertia of tradition; how cultural fields can achieve greater autonomy and at the same time make that will for independence compatible with the precarious development of the artistic and literary market; and in what ways the industrial reordering of culture re-creates inequalities.

(García Canclini 1995: 53).

*Artefacto de primera necesidad* casts that local as the indigenous maid, who is exploited by her rude and arrogant employer, who embodies the cosmopolitan in her European looks and dress. The assertion of autonomy is achieved in the

reversal of viewer expectations as the supposedly primitive Paraguayan placed in the role of the white woman ravaged by the beast, while the primitive merges with the technological sophistication of the West in the attribution of bestial characteristics to the Hoover through its strong associations with the sexually rapacious ape. The industrial reordering of culture is replaced by a very subjective local reordering, so that the high-budget Hollywood features serve the agenda of independent filmmakers producing a low-budget short.

The re-appropriation of popular Hollywood films also leads to an interrogation of the idea of Paraguay's marginalized position as a poor Latin American nation in terms of its filmmaking potential. One reason for the deliberately absurd use of a lowly Hoover as an example of advanced technological power is that it deflates the very notion of hierarchies between First World and Third World cinema. Other experimental filmmakers such as Lourdes Portillo and Guillermo Gómez Peña have deliberately used low-rent special effects to make a similar point. In *Columbus on Trial*, for example, Portillo ridicules the idea of Columbus as a heroic figure by placing him on an obviously fake ship wearing a bad wig that is ruffled by a cheap electric fan instead of an offstage wind machine. Gómez Peña, in *The Great Mojado Invasion* presents a frenetic montage of Mexican B-movie vampire films, anthropological documentaries on Mexican indigenous tribes and worthy Hollywood films such as *Dances with Wolves* without any contextualization, so that the distinctions between the films are broken down and the superiority of the Hollywood product is called into question.

In *Artefacto de primera necesidad*, the clash between so-called civilisation and primitivism is similarly overturned by the juxtaposition of the scene of the white woman being attacked by a giant ape with scenes of the protagonist of *Artefacto de primera necesidad* enjoying sex with a supernaturally powerful Hoover. On a more local level, Schémbori and Maneglia critique class divisions in Paraguay through the recurring presence in their films of the character of the maid, whose presence is detested by her employers but whose work is indispensable to them. The protagonist's blasé expression of a desire to have a lover who would service her and leave, as well as her indifference to her husband's adultery, also disturbs expected gender roles and parodies the supposed macho character of Paraguayan men.

## ***Chokokue***

Chokokue addresses the inequalities caused by globalisation through a much more serious real-life narrative. This documentary tells the story of a group of Paraguayan peasants whose resistance to the spread of huge soy-producing farms in their area resulted in the imprisonment of six community activists who had fled to Argentina seeking political asylum. The first half of the film consists of a series of interviews with local people who note that their livelihoods and health are being imperilled by their proximity to huge soy plantations owned mainly by Brazilian companies. Esteban Britez of the Movimiento Agrario y Popular Comunidad in San Antonio explains the problem as follows:

La situación no es fácil acá porque nosotros tenemos para comer porque trabaja para la alimentación pero después sobra la salud, la educación, vivienda y muchas otras cosas más. Y nosotros lo que no podemos conseguir es renta, plata. Nosotros vemos que esta situación cada día empeora en el Paraguay.

[The situation is not easy here because we don't have enough to eat because we work to feed ourselves but there is healthcare, education, accommodation and many other things to consider. What we can't access is cash, money. We see this situation get worse every day in Paraguay.]

This bleak assessment is confirmed by teacher Maximina Amarilla of Asentamiento Sanguina kué, who notes that of a class of 30 students she began teaching seven years ago, only two graduated because the children have no money for clothes or copy books and they have to work in the fields to help their parents. The need for land reform is introduced by a title that suggests that 80 percent of cultivatable land in Paraguay is owned by 4% of the population. This view is supported by April Howard, who cites similar statistics about land ownership and notes that:

Stroessner's land reform institution, INDERT, ran a corrupt and incomplete agrarian reform that illegally sold vast parcels of state land reserved for Paraguayan farmers to Brazilian and Argentine buyers and left most campesinos landless, with no choice but to occupy unused land for subsistence farming.

(Howard 2009: 38)

Andrew Wasley observes that this history of land conflict has intensified as a result of the establishment of large-scale soy farming:

Peasant and indigenous organisations have repeatedly protested against the encroachment of their land – organising protests, blockades, land occupations and actions to prevent pesticide spraying. But the response from soy farmers, often backed up by police and paramilitary units acting on the orders of the authorities, has been brutal, according to peasant leaders, with violent evictions, frequent shootings and beatings – resulting in numerous injuries and several deaths – as well as arbitrary detentions and frequent disappearances.

(Wasley 2009)

Gregorio Cardozo of Comunidad Sidepar 3000 echoes the concerns of Esteban Britez about the struggle to make a living as a peasant farmer, and he adds that any attempt to organise to improve the situation is met with harsh government repression:

Es demasiado pesado nuestra realidad y si queremos organizarnos para reclamar nuestros derechos siempre hay represiones y siempre nos acusan como terroristas porque pensamos que debemos cambiar este país.

[Our reality is extremely difficult and if we want to organise to fight for our rights there are always repressions and they always accuse us of being terrorists because we think this country should change.]

This comment is followed by scenes showing the army move in to break up protests in the Distrito 3 de Febrero by landless peasants against the owners of a nearby soy plantation. The Brazilian owners of the plantation shot into the crowd of some 30 protestors, killing two and injuring many others. This sequence leads to a title that introduces the second part of the film—the campaign to free six organisers accused by the government of murder and kidnapping. On May 2006, peasant leaders Agustín Acosta, Roque Rodríguez, Basiliano Cardozo, Arístidea Vera, Simeón Bordón and Gustavo Lezcano went to Argentina to seek political asylum only to be accused of murder and kidnapping. This accusation followed a meeting of the Partido Patria Libre on January 3, held at the house of former director of the party Regina Rodas. It was alleged that the meeting was held to discuss the fate Cecilia Cubas, the daughter of the former president, who had been kidnapped and whose dead body was found on February 16. Not only does Rodas deny that Cubas was discussed at the meeting, but she notes that Rodríguez was not a member of the Partido Patria Libre and that he had never been to her house. Similarly, Raquel Talavera, the group’s lawyer, notes that there was not a single piece of evidence to link the men to Cubas’ kidnapping or murder. A number of other people in the area are interviewed, all of whom confirm that the detention of the six is an

example of the criminalisation of popular protest in Paraguay. The film concludes with statements from the men recorded in prison, which show them defiant despite their situation. Rodríguez declares:

Luchamos contra el imperialismo, contra la política neoliberal. Yo creo que la herramienta válida es la organización, la unidad de los trabajadores del campo y de la ciudad y de toda América Latina.

[We fight against imperialism, against neoliberal politics. I believe that organisation is a valid tool, as is the unity of workers in the countryside, the city and in all of Latin America.]

While *Artefacto de primera necesidad* and *Chokokue* represent diverse strands of Paraguayan filmmaking, both engage with the problems of globalization and independence in a marginalised country. *Artefacto de primera necesidad*'s playful post-modern engagement with film genres and its irreverent re-appropriation of Hollywood films mock the supposed superiority of U.S. culture and technology while also suggesting that a counterculture that questions all kinds of authoritative texts is possible in a post-dictatorship Paraguay. In terms of tone and style, *Chokokue* calls to mind the New Latin American Cinema, and its use of film as a political tool to call attention to the persecution of rural organisations that strive to counter the globally powerful interests of big soy producers is a searing indictment of the supposed return to democracy in Paraguay. Both films suggest the importance of visual culture as a means of opposing official versions of representation and history, and both are strongly suggestive of independent voices that will refuse to be silent despite continued state repression, whether through the indirect means of lack of funding or the direct means of military force.



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<sup>2</sup> All translations of quotations from Spanish are by the author.

<sup>3</sup> My translation. The original reads: 'En esta era de globalización hay una autoridad suprema de poder público que es el derecho a nuestra propia imagen: es la soberanía de nuestra identidad y condición básica para nuestra sobrevivencia cultural.

Afirmar, explorar, testimoniar y difundir la identidad nacional, nuestro sentido de unidad y pertenencia a través de las expresiones e imágenes audiovisuales narrativas y no narrativas, en géneros de documental, ficción o experimental. Si no lo hacemos nosotros, es difícil que otros lo hagan por nosotros y si lo hacen (apropiándose de nuestros escenarios, historias y

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personajes) sería aún más difícil que lo hagan con buen conocimiento y respeto.' (Gamarra Echeverry 2005: 27).